

Who was Gandhi ?

Mohandas Gandhi, also known as Mahatma Gandhi, was one of the most famous leaders against injustice. In India, people call him Bapu or the “Father of the Nation”.

Early Life of Gandhi

Gandhi was born in Porbandar, India, on October 2, 1869. He came from a wealthy family and got married at 13 in an arranged marriage. Gandhi went to London for college to become an **attorney**. He also studied Indian law, joined the Vegetarian Society, and decided not to eat meat or drink alcohol for his whole life while in college. When he returned to India, he was not able to start his own **law practice**. Instead, he and his family moved to South Africa so he could work for an Indian law firm. In South Africa, Gandhi started fighting for civil rights and began his peaceful battles against injustice.

The Fight for Civil Rights Begins

Gandhi arrived in South Africa in April 1893 and saw lots of racial discrimination. They did not allow him to ride in a first-class section of a train because of the color of his skin as an Indian man. This is when he decided to devote his life to fighting injustice.

On the day when he wanted to return to India, the South African government debated whether they should deny Indians the right to vote in elections. Almost no one opposed the law. So Gandhi remained in South Africa. He began by writing a pamphlet about the discrimination against Indians in South Africa. Great Britain controlled the country at this time and saw his pamphlet (called the “Green Pamphlet”) as anti-government. They thought he wanted to cause trouble.

Gandhi spent the next 20 years participating in peaceful protests against the South African government which treated him and the other protestors badly, but still they refused to use violence and fought through passive resistance and civil disobedience. Many of his followers were beaten, jailed or shot by the state police. Gandhi was also arrested and spent his time in prison reading books like *Civil Disobedience* by Henry David Thoreau, which influenced his decision to commit even more to peaceful resistance.

Gandhi eventually negotiated with the South African government and got them to recognize Indian marriages and remove taxes that only Indian people had to pay. The country became more tolerant of Indians and Gandhi returned to India.

Back to India

When Gandhi returned to India in 1914, they saw him as a hero. A poet, two years earlier, called him “Mahatma,” a title only given to the **holiest** men meaning « Great Soul ». In 1918, he led the protest against a law that gave Britain lots of power in India. These protests resulted in many deaths and injuries on both sides. Gandhi remained peaceful throughout all of this.

Gandhi then started a movement to break India away from Great Britain and gain its independence. He represented the Indian National Congress and started persuading other people that India should be independent. He published the Declaration of Independence of India in 1930. This document outlined how India would self-rule independent from Great Britain. That year, Gandhi also led tens of thousands of people in a protest against a law that required India to only purchase salt from Great Britain. Britain had a monopoly and the taxes were high, placing a **burden** on the poor people in India. For the protest, the people walked peacefully 240 miles to the Arabian Sea. Once there, they broke the law by making their own salt, an act of civil disobedience. They arrested 60,000 people, including Gandhi. We call this the Salt March protest. It was successful and the British overturned the tax.

Gandhi spent the next few years protesting other injustices, like the treatment of the untouchables, or poor people in India. People and the government mistreated them. Gandhi protested this using a **hunger strike** or **fasting**. Gandhi also led other types of peaceful protests, like refusal to work, sit-downs in the street, boycotting courts, and more. Having thousands of people participate brought attention to the civil rights issues and helped them gain new freedoms from Great Britain.

The British left India in 1947 and 1948, and established two independent countries: India and Pakistan. Thousands of people died during the celebration of independence because two religious groups (Hindus of India and Muslims of Pakistan) fought. A man who did not believe Muslims and Hindus should work or live together shot and killed Gandhi on January 30, 1948. This event actually brought the two groups together.

Gandhi's commitment to nonviolence inspired Martin Luther King Jr. in the U.S. and Nelson Mandela in South Africa, among others. Gandhi changed the lives of many people using prayer, nonviolence, civil disobedience, passive resistance, and meditation.

Attorney = defends people using the law

law practice = a place to be when you are an attorney

Holiest = religious / holidays

Burden ≠ light

hunger strike , **fasting** ≠ eating