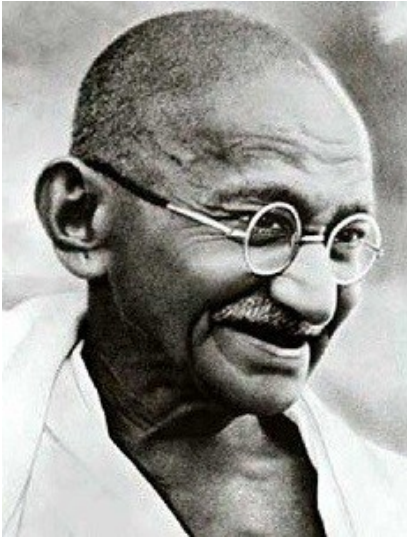


Mahatma Gandhi



Mahatma Gandhi was the leader of India's independence movement and also the architect of a form of non-violent civil disobedience that would influence all the world.

Born on October 2, 1869, in India, he studied law and fought for the civil rights of Indians, both at home under British rule and in South Africa. Gandhi organized boycotts against British institutions in peaceful forms of civil disobedience. He was killed by a fanatic in 1948.

Young Gandhi was a shy, anonymous student who was so timid that he slept with the lights on even as a teenager. Although interested in becoming a doctor, his father steered him to enter the legal profession. And so 18-year-old Gandhi sailed for London in 1888 to study and become a lawyer

Back in India Gandhi struggled hard to find work there but obtained only a one-year contract to perform legal services in South Africa.

When Gandhi arrived there, he was shocked by the discrimination and racial segregation faced by Indian immigrants under white British authorities. Upon his first appearance in a courtroom, Gandhi was asked to remove his turban.

Another crucial moment in Gandhi's life was during a train trip when a white man objected to his presence in the first-class railway compartment, although he had a ticket. Refusing to move to the back of the train, he was forcibly removed and thrown off the train. This act awoke in him a determination to devote himself to fighting the "deep disease of colour prejudice."

In India Gandhi organized then his first mass civil-disobedience campaign against government's restrictions on the rights of Indians, for example marriages. Gandhi lived an austere life devoted to prayer, fasting and meditation. He became known as "Mahatma," which means "great soul."

Gandhi urged Indians not to purchase British goods and clothes and he began to use a portable spinning wheel to produce his own cloth.

In 1922 British authorities arrested and sentenced him to a six-year imprisonment, but he was released in February 1924 after appendicitis surgery.

Gandhi returned in 1930 to protest Britain's Salt Acts, which not only prohibited Indians from collecting or selling salt but imposed a heavy tax particularly hard. He then led a 390-kilometer march to the Arabian Sea, where he collected salt by making salt from evaporated seawater.

By then famous worldwide, Gandhi attended the London Round Table Conference on Indian constitutional reform in August 1931. While in London, he slept on the floor in his own cloth and drank tea with King George V.

A Hindu extremist, upset at Gandhi's tolerance of Muslims, knelt before the Mahatma before pulling out a pistol and shooting him three times. The violent act took the life of a pacifist who spent his life preaching non-violence.

Even after his death, Mahatma Gandhi remains one of the most potent philosophers in freedom struggles throughout the world. His actions inspired future human rights movements around the globe, including those of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. in the United States and Nelson Mandela in South Africa.