

Mahatma Gandhi's achievement

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Mahatma Gandhi held no office, pursued no career, accumulated no wealth and desired no fame. Yet, millions of people in India and around the world are captivated by his life and his achievements. Gandhi inspired so many because he practiced what he preached, he lived the change he wanted to see in the world and his message was none other than his life itself. He was an honest seeker of truth, a fearless defender of the weak and uncompromising practitioner of non-violence.

He was born as Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi on 2 October 1869 in the town of Porbandar, Gujarat in western India. His father, a devout Hindu, was prime minister in his native princely state. The young Gandhi [5] was sent to England to study law. Then he went to South Africa to practice it. There he was thrown out of a segregated train on the ground of his colour. Gandhi was- shaken by this unjust encounter, and mounted in response a non-violent civil-disobedience campaign to expose the evils of racial classification (later to be known as "apartheid"). Gandhi used a Sanskrit word to describe his campaign: *Satyagraha* (truth force). Against the brute force of weapons and prisons [6], Gandhi - inspired too by the writings and example of Henry David Thoreau - used the power of non-violence and truth, and proved its superiority. His campaign stirred the political circles of South Africa, and the surprise of its methods meant the perpetrators of apartheid found themselves confused and powerless.

On returning to India Gandhi refined his techniques of Satyagraha [7] and introduced them to empower the people of India to wage their struggle for freedom. His movement [8] became so powerful and effective that the almighty British colonial authorities could not withstand it and eventually agreed to grant independence to India. Even as the freedom struggle was in progress, Gandhi was working [9] on ideas of a new social order for post-colonial India. He believed that there would be no point in getting rid of the British without abolishing the centralised, exploitative and violence-based system of governance and the economics of greed that they pursued. Gandhi designed a trinity to achieve his vision of a new, non-violent [10] social order.

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Also by Satish Kumar in **openDemocracy**:

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Three foundations

The first element of this trinity was *Sarvodaya* (upliftment of all). The western system of governance is based on the rule of the majority and is called democracy. This was not good enough for Gandhi. He wanted [11] no division between the majority and the minority. He wanted to serve the interests of each and everyone, of all.

Democracy is also limited in its care for the interests of human beings. Democracy working with capitalism favours the few who have capital; democracy together with socialism favours the majority, but is still limited to humans. *Sarvodaya* includes the care of the earth; of animals, forests, rivers and land. For Gandhi, life is sacred and so he advocated reverence for all life, humans [11] as well as other than humans.

The second part of the Gandhian trinity is *Swaraj* (self-government). *Swaraj* in turn has a dual aspect. On the one hand, it works to bring about a social transformation [12] through small-scale, decentralised and participatory structures of government. On the other, it implies self-transformation, self-discipline and self-restraint. "There is enough in the world for everybody's need, but not enough for anybody's greed", said Gandhi. So a moral, ethical, ecological and spiritual foundation is necessary to build good governance.

The third aspect of the trinity is *Swadesi* (local economy). Gandhi opposed "mass production" and favoured production by people. Work for him is as much a spiritual as an economic necessity. So he insisted on the principle that every member of society should be engaged in manual work. Manufacturing in small workshops and adherence to arts and crafts feeds the body as well as the soul, professed Gandhi. He believed that long-distance transportation of goods, competitive trading and relentless economic growth would destroy the fabric of human communities as well the integrity of the natural world.

Mahatma (the honorific [13] means "great soul") Gandhi's vision of a non-violent social order built on these three foundations. Gandhi was, for example, a great champion of Hindu-Muslim solidarity. This was appreciated neither by the fundamentalist Hindus nor the fundamentalist Muslims. Against the wishes of Gandhi, India was partitioned on religious lines and hundreds of thousands of Hindus and Muslims were massacred or made refugees. A Hindu fundamentalist named Nathuram Godse assassinated Gandhi on 30 January 1948 [14], just six months after India's independence. As a consequence, Gandhi lost the opportunity to work for a new social order and his trinity had only a limited impact. Sixty years later [15], it is clear that the world has more need of it than ever.

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