



GANDHI: A LEADER OF MASSES

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ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi was a true leader of masses and the best communicator who mobilised crores of people towards the freedom movement. He is recognized as one of the 20th century's greatest leader of the people. He resorted to simple living just like millions in the country, hence people look at Gandhi as one of their own and he emerged as a leader of masses. Due to his stature, he is referred to as Mahatma (a great soul). King Martin Luther and Nelson Mandela also have credited Gandhi as a source of inspiration in their struggles to achieve equal rights for their people. He played a very pivotal role in making India independence and this is the reason that Parliament of independent India officially recognised him as a Father of Nation.

Keywords: Ahimsa, Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, National Movement, popular leader, Satyagraha, Truth.

Mahatma Gandhi was a very empowering and Popular leader not only in India but in the entire world. He established himself as a slave of the people of India, empowering the general public. He always believed in simple living and high thinking so the people of India inclined towards Gandhi and he emerged as a leader of the masses. At the age of 23, he arrived in South Africa on a one-year assignment to assist an Indian merchant in a civil suit. He had shown little interest in politics and had less experience in organizing and leading people. But he had a strong sense of duty, an attachment to truth and an open mind. In South Africa, he had a full measure of racial hauteur of which he had a mild foretaste in India. Within days of his arrival, he was thrown out of a First class compartment from a train, assaulted by a white coachman, denied hotel rooms and pushed off a side-walk—all because of his colour. He saw the dispossession and oppression of the African Negroes, the children of the soil and learnt of the harassment and humiliation suffered by the Indians. So he decided to prolong his stay in South Africa and try to help improve the Situation.

Himself a member of the colonial middle class, Gandhi had realized the futility of aping the English gentlemen in England, and the process of his being 'de-classed' began right there. But it was in South Africa that he realized the deplorable condition to which Indians had been reduced. So he prolonged his stay among his countrymen for two decades, realized his vocation and developed his philosophy of life. It was here that his views on the problems of India were crystallised and it was here that he discovered, developed and first practiced Satyagraha which was inherent in his blood. When he was leading the Satyagraha in the Transvaal, Leo Tolstoy wrote to him from Russia on 7th September 1910 that his activity in the Transvaal was the most essential work then being done in the world and in which all the world would undoubtedly take part. It took Gandhi a long time to evolve his unique weapon. In course of this long struggle he learnt the importance of cultivating the attributes of self-control, self-suffering, self-abnegation and self-purification. This significance of service to fellow-beings also became evident to him. Now he became one with the lowly and down trodden in

South Africa and through them with those of India.

Today it is the dream of Gandhi that has been realized and after a century the South African people have the opportunity to raise his vision of a South Africa in which all the different races commingle and produce a civilization that perhaps the world has not yet seen. During this epic struggle in South Africa, Gandhi continued to pay occasional visits to India, and it was during on such visit that he wrote his seminal book Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule. In this book he drew up the picture of India of his dream. At that time the Indian national Congress was riven by rivalry between the two wings of the Congress – the Liberals and the Extremists. In Gandhi there was the commingling of the brighter side of both liberal nationalism and extremism. He would ask both the Moderates and the Extremists to work on a higher plane for the emancipation – social, economic, political and spiritual of India. He would say to the Extremists that the Home Rule they wanted for India could not be had for their asking and that everyone would have to take it for himself; for what others would get for anybody would not be Home Rule, but foreign rule. So it would not be proper for them to say that they had obtained Home Rule merely by expelling the English². He said, "Swaraj that I wish to picture is such that, after we have once realized it, we shall endeavour to the end of our life time to persuade others to do likewise"³. So there was no necessity for having as goal the expulsion of the English. Those Englishmen who had been Indianised might be accommodated, but there could be no room for them in India with their civilization⁴.

Gandhi's greatest apprehension, however, was from the colonial middle class. When to counter the move of the Rowlatt Committee, Gandhi had organized the Satyagraha Sabha with himself as the President, he soon found that there was little chance of agreement between himself and the intelligentsia comprising that Sabha, as also some of his other methods of work that would appear to be peculiar, caused them much worry and embarrassment. Most of them, however, generously put up with the idiosyncrasies of Gandhi. But from the outset he feared that the Sabha was not likely to live long, that already his emphasis on truth and ahimsa had begun to be

disliked by some of its members⁵. Gandhi had to face the same difficulty while the non-cooperation resolution was debated at Calcutta. Most of the old and tired leaders of the Congress were against the non-cooperation resolution, but it was carried. When Gandhi suspended the movement abruptly he again faced a stiff opposition from the highly articulate section of the Congress⁶.

His Passion for associating the masses fully with the Congress was the forte of Gandhi. Earlier at the annual session at nagpur in the last week of December in 1920 the Congress under his leadership had accepted a new objective for the national struggle, viz for the attainment of Swaraj by peaceful means. He had appealed to the people to intensify the struggle and, finally, had adopted for itself a village oriented constitution which would transform it into a mass organization and an instrument of effective action.

The Post world war period witnessed the growth of National Movement which later changed into a widespread mass movement. M.K. Gandhi became the undisputed leader of the National Movement by 1920 and remained so until independence was won in 1947.

REFERENCES

[1] Entirely based on Gandhi's Autobiography, the story of My Experience with Truth published in Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG) XXXIX

[2] M.K.Gandhi, Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule, P.71

[3] Ibid, P39.

[4] Ibid

[5] Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, XXXIX P.363

[6] V.C. Joshi, ed; Lala Lajpat Rai, Writings and speeches, II, (1920-28), Delhi, 1965, PP.89-96