

Mahatma Gandhi

1869 - 1948

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Family Life

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on 2nd October 1869. He was born in Porbander in Gujarat, north-west India.

His father was the chief minister of Porbander and his mother was highly religious. She worshipped the god Vishnu, but also believed Jain teachings of mutual tolerance and not causing injury to living things.

Gandhi was born into a privileged caste and therefore received a good education.

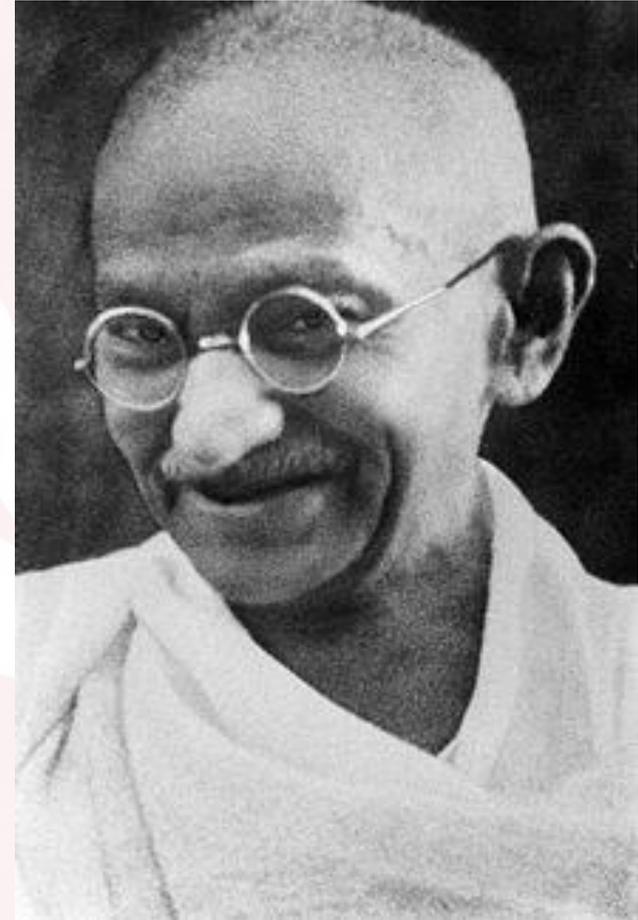


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Married Life

At the age of 13, Gandhi had an arranged marriage to a girl who was also 13 called Kasturbai Makhanji.

His first son of four was born in 1888 when Gandhi was 18 years old and a student at Samaldas College.



Studying

Gandhi was not very happy at college, so when he was offered the chance to study law in London, he took it.

He worked hard and began to study all religions. Until this time, he had never really been interested in religion.

When he returned to India, he found it hard to find work, so eventually took a job in South Africa for a year.

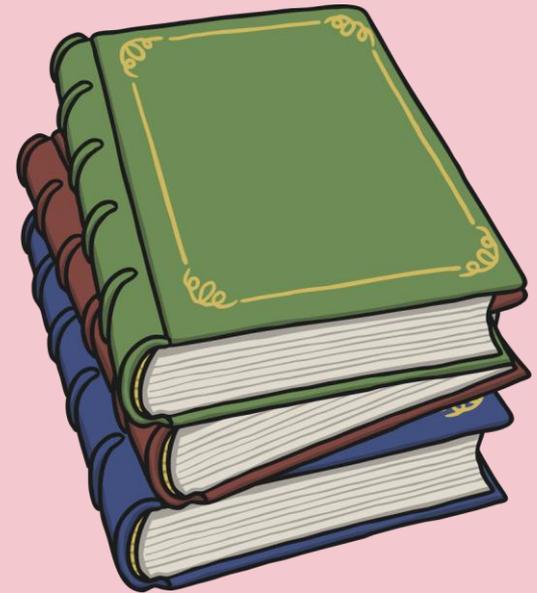


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South Africa

Apartheid was in force in South Africa. Gandhi was horrified at the way people who were not white were treated.

On one occasion, Gandhi was removed from a train purely because he was not white.

Another time, he was asked to remove his turban by a European magistrate. He refused and left the courtroom.



Apartheid is an Afrikaans word that means “status of being apart”. In real life terms, it meant that white people were treated a lot better than black or Asian people. There were even shops that “non-whites” weren’t allowed to go into!

Gandhi and Politics

Gandhi started a political movement called the Natal Indian Congress. He believed in non-violent political protests.

He returned to India in 1916 and was horrified to find how oppressed the Indian people of Bihar were by the white British masters.

He began to encourage people to stand up for themselves and their rights in peaceful protests and strikes.

The people were grateful that somebody was interested in their situation and he became known as Mahatma, meaning 'Great Soul'.



A Famous Leader

Gandhi's fame began to spread. Indian people saw him as their voice for freedom and fairness. He started a boycott of buying British goods. This meant that he encouraged people not to buy things made in Britain. This led to his first arrest, and on 2nd March 1922, he was put into prison for 2 years. Gandhi went on many hunger strikes to bring attention to the unfair treatment of Indian people at the hands of the British.



The Salt March

When he was released, he began a campaign to end the British rule over Indian people.

In 1930, the British introduced a tax on salt. This hit the poorest people the most. In protest, Gandhi marched 250 miles to the sea to get his own salt.

Thousands of people joined him on his march and 60,000 people were arrested, including Gandhi.



People Power

The British began to realise that Gandhi had many followers and a lot of influence on those people. As a result, they had to:

- ease poverty;
- grant status and recognition to the people classed as 'the untouchables';
- give women more rights;
- eventually allow India to have political independence from Britain.



Civil Unrest



When the Second World War broke out, Indian men were fighting for the British. Gandhi did not see why they should when they were being treated so unfairly at home. He was arrested for encouraging people to rise up against Indian men fighting for the British, and spent 2 years in prison at the Aga Khan Palace in Puna.

Sadly, his wife was also held there, but she died in prison not long before Gandhi was released.

Assassination Attempts

Because Gandhi was so well known, not everyone agreed with his beliefs. There were 6 times when somebody tried to assassinate (kill) him.

One man in particular called Nathuram Godse was a Hindu who didn't believe the same things as Gandhi, so he tried a number of times to kill him.

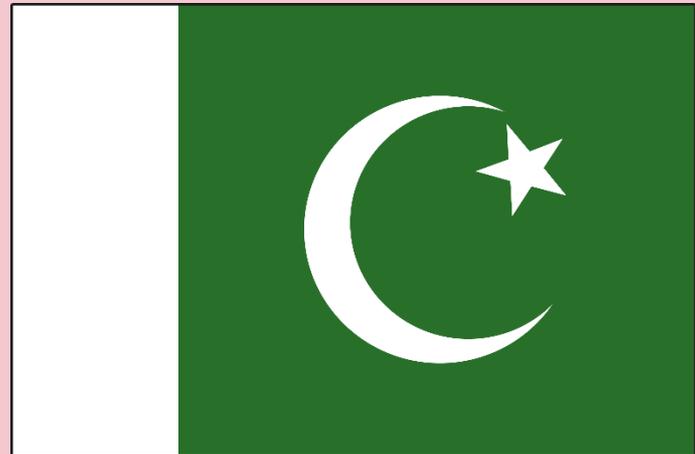


India is Split

The Congress Party decided that it would be better if they split India into two halves, one being Hindu India and other Muslim Pakistan. Gandhi was unhappy about this and worried that the two sides would start a war. He worked tirelessly for peace.



India



Pakistan

Pay Out

Gandhi believed that Pakistan should receive payment from the government for its lost territories. Other people did not agree and thought Pakistan would use the money to buy weapons and start a war.

Some men tried a fifth time to kill Gandhi.



Death of a Good Man

On 30th January 1948, Gandhi was on his way to a prayer meeting at Birla House in Delhi. He was shot 3 times in the chest. Allegedly, his dying words were “*He Rām*” which means “Oh God”.



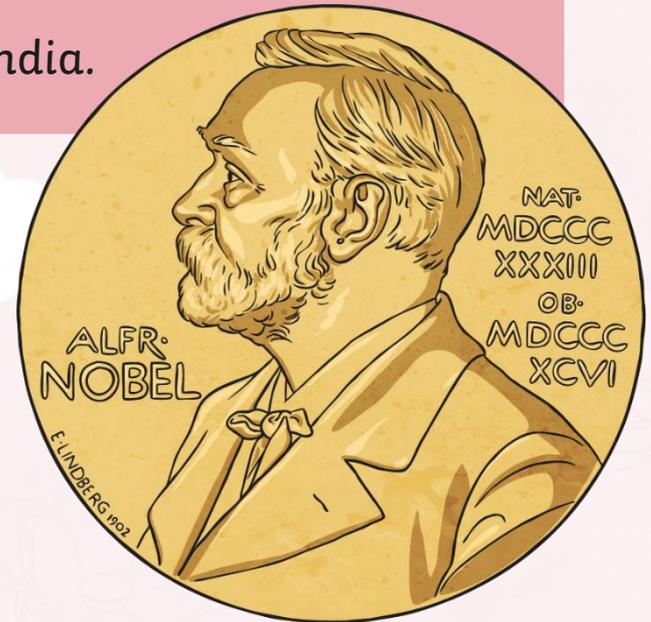
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Nobel Peace Prize

Gandhi's body was cremated and the ashes are kept in the Aga Khan's Palace in Pune, where he was once kept prisoner.

Gandhi had been nominated 5 times for the Nobel Peace Prize but had never been awarded it. In the year of his death, the prize was not awarded to anyone. The reason given was "there was no suitable living candidate".

His birthday is now a national holiday in India.



Gandhi's Quotes



An eye for eye
only ends up making
the whole world blind

- Gandhi

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