

III – The Decline of the Empire

Opposing British rule: Mahatma Gandhi

A - His Life

In the 1930s and 40s Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) was one of the most important leaders of the movement that was struggling to **free India from British rule** and make it an _____ country, a goal that was finally achieved in August 1947. However, that isn't enough to explain why so many people think of Gandhi as one of the greatest political figures of the 20th century. What really made him special was his belief in **non-violent _____** to British economic, political and military power: he believed the way forward for the Indian independence movement – and for all people suffering oppression – was simple 'non-cooperation' rather than violence. Non-cooperation included _____, **boycotts**, the refusal to pay taxes, and the willingness to go to prison if necessary – tactics that were effective in putting pressure on the British authorities.

Gandhi's _____ certainly influenced the leaders of other 20th-century **freedom struggles**, such as Martin Luther King in the United States and Nelson Mandela in South Africa.

Gandhi was born in the northern Indian state of Gujarat, the son of an important local politician. His family wanted him to become a _____ and sent him to study law at university in London, where his _____ for English food was one of the things that made him become a vegetarian for the rest of his life.

In 1893 he went to work as a lawyer in South Africa, where his political beliefs began to develop as he saw the _____ suffered by non-white people, including the country's large Indian community. He also moved closer to Hindu religious ideas, particularly *ahimsa* or non-violence.

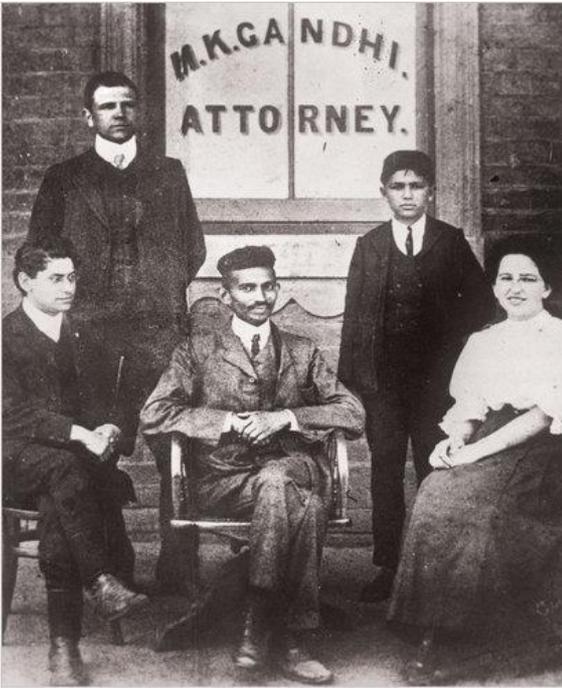
After returning to India he decided to live a **life of 'simplicity'**, which meant giving up unnecessary spending and _____ as few clothes as possible. In 1918 he _____ poor farmers in Gujarat to resist a new tax introduced by the British. The authorities put him in prison, but thousands of people protested and soon he was released. The British _____ with the poor farmers, and Gandhi became famous all over India.

Over the next 30 years he devoted himself to the _____ of Indian independence. He lived long enough to see his dream become _____, but he was sad to see the violence that surrounded the division of the subcontinent into two countries for Hindus and Muslims respectively – India and Pakistan – because he had always believed that the followers of the two religions should be able to live together peacefully.

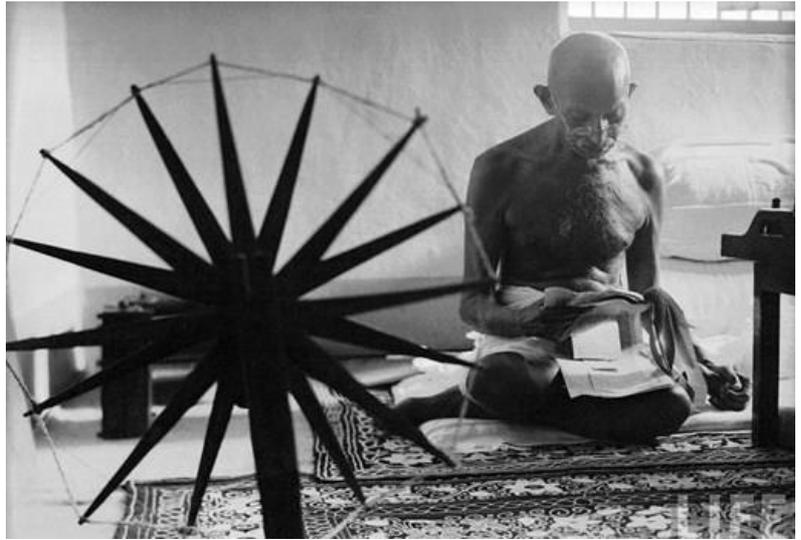
Fill the twelve gaps in the text on Worksheet A with the correct words from the box below. There are four words that you will not be able to use.

barrister	bombs	encouraged	reality
ideas	cause	elections	strikes
resistance	compromised	independent	poor
owning	dislike	mistake	discrimination

B - His Opinions



Source 1: Gandhi with his co-workers at his Johannesburg law office in 1902, Associated Press



Source 2: Gandhi and his spinning wheel, 1946, Life magazine

Source 3: The Civil Disobedience movement gathered momentum with the Salt March

TOOLBOX
To give the hint: to make a suggestion
Gandhiji: Gandhi; respectful term
A breach: A violation
National Congress: political party that conducted political campaigns for self-rule and independence

“What form of civil disobedience should we take up that would be effective, suited to the circumstances and popular with the masses? And then the Mahatma gave the hint. (...) The Salt Tax was to be attacked, the salt laws were to be broken (...). Then came the beginning of the Dandi Salt March (...).

[On April 6, 1930] Gandhiji began the breach of the salt laws at Dandi beach and three or four days later permission was given to all Congress organizations to do likewise and begin Civil Disobedience in their own area. (...) Gandhiji had been arrested on May 5th. (...) There were very painful incidents of police brutality.”

Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964), *An Autobiography*, 1936

To comment on the text: to rise against / to be repressed

Source 4: Churchill's view of Gandhi

TOOLBOX
Seditious: rebellious
A Middle-Temple lawyer: a second-class lawyer
To stride: to move with long steps
To parley: to discuss terms with an enemy
To come to terms with: to reach an agreement

The following commentary was made after Lord Irwin (Viceroy of India)'s meeting with Gandhi in January 1931.

“It is alarming (...) to see Mr Gandhi, a seditious Middle Temple lawyer, (...) striding half-naked up the steps of the Viceregal Palace, while he is still organizing and conducting a defiant campaign of civil disobedience, to parley on equal terms with the representative of the King-Emperor. I am against these conversations and agreements between Lord Irwin and Mr Gandhi. Gandhi stands for the expulsion of Britain from India. (...) You will never be able to come to terms with Gandhi.”

W. Churchill (1874-1965), Address to the West Essex Unionists, February 23rd, 1931

QUESTIONS

- 1 – Why did Gandhi gradually reject European ideas and values? (sources 1 and 2)
- 2 – Why did Nehru write that “the salt laws were to be broken”? (source 3)
- 3 – How did British authorities react to this movement? (source 3)
- 4 – Explain why Churchill saw Gandhi as an enemy of the British Empire. (source 4)

