

## **Mahatma Gandhi: Pilgrim of Peace An A&E Biography**

### **Questions to ponder**

- \*Why is he called Mahatma, “Great Soul”? What Hindu ideas does this title reflect?
- \*Gandhi saw his life as “an experiment with Truth.” What do you think truth meant for Gandhi in a Hindu context?
- \*What reasons did Gandhi come to be seen as a saint? What elements of traditional Hinduism adopted by Gandhi might have contributed to his saintly status?
- \*What does Bikhu Parekh mean in saying that “the Mahatma was born” on the Gandhi was thrown off the train?
- \*Why did Gandhi consider partition and the resulting Hindu-Muslim violence his personal failure?
- \*What does Bikhu Parekh mean when he states that Gandhi “atoned” for Indians?
- \*What might have motivated Gandhi’s Hindu assassin?
- \*What does Gandhi’s dying word, “Rama” tell us about his Hindu background?-

### **Childhood and early years**

- \*Mohandas K. Gandhi, born 1869 in Gujarat, west India.
- \*Mother early influence, fasted “for God”. Father politician
- \*Married age 13 to girl of same age
- \*Age 16 father dies, blames himself for lack of “duty” (dharma)
- \*Age 17 leaves family to law school in London, experiences British culture firsthand \*Returns to India but too shy to practice law

### **In South Africa**

- \*Age 24 tries to ride train 1<sup>st</sup> class in South Africa, brutally thrown off, experiences epiphany about racism against Indians under colonial rule
- \*This experience “most creative night of his life;” decides to resist British domination of Indians in South Africa, begins to mobilize community movements in South Africa
- \*1906 witnesses atrocities of British-Zulu wars, personal commitment to non-violence strengthened
- \*Age 37 takes vow of celibacy
- \*Begins new campaign against anti-Indian British laws forbidding Hindu-Muslim marriage:
  - Vows to god to go to jail until laws repealed, South African Indians make vow with him
  - Beginning of Indian civil disobedience movement
  - Develops idea of satyagraha, the “pursuit of truth”
  - Begins to integrate non-violence with political resistance
  - Promotes women’s participation in strikes against marriage laws

### **In India**

- \*1915 age 45 returns to an India of 300,000,000 Indians ruled by 100,000 British
- \*Anti-British sentiment strong as Gandhi returned to India
- \*1919 Amritsar massacre sparks violent conflict between Indians and British; Gandhi seeks non-violent response
- \*1920’s Promotes self-reliance by using Indian clothing, burns foreign cloth; Spent one hour each day spinning yarn as symbolic connection to Indian population
- \*1930 British levy on salt: illegal for Indians to produce and sell salt
- \*Salt march: begins with 80 followers on 230 mile march to ocean to, ends with 100,000s; forces negotiations with British
- \*Travels on publicity campaign to England, has audience with the king at Buckingham Palace
- \*August 1942 demanded complete independence, gives “Quit India” speech; he and all of his followers imprisoned for two years
- \*1945 Britain admits that it can no longer support its empire in India
- \*News of imminent independence causes Hindus and Muslims disagree on new rule
- \*August 14<sup>th</sup> 1947 Indians celebrate independence
- \*Partition begins, Hindus flee to India, Muslims to Pakistan; Violence spreads, nearly 500,000 people killed
- \*Gandhi takes violence as personal failure; Begins hunger strike to stop violence in New Delhi
- \*January 30<sup>th</sup> 1948 Gandhi killed by Hindu
- \*Gandhi’s parting word: “Rama”