

# **UNIT 1 GANDHI: LIFE AND TIMES\***

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## **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

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Mahatma Gandhi or *Bapu* (1869-1948) as affectionately called by Indians has always been a much discussed figure in the story of India's struggle for independence. The values propagated by him still remain at the core of Indian governance and a barometer of right and wrong. Over the years Mahatma Gandhi's multifarious personality has attracted many scholars and thus we have a vast literature on Gandhi. Efforts to engage Gandhi broadly falls into study of either the historical narratives of his life and leadership or theoretical assessment of his thought. The following unit is a brief introduction of his life and times. The unit outlines Gandhi's evolution by discussing four important periods of his life (a) Childhood, (b) Gandhi's education and youth in England, (c) Gandhi's time in South Africa and (d) Gandhi's emergence as a political leader in India.

### ***Aims and Objectives***

This unit will enable you to understand

- The life and times of Mahatma Gandhi.
- The childhood days of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.
- Gandhi's education in England.
- The struggle for the rights of the Indians living in South Africa.
- Gandhi's struggle to gain independence from British rule in India.

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## 1.2 CHILDHOOD

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869 in Porbandar, on the coast of Kathiawad in Gujarat. His parents were Karamchand Gandhi and Putlibai. Although the Gandhis, meaning grocers, were merchants (baniya) by caste, they had risen to important political positions. Mohandas's father was the chief administrator and member of the court of Porbandar, and his grandfather that of the adjacent tiny state of Junagadh. Gandhi grew up in a varied religious environment. His parents were followers of the largely devotional Hindu cult of Vishnu (or Vaishnavites). His mother belonged to the Pranami sect, which combined Hindu and Muslim religious beliefs, gave equal honour to the sacred books of the Vaishnavites and the Koran, and preached religious harmony. Her religious fasts and vows, observed without exception all her life, left an abiding impression on her son.

His father's friends included many Jains who preached a strict doctrine of nonviolence and self-discipline. Gandhi was also exposed to Christian missionaries, but Christianity was not a significant presence in his childhood. Like many Hindus he unselfconsciously imbibed a variety of religious beliefs, but had no deep knowledge of any religious tradition including his own. Gandhi was a shy and mediocre student, and completed his school education with average results. He was married to Kasturbai when they were both 13 years of age. Events in Gandhiji's life which resulted from two immature minds trying to settle into adult roles of husband and wife made him an opponent of child marriage.<sup>1</sup>

The early years of Mohandas' childhood were spent in Porbandar. He was not far behind the other naughty children of his age, who kept names for their teachers behind their backs. He enjoyed school but would not get through the multiplication table easily. When Mohandas or Moniya as his mother called him, was seven years of age, his father became a member of the Rajkot Court. So his parents shifted to Rajkot from Porbandar. Here, Mohandas was admitted to Primary school.

Young Gandhi was a shy boy. He was very punctual. He did not like to be late to school and preferred to go back home soon after the school closed. It was only later when he was little grown up that he started playing on the streets and by the seaside. Mohandas was an unremarkable student who was so timid that he slept with the lights on even as a teenager. In the ensuing years, the teenager rebelled by smoking, eating meat and stealing change from household servants. At one time he stole some gold from his brother's armlet. He was afraid of his father. Not because of any punishment from him, but because of causing great pain to his father. He confessed to his father in writing and tried to get out of the mess.

He was ashamed of himself and with trembling hands he gave the note to his father. Gandhiji expected a violent reaction. His father was sick at that time. He sat up and read what his son had written. His eyes filled with tears and he simply tore the note up. This was not expected of his father. But the clear confession and the promise to never commit such sin again, made father forgive his son. Mohandas cried too. At the same time he felt his sins had been washed away in

the tears of his father. His first lesson in Ahimsa began here. He realised its unlimited power of transforming everything.

Childhood experiences and influences impacted Gandhi's adult life as do everybody else's. He was a deeply religious Hindu and yet respected all other religions. He realized he could not lie because he could not tolerate the enormous guilt that he felt later on.<sup>2</sup>

Mohan passed the matriculation examination of Bombay University in 1887. His father's death a year earlier had strained the means of the family. Being the only boy in the family who had persevered in his studies, its hopes rested on him and he was sent to Bhavnagar, the nearest town with a college. Unfortunately for Mohan the teaching was in English. He was unable to follow the lectures and despaired of making any progress. Meanwhile, Mavji Dave, a friend of the family, suggested that Mohan should go to England to qualify at the bar. Mohan jumped at the idea of going abroad. His elder brother had no doubt that the proposal was attractive but wondered how they could afford it. His mother was reluctant to let her youngest boy sail to an alien land to face unknown temptations and dangers. The Modh Bania caste to which the Gandhis belonged, threatened to make the whole family outcastes if Gandhi went to England. All these hurdles were, however, successfully overcome by Mohan's determination to go broad, and in September 1888, at the age of 18, he sailed for England.<sup>3</sup>

### **1.3 YEARS IN ENGLAND**

On September 4, 1888, Mohandas left Bombay for England. Mohandas never forgot his first morning on board. He felt uncomfortable in his black suit and shirt and tie. He was quite sure that Indian attire was more suitable, but he thought he looked very impressive. On landing at Southampton he saw that all the people were in dark clothes, wearing bowler hats and carrying overcoats. Mohandas was embarrassed to find that he was the only one wearing white flannels. In London, he stayed at first at the Victoria Hotel. Dr. P. J. Mehta, a friend of the Gandhi family, was the first to meet him.

Gandhi found everything around him strange. He was homesick and almost starved until he discovered a vegetarian restaurant. He struggled to learn western manners and customs. He bought well-tailored clothes and a top hat. He spent a lot of time before the mirror, parting his straight hair and fixing his tie. He took lessons in dancing, but soon gave it up as he had no sense of rhythm. He tried his hand at playing the violin, but failed. He took lessons in French and elocution, but went to sleep. His attempt to be an Englishman lasted about three months. Then he gave up the idea. He converted himself into a serious student. His meals were simple. He avoided expenditure on transport and went on foot everywhere in London. He started to keep an account of every penny he spent. Mohandas joined the London Vegetarian Society and soon found himself in its executive council. He wrote articles for the magazine, *Vegetarian*.<sup>4</sup>

In the boarding houses and vegetarian restaurants of England, Gandhi met not only food faddists but some earnest men and women to whom he owed his introduction to the Bible and, more important, the *Bhagavadgita*, which he read for the first time in its English translation by Sir Edwin Arnold and his rendering

of Buddha's life-*The light of Asia* as well as the chapter on the Prophet of Islam in Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero Worship*. The attitude of respect for all religions and the desire to understand the best in each one of them were thus planted in his mind early in life.<sup>5</sup>

The *Bhagavadgita* (commonly known as the *Gita*) is part of the great epic the *Mahabharata* and, in the form of a philosophical poem, is the most-popular expression of Hinduism. The English vegetarians were a motley crowd. They included socialists and humanitarians such as Edward Carpenter, "the British Thoreau"; Fabians such as George Bernard Shaw; and Theosophists such as Annie Besant. Most of them were idealists; quite a few were rebels who rejected the prevailing values of the late-Victorian establishment, denounced the evils of the capitalist and industrial society, preached the cult of the simple life, and stressed the superiority of moral over material values and of cooperation over conflict. Those ideas were to contribute substantially to the shaping of Gandhi's personality and, eventually, to his politics. The teachings of the Bible, the Buddha and Gujarati poet Shamal Bhatt fused in his mind. The idea of returning love for hatred, and good for evil, captivated him; he did not yet comprehend it full, but it continued to ferment in his impressionable mind.

The bar examination did not require much study and Gandhi had ample time to spare. Getting admission to Oxford or Cambridge was not possible as study at those institutions would entail long course work and much financial resources. He therefore decided to appear for the London matriculation examination. It meant hard work and sacrifice, but he enjoyed hard work. He passed in French, English, and chemistry but failed in Latin. He tried again, and this time passed in Latin too.

Meanwhile, he progressed in his study of law and in November 1888 was admitted to the Inner Temple. It was the tradition of the Inns of Court for the students to dine together at least six times each year. The first time Gandhi dined with his fellow students, he was nervous. He was sure the boys would tease him for refusing meat and alcohol. When wine was offered, he refused to have any. He did not touch the meat either, and sat there, quite content with his bread, boiled potatoes and cabbage. He was pleasantly surprised to find that his strange habits did not make him unpopular. The next time he went for the dinner, he had a pile of law books with him. He was taking the books to his room to study. The other students were amazed by his dedication to learning and very surprised to find him reading Roman law in Latin. Some friends suggested he read abbreviated versions of the law instead of bothering unduly over such tomes. Gandhi explained to his friends that he worked so hard for sheer interest in the subject, and that he wanted to acquire knowledge for its own sake.

After a short trip to France, he prepared for the final law examination. The results were soon declared. He had passed with high marks. On June 10, 1891, Gandhi was called to the bar. He was admitted as a barrister and the next day was formally enrolled in the High Court. The following day, June 12, he sailed for India. Gandhi's three-year stay in England was eventful. Those were days of great intellectual activity, and there was tolerance for every school of thought. The country as a whole was a living university. As Gandhi sailed for home on the S.S. Assam, he felt that, next to India, he would rather live in England than any other place in the world.<sup>6</sup>

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.  
ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

- 1) Briefly describe Gandhi's childhood years and his early stay in England.

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## **1.4 STRUGGLE IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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When Gandhi reached Bombay he learnt that his mother had died. The news had been deliberately kept back from him to spare him the shock in a foreign land.

After spending some time in Rajkot he immediately took in hand the education of his little son and of his brother's children. He decided to set up a legal practice in Bombay. He stayed in Bombay for a few months where he had a small case, but when he rose to argue it in the court, his nerve failed him and he could not utter a word.

Having failed to establish himself in Bombay, Gandhi returned to Rajkot where he started practice again. He still did not make much progress and was unhappy and could not get in sync with the atmosphere of petty intrigue that was rampant in the small states of Kathiawar. During this time an offer came from Dada Abdulla & Co. to proceed to South Africa on their behalf to instruct their counsel in a lawsuit. According to Gandhi this was a godsend opportunity. Gandhi jumped at it and sailed for South Africa in April 1893 intending to stay for a year but staying on for twenty-one. It was in South Africa that a shy, timid, inexperienced, lawyer, came into clash with forces that made him to tap into his hidden moral resources and turn misfortunes into creative spiritual experiences.

Dressed in a frock-coat and turban Gandhi landed in Durban where his client Abdulla Sheth received him. Almost at once the first thing he sensed on arrival was the oppressive atmosphere of racial snobbishness. A large number of Indians were settled in South Africa, some as merchants, some in other professions, a large majority of them were indentured labourers or their descendants. They were all looked down upon as pariahs by the white settlers and called coolies or samis. Thus a Hindu doctor was a coolie doctor and Gandhi himself a coolie barrister. After about a week's stay in Durban Gandhi left for Pretoria, the capital of the Transvaal. There his presence was needed in connection with a lawsuit. A first class ticket was purchased for him by his client. When the train reached Maritzburg, the capital of Natal, at about 9 p.m. a white passenger who boarded the train objected to the presence of a 'coloured' man in the compartment and Gandhi was ordered by a railway official to shift to a third class. When he refused to do so, a constable pushed him out and his luggage was taken away by the railway authorities. It was winter and bitterly cold. Gandhi sat and shivered the whole night in the waiting-room, thinking whether he should fight for his rights

or go back to India. He decided that it was cowardice to run away without fulfilling his obligations.

The next evening he continued the train journey, this time without any incident, but a bigger mishap awaited him on the journey from Charlestown to Johannesburg which had to be covered by stagecoach. He was made to sit with the coachman on the box outside, while the white conductor sat inside with the white passengers. Gandhi pocketed the insult for fear of missing the coach altogether. On the way the conductor who wanted a smoke spread a piece of dirty sack-cloth on the footboard and ordered Gandhi to sit there so that the conductor could have Gandhi's seat and smoke. Gandhi refused. The conductor swore and rained blows on him, trying to throw him down. Gandhi clung to the brass rails of the coach box, refusing to yield and unwilling to retaliate. Some of the white passengers protested at this cowardly assault and the conductor stopped beating Gandhi.

Though his main concern in Pretoria was with the lawsuit, Gandhi's sense of social justice had been aroused by his personal experience of the brutalities to which his countrymen were subject to. He therefore lost no time in calling a meeting of the Indian community in Pretoria which consisted largely of Muslim merchants. This was his first public speech which he delivered successfully. He encouraged his countrymen to observe truthfulness even in business and reminded them that their responsibility was all the greater since their country would be judged by their conduct in a foreign land. He asked them to forget all distinctions of religion and caste and to give up some of their unsanitary habits. He suggested the formation of an association to look after the Indian settlers and offered his free time and services.<sup>7</sup>

The position of Indians in the Transvaal was worse than in Natal. They were compelled to pay a poll tax of £3; they were not allowed to own land except in a specially allotted location, a kind of ghetto; they had no franchise, and were not allowed to walk on the pavement or move out of doors after 9 p.m. without special permit.

Gandhi had been working hard at the lawsuit for which he had come to South Africa and had gained a sound knowledge of legal practice. He made two discoveries: one was that facts are three fourth of the law; the other, that litigation was damaging to both parties in a suit and therefore the duty of a lawyer was to bring them together in a settlement out of court. In this particular case he succeeded in persuading both Abdulla Seth and the opposing party, Tyeb Seth, to accept arbitration. Having completed his work in Pretoria, Gandhi returned to Durban and prepared to sail home, but at a farewell dinner given in his honour someone showed him a news item in Natal Mercury that the Natal Government proposed to introduce a bill to disfranchise Indians. Gandhi immediately understood the ominous implications of this bill which according to him was the first nail into their coffins and advised his compatriots to resist it by concerned action. The Indian community convinced him of their helplessness without him and begged him to stay on for another month. Gandhi agreed, little realizing that this one month would become twenty years.<sup>8</sup>

With his usual earnestness Gandhi then and there turned the farewell dinner into an action committee and drafted a petition to the Natal Legislative Assembly. Volunteers came forward to make copies of the petition and to collect signatures all during the night. The petition received good publicity in the press the following

morning. The bill was however passed. Undeterred, Gandhi set to work on another petition to Lord Ripon, the Secretary of State for Colonies. Within a month the mammoth petition with ten thousand signatures was sent to Lord Ripon and a thousand copies printed for distribution. Even *The Times* admitted the justice of the Indian claims and for the first time the people in India came to know of the hardships of their countrymen in South Africa. Gandhi realized that if he had to extend his stay in South Africa he would not accept remuneration for his public services and estimated that he needed about £300 to meet his expenses. He therefore enrolled as an advocate of the Supreme Court of Natal.

Three years' stay in South Africa persuaded Gandhi that he could not now desert a cause he had so warmly espoused. He therefore took six months' leave to visit India and bring his family back, but it was no holiday. He visited many cities in India and worked hard to rouse interest of the editors of papers and eminent public men in the unfortunate condition of Indians in South Africa. He published a small pamphlet on the subject. Though it was a very sober and restrained statement of the Indian case, a distorted summary cabled by Reuters created considerable misunderstanding in Natal which was to have unpleasant consequences later.

When plague broke out in Rajkot, Gandhi volunteered his services and visited every locality, including the quarters of the untouchables, to inspect the toilets and teach the residents better methods of sanitation. During this visit, he made the acquaintance of veteran leaders like Badruddin Tyabji, Pherozeshah Mehta, Surendranath Banerjee and the great patriot, Tilak. He met the wise and noble-hearted Gokhale and was greatly inspired by him. He addressed a large public meeting in Bombay. He was due to speak in Calcutta also, but before he could do so an urgent telegram from the Indian community in Natal obliged him to cut short his stay and sail for Durban with his wife and children in November 1896.

When the ship reached Durban, it was put into five day's quarantine. The European community, misled by garbled versions of Gandhi's activities in India and by a rumour that he was bringing shiploads of Indians to settle in Natal, were angry and threatened to drown all the passengers. However, the passengers, including Gandhi's family, were allowed to land unmolested, but when Gandhi came down a little later and his identity was discovered, an infuriated mob fell upon him, stoning, beating and kicking him and would probably have killed him if a brave English lady had not come to his rescue. News of this cowardly assault received wide publicity and Joseph Chamberlain, the British Secretary of States for the Colonies, cabled an order to Natal to prosecute all those who were responsible for the attempted lynching. Gandhi refused to identify and prosecute his assailants, saying that they were misled and that he was sure that when they came to know the truth they would be sorry for what they had done.

It was during this second period in South Africa that Gandhi's mode of living underwent a change, albeit gradual. Formerly, he was anxious to maintain the standard of an English barrister. Now he began, in his methodical but original fashion, to reduce his wants and his expenses. He learnt laundering and became his own washerman. He could now iron and starch a stiff white collar. He also learnt to cut his own hair. He not only cleaned his own chamber-pots but often of his guests as well. Not satisfied with self-help, he volunteered, despite his busy practice as a lawyer and demand of public work, his free service for two hours a day as compounder in a charitable hospital. He also undertook the education at

home of his two sons and a nephew. He read books on nursing and midwifery and in fact served as midwife when his fourth and last son was born.

Gandhi visited India again in 1901 to attend the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress and had the satisfaction of seeing his resolution on South Africa approved. He was however disappointed with the Congress. He felt that Indian politicians talked too much but did little. He deplored the importance given to the English language in their discussions and was pained to see the unsanitary condition of the latrines in the camp. After staying for a few days in Calcutta as Gokhale's guest, he went out on a tour of India, travelling third class in order to study for himself the habits and difficulties of the poor. He observed that the extreme discomfort of third class travel in India was due to much of the indifference of the railway authorities as to the dirty habits of the passengers themselves and suggested that educated persons should voluntarily travel third so as to reform the people's habits and be in a position to ventilate their legitimate grievances. The diagnosis as well as the remedy suggested was characteristic of his approach to all social and political problems-equal emphasis on duties as on rights. Gandhi was not destined to work in India yet. Hardly had he set up his practice in Bombay when a cablegram from the Indian community in Natal recalled him. He had given them his word that he would return if needed. Leaving his family in India he sailed again.

He had been called to put the Indian case before Joseph Chamberlain who was visiting South Africa. Chamberlain did not lend an ear to Gandhi and the Indians' petition. The situation in Transvaal was unfavourable for the Indians, so Gandhi decided to shift to Johannesburg as an advocate of the Supreme Court. He had stayed on specifically to challenge European arrogance and resist injustice. He had no malice in his heart but only wanted to right wrongs.

### **Founding of "The Indian Opinion"**

About the middle of 1903, it had occurred to him that, if the South African Indians were to be brought into closer association with each other and with their European fellow-colonists, and to be politically and socially educated, it was absolutely necessary to have a newspaper, and, after consultation, he provided the greater part of the capital for its inauguration, with the late Mr. M. H. Nazar as editor, and thus the Indian Opinion was born.

Gandhi often pondered deeply over the kind of life he should lead in order to dedicate himself completely to the service of humanity. He realized that absolute self-control or *Brahmacharya* was necessary for the purpose, for one "could not live both after the flesh and the spirit". So, immediately after his return from the Zulu campaign in 1906, he announced his resolution to take a vow of absolute celibacy to a select group of friends.

This step was taken under the influence of the *Bhagvad Gita* which he had been reading regularly every morning for some time and committing to memory. Another doctrine of the Gita which influenced him profoundly was 'non-possession'. As soon as he realized its implications he allowed his insurance policy of Rs.10,000 to lapse. Henceforth he would put his faith in God alone. Next to the Gita, the book which influenced him most deeply was Ruskin's *Unto This Last* which his friend Polak had given him to read one day in 1904. What Ruskin preached, or rather what Gandhi understood him to preach, was the moral

dignity of manual labour and the beauty of community living on the basis of equality. Since, unlike Ruskin, Gandhi could not appreciate an ideal without wanting to practice it, he immediately set about to buy a farm where such a life could be lived. Thus was founded the famous Phoenix colony, on a hundred acres of land, some fourteen miles from Durban, but Gandhi could not stay long at Phoenix as duty called him to Johannesburg where, later, he founded another colony on similar ideals, at a distance of twenty-one miles from the city. He called it the Tolstoy Farm. In both these ashrams, as settlements organized on spiritual ideals are known in India, the inmates did all the work themselves, from cooking to scavenging. Extreme simplicity of the life was observed, reinforced by a strict code of moral and physical hygiene. No medicines were kept, for Gandhi who had earlier read Adolf Just's *Return to Nature* believed profoundly in natural cure. Every inmate had to practise some handicraft. Gandhi himself learnt to make sandals. From 1907 Gandhi and the rest of the Indians struggled with the Black Act of General Smuts. Gandhi was jailed thrice. It was his time in jail praying and undergoing privations that Gandhi was able to harden himself for further struggle which was waiting in the future for him.

He foresaw that a showdown with the South African Government was sooner or later inevitable and knew from his own individual experience that no brute force could quell the spirit of man ready to defy and willing to suffer. What he could do himself he could train others to do. Individual resistance could be expanded and organized into a mass struggle in the prosecution of a moral equivalent of war. He had read Tolstoy and Thoreau's use of the term 'civil disobedience' did not seem to express Gandhi's own concept of ahimsa as a positive force of love, nor did he like the use of the phrase 'passive resistance'. The concept was now clearly formulated in his mind but the word to describe it was wanting. His cousin Maganlal Gandhi suggested *Sadagraha*, meaning holding fast to truth or firmness in a righteous cause. Gandhi liked the term and changed to Satyagraha. Thus was evolved and formulated Gandhi's most original idea in political action.<sup>9</sup>

In 1911 things seemed to settle down, but the Union government went back on its promise and even nullified all non-Christian marriages and now Kasturbai too joined the struggle. The Satyagraha which was Gandhi's form of non-violent protest spread rapidly. In January, 1914 a provisional agreement was worked out between Gandhi and Smuts and the main Indian demands were conceded too. In 1914 on Gokhale's request Gandhi sailed to India.

### **Check Your Progress Exercise 2**

**Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

- 1) Discuss in what ways Mahatma Gandhi contributed to the struggle for the rights of the Indians living in South Africa.

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## 1.5 THE STRUGGLE IN INDIA

In April 1893, Gandhi had sailed for South Africa, a young and inexperienced barrister in search of fortune. In January 1915 he finally returned to India with no possessions and with only one ambition and purpose that is to serve his people. He didn't know India, its people or their problems well. He therefore promised his 'political guru' Gokhale, that he would spend the first year in India studying the country, with 'his ears open but his mouth shut'. After one year of roaming India, Gandhi settled down on the bank of the river Sabarmati, on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, where he founded an ashram in May 1915. He called it the 'Satyagraha Ashram'.

Gandhi's first public address in India was on the occasion of the opening ceremony of the Banaras Hindu University in February 1916, which was attended by many distinguished persons and princes and the Viceroy himself. Speaking in English he shocked them all by expressing his 'deep humiliation and shame' at being compelled to address his countrymen in a language that was foreign to him.

His first Satyagraha in India was in Champaran, in Bihar, where he went in 1917 at the request of poor peasants to inquire into the grievances of the much exploited peasantry of that district. The peasants here were forced by British indigo planters to grow indigo on 15 per cent of their land and part with the whole crop for rent. The indigo farmers of the area found a champion in Gandhi and Gandhi embarrassed the magistrate into releasing him. The incident taught Gandhi the power of peaceful Satyagraha and the masses. The report of the committee of which Gandhi was a member went in favour of the tenant farmers. The success of his first experiment in Satyagraha in India greatly enhanced Gandhi's reputation in his country. Similarly, Gandhi took up the cause of the textile mill workers in Ahmadabad. He refused to touch food till the matter was amicably solved. At the end of three days, both parties agreed on arbitration amid general rejoicing.

Soon the agrarian trouble in the Kheda district of Gujarat began. The peasants who were on the verge of starvation were being forced by the Government to pay the usual tax. Gandhi advised Satyagraha and persuaded all the peasants, the well-to-do as well as the poor, to take a pledge not to pay any tax until those who could not pay were granted respite. The no-tax campaign lasted for about four months at the end of which the Government suspended the tax for the poor peasants.

### 1.5.1 Khilafat Movement Post the First World War

Gandhi had agreed to support the British during their fight in the First World War, but the British failed to fulfil their promise of granting India independence post the war, and as a result of this the Khilafat Movement was launched. Gandhi realized that Hindus and Muslims must unite to fight the British and urged both the communities to show solidarity and unity, though his motives were questioned by many Hindu leaders. Despite the opposition from many leaders, Gandhi managed to gather the support of Muslims, but as the Khilafat Movement ended abruptly, all his efforts got wasted.

### 1.5.2 Non-cooperation Movement

Non-cooperation Movement was one of Gandhi's most important movements against the British. Gandhi urged his fellow countrymen to stop cooperating

with the British. He believed that the British succeeded in ruling over India only because of the co-operation of the Indians. He warned the British not to pass the Rowlatt Act, but they did not pay any attention to his words and passed the Act. As soon as it was announced, Gandhi asked everyone to start civil disobedience (boycott, picketing etc.) against the British. The British began suppressing the civil disobedience movement by force. He urged people to show unity, non-violence and respect for human life, but the British responded aggressively to this and arrested many protesters. On 13 April 1919, a British officer General Dyer, ordered his forces to open fire on a peaceful gathering, including women and children, in Amritsar's Jallianwala Bagh. As a result of this, hundreds of innocent Hindu and Sikh civilians were killed. The incident came to be known as 'Jallianwala Bagh Massacre'. This cowardly massacre of the innocent was followed by the declaration of martial law in the Punjab, with wholesale arrests, floggings and the inhuman order. The events of that day which have been called by Sir Valentine Chirol as that "black day in the annals of British India" marked a turning point in the history of the Indian struggle. The moral prestige of Britain received a fatal blow. Henceforth, Gandhi could not keep away from the battlefield of Indian politics.

The concept of non-cooperation became very popular and started spreading through the length and breadth of India. Gandhi extended this movement and focused on Swaraj (independence). He urged people to stop using British goods. He also asked people to resign from government employment, quit studying in British institutions and stop practicing law in courts. However, the violent clash in Chauri Chaura town of Uttar Pradesh, in February 1922, forced Gandhi to call off the movement all of a sudden. Gandhi was arrested on 10th March 1922 and was tried for sedition. He was sentenced to six years imprisonment, but served only two years in prison.

### **1.5.3 Simon Commission and Salt Satyagraha**

During the period of 1920s, Mahatma Gandhi concentrated on resolving the differences between the Swaraj Party and the Indian National Congress. In 1927, British appointed Sir John Simon as the head of a new constitutional reform commission, which was popularly known as the 'Simon Commission'. There was not even a single Indian in the commission. Agitated by this, Gandhi passed a resolution at the Calcutta Congress session in December 1928, calling on the British government to grant India dominion status. In case the British did not comply with this demand, they were to face a new protest of non-violence demanding complete independence or 'Poorna Swaraj' for the country. These demands were rejected by the British. The Indian flag was unfurled by the Indian national Congress on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1929 at its Lahore session on the banks of river Ravi. January 26, 1930 was also celebrated as the Independence Day of India. The British failed to give into these demands and soon they levied a tax on salt and thus the 'Salt Satyagraha' was launched in March 1930, opposing the tax levied on salt. Gandhi started the Dandi March with his followers in March, going from Ahmedabad to Dandi on foot. The protest was successful and resulted in the Gandhi-Irwin Pact in March 1931.

### **1.5.4 Round Table Conferences**

Post the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, Gandhi was invited to round table conferences by the British. While Gandhi pressed for the Indian independence, British questioned

Gandhi's motives and asked him not to speak for the entire nation. They invited many religious leaders and B. R. Ambedkar to represent the untouchables. The British promised many rights to various religious groups as well as the untouchables. Fearing this move would divide India further, Gandhi protested against this by fasting. After learning about the true intentions of the British during the second conference, he started another Satyagraha, for which he was once again arrested.

### 1.5.5 Quit India Movement

As the Second World War progressed, Mahatma Gandhi intensified his protests for the complete independence of India. He drafted a resolution calling for the British to Quit India. The 'Quit India Movement' or the 'Bharat Chhodo Andolan' was the most aggressive movement launched by the Indian national Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi was arrested on 9th August 1942 and was held for two years in the Aga Khan Palace in Pune, where he lost his secretary, Mahadev Desai and his wife, Kasturba. The Quit India Movement came to an end by the end of 1943, when the British gave hints that complete power would be transferred to the people of India. Gandhi called off the movement which resulted in the release of 100,000 political prisoners.

### 1.5.6 Freedom and Partition of India

The independence cum partition proposal offered by the British Cabinet Mission in 1946 was accepted by the Congress, despite being advised otherwise by Mahatma Gandhi. Sardar Patel convinced Gandhi that it was the only way to avoid civil war and he reluctantly gave his consent. After India's independence, Gandhi focused on peace and unity of Hindus and Muslims. He launched his last fast-unto-death in Delhi, and asked people to stop communal violence.

### 1.5.7 Assassination of Mahatma Gandhi

The inspiring life of Mahatma Gandhi came to an end on 30th January 1948, when he was shot by a fanatic, Nathuram Godse, at point-blank range. Nathuram was a Hindu radical, who held Gandhi responsible for weakening India by ensuring the partition payment to Pakistan. Godse and his co-conspirator, Narayan Apte, were later tried and convicted. They were executed on 15th November 1949.<sup>10</sup>

#### Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.  
 ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

- 1) Discuss the various political movements launched by Gandhi in India to gain Independence.
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## 1.6 SUMMARY

Mahatma Gandhi proposed the acceptance and practice of truth, non-violence, vegetarianism, Brahmacharya (celibacy), simplicity and faith in God. Though he would be remembered forever as the man who fought for Indian independence, his greatest legacies are the tools he used in his fight against the British. These methods inspired several other world leaders in their struggle against injustice. His statues are installed all over the world and he is considered the most prominent personality in Indian history. The word Mahatma is often mistaken in the West as Gandhi's first name. His extraordinary life inspired innumerable works of art in the field of literature, art and showbiz. Many movies and documentaries have been made on the life of the Mahatma. Post the Independence, Gandhi's image became the mainstay of Indian paper currency.

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## **1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES**

### **Check Your Progress Exercise 1**

- 1) Your answer should highlight the influence of family, friends and religion on Gandhi's early learning.

### **Check Your Progress Exercise 2**

- 1) Discuss the importance of Satyagraha movement, the role of Indian Opinion in shaping public opinion.

### **Check Your Progress Exercise 3**

- 1) Highlight the contribution of NCM, CDM and the Quit India movement.

