

Mohandas Gandhi Biography

<http://www.notablebiographies.com/Fi-Gi/Gandhi-Mohandas.html>

Born: October 2, 1869

Porbandar, India

Died: January 30, 1948

Delhi, India

Indian religious leader, reformer, and lawyer

Mohandas Gandhi was an Indian revolutionary and religious leader who used his religious power for political and social reform. Although he held no governmental office, he was the main force behind the second-largest nation in the world's struggle for independence.

Early years

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869, in Porbandar, India, a seacoast town in the Kathiawar Peninsula north of Bombay, India. His wealthy family was from one of the higher castes (Indian social classes). He was the fourth child of Karamchand Gandhi, prime minister to the raja (ruler) of three small city-states, and Purtlibai, his fourth wife. Gandhi described his mother as a deeply religious woman who attended temple (a place for religious worship) service daily. Mohandas was a small, quiet boy who disliked sports and was only an average student. At the age of thirteen he did not even know in advance that he was to marry Kasturbai, a girl his own age. The childhood ambition of Mohandas was to study medicine, but as this was considered beneath his caste, his father persuaded him to study law instead. After his marriage Mohandas finished high school and tutored his wife.

In September 1888 Gandhi went to England to study. Before leaving India, he promised his mother he would try not to eat meat. He was an even stricter vegetarian while away than he had been at home. In England he studied law but never completely adjusted to

the English way of life. He became a lawyer in 1891 and sailed for Bombay. He attempted unsuccessfully to practice law in Rajkot and Bombay, then for a brief period served as lawyer for the prince of Porbandar.

South Africa: the beginning

In 1893 Gandhi accepted an offer from a firm of Muslims to represent them legally in Pretoria, the capital of Transvaal in the Union of South Africa. While traveling in a first-class train compartment in Natal, South Africa, a white man asked Gandhi to leave. He got off the train and spent the night in a train station meditating. He decided then to work to end racial prejudice. He had planned to stay in South Africa for only one year, but this new cause kept him in the country until 1914. Shortly after the train incident he called his first meeting of Indians in Pretoria and attacked racial discrimination (treating a certain group of people differently) by whites. This launched his campaign for improved legal status for Indians in South Africa, who at that time suffered the same discrimination as black people.

In 1896 Gandhi returned to India to take his wife and sons to Africa and to inform his countrymen of the poor treatment of Indians there. News of his speeches filtered back to Africa, and when Gandhi returned, an angry mob threw stones and attempted to lynch (to murder by mob action and without lawful trial) him.

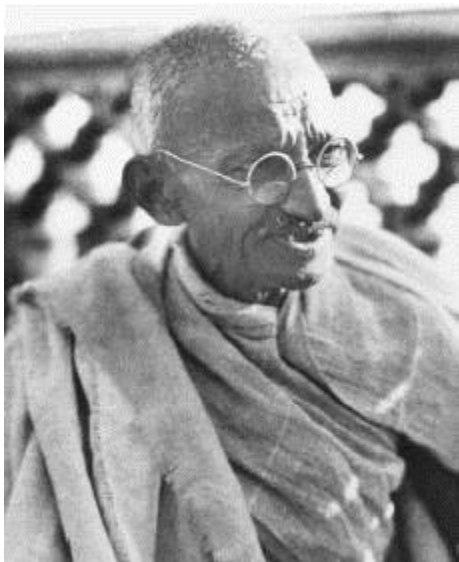
Spiritual development

Gandhi began to do day-to-day chores for unpaid boarders of the lowest castes and encouraged his wife to do the same. He decided to buy a farm in Natal and return to a simpler way of life. He began to fast (not eat). In 1906 he became celibate (not engaging in sexual intercourse) after having fathered four sons, and he preached Brahmacharya (vow of celibacy) as a means of birth control and spiritual purity. He also began to live a life of voluntary poverty.

During this period Gandhi developed the concept of Satyagraha, or soul force. He wrote: "Satyagraha is not predominantly civil disobedience, but a quiet and irresistible pursuit of truth." Truth was throughout his life Gandhi's chief concern, as reflected in the

subtitle of his *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Gandhi also developed a basic concern for the means used to achieve a goal.

In 1907 Gandhi urged all Indians in South Africa to defy a law requiring registration and fingerprinting of all Indians. For this activity he was imprisoned for two months but released when he agreed to voluntary registration. During Gandhi's second stay in jail he read the American essayist Henry David Thoreau's (1817–1862) essay "Civil Disobedience," which left a deep impression on him. He was also influenced by his correspondence with Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy



Mohandas Gandhi.

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(1828–1910) in 1909–1910 and by John Ruskin's (1819–1900) *Unto This Last*.

Gandhi decided to create a place for civil resisters to live in a group environment. He called it the Tolstoy Farm. By this time he had abandoned Western dress for traditional Indian garb. Two of his final legal achievements in Africa were a law declaring Indian (rather than only Christian) marriages valid, and the end of a tax on former indentured (bound to work and unable to leave for a specific period of time) Indian labor. Gandhi regarded his work in South Africa as completed.

By the time Gandhi returned to India in January 1915, he had become known as "Mahatmaji," a title given him by the poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941). This title means "great soul." Gandhi knew how to reach the masses and insisted on their resistance and spiritual growth. He spoke of a new, free Indian individual, telling Indians that India's cages were self-made.

Disobedience and return to old values

The repressive Rowlatt Acts of 1919 (a set of laws that allowed the government to try people accused of political crimes without a jury) caused Gandhi to call a general hartal, or strike (when workers refuse to work in order to obtain rights from their employers), throughout the country. But he called it off when violence occurred against Englishmen. Following the Amritsar Massacre of some four hundred Indians, Gandhi responded by not cooperating with British courts, stores, and schools. The government agreed to make reforms.

Gandhi began urging Indians to make their own clothing rather than buy British goods. This would create employment for millions of Indian peasants during the many idle months of the year. He cherished the ideal of economic independence for each village. He identified industrialization (increased use of machines) with materialism (desire for wealth) and felt that it stunted man's growth. Gandhi believed that the individual should be placed ahead of economic productivity.

In 1921 the Congress Party, a group of various nationalist (love of one's own nation and cultural identity) groups, again voted for a nonviolent disobedience campaign. Gandhi had come to realize that India's reliance on Britain had made India more helpless than ever. In 1922 Gandhi was tried and sentenced to six years in prison, but he was released two years later for an emergency appendectomy (surgery to remove an inflamed appendix). This was the last time the British government tried Gandhi.

Fasting and the protest march

One technique Gandhi used frequently was the fast. He firmly believed that Hindu-Muslim unity was natural and he undertook a twenty-one-day fast to bring the two

communities together. He also fasted during a strike of mill workers in Ahmedabad. Another technique he developed was the protest march. In response to a British tax on all salt used by Indians, a severe hardship on the peasants, Gandhi began his famous twenty-four-day "salt march" to the sea. Several thousand marchers walked 241 miles to the coast in protest of the unfair law.

Another cause Gandhi supported was improving the status of members of the lower castes, or Harijans. On September 20, 1932, Gandhi began a fast for the Harijans, opposing a British plan for a separate voting body for them. As a result of Gandhi's fast, some temples were opened to exterior castes for the first time in history.

Gandhi devoted the years 1934 through 1939 to the promotion of making fabric, basic education, and making Hindi the national language. During these years he worked closely with Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964) in the Congress Working Committee. Despite differences of opinion, Gandhi designated Nehru his successor, saying, "I know this, that when I am gone he will speak my language."

World War II and beyond

England's entry into World War II (1939–45; when the United States, France, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union fought against Germany, Italy, and Japan) brought India in without its consent. Because Britain had made no political compromises satisfactory to nationalist leaders, in August 1942 Gandhi proposed not to help in the war effort. Gandhi, Nehru, and other Congress Party leaders were imprisoned, touching off violence throughout India. When the British attempted to place the blame on Gandhi, he fasted for three weeks in jail. He contracted malaria (a potentially fatal disease spread by mosquitoes) in prison and was released on May 6, 1944.

When Gandhi emerged from prison, he sought to stop the creation of a separate Muslim state of Pakistan, which Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876–1948) was demanding. Jinnah declared August 16, 1946, a "Direct Action Day." On that day, and for several days following, communal killings left five thousand dead and fifteen thousand wounded in Calcutta alone. Violence spread through the country.

Extremely upset, Gandhi went to Bengal, saying, "I am not going to leave Bengal until the last embers of trouble are stamped out." But while he was in Calcutta forty-five hundred more people were killed in Bihar. Gandhi, now seventy-seven, warned that he would fast to death unless Biharis reformed. Either Hindus and Muslims would learn to live together or he would die in the attempt. The situation there calmed, but rioting continued elsewhere.

Drive for independence

In March 1947 the last viceroy, Lord Mountbatten (1900–1979), arrived in India with instructions to take Britain out of India by June 1948. The Congress Party by this time had agreed to separation, since the only alternative appeared to be continuation of British rule. Gandhi, despairing because his nation was not responding to his plea for peace and brotherhood, refused to participate in the independence celebrations on August 15, 1947. On September 1, 1947, after an angry Hindu mob broke into the home where he was staying in Calcutta, Gandhi began to fast, "to end only if and when sanity returns to Calcutta." Both Hindu and Muslim leaders promised that there would be no more killings, and Gandhi ended his fast.

On January 13, 1948, Gandhi began his last fast in Delhi, praying for Indian unity. On January 30, as he was attending prayers, he was shot and killed by Nathuram Godse, a thirty-five-year-old editor of a Hindu Mahasabha extremist newspaper in Poona.

For More Information

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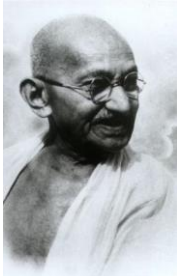
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MAHATMA GANDHI

-By Jyoti Solapurkar
(For 5 to 7 Year Old Children)

: 1 :



Children, there is not a single country in the whole world where the name of Mahatma Gandhi is not known. Do you know why Gandhiji became so famous? It was because he dedicated his whole life to the service of the motherland, and service of humanity. Today, I am going to tell you in brief, the story of Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the Nation, or Bapuji, as he is affectionately called. In the early days our country was made up of a large number of small Princely Kingdoms. Porbandar in Gujarat was one such Princely Kingdom. Gandhiji's father Karamchand Gandhi, popularly known as Kaba, was a Minister there. Kaba Gandhi was an honest, upright man, a strict disciplinarian, and very hot tempered. His wife Putlibai was a extremely religious person. She would not have her meal until she had worshipped the sun. Hence sometimes in the rainy season, she would go hungry for two-three days at a stretch. She was a very loving person, and immensely hard-working. To these parents a son was born on October 2nd, 1869. He was their youngest son. He was called Mohandas. He was our Gandhiji. The strict discipline of his father, the religious bent of mind of his mother, all influenced Gandhiji greatly. He was deeply attached to his parents and brothers. The values of truthfulness, honesty, integrity were instilled in him from the very beginning. As a child he was not very brave. He was mortally afraid of the dark, of ghosts and spirits, and also of snakes and scorpions. At night he would cry in fear. The maid who looked after him scolded him very often. "You should be ashamed of yourself" she would say. "What will you do when you grow up?" She then told him that everytime he was frightened he should take the name of God Rama. Gandhiji took her advice, and gradually he overcome his fear. Soon it was time for him to go to school. As his father was in Rajkot at that time, he attended the school there. Being extremely shy, he did not mix with the other children. Most of the time he kept to himself. In the beginning he did not like some of the subjects that were taught to him, but with encouragement from his teachers he studied them, and began to enjoy them. From then onwards he took his studies very seriously. Mohan was very shy. As soon as the school bell rang, he collected his books and hurried home. Other boys chatted and stopped on the way;

some to play, others to eat, but Mohan always went straight home. He was afraid that the boys might stop him and make fun of him. One day, the Inspector of Schools, Mr Giles, came to Mohan's school. He read out five English words to the class and asked the boys to write them down. Mohan wrote four words correctly, but he could not spell the fifth word 'Kettle'. Seeing Mohan's hesitation, the teacher made a sign behind the Inspector's back that he should copy the word from his neighbour's slate. But Mohan ignored his signs. The other boys wrote all the five words correctly; Mohan wrote only four. After the Inspector left, the teacher scolded him. "I told you to copy from your neighbour," he said angrily. "Couldn't you even do that correctly?" Every one laughed.

As he went home that evening, Mohan was not unhappy. He knew he had done the right thing. What made him sad was that his teacher should have asked him to cheat. As was the custom in those days, when he was about 13-14 years old, he got married.

His wife's name was Kasturba (and she was as old as him). It was at this time that Gandhiji fell into bad company and picked up many bad habits. It was because of these bad habits, that unknown to his parents, he was once forced to sell a part of his gold bracelet. However, he soon realised his mistake, and amply repented his sinful behaviour. He decided to make a clean breast of everything to his father, but he lacked the courage to face him. So instead, he wrote a letter to his father, mentioning all the sinful deeds he had done. He gave the letter to his father, and stood by his bedside, his face hanging down in shame. At that time Kaba Gandhi was seriously ill. He felt miserable when he read the letter. Tears rolled down his cheeks, but he did not say a single word to his son. It was too much for Gandhiji to bear. Right then he resolved that he would always lead a truthful and honest life, and throughout his life he stuck to his resolution.

: 2 :

During his father's illness Gandhiji nursed him with great devotion and care, but unfortunately his father never recovered from his illness. He died soon thereafter. In 1887, two years after his father's death, Gandhiji passed his High School examination. At that time he was 18 years old. Everyone in the family decided that he should go to England and become a Barrister, so that on his return he could become a Dewan like his father. Respecting their wishes, Gandhiji set sail for England in **1888**. Life was entirely different in England. The style of dressing, eating habits, everything was all new to him. He was totally confused and bewildered for some time. However, he soon

got adjusted to the new environment. He had promised his mother that he would not eat non-vegetarian food, or drink alcohol, and he remained true to his word. Many attempts were made to make Gandhiji accept Christianity as his religion. Gandhiji remained firm. However, he studied the Bible, Geeta and Quran and came to the conclusion that the principle tenets in all religions are the same. So whether the person was Hindu, Muslim or Christian, Gandhiji felt that as long as he followed the religion principles, he attained salvation. He told this to all those who had tried to convert him, and remained a staunch Hindu till the very end. Gandhiji concentrated on his studies thereafter, and successfully passed his Bar examination. He returned to India in 1891, after the completion of his studies. Eagerly he looked forward to meeting his mother, and giving her the good news, but he was to be sorely disappointed. For while he was away in England, his mother had passed away. The news of her death had been withheld from him because his brother thought he would be mentally disturbed, and his studies would be affected.

: 3 :

After qualifying as a Barrister, he set up his practice as a lawyer, in Rajkot. As he did not get much work there, he came to Bombay. Even in Bombay he did not get any cases. Finally, he got one case. He prepared well for it, but in court he was unable to present it satisfactorily. Disappointed, he felt he would never make a successful lawyer. Just at that time Gandhiji's elder brother managed to get him a case. He was asked to represent Mr. Abdulla, a rich businessman in South Africa. After much deliberation, Gandhiji agreed to accept the case. He left his homeland and set sail for Africa in 1895. Although there were many Indians staying in Africa at that time, all the power was in the hands of the British people. They considered themselves superior, and treated the Indians and the natives in a most insulting manner. Gandhiji undertook Abdulla's case and handled it very well. The Indians were very much impressed, and wanted Gandhiji to stay on in Africa. In connection with his work, Gandhiji travelled a good deal. However, he was treated very badly by the British people. Wherever he went, he had to face insults and rudeness. At times, he was even physically assaulted. One day, when he was travelling from Durban to Pretoria in the first class compartment of a train, a Britishman boarded the compartment. On seeing Gandhiji, the Britishman got furious. He called the Railway officer, and both ordered him to get out of the train. Since Gandhiji had purchased a first class ticket, he refused to do so. However, they

paid no heed to him. Gandhiji also did not budge. Finally the police were summoned.

They pushed him out of the compartment and threw his luggage out of the window. Gandhiji had to spend the whole night on the platform. This was only one of the many humiliating experiences Gandhiji had to face. He had decided to return to India on the completion of his work in Africa, but the plight of the Indians there disturbed him greatly. He resolved to stay, and fight the unjust and inhuman laws that were imposed on them. For everywhere there was discrimination. There was one set of rules for the Indians and natives, and a different set for the British people.

: 4 :

Gandhiji gave considerable thought to the matter. He realised that to fight against injustice it was vital for the people to have unity amongst themselves. He tried very hard to bring about this unity. He organised many meetings, and made the people aware of the situation. In reply, the people appointed him as their leader, and agreed to be guided by him. Since all the power was in the hands of the English people, Gandhiji realised that to fight them it was necessary to use an entirely different method. It was then that he thought of the novel idea of 'Satyagraha'. Satyagraha insistence on truth, a non violent protest against injustice. His movement aimed at fighting the many unjust laws that were imposed on them, and for it to be successful, he was prepared to face all hardships and obstacles. It was no easy task. He suffered much humiliation, faced many problems, but he did not give up. It was during this time that a war broke out between the British and the Dutch settlers in Africa. It was known as the Boer War. Gandhiji and other Indians gave whatever help they could to the British. The British won the war, and taking into consideration the help Gandhiji had rendered to them, they gave the Indians more privileges. They also agreed to abolish the unjust laws that were imposed on them. Gandhiji felt very happy that his stay in Africa had served some useful purpose. Thinking that his work was now over, he decided to return to his motherland. The people were very reluctant to let him go back. They were very keen that he should settle down in Africa itself. Finally Gandhiji told them that he would go to India, but come to Africa whenever they called him. Only then did the people agree to let him go. They gave him a grand farewell, and showed him with many expensive gifts. However Gandhiji did not accept anything. He donated everything to the local organisations. During his long stay in Africa, Gandhiji visited India sometimes, where he met many important leaders and sought their advice. Gopal

Krishna Gokhale was one such leader who rendered assistance to Gandhiji in many ways. Gandhiji admired him tremendously, and looked upon him as his mentor. It was largely due to him that Gandhiji joined the mainstream of Indian politics.

: 5 :

By the time all these developments took place in Africa, it was 1914. Gandhiji had spent almost 20 years in that country. He returned to India, for he had made up his mind to fight for the freedom of India. He decided that he would not miss a single opportunity that would help him in serving his country and countrymen. As such he toured the



whole of India, and brought an awakening in the people living in villages and towns.

North of the Ganges, near the boundary of Nepal, was a small place called Champaranya. It was noted for its cultivation of Indigo dye. Unfortunately, the British planters in Champaranya treated the local workers most cruelly. Worse still, the Government paid little heed to the workers' cries. With the result that they were utterly disgusted with their employers. Gandhiji heard of this and went to Champaranya to do something for them. He was unable to bear their miserable plight. He began a satyagraha against the injustice done to the workers. Finally the British were compelled to stop their inhuman treatment of the workers. This satyagraha came to be known as the 'Champaranya Satyagraha'. After the success of the 'Champaranya Satyagraha', Gandhiji felt that he should settle down in one place. He selected a site near the banks of the Sabarmati river in Gujarat, and established his Ashram there. He decided that thereafter he would devote all his time to the service of humanity, and work for the downtrodden. He preached what he practiced. He picked up the cause of the Harijans who were treated most atrociously all over the country. He raised his voice against the inhuman and unjust treatment meted out to them. He started two newspapers 'Harijan' and 'Young India', and through them he expressed his views and spread social awareness in the people.

: 6 :

In the meantime all over India agitations and uprisings against the British rule were on the increase. In 1920, Lokmanya Tilak died, and Gandhiji became the leader of the

Freedom Movement. Under his guidance, the people went on Satyagraha to fight against injustice. He was arrested and imprisoned many times, but that did not deter him and his loyal followers. They continued their fight for freedom with even greater fervour. Gandhiji was greatly respected for his simple living, high thinking, and fearless attitude. The British too were greatly impressed by him, and called him for negotiations regarding India's freedom. Since it had been decided that the freedom struggle would not stop until full freedom was granted, the negotiations did not serve any purpose.

Various forms of Satyagraha and Civil Disobedience movements took place at that time. The 'Swadeshi Movement' (to use local made goods) was one of them. Gandhiji advised and encouraged the people to use Indian goods and use Khadi (hand spun cloth). He himself wore Khadi clothes, and would sit to spin on his Charkha (Spinning wheel). People stopped buying British made goods. Instead, they lit bonfires of these goods. The Government, with the help of the police and the army, tried its best to put an end to all these demonstrations and agitations, but these were unsuccessful. On the contrary, they became more intense. The Government had imposed a tax on salt, and Gandhiji started the 'Salt Satyagraha'. He and many other leaders were imprisoned, but the struggle for freedom continued with greater intensity. While India fought for freedom, in Europe, the second world war had begun. The British looked towards India for help, but Gandhiji started the Non-co-operation Movement. Jawaharlal Nehru and many other Indian leaders joined the movement because they all had immense faith in Gandhiji. The British Government thought it would please the Indians by granting them partial freedom. Once again they began negotiations with Gandhiji, but Gandhiji made it clear that he and his people wanted nothing less than complete freedom (Independence). To make this demand stronger, the Indian National Congress passed the Quit India resolution in 1942, wherein they demanded that the British leave India immediately. Angered by this resolution, the British again imprisoned him and his wife Kasturba. Kasturba died in jail. She was always behind him in his freedom movements and the other leaders. Many secret organisations were formed as a result, and they put a number of obstacles in the regular functioning of the Government. Around this time Netaji Subhashchandra Bose formed his 'Azad Hind Fauj' in Japan. Many Indians who were in the British Army, left it and joined the Indian Netaji's Army. The British Government realised that it was now impossible for them to continue their rule in India, They released Gandhiji and other leaders from prison, and once again began negotiations with him. Finally, on 15th August 1947, India attained freedom, and for the first time the Indian tri-colour National flag fluttered on the Red Fort in Delhi.

However, in its fight for freedom, India had to pay a heavy price. What was once a large single geographical unit, now comprised of two new nations - India and Pakistan. It was during this period that Hindu Muslim riots took place all over the country. People of both communities were killed brutally, and there was large scale bloodshed all around. Gandhiji put his life in danger, pleaded with the people and made ceaseless efforts to stop this senseless killing. After Independence, Gandhiji concentrated his attention on the betterment of the Downtrodden people. He went from village to village and advised the people that for the good of the country it was necessary for everyone to work together in unity and harmony. Equal opportunities and equal status was what he wanted. Although Gandhiji strived so hard for unity, there were some people who were under the misconception that Gandhiji favoured the Muslims. On 30th January 1948, in Delhi, when Gandhiji set out to attend a prayer meeting, he was shot dead by an assailant. His last words were `Hey Ram'. People all over the world paid rich tribute to Gandhiji. The great Mahatma's life had come to an end! The news shocked everyone. Not only India, but the whole world mourned the death of the great man — a real Mahatma, who had dedicated his entire life to the service of humanity, and had taught the importance of truth, brotherhood, peace, non-violence, equality and simplicity. The most befitting tribute that we can pay him, is to follow the path he has shown us.

<http://www.mkgandhi-sarvodaya.org/solapur.htm>

Mohandas Gandhi (1869 - 1948)

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/gandhi_mohandas.shtml

Known as 'Mahatma' (great soul), Gandhi was the leader of the Indian nationalist movement against British rule, and is widely considered the father of his country. His doctrine of non-violent protest to achieve political and social progress has been hugely influential.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on 2 October 1869 in Porbandar in Gujarat. After university, he went to London to train as a barrister. He returned to India in 1891 and in 1893 accepted a job at an Indian law firm in Durban, South Africa. Gandhi was appalled by the treatment of Indian immigrants there, and joined the struggle to obtain basic rights for them. During his 20 years in South Africa he was sent to prison many times. Influenced primarily by Hinduism, but also by elements of Jainism and Christianity as well as writers including Tolstoy and Thoreau, Gandhi developed the *satyagraha* ('devotion to truth'), a new non-violent way to redress wrongs. In 1914, the South African government conceded to many of Gandhi's demands.

Gandhi returned to India shortly afterwards. In 1919, British plans to intern people suspected of sedition - the Rowlatt Acts - prompted Gandhi to announce a new *satyagraha* which attracted millions of followers. A demonstration against the acts resulted in the Amritsar Massacre by British troops. By 1920, Gandhi was a dominant figure in Indian politics. He transformed the Indian National Congress, and his programme of peaceful non-cooperation with the British included boycotts of British goods and institutions, leading to arrests of thousands.

In 1922, Gandhi himself was sentenced to six years' imprisonment. He was released after two years and withdrew from politics, devoting himself to trying to improve Hindu-Muslim relations, which had worsened. In 1930, Gandhi proclaimed a new campaign of civil disobedience in protest at a tax on salt, leading thousands on a 'March to the Sea' to symbolically make their own salt from seawater.

In 1931, Gandhi attended the Round Table Conference in London, as the sole representative of the Indian National Congress, but resigned from the party in 1934 in protest at its use of non-violence as a political expedient. He was replaced as leader by Jawaharlal Nehru.

In 1945, the British government began negotiations which culminated in the Mountbatten Plan of June 1947, and the formation of the two new independent states of India and Pakistan, divided along religious lines. Massive inter-communal violence marred the months before and after independence. Gandhi was opposed to partition, and now fasted in an attempt to bring calm in Calcutta and Delhi. On 30 January 1948, he was assassinated in Delhi by a Hindu fanatic.

