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# Gandhi

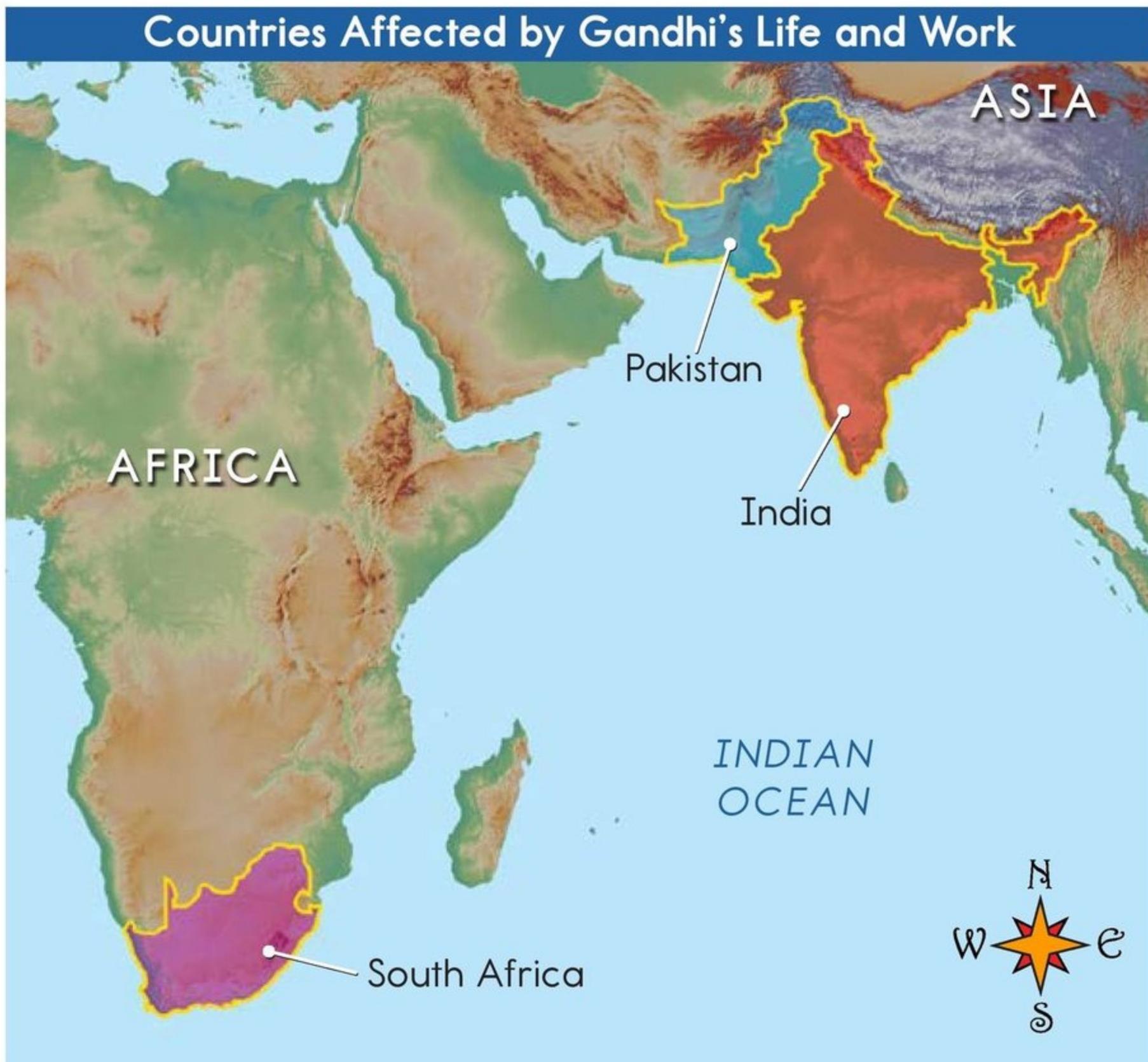
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Written by Jennifer Dobner

# Gandhi

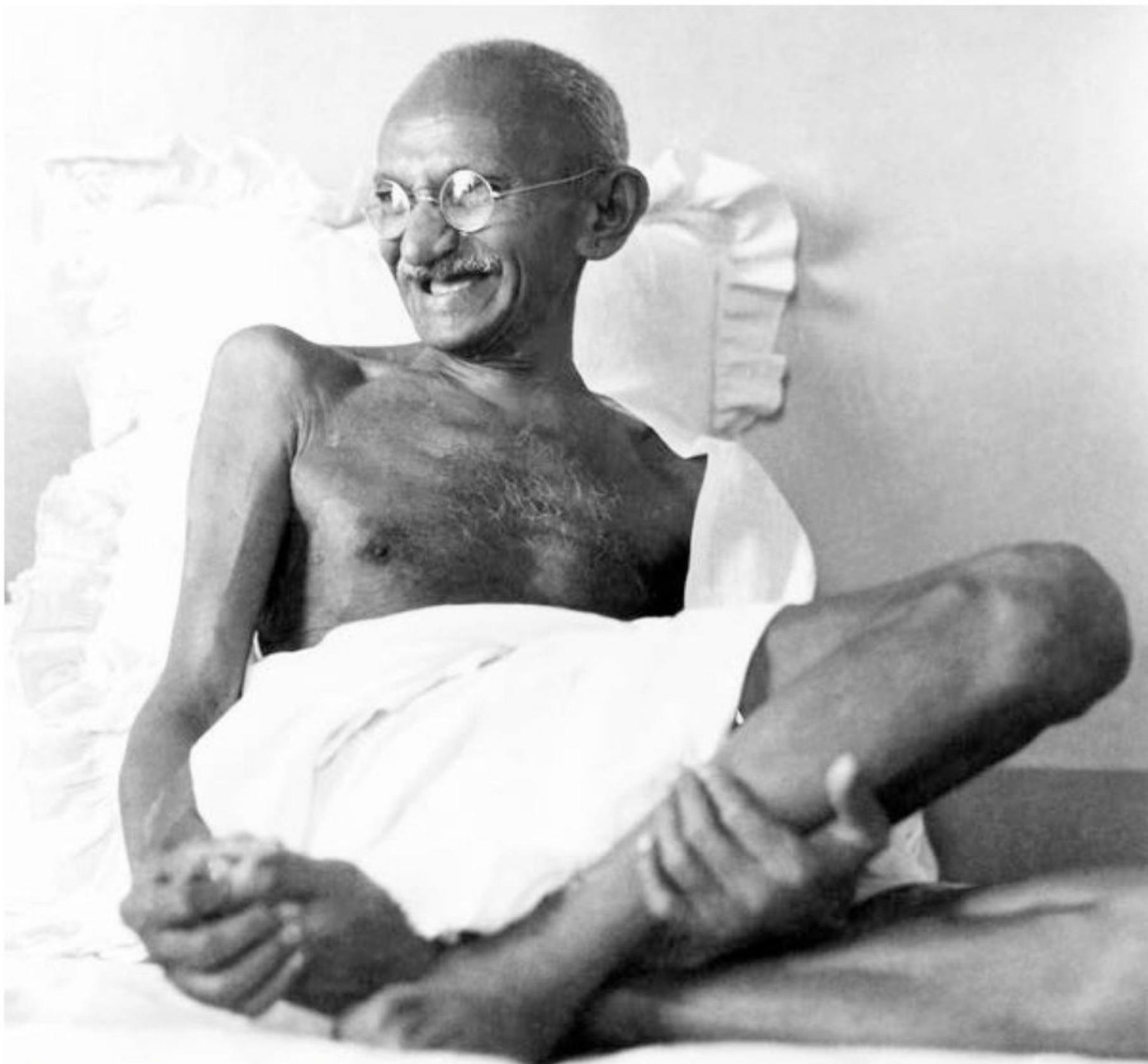


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Mohandas Gandhi

## “Father of India”

With his bald head, thin body, wire-rimmed glasses, and shy nature, Mohandas Gandhi seemed like a kind grandfather. Within this quiet man, however, was a powerful will. His strong beliefs in fairness, freedom, kindness, and peace carried him through years of **struggle**—and changed nations. Even many years after his death, the man who was called “The Father of India” continues to **inspire** people around the world.



Gandhi (right) and his older brother

## Early Life

Gandhi was born into a large **Hindu** family on October 2, 1869. Many Hindus, including Gandhi's family, strongly believe in **nonviolence** and caring for others, and his mother proved an excellent example. She prayed daily and would often take care of people who were sick or poor.

His father worked as a local government leader. He often settled disagreements between the local people and the British, who ruled India. From him, Gandhi would learn to respect others and their beliefs.



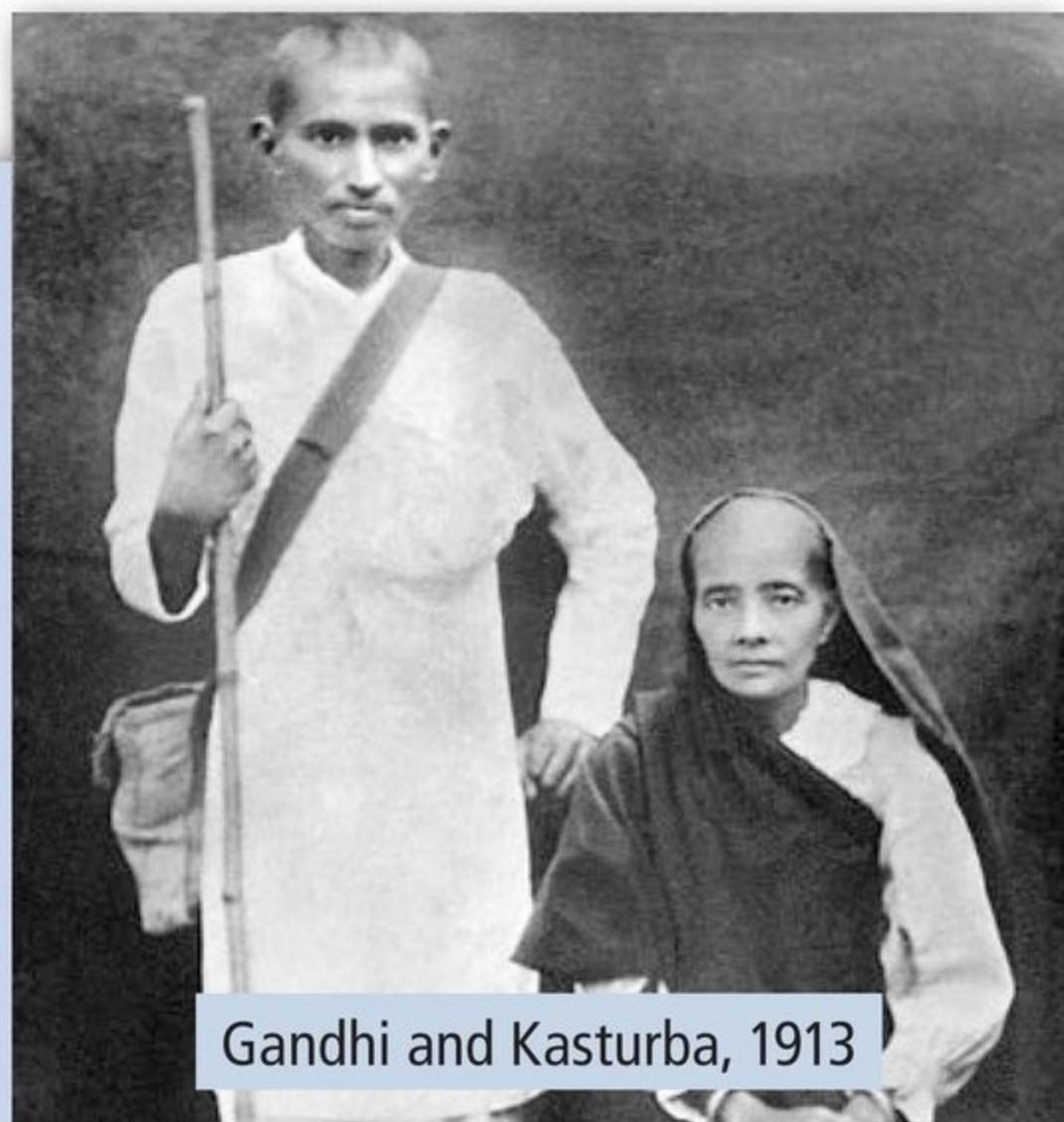
Gandhi in London, 1908

At eighteen, Gandhi sailed to England to study law. While attending school in London, he began to study different religions and their texts. He learned about the Bible and the Bhagavad Gita, a sacred Hindu poem.

After a few years, Gandhi earned his law degree and returned to India. Still very shy, he struggled to find work. He eventually took an assignment in South Africa in 1888.

## Marriage

When Gandhi was very young, his parents arranged his marriage. This custom was common in India. At thirteen, Gandhi married Kasturba, who was the same age.



Gandhi and Kasturba, 1913

## South Africa

In South Africa, which was also ruled by the British, life was very different. One day while Gandhi traveled by train, a conductor told him he couldn't sit in the first-class car. A well-dressed Gandhi explained that he was traveling on business and had bought a first-class ticket. None of that mattered, however, because of the color of Gandhi's skin. When Gandhi refused to leave, he was thrown off the train. On another trip, a driver beat Gandhi for refusing to make room for a white passenger.

These events brought the suffering of Indians in South Africa to Gandhi's attention. South Africa had many laws that **discriminated** against black, coloured (mixed race), and Indian and other Asian peoples. Gandhi felt he had to do something.

Gandhi stayed in South Africa when the government tried to pass a law that denied Indians the right to vote. He made speeches, wrote letters, and even tried to file a lawsuit to stop the law from passing. Although he was not successful, Gandhi's work brought attention to him as well as to the struggles in South Africa. It also began to unite the Indian population under his leadership.

A few years later, a new law forced every Indian in South Africa to register with the government. Gandhi held a **protest** during which he explained his idea of *satyagraha* (suh-TYAH-gruh-huh). The word means “holding firmly to the truth.” Gandhi used it to represent his form of nonviolent protest. He called for Indians in South Africa to disobey the **unjust** laws and accept the punishments. Many Indians were beaten or jailed, including Gandhi. News of the protests and punishments reached around the world. People were shocked. They spoke out against the government. Eventually the government was forced to **compromise** with the protesters.



A police officer confronting Gandhi as he leads a protest in South Africa in 1913

Gandhi remained in South Africa for twenty years. He continued to work for better treatment of Indians there. During this time, he stopped wearing western clothes. Instead, he wore the simple homemade robes and sandals for which he would become known.

## A Leader in India

When Gandhi returned to India in 1915, he was already considered a leader. He joined the Indian National Congress (INC) and began working to free India from British rule. Gandhi's support grew quickly.



Gandhi on his return to India, 1915

In 1919, the government passed the Rowlatt Acts. These acts allowed authorities to arrest and hold people who caused **political** trouble without a trial. Gandhi and his supporters called for a strike. People were to stay home from work and school in protest. When violence broke out against the British, Gandhi canceled the strike.

A few days later, thousands of people gathered in the city of Amritsar in a peaceful, yet illegal, protest. Without warning, the British troops surrounding the protest opened fire. After ten minutes of shooting, between 400 and 1,500 Indians were dead. Many others were wounded.

Up to this point, Gandhi had been trying to work with the British government. The Amritsar Massacre changed everything. Soon after, Gandhi called for noncooperation, another form of nonviolent protest. Noncooperation asked Indians to no longer buy British goods or work for British people or companies. It also asked them to quit jobs in the British government and to refuse any British honor. While Gandhi's efforts at noncooperation were somewhat successful, some Indian protestors still resorted to violence.

Gandhi was seen as the leader of the protest movement. Because of the violence, he was arrested and **sentenced** to six years in prison. He was released after two years and immediately continued his work.

## Gandhi and Kasturba

Although Gandhi and Kasturba did not know each other at first, they grew to support the same ideas. She worked alongside her husband and even stood in for Gandhi while he was imprisoned. Kasturba and Gandhi had four sons, and their marriage lasted until she died in 1944.

Kasturba with her sons





Gandhi and his followers marching to the shore

## The Salt March

One of Gandhi's most successful protests took place in 1930. In India, only British companies were allowed to produce and sell salt. The government also placed a large **tax** on any salt sold. Gandhi thought it was unfair for Indians to pay the British for the salt from Indian lands.

### Salt

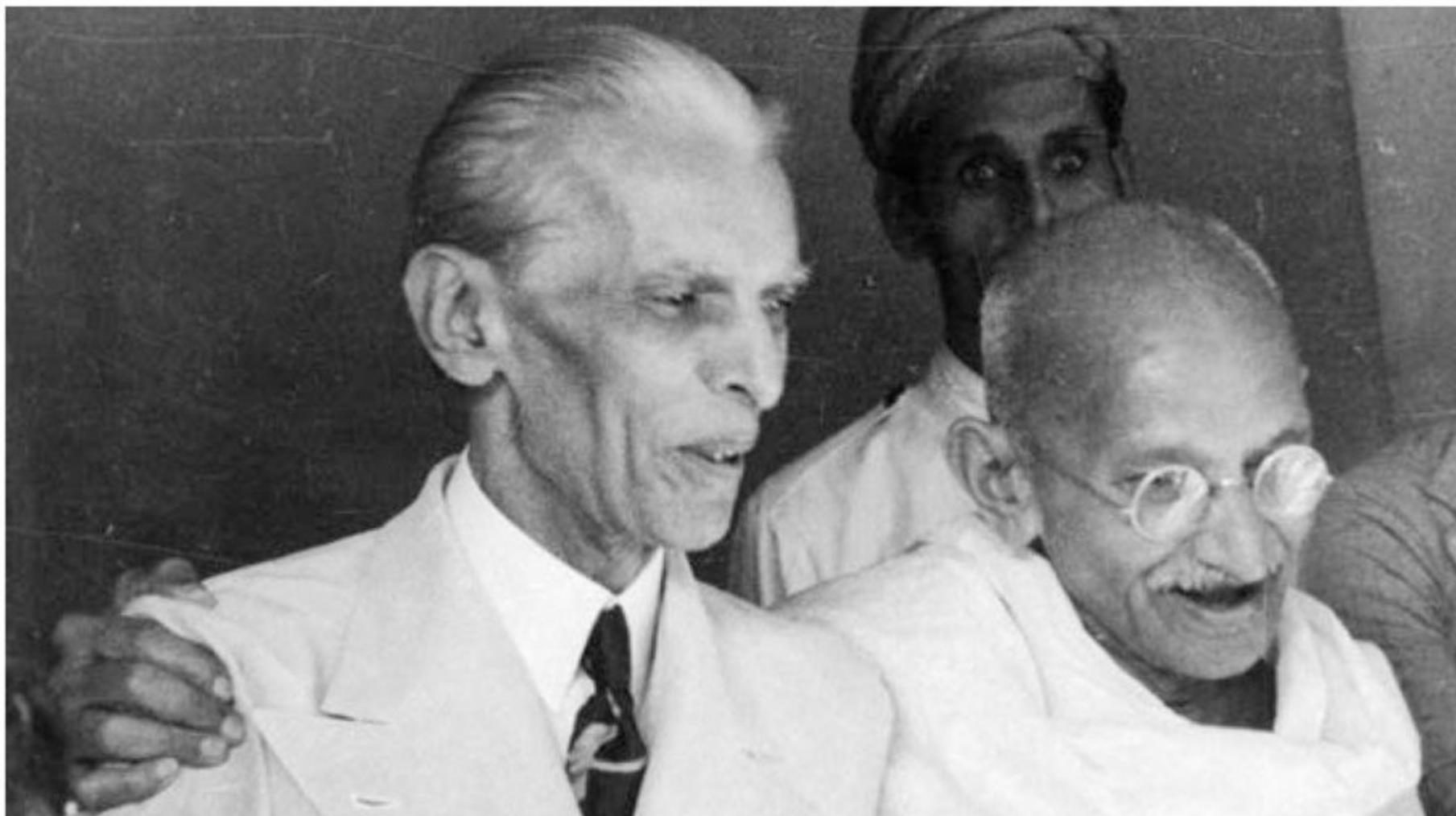
Along India's coast are large salt flats, where seawater evaporates and leaves salt behind on the ground. Until the government made it illegal, Indians could simply gather and use this salt for free.



Gandhi picking up salt at the end of his long march

On March 12, Gandhi and a few dozen followers began a 21-day, 240-mile (386 km) walk across India to the sea. Along the way, Gandhi spoke to people and made speeches to large crowds. When he reached the coastal town of Dandi, tens of thousands of Indians were following him.

Early on the morning of April 6, Gandhi went down to the shore. Surrounded by British soldiers, he picked up a grain of salt from the ground. His followers did the same. Gandhi was arrested along with more than 60,000 others.



Gandhi with Muhammad Ali Jinnah, leader of the Muslim League

## Change Begins

The arrests and treatment of Indians caused anger throughout the world. More and more people spoke out against the government, and finally the British were ready to consider leaving India. World War II began in 1939, interrupting the process. When Gandhi and the INC demanded that the British leave India in 1942, they were all arrested. Violent protests took place all over India. In 1945, the war ended. British and Indian leaders began to discuss the British leaving India.

Throughout India's history, Hindus and **Muslims** had often been in conflict. Gandhi believed that the people of these two religions could learn to live in peace in a united India. The Muslim League, which represented the Islamic people, wanted its own country.



Muslims climbing onto a train headed for Pakistan

When the agreement that ended British rule was signed in 1947, the country was split, against Gandhi's advice. The Muslim people formed the new country of Pakistan. More than ten million people moved from one country to the other. There was much fighting, and many people died. Gandhi worked tirelessly. Through discussion and various nonviolent protests, he achieved a number of temporary peace agreements. No one else was able to do this at the time.

## Fasting

Fasting, or going without food, is a regular practice in many religions, including Hinduism. Gandhi often fasted as part of religious practice, and he also used fasting as a political tool. In 1947, Gandhi fasted to protest the riots in Calcutta, and they ended. He fasted again in 1948 and convinced the people of Delhi to find peace.



Gandhi with his granddaughter and grandniece, 1948

## Death and Legacy

On January 30, 1948, Gandhi was on his way to a prayer meeting. He went to the ceremony with his granddaughter and grandniece. They helped the aging man walk and climb up onto the stage. About five hundred people were gathered to hear Gandhi's prayers. A young Hindu man in the crowd opposed Gandhi's work to make peace with Muslims. He came up to the stage, pulled out a gun, and shot Gandhi three times.

Gandhi's death saddened people everywhere. Nearly a half million people were at his funeral. Despite his death, the influence of this small man, whom Indians called *Mahatma*, or "Great Soul," continued to change the world. His efforts inspired such great leaders as Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela, and will continue to inspire people for many years to come.

## Glossary

<b>compromise</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to reach an agreement after both sides give up part of what they asked for (p. 8)
<b>discriminated</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	treated a person or group unfairly because of gender, race, age, religion, or other differences (p. 7)
<b>Hindu</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	of or relating to the major religion in India, which includes many gods and a belief in reincarnation (p. 5)
<b>inspire</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to encourage a person to act (p. 4)
<b>Muslims</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	people who follow the religion of Islam (p. 13)
<b>nonviolence</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the refusal to use physical force or violence as a response (p. 5)
<b>political</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	having to do with government, politics, or politicians (p. 9)
<b>protest</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	an action to express strong disagreement or disapproval (p. 8)
<b>sentenced</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	formally declared a punishment given to someone by a court of law (p. 10)
<b>struggle</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a goal that is difficult to achieve, or the effort to achieve such a goal; a fight or conflict (p. 4)
<b>tax</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a fee collected by a government to pay for its services, functions, and operations (p. 11)
<b>unjust</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	unfair, undeserved, or dishonest; not just (p. 8)

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