

Title:

Another Look at Mahatma Gandhi

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396

Summary:

Many myths abound about Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand known as Mahatma "Great Souled") Gandhi (1869-1948).

Keywords:

Article Body:

Many myths abound about Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand known as Mahatma "Great Souled") Gandhi (1869-1948).

He was not born to a poor Indian family. His father was dewan (chief minister) of Porbandar, the capital of a small principality in Gujarat in western India under British suzerainty. He later became dewan of Rajkot.

He married at the age of 13 and was a mediocre student. In his adolescence he defied his repressive environment by petty thieving, meat eating, smoking, and professed atheism.

Until the age of 18 He spoke very little English. His main language was Gujarati.

He wanted to be a medical doctor - more precisely, a surgeon. His family forced him to study law.

His first political activity was as a member of the executive committee of the London Vegetarian Society.

He went to South Africa because he couldn't find work in India. He was a poor lawyer, in both senses of the word. He suffered from stage fright.

The "Encyclopedia Britannica" describes his first days there:

"Africa was to present to Gandhi challenges and opportunities that he could hardly have conceived. In a Durban court, he was asked by the European

magistrate to take off his turban; he refused and left the courtroom.

A few days later, while traveling to Pretoria, he was unceremoniously thrown out of a first-class railway compartment and left shivering and brooding at Pietermaritzburg Station; in the further course of the journey he was beaten up by the white driver of a stagecoach because he would not travel on the footboard to make room for a European passenger; and finally he was barred from hotels reserved "for Europeans only." These humiliations were the daily lot of Indian traders and labourers in Natal who had learned to pocket them with the same resignation with which they pocketed their meagre earnings."

He was about to sail to London when he read about a bill to deprive the Indians of their right to vote. He decided to stay. It is in Johannesburg, South Africa that his first civil disobedience ("Satyagraha") campaign was staged - not in India.

Gandhi's life was at peril many times. He was almost lynched in Durban as early as January 1897. He was assassinated in 1948.

He was not a pacifist. Nor was he anti-British. When the Boer war broke out, he organized a volunteer corps of 11,000 Indians to defend the British colony of Natal.