

# Gandhi's Example! - Part 1

Mahatma Gandhi held no office, pursued no career, accumulated no wealth and desired no fame. Yet, millions of people in India and around the world are captivated by his life and his achievements. Gandhi inspired so many because he practiced what he preached, he lived the change he wanted to see in the world and his message was none other than his life itself. He was an honest seeker of truth, a fearless defender of the weak and uncompromising practitioner of non-violence.

Gandhi opposed "mass production" and favored production by people. Work for him is as much a spiritual as an economic necessity. So he insisted on the principle that every member of society should be engaged in manual work. Manufacturing in small workshops and adherence to arts and crafts feeds the body as well as the soul, professed Gandhi. He believed that long-distance transportation of goods, competitive trading and relentless economic growth would destroy the fabric of human communities as well the integrity of the natural world. It is because of this belief that he did his famous Salt March so that Indians could free themselves from the British salt trade. He also set an example by weaving his own cloth so that India was not reliant on the British textile industry.

His movement became so powerful and effective that the almighty British colonial authorities could not withstand it and eventually agreed to grant independence to India. Even as the freedom struggle was in progress, Gandhi was working on ideas of a new social order for post-colonial India. He believed that there would be no point in getting rid of the British without abolishing the centralized, exploitative and violence-based system of governance and the economics of greed that they pursued. According to Gandhi, the Western system of governance is based on the rule of the majority and is called democracy. This was not good enough for Gandhi. He wanted no division between the majority and the minority. He wanted to serve the interests of each and every one, of all. For Gandhi, life is sacred and so he advocated reverence for all life, humans as well as other than humans.

Mahatma (meaning "great soul") Gandhi's vision of a non-violent social order built on these foundations. Gandhi was, for example, a great champion of Hindu-Muslim solidarity. This was appreciated neither by the fundamentalist Hindus nor the fundamentalist Muslims. Against the wishes of Gandhi, India was partitioned on religious lines and hundreds of thousands of Hindus and Muslims were massacred or made refugees. A Hindu fundamentalist named Nathuram Godse assassinated Gandhi on 30 January 1948, just six months after India's independence. As a consequence, Gandhi lost the opportunity to work for a new social order and his ideas had only a limited impact. Sixty years later, it is clear that the world has more need of it than ever.

-Satish Kumar (with minor editing)

- 1. Why didn't Gandhi like the economics of the British? What did Gandhi do to oppose it?**
- 2. According to Satish Kumar, why were Gandhi's methods so effective?**
- 3. Why does Satish Kumar find Gandhi an example that the "world has more need of than ever?"**

## Gandhi's Example? - Part 2

"[Gandhi's] teachings had no relevance to India's problems or aspirations. Hand-weaving made no sense in a country whose chief industry was the mass-production of textiles. His "Salt March" served a propaganda theater but did not create a realistic model for obtaining one of the most important commodities of the era. His food policy would have led to mass starvation. In fact Gandhi's own very expensive 'simple' tastes and innumerable 'secretaries' and handmaidens, had to be heavily subsidized by three merchant princes. As one of his circle observed: 'It costs a great deal of money to keep Gandhi living in poverty.' About the Gandhi phenomenon there was always a strong aroma of twentieth-century humbug (someone or something that is dishonest).

His methods could only work in an ultra-liberal empire. 'It was not so much that the British Empire treated him forbearingly', George Orwell (author of *Animal Farm* and 1984) wrote, 'as that he was always able to command publicity... It is difficult to see how Gandhi's methods could be applied in a country where opponents of the regime disappear in the middle of the night and are never heard from again. Without a free press and the right of assembly, it is impossible not merely to appeal to outside opinion but to bring a mass-movement into being... Is there a Gandhi in Russia at this moment?'

All Gandhi's career demonstrated was the unrepressive nature of British rule and its willingness to abdicate. And Gandhi was expensive in human life as well as money. Though he could bring a mass-movement into existence, he could not control it. Yet he continued to play the sorcerer's apprentice, while the casualty bill mounted into hundreds, then thousands, then tens of thousands, and the risks of a gigantic sectarian and racial explosion accumulated. This blindness to the law of probability in a bitterly divided sub-continent made nonsense of Gandhi's professions that he would not take life in any circumstances."

- Paul Johnson (with minor editing)

**4. Why does Paul Johnson find Gandhi's economic models impractical for India?**

**5. According to the quote from George Orwell, why did Gandhi's methods work in Great Britain but would not work in Russia?**

**6. Why does Paul Johnson think Gandhi did more harm than good?**