

Gandhi's Journey

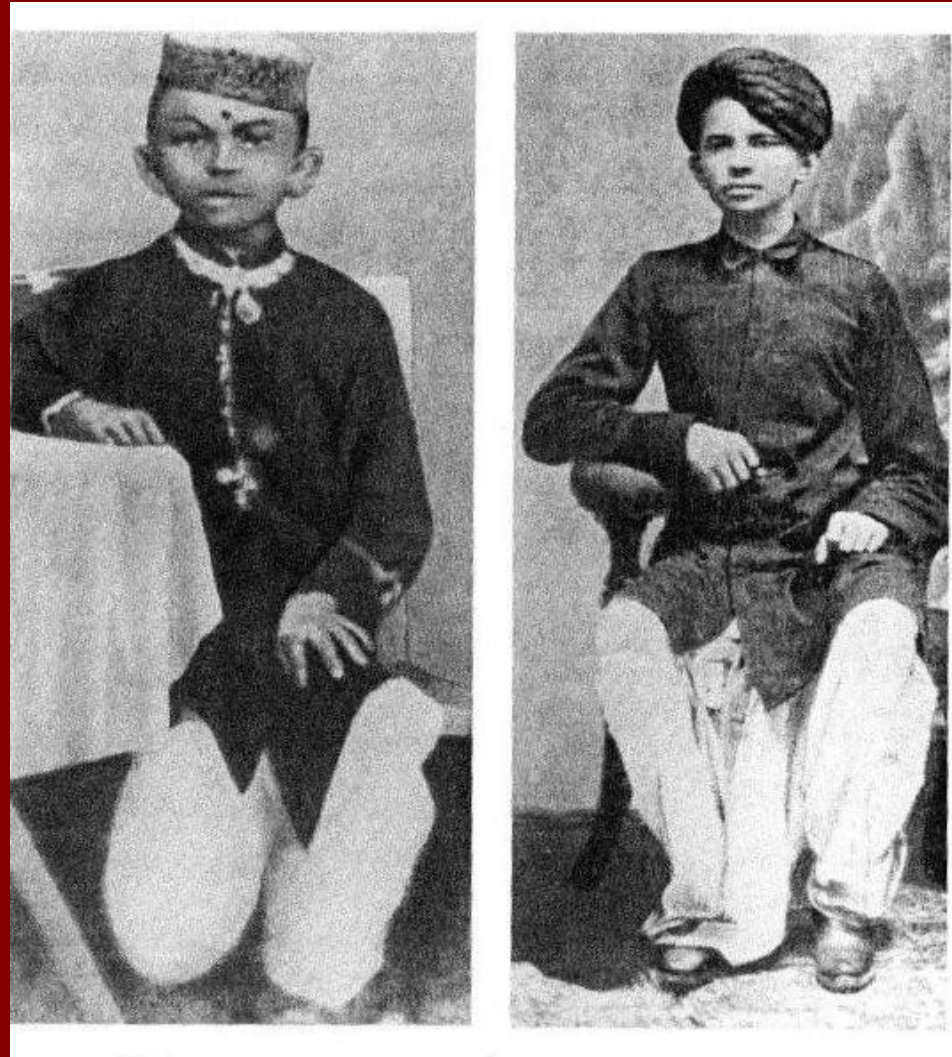
Professor Dennis Dalton

The Journey in Pictures

- If ever a person's life may be portrayed as a journey, then it was Gandhi's.
- The dramatic changes that occurred in his ideas were usually accompanied by differences in dress or facial expression, as illustrated in these photographs.

A Youth Shaped by Hinduism

Mohandas Gandhi, age 7, at his birthplace Porbandar, now in the state of Gujarat in Western India; and at age 17, in nearby Rajkot, where he graduated from high school in 1887.



Summary: Gandhi's childhood and adolescence were shaped by 3 forces:

1. Region of his birth, a relatively small town of Porbandar, India, unlike the large cities of Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta and Madras, brought him close to the vast rural population of India.

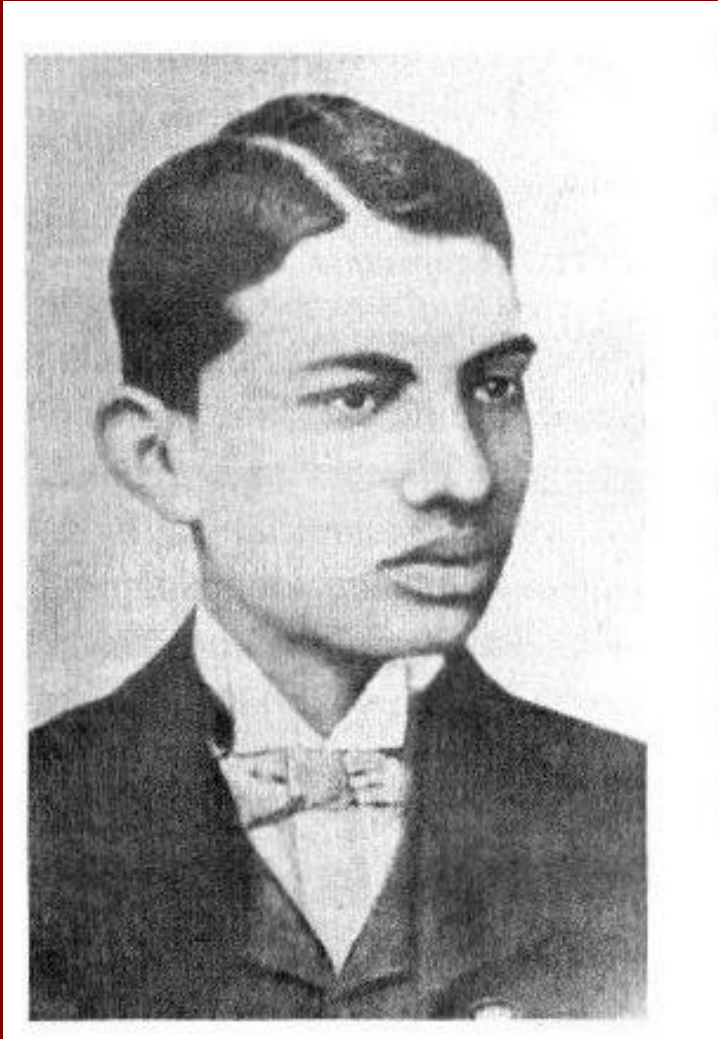
Summary: Gandhi's childhood

2. Caste and class status: relatively low in the caste hierarchy of Hinduism and into a lower middle class family that again identified him nearer to the peasantry, not with the high caste Brahmins or aristocracy.

Summary: Gandhi's childhood

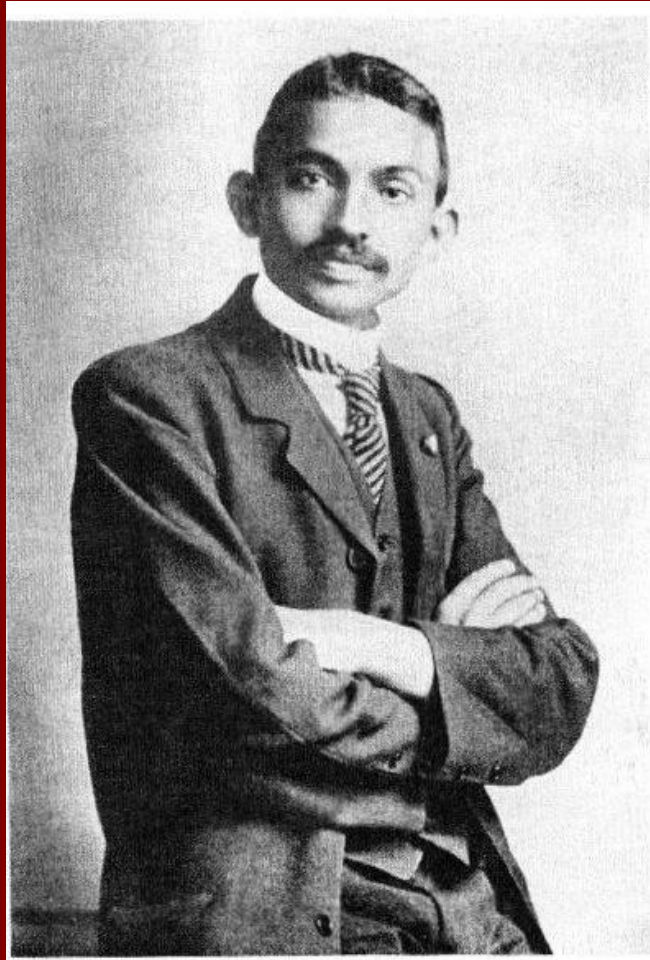
3. Influence of his large family and its orthodox Hinduism, conveyed especially through his mother with her example of vows, fasting and self control, an intense maternal role model of caring, with a primary emphasis on *ahimsa* or strict nonviolence.

Emulating British Culture



During his loyalist period, as a staunch admirer of the British Empire. At age 21, as a law student in London (1890), his aim was “to become like an English gentleman.”

The Successful Lawyer



Age 37, at the height of his lucrative career as a barrister in Johannesburg, South Africa (1906).

Civil Resister

A change of dress and countenance that signaled a profound change of thought and action: age 45, at the successful conclusion of a civil disobedience campaign in South Africa, 1914.



Power of nonviolence

- ***Satyagraha***: literally adhering firmly to the forces of truth and love, became the core of his message and the meaning of his action.
- “The power of love and compassion is a thousand times more effective than that of punishment.”

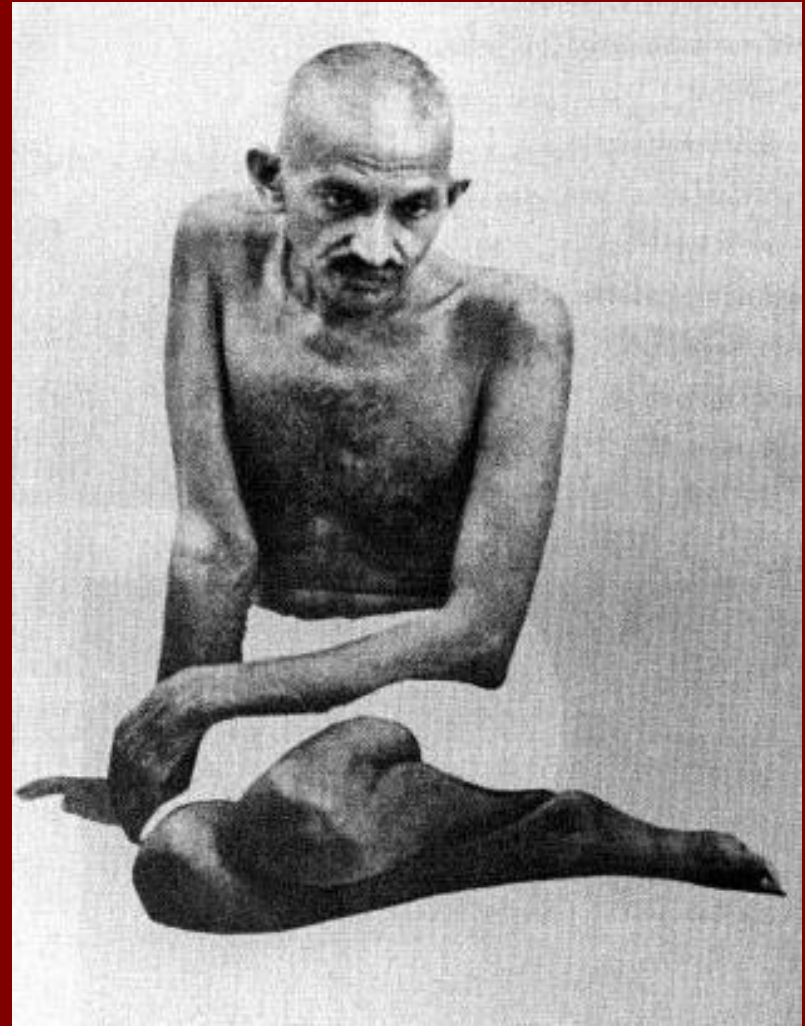
NATIONAL LEADER

Age 49, in local dress,
after his return to India,
shortly before assuming
leadership of the Indian
nationalist movement
for independence in
1919.



International Symbol

By age 55, Gandhi had so simplified his clothing that Churchill could call him a “half-naked fakir.” British cartoons depicted him thus, but Gandhi saw this as part of his philosophy of renunciation and knew that Indian tradition valued its symbolism.



Political Strategist

By far the most famous of his mass campaigns of civil disobedience is called the “*salt satyagraha*”, when in 1930, he unleashed the **power of nonviolence** through mass action against the infamous salt tax that the British had imposed on all Indians, heaviest on the poor peasantry, for whom a year’s taxation on salt could comprise a week’s wages.

In his attack on the salt tax, Gandhi seized on symbolic as well as economic injustices:

“Next to air and water, salt is perhaps the greatest necessity of life. It is the only condiment of the poor. Through this injustice the British exploit the starving millions, the sick, the maimed and utterly helpless. The salt tax constitutes the most inhuman poll tax that the ingenuity of man can devise.”

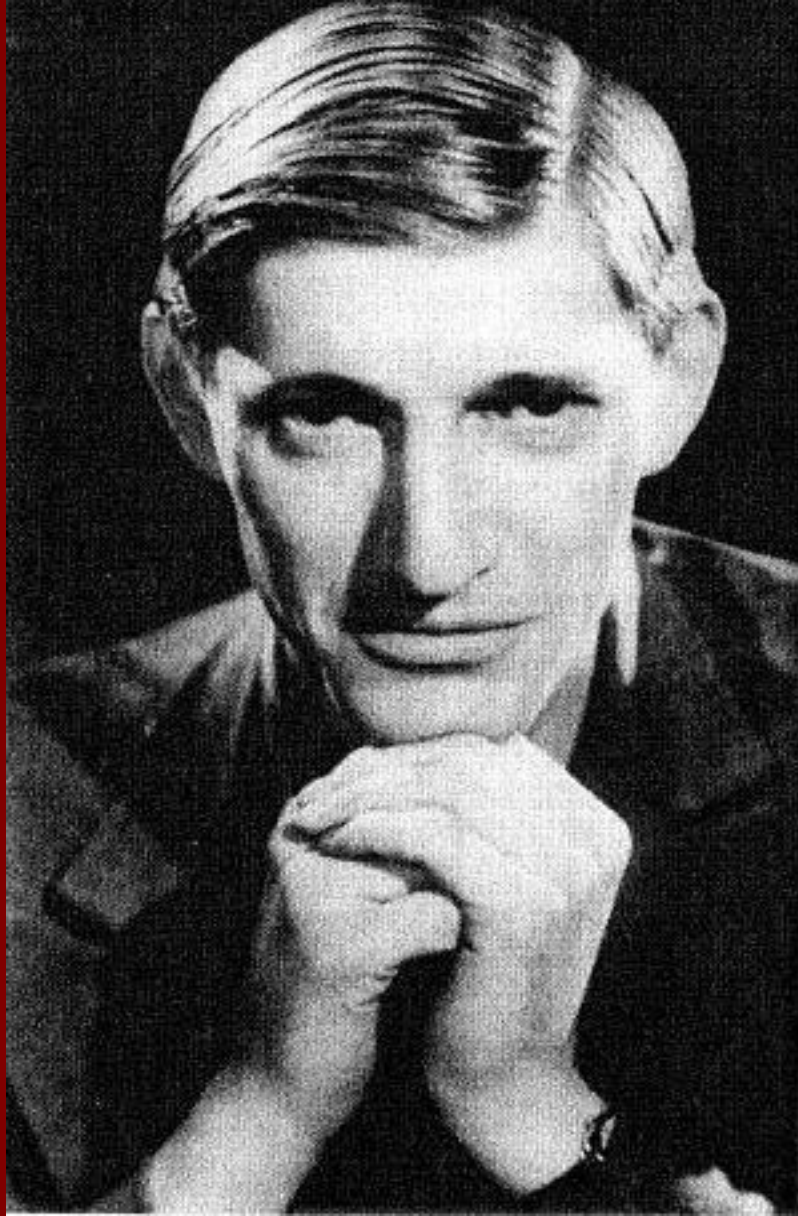
Salt March to the Sea, 1930

- Gandhi's letter to Lord Irwin, March 2, 1930
- Campaign of mass civil disobedience: to walk 240 miles in 24 days with 80 ashram members from Ahmedabad to western coast
- Purpose: to defy British salt tax by gathering natural sea salt
- Tension builds on eve of march as to whether British will arrest Gandhi

The Opponent

Lord Edward Irwin
(1881-1959), Viceroy
of India during the salt
satyagraha, was
Gandhi's chief
adversary.





Gandhi's Ally

Reginald Reynolds (1905-1958), an English Quaker who joined Gandhi's ashram and then hand-delivered to Lord Irwin Gandhi's letter with its plan of civil disobedience.

Letter to Lord Irwin

- Informs his adversary of proposed action 10 days before campaign begins
- Letter addressed: “Dear Friend” asking for cooperation rather than confrontation
- Diagnosis: “British rule is a curse that has reduced us to serfdom and sapped the foundations of our culture, degrading us spiritually”
- Remedy: civil disobedience against salt tax

Gandhi to Nehru on eve of march

“It is nearing 10 pm and the air is thick with rumor that I shall be arrested during the night.

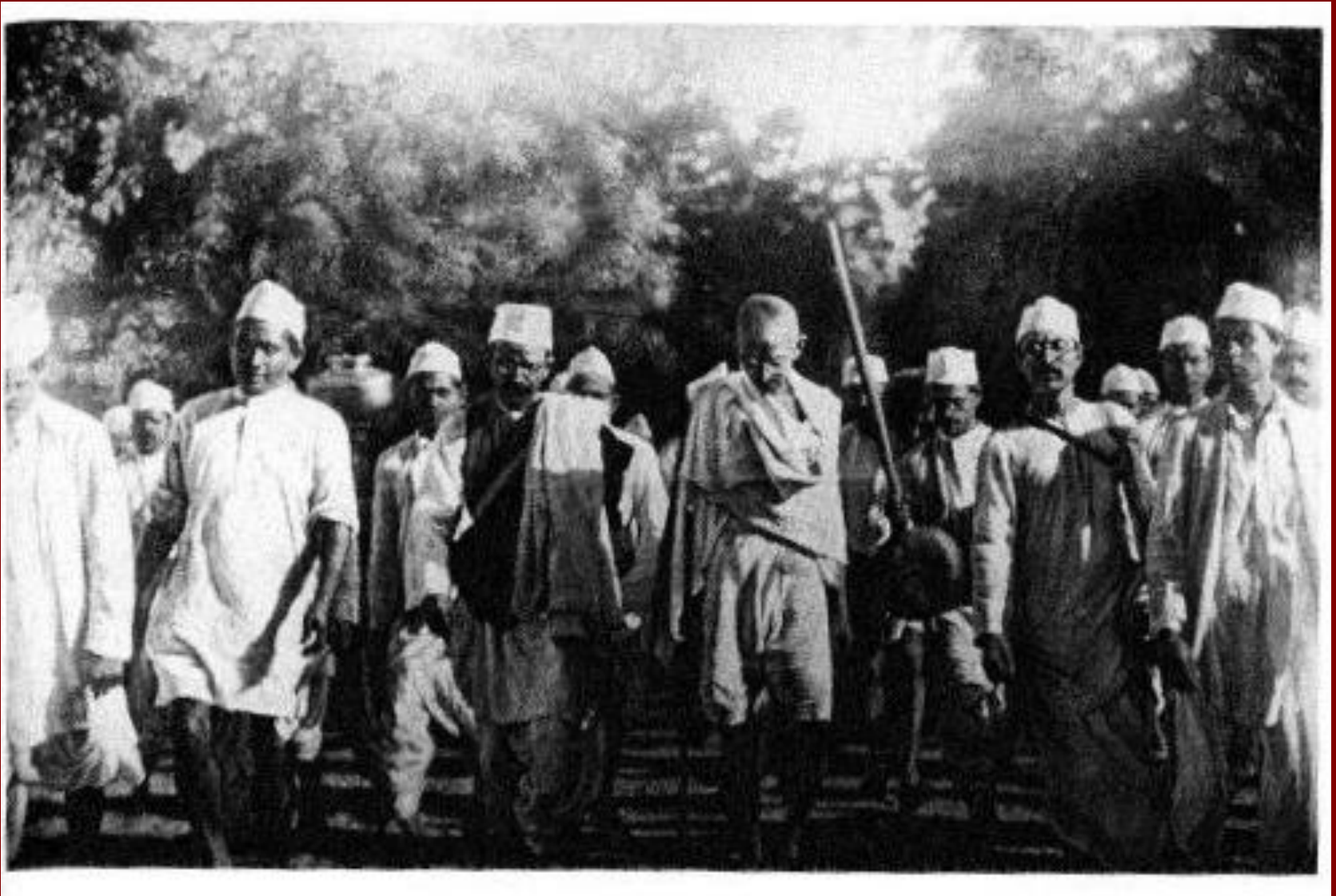
Things are developing extraordinarily well. Volunteers are pouring in.”

11/30
My dear J.awahar Lal,
It is nearing 10 pm now -
the air is thick with the
rumor that I shall
be arrested during the
night

Things are developing
extraordinarily well.
Offers of volunteers
are pouring in.

with love to my mother
11/30
T. Gandhi

Gandhi, age 60, beginning the salt march on
March 12, 1930



Mobilizing the march

- Politicizing groups not included earlier: millions of poor peasants, thousands of women and students from all regions
- Engaging the media: the worldwide press and film producers combine with local newspapers to cover the march
- Dramatizing the issue as “nonviolent struggle of right against might” to seize moral high ground

The most dramatic moment in modern Indian History

The salt march ends April 6, 1930 at the sea. Gandhi picked up natural salt—a symbolic, yet illegal act, that inspired a nation to civil disobedience.



REASONS FOR SUCCESS

- Numbers count: in any nonviolent movement it helps if resisters greatly outnumber the adversary
- British in India never more than 100,000, therefore outnumbered almost 4000 to 1
- Motives of ruling authority matter: the British rulers were ambivalent in their response, letting movement build

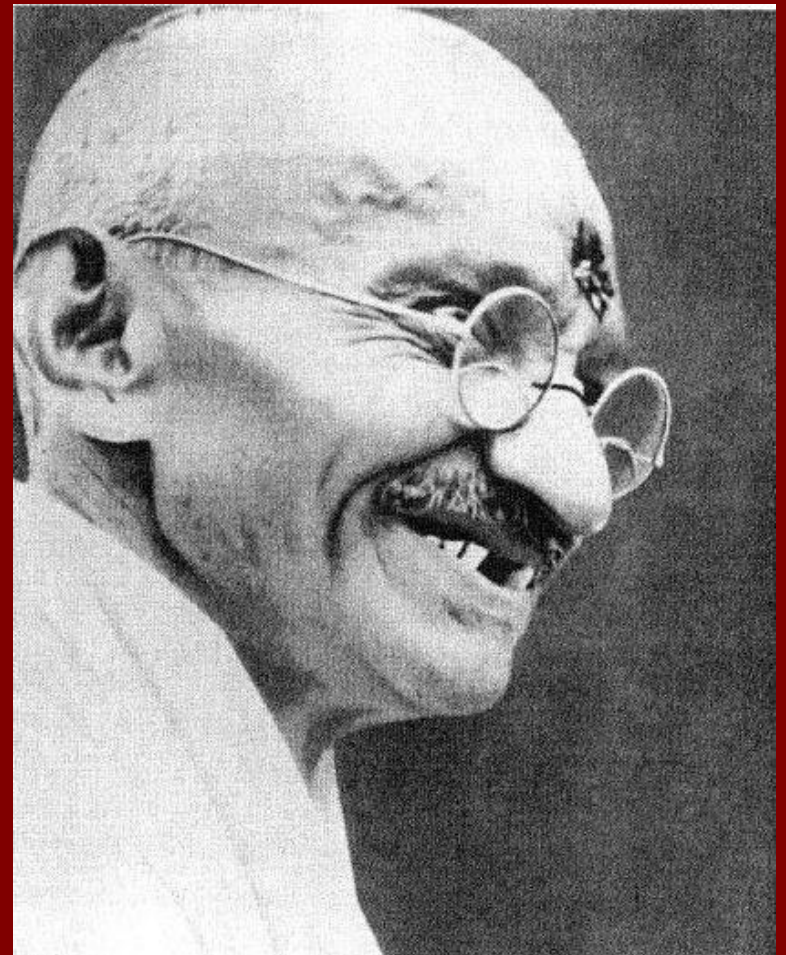
Gandhi's Style of Wit

His self-deprecating humor:

“I possess few clothes and fewer teeth.”

Or teasing: “Western civilization? It would be a good idea!”

Or mockery: “The King had on enough clothes for both of us.”



I will give you a talisman.
Whenever you are in doubt, or when the
self becomes too much with you, apply the
following test. Recall the face of the
poorest and the weakest man whom you may
have seen, and ask yourself, if the step
you contemplate is going to be of any
use to him. Will he gain anything by it?
Will it restore him to a control over his
own life and destiny? In other words,
will it lead to Swaraj for the hungry and
spiritually starving millions?

Then you will find your doubts
and your self melting away.

म. ग. अ. वि. वि.
०३१. ४. १९४८

One of the last notes to be signed and left by Gandhi in 1948 as
a final testament of his deepest belief.

Gandhi's meaning for today

The significance of Gandhi's personal and political journey was to show how to achieve through nonviolent action freedom with equality, the twin values of democracy. His goal of Indian independence required equal rights and opportunities for all, taking responsibility for the least privileged. This later became the mission of Martin Luther King, Jr.

"If humanity is to progress, Gandhi is inescapable. He lived, thought and acted, inspired by the vision of humanity evolving toward a world of peace and harmony. We may ignore him at our risk. His is the only morally and practically sound method open to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom."

Martin Luther King, Jr., writing in 1958 of Gandhi's profound influence on the American civil rights struggle.