Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

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## COMM 314

## Term Paper

I selected Mohandas K. Gandhi as my term paper topic because I have learned about him since a young age. I have always been very intrigued as to how he accomplished such great feats by something as simple as nonviolence. Personally, it’s hard for me to believe that one man’s action could do so much for not only his followers or his country, but people around the world. The organization and techniques of his campaigns and individual actions were nothing short of absolutely brilliant. I don’t believe I could ever respect a man as much as I do Gandhi for the fact that he was capable of accomplishing such large things with something as simple and nonviolent protest.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, more commonly known as Mahatma Gandhi, was born on October 2, 1869 in the town of Gujarat, India. His father, Karamchand Gandhi, was the diwan, or Prime Minister of a state called Porbander. During this time period, Porbander was part of British India. His mother, Putlibai, and Jain traditions are greatly responsible for shaping the way for Mohandas at a very early age. Vegetarianism, fasting for purification of self and tolerance of others with different creeds are just a few of these traditions. In May of 1883, 13 year old Mohandas married Kasturbai Makhanji. Their first child was born in 1885, but only survived a few days. Mohandas and Kasturbai then had four more children, beginning with Harilal in 1888, Minilal in 1892, Ramdas in 1897, and Devdas in 1900.

Throughout his school years, Mohandas was no more than an average student. After middle and high school, he began college at Samaldas College in Gujarat. Around at 19, he traveled to London to begin law school at University College London and to train as a barrister, a type of lawyer. Upon his departure of India, Gandhi made a vow to his mother to abstain from meat, alcohol, and sex. While in London, he became more interested in religion than ever before. London is the very place in which Gandhi was encouraged to begin reading the Bhagavad Gita. After becoming interested in religion, more now than ever, he began to explore Hindu and Christian texts as well.

On June 12, 1891 Gandhi departed London to return to his homeland of India. Upon his arrival, he learned that his mother had passed away. This was news that his family had failed to mention to him while he was away. After many failed attempts to obtain a law occupation in Mumbai, Gandhi began an occupation of drafting petitions for litigants. He was required to do this job after a brief run-in with a British Officer. In April of 1893, Gandhi was presented with a one year contract from an Indian law firm called Dada Abdulla & Co. They position he was offered was located in the Colony of Natal, South Africa.

Gandhi arrived in South Africa in the midst of a discrimination war against Indians. He himself was thrown off a train in Pietermaritzburg when he refused to give up his first class seat to move to third class, all while possessing a valid first class ticket. This event was just one of the many that his future held. It was events like these, along with being a firsthand witness to racism and injustice against Indians that steered Gandhi down the path of social activism. Gandhi stayed in South Africa longer than expected to help assist Indians in protesting a bill which would deny them the right to vote. Although he was unsuccessful and the bill passed, he was successful in the since of drawing attention to the injustice against Indians in South Africa.

It was not until September of 1906 that Gandhi began his method of Satyagraha (nonviolent protest) for the first time. He and other Indians gathered to defy the law, willing to suffer punishments, by means other than violence. One of the most famous instances of satyagraha involved the 1906 Transvaal Act that required Indian’s to carry registration cards on them at all times. Realizing this injustice, Gandhi and other Indians gathered and burnt all of their registration cards to show their resistance against the act.

When the word “non-cooperation” comes to mind, Gandhi is also a name that seems to be closely paired with it. His acts of nonviolent protest and peaceful resistance were his most valuable weapons against the British. After noticing the success of this method, many of Gandhi’s supporters and much of the Indian society joined in. Near the apex of Gandhi’s nonviolent movement, he and his followers were struck with great Tragedy. On April 13, 1919, 50 British soldiers led by General Dyer opened fire on a group of nonviolent protesters in an Indian city called Amritsar. The only reason for the cease of fire was due to an insufficient amount of ammunition. After a total elapsed time of 10 to 15 minutes, there were 379 fatalities, 1100 wounded, and a total of 1526 casualties. Even though this type of extreme action was thought to have halted these types of protests, it only motivated the protesters and gave them greater determination to succeed.

On March 12, 1930 Gandhi led a group 241 miles on a journey against a tax they British had set on salt. They departed Ahmedabd in route to Dandi, Gujarat to produce their own salt without paying the tax. Along the way, many Indians joined in and strengthened not only the march, but the message it carried. After reaching Dandi, Gandhi along with 80,000 other Indians were jailed as a result of their disobedience. This march gained much publicity and spread their message worldwide. Protests against the salt tax went on for almost a year, ultimately leading to the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of 1931. The British government agreed to free all of the political prisoners in return for the end of the movement. After the pact was signed, Gandhi attended a round table meeting in London. Being very displeased with what was actually changing, Gandhi continued his campaigns. Gandhi began using his fasting as a more significant form of persuasion. In September of 1932, Gandhi took part in a 6 day fast due to the fact that the government was very limited to what they granted the untouchables. On May 8, 1933, he began a 21 day fast to aid the Harijan movement. This movement was aimed at improving the lives of the untouchables, whom Gandhi himself named Harijans.

Throughout his years, Gandhi faced four attempts of assassination. After surviving the first three, he was not so fortunate with the fourth. On January 30, 1948 Gandhi was shot in the chest three times prior to addressing a prayer meeting. As he fell to the ground, he used his remaining energy to utter his last words of “oh God.” Shortly after, Gandhi succumbed to his injuries. The assassin, Nathuram Godse, held Gandhi responsible for weakening the foundation of India. Godse and an accomplice, Narayan Apte, were then tried and convicted of the crime. They were then executed in November of 1949.

Gandhi lived his life based on a system of principles. These principles include: Truth, Nonviolence, Vegetarianism, Brahmacharya (self purity), Simplicity, Faith, and Swaraj. He dedicated his life to truth of self. His belief in truth was summarized into one of his most famous quotes, “God is Truth” (later changed to (“Truth is God”). He believed that he learned best by learning from his mistakes throughout his life. The most common thing that Gandhi is known for is nonviolence. He used peaceful resistance because of its importance to all Indian religious contexts, including: Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Jewish, and even Christian. In his younger years, Gandhi did happen to give meat eating a try. As he grew older, he began to comply with the traditions of his religion and his family. He began strict vegetarianism when he made the promise to his mother before he left for London. Brahmacharya became significant in Gandhi’s life around age 16 when his father past away. Being a very close knit family, he was there for his father, tending to him at all times when he was ill and in need. One night his uncle came to relieve him with the care of his father, and Gandhi decided to go make love to his wife. Shortly after Gandhi left his father, he received the message that his father had passed away. Taking all responsibility upon himself, Gandhi began seeking purification of self. This ultimately led to him becoming celibate at age 36. Simplicity came into play around the time that Gandhi was becoming involved with the public. At one point, he would no longer wear western style clothing because it was associated with wealth and success. He refused to “dress to impress.” He wanted to dress in a manner that would be accepted by everyone. Once the spinning wheel was created, Gandhi began making his own close. He ended up wearing a dhoti for the greatest portion of his life to show his simplicity. Although Gandhi was born Hindu and practiced Hinduism all of his life, he considered himself to be Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, and Jewish. He said that all religions are questionable at some points. He took everything that he agreed with from each religion, put it all together, and lived his life by that. He stated that the foundation of every religion is found within truth and love. Swaraj, or self governing, was a concept Gandhi developed to discuss Indian independence. He believed that the government should be ran by the people, rather than a hierarchical system; a concept similar to anarchism. Although he was unsuccessful with achieving his goal of self governance, he paved the way for future people and organizations trying to accomplish the same thing.

## References

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