

GANDHI IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, or Mahatma Gandhi, as he came to be revered later, immeasurably contributed to the emergence of India as an independent nation. Gandhi provided an alternative vision and strategy for attaining independence that became the prevailing discourse of the nationalist movement. Gandhi's novel political ideology was, according to Judith Brown, "appealed to few wholly, but to many partially", as everyone could find in it something to identify with. The time which Gandhi spent in South Africa was vital for the evolution of his vision and ideology. Gandhi's twenty-one year stay in South Africa gave him a world outlook and an internal strength to develop and experiment with the non-violent techniques of struggle. He went there as a lawyer in search of livelihood and returned as Mahatma Gandhi. As Ramchandra Guha succinctly remarks, Gandhi "worked in three different countries (Britain, South Africa and India), as anti-colonial agitator, social reformer, religious thinker and prophet, he brought to the most violent of centuries a form of protest that was based on non-violence". As India, this year, celebrates his 150th birth anniversary, we as nation's thinkers should ponder over his immense contributions towards the making of an independent India. In this context, it wouldn't be amiss to deliberate on his almost two decades' stint in South Africa. South Africa shaped Gandhi from a floundering, shy, uncertain and hesitant lawyer, into a confident, effective and an assured person and a social activist. And in-turn, he deeply impacted the history of South Africa, influencing native leaders to forge a struggle and agitation against the deeply entrenched racism, by adopting and adapting the strategies devised by Gandhi. His journey from being Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi to a Mahatma was definitely rooted in South Africa.

Gandhi was born on 2nd October, 1869, in a Bania family of a small coastal town of Porbandar in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat. Gandhi was brought up in a deeply religious, though, eclectic

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environment, in which religious thinkers belonging to different sects and communities were welcomed. In an age where for the Bania community social distance with other communities was the norm, Gandhi's family was open-minded. Mohandas's mother, Putlibai, introduced him to the splendors and mysteries of faith, and inspired him to be religious but not dogmatic. Gandhi's school days were unremarkable and he showed average proclivity towards academic subjects. Fortunately, his results in matriculation were good and he could enroll for a BA in a local college. However, Gandhi did not complete the course as he had the better option of going to London for a degree in law. In spite of immense social and financial difficulties, Mohandas proceeded to London in September 1888 for further studies. London was an eye-opening experience for Gandhi, where the seeds of inter-faith connectedness were sown. Gandhi began reading Christian texts, but the Sermon on the Mount went straight to his heart. Comparing it to the Gita (Hindu Religious text), he concluded that both taught that "renunciation was the highest form of religion". Henry

