

## [Ghandi's walk changed India]

FEBRUARY 5, 1987

# Ghandi's walk changed India

By JOAN MAYO

Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated Jan. 30, 1948. Shot during his nightly prayer meeting by a fanatical high caste Hindu who opposed his efforts to obtain equal rights for minority groups.

For 55 years Gandhi had struggled to convince the authorities both in South Africa and India of his philosophy, that to divide by reason of religion or social bearing was wrong.

*My religion has no geographical limits.*

*My religion is based on truth and non-violence.*

*My religion forbids me to hate anybody.*

*Religion is not for separating people—*

*It is to bind them.*

Born into a high caste Hindu family, Gandhi's formative experience with racial prejudice in South Africa in 1893, shaped him on a path of social reform. Although his African assignment was for only one year, he remained 21 years, fighting for equal rights for Indians. In all his efforts to unite and strengthen the Indian community, Gandhi viewed the point that rights involved obligations. His emphasis was on good citizenship.

When the Boer War broke out in 1899, he had enough support to offer the sand government the support of the Indian community, whose right it had largely denied. He was allowed to organize an ambulance corps of over 1,000 men whose conduct and particularly his own won praise.

Gandhi's affluent lifestyle as a lawyer contradicted his inner feelings. He had long since accepted the idea that we are our brother's keepers. As a result he gave up his material possessions and moved to a small farm, where he found his first solace. The Indian Relief Act was passed in 1944 and Gandhi and his family returned to India.

Within five years he was embroiled in a struggle for Indian home rule and social reform. But first he traveled the country learning the needs of the people. It was on this epic journey he discovered the real India, the starkness of its 300,000 villages could not be written. "I did not possess anything which I do not want," but Gandhi, denied he was a socialist, saying, "I do not want to dispossess those who have poor possessions."

What he advocated for the relief of poverty was the method of rural life by the recovery of the village industries. One of the chief of these was the spinning and weaving of cloth in the home. Before long he was criticized as workers dignify, lawlessness and better living conditions.

Negotiations with the British government for a new constitution for India failed to offer fair provisions for the unresolvable who Gandhi had renamed "Harijans—Children of God." Even though he was in prison he entered upon a fast which nearly ended his life. Amendments were finally agreed upon and in a result the Poona Pact decreed that "no-one shall be regarded as untouchable by reason of his birth."


Upon release from prison Gandhi continued his plan of civil disobedience. He walked hand in hand and forth across India, quieting anti-government 1930. The Muslim League under the leadership of Jinnah, was pressing for a separate country for the Muslim minority. Violent battles broke out between Hindus and Muslims. The rising became so severe that the Prime Minister in England sent Sir Stafford Cripps to India with the proposal that if the violence would stop now, Great Britain would begin negotiations for independence as soon as the war in Europe ended. The British proposal included the right for any province to withdraw on their own which would have resulted in a divided India, which Gandhi and the Congress refused to accept.

By 1947 the war had ended but the situation within India was getting worse. Finally the British government took control of the situation and proposed to divide India into a smaller country for the Muslims and the larger one for those who desired to remain in India.

Then, though Gandhi was hard and disappointed at the plans to divide the country, he realized that a divided India was better than anarchy, so he announced at his regular prayer meetings that neither the Viceroy nor the British were to be blamed for partition but only the cowardly of Indians themselves.

The new constitution had not provided for the power claims as he had anticipated. On Jan. 15, 1948, at 78 years of age, Gandhi entered his final fast. As a result the government guaranteed the future safety and behavior of all communities and agreed to turn over to Jinnah the money due them under the terms of the agreement.

On Jan. 30, as he reached his nightly prayer meeting, Gandhi was shot dead by a young Hindu extremist who opposed his ideals of equality for all.



### IDENTIFIER

2020\_06\_07\_01\_034

### ARTIST

Mayo, Joan; Gandhi, Mahatma