



Session: 2024-25

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

Early Life and Background

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869, in Porbandar, a coastal town in Gujarat, India. His father, Karamchand Gandhi, was the dewan (chief minister) of Porbandar, and his mother, Putlibai, was a devout Hindu who greatly influenced Gandhi's spiritual and ethical outlook. Gandhi was married to Kasturba Makhanji at the age of 13, and they had four sons: Harilal, Manilal, Ramdas, and Devdas.

Education and Early Career

Gandhi travelled to London in 1888 to study law at the Inner Temple. He was called to the bar in 1891 and returned to India to practice law. However, he struggled to establish a successful legal career in India and accepted a position in South Africa in 1893.

Activism in South Africa

In South Africa, Gandhi faced racial discrimination, which profoundly impacted him. He was thrown off a train for refusing to move from the first-class compartment, despite holding a valid ticket. This incident was a turning point in his life. Gandhi spent 21 years in South Africa, where he developed his philosophy of satyagraha (truth and nonviolence). He led campaigns for civil rights and fought against discriminatory laws targeting the Indian community.

Return to India and Leadership in the Independence Movement

Gandhi returned to India in 1915 and quickly became a prominent leader in the Indian National Congress. He advocated for nonviolent resistance and civil disobedience as tools to achieve independence from British rule.

Major Movements:

1. Champaran and Kheda Satyagraha (1917-1918): Gandhi led successful campaigns against oppressive plantation systems and tax policies.
2. Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-1922): Gandhi called for Indians to boycott British goods, institutions, and honour.
3. Salt March (1930): Also known as the Dandi March, this was a 240-mile march to the Arabian Sea to protest the British monopoly on salt production and sales.
4. Quit India Movement (1942): A mass protest demanding an end to British rule in India. Gandhi's call for "Do or Die" inspired millions to join the struggle.

Personal Philosophy and Practices

Gandhi's philosophy was deeply rooted in the principles of ahimsa (nonviolence) and satyagraha. He believed in living a simple life, wearing hand-spun cloth (khadi), and promoting self-sufficiency. He also emphasized the importance of communal harmony and worked tirelessly to bridge the gap between Hindus and Muslims.

Assassination and Legacy

On January 30, 1948, Gandhi was assassinated by Nathuram Godse, a Hindu nationalist who opposed Gandhi's efforts to reconcile Hindus and Muslims. Gandhi's death was a profound loss for India and the world.

Gandhi's legacy continues to inspire movements for civil rights and social justice globally. His life and teachings remain a testament to the power of nonviolent resistance and the pursuit of truth.

Key Contributions and Impact

- Civil Rights Movement: Gandhi's methods influenced civil rights movements worldwide, including Martin Luther King Jr.'s struggle for racial equality in the United States.
- Economic Self-Reliance: He promoted the use of khadi (hand-spun cloth) and the revival of village industries to make India self-reliant.

- Social Reforms: Gandhi worked to eradicate untouchability and improve the status of women in society.
- Environmentalism: His principles of simple living and self-sufficiency have inspired modern environmental movements.

Writings and Publications

Gandhi was a prolific writer. Some of his notable works include:

- “Hind Swaraj” (1909): A critique of modern civilization and a call for Indian self-rule.
- “The Story of My Experiments with Truth” (1927): His autobiography, detailing his personal and political journey.
- Numerous articles and letters: Published in journals like “Young India” and “Harijan”.

Lal Bahadur Shastri

Lal Bahadur Shastri holds a significant place in Indian history. He was born on October 2, 1904, in Mughalsarai, Uttar Pradesh. His father, Munshi Sharda Prasad Srivastava, was a school teacher, and his mother, Ramdulari Devi, was a homemaker. Shastri’s early life was marked by hardship, as his father passed away when he was just eighteen months old.

Education and Early Life

Shastri received his early education in Mirzapur and later graduated from Kashi Vidyapith with a degree in philosophy, earning the title ‘Shastri’. He dropped his caste-based surname ‘Srivastava’ and adopted ‘Shastri’ as his surname.

Contribution to the Freedom Struggle

Deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi’s call for non-cooperation, Shastri left his studies in 1921 to join the Indian independence movement. During this period, he was imprisoned several times.

Political Career

After India gained independence, Shastri served as the Parliamentary Secretary in Uttar Pradesh and later as the Minister of Police and Transport under Govind Ballabh Pant. As Transport Minister, he introduced female conductors, and as Police Minister, he replaced the use of lathis (sticks) with water jets for crowd control.

Tenure as Prime Minister

Following Jawaharlal Nehru’s death, Shastri became the Prime Minister of India in 1964. His tenure saw the Indo-Pak war of 1965, during which he provided exemplary leadership and led India to victory. He coined the slogan “Jai Jawan Jai Kisan” (Hail the Soldier, Hail the Farmer), which remains popular in India.

Death and Legacy

Shastri passed away under mysterious circumstances on January 11, 1966, in Tashkent, shortly after signing a peace agreement with Pakistan’s Prime Minister Ayub Khan. He was posthumously awarded the Bharat Ratna, India’s highest civilian award, for his simplicity, patriotism, and integrity.

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