**Brief Biography of M. K. Gandhi**, **1869-1948**

*Directions: After you read this biography of Mahatma Gandhi make a timeline of events and critical moments in his life.*

Gandhi was born in an India when it was under the colonial rule of the British Empire; almost 80 years later, he died just months after India gained her independence from that Empire. Beloved and respected by millions all over the world, this teacher and leader had many names in his life: born Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in1869, he was first called "Mahatma" ("Great Soul") in 1915 by a leading Indian poet. This honorary title suggested that he was a kind of god, something he absolutely denied. Among his followers, he was also known as Gandhi (‘-ji’ is an affectionate nickname) and Bapu ("Daddy").

Youngest son of a Hindu family of the merchant caste, Mohandas was married, in an arranged marriage typical of the times, to a local girl, Kasturba, a relationship which lasted until her death at the age of 74. Even as a boy, Mohandas was interested in religion and tried hard to follow local religious customs of diet and behavior. Sent to London to study law in 1888, Gandhi developed a deep respect for the British legal system; he did not know that he would spend much of his life fighting against the rule of Great Britain. He returned to India in 1891, but could not easily find work.

In 1893, he was offered a chance to work as a lawyer for an Indian firm in South Africa. Early in his stay there, Gandhi personally experienced hateful racial discrimination--he was thrown off a train and refused rooms at a hotel. These incidents opened his eyes to the reality of the South African system of racial separation. In 1894, when the government threatened to take away all voting rights from Indian citizens, Gandhi formed the Natal National Congress, a political group that worked for Indian rights.

Even though he disagreed with many things that the colonial government did, Gandhi remained loyal to Great Britain, and he, along with many Indian residents of South Africa, supported the British Army in the Boer War of 1899-1902. The British won that war and took over the government of the newly formed Union of South Africa. There were still many laws that restricted the rights of Indian and other non-white citizens, however, and Gandhi and his family stayed in South Africa for more than a decade, seeking to improve human rights under the British administration.

Gandhi worked to help the Indian community in many ways: In 1903 he started an Indian newspaper, and organized a farm where the newspaper employees would not only print the paper, but also live, grow food and work to support each other. In 1906 the government tried to make Indian residents carry identification cards. Gandhi led thousands of Indians in a peaceful protest against this proposal. In this protest, and others that followed, Gandhi developed his ideas about nonviolent resistance to unfair laws and inspired many people to follow his example.

In 1914, Gandhi and his family moved back to India, where he continued working in two main areas: independence from Britain and human rights for all Indian citizens. He particularly tried to remove the worst injustices of the caste system, a traditional way of organizing society in which the lowest levels, the "Untouchables," were denied basic economic and social freedoms. To train people in his nonviolent methods, Gandhi started an ashram, a kind of religious study center, where everybody, including Untouchables, could come to live and work together, and study the principles of non-violence. People came from all over the world to live at this ashram. By 1918, Gandhi was leading Indian peasants in nonviolent protests. By 1920 he was active in a political organization that wanted to liberate India from the British Empire.

For the next 28 years, Gandhi continued to lead protests against unfair economic and political restrictions, fight for national independence and teach his followers to use peaceful and nonviolent methods to change society. Sometimes Gandhi would fast as a sign of protest; when he fasted, he would become very weak and sometimes come near to death. He was very beloved by the population of India; knowing that his death would cause great anger and violent riots among the people, the government often changed its policies or at least negotiated with Gandhi rather than let him die of hunger.

At other times Gandhi and his followers would make peaceful marches or simply refuse to cooperate with a law. Unfortunately, even these nonviolent methods often produced violence among the people he was trying to help, especially between Indian Hindus and Indian Moslems. Gandhi himself always tried to reach a peaceful conclusion, even if it meant compromising with his opponents, but some people hated the idea of compromise. Mahatma Gandhi lived to see Independence Day, when Britain finally left India on Aug 15, 1947. On January 30, 1948, he was assassinated by a Hindu fanatic, who was angry with him for negotiating with Muslims.