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SAGES – Change Agents

Third Essay

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Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, also known as Mahatma Gandhi, was a famous change agent who used nationalism as a means to peace and as a way to unify the Indian subcontinent. Gandhi is most famous for his role as a freedom fighter and a revolutionary during the struggle for India’s independence. However, Gandhi was not only a political activist but also a social change agent. His views on social change and the overall progression of the Indian subcontinent are less well-known, but still reflect his ability to garner the support of an inconceivable amount of people and to banish and eradicate the British enemy. Though many of his societal goals were controversial and at times outlandish, he was still able to sway the masses. How was Gandhi able to gather so much support? In this essay, I will attempt to answer this question. First, I will examine what Gandhi wanted to change in both the political and societal realms, and what his efforts were to implement his desired changes. There are three main ways in which he was able to gain support: first, by spreading his theory of *satyagraha*, second, by rejecting the British way of life, and last, by upholding the morals he preached and staying true to the ultimate Truth. Later, I will analyze how his methods fit into the context of our class. Ultimately, the information provided by the essay will further legitimize Mahatma Gandhi as a prominent change agent.

Gandhi had very specific notions about how nationalism was supposed to be used and implemented. First and foremost he believed all people should follow *satyagraha* or the soul-force. This, he said, should guide everyone in all that they do. The reason *satygraha* was so widely accepted was because it followed the cultural traditions of the Indian people and was foreign to the British imperialists. *Satyagraha* is essentially Gandhi’s moral rulebook, and from it stems his notion of nonviolence. Violence in the face of violence signified hypocrisy to Gandhi; it was a matter of morality that he was non-violent. Also as a principle, Gandhi stated that his problem was not with the British *people*, but rather the immoral standards that they upheld. Gandhi defiantly rejected the British way of life, mostly because of its links to modernity.

Gandhi dogmatically opposed modernity. He believed that scientific progress was a corruption of tradition and culture and that it led to materialism and the emergence of superficial ideals. He wanted India to be independent and self-sufficient, which is why he encouraged people to sew their own clothing. He was a minimalist who made all of his clothes and avoided luxury. He believed that those who are self-sufficient do not indulge. Indian tradition is consistent with *satyagraha*, according to Gandhi, so the flaws of Indian society were imposed by the British and needed to change. Therefore, Gandhi believed that change in the form of progress was not always equivalent to modernization. There was no timeline of progression in which the West was ahead of the East.

Gandhi often used his divine beliefs as justification of his morals. These beliefs were very traditional and culturally centered. He believed only some aspects of religion, such as the caste system, were wrong, but not religion itself. The caste system was used by the British to exploit and oppress the Indian people. For Gandhi, religion was not necessarily a representation of Truth. He defined as Truth as absolute, or unchanging. This is why Gandhi felt that there were no circumstances in which he should go against his morals. He preached and practiced his principles so that the masses were able to learn from his example. His thoughts on the caste system and were highly controversial to most people in society, yet his efforts to eradicate the rigid social structure were accepted because people were able to see how they corresponded with a higher morality.

In the last part of our course we have been discussing change on the individual level and how individuals go about making change happen. Gandhi implemented many of the protest tactics and leadership skills about which we have talked. In Gardner’s book *Changing Minds* Gandhi is a perfect example of a successful leader. Gandhi mostly used the tactics of Resonance, Resistance, and Redescriptions in his efforts. Resonance he used by targeting morality as the central issue in the fight. He obviously calculated the violent resistance that the British would give, and he used it to his advantage. Redescription he used by relying on many different aspects of society to form a singular point of view. Above these leadership tactics, Gandhi was incredibly skilled at implementing the protest tactics that Alinsky discusses. The golden rule was “Power is not only what you have, but what the enemy thinks you have”. Gandhi knew that the people of India were stronger than the British, and he used the faults and mistakes of the British to raise the power and unification of the Indian masses. Alinksy mentions Gandhi directly in the eleventh protest tactic: “If you push a negative hard and deep enough it will break through into its counterside”. Gandhi’s nonviolence and passive resistance is an excellent example of this. Overall, Gandhi’s use of leadership and protest tactics allowed him to create a strong and unyielding nationalistic force.

Gandhi was a successful leader and change agent for many reasons. Firstly, he associated all of his efforts with his theory of *satyagraha*. Secondly, he blatantly rejected the British way of life and materialism as a whole. Lastly, Gandhi practiced and preached his ideas. All these reasons allowed Gandhi to mobilize the masses because he could understand them. His ability to connect with them as well as portray an example of how they should act was crucial in the fight for independence. His efforts as a change agent resulted in major social and political changes for the Indian subcontinent. Furthermore, Gandhi successfully used protest tactics and nationalism to eradicate the British and above all, unite the people of India.