Gandhi, an Exemplary Leader

Mahatma Gandhi, who is also rightfully honored as the “Father of the Nation” was the key leader in the independence struggle for India. The following article explores how the essential qualities of leadership can be distinctly found in the Gandhi.

Purpose

The basic purpose of leadership in colonial India was simply “Freedom from British”, thus Gandhi had to find out how his leadership could be different from hundreds of other national leaders.

While other leaders where contemplating different ways to drive the British out of India, Gandhi tried to see a broader reason of colonialism. The answer existed in the purpose of colonialism; if one can understand the motive of your opponent’s leadership; one can find ways to tackle it.

Several point to ponder during that era were-

- By later 1800s, British had already looted all the treasures of the occupied princely states. The Gold/Silver & other precious belongings were already transferred to England, then why were British still there?
- The previous invaders of the sub-continent had only 2 purpose of invasion, either they wanted the riches of India and return to their native countries (e.g. Gengis Khan) or they were settlers (e.g. Mughals). British were clearly not settlers, they were in India on deputation from Queen of England and had no desire to be in India forever.

Hence, the fundamental question still remains unanswered, what benefit was India to the British empire? British will never have a big colony as India as a liability unless it was profitable.

Prior to British occupation, India was amongst the leading goods exporting nation which perhaps explained the amount of wealth it had. However the British rule with its modern mechanized industrial power successfully eliminated the local Indian artisans infrastructure. Even the basic commodities like cloth, salt etc were being imported from England.

“India turned from a goods exporting nation to a big importer or consumer nation”

Hence there was an “Economic Purpose” to British colonialism, and the most effective way to fight them was not through armed conflict but non-violent way to become self-reliant and stop consuming English products!
Purpose of leadership was “Free India”  
Plan was to have a non-violent approach which was easily adoptable by masses and could break the “Economic Purpose” of colonialism.

Inspire and motivate others

Gandhi without a doubt could inspire and move the masses in India, he could show the common man that even he can make a difference and bring the British Empire to its knees. It was possible since his leadership was based on self-reliance and non-cooperation, something everyone could adopt and feel that they were a part of freedom struggle, synergizing the common man.

Credibility

Gandhi had an initial credibility already established through his work and movements in South Africa. People already had great honor and hopes from him due to what he could achieve in south Africa, his non-violent methods were also very well respected within the indian society.

Further in India, Gandhi established the credibility by leading through example, he established himself as a slave of the people of India, empowering the general public. He made it his policy to practice what he preached, even the small things like spinning yarn to make his own clothes. He resorted to simple and poor living, just like millions in the country, hence people looked at Gandhi as one of their own, they could see their own sufferings in him.

Relationships

Gandhi established a clear relationship with people by touring across India, leading all the major movements personally and by holding various public meetings repeatedly. In this way he always managed to be accessible to others, just a glimpse of Gandhi was enough for a common man to be connected to this great leader.

Vision & radically different strategies

One of the most outstanding qualities of Gandhi which makes him a great transformational leader of modern history was his long term vision, self confidence (which was perhaps perceived as stubbornness by some) and strong principles of righteousness.

Non-Violence in Practice

The principles of non-violence were not new to Indian philosophy, the vaishnavism subconsciously preached peaceful preservation of the social system, the two contemporaries Mahavira (Jainism) and Buddha (Buddhism) both promoted non-violence. Gandhi took the same principles but illustrated that there was a newer way to resistance that did not involve armed revolution, something that was not thinkable and had never occurred in the history. The Indian rebellion of 1857 was crushed brutally by the British and it exposed the size & diversity of Indian states, perhaps Gandhi understood that sporadic fighting cannot bring down the British army. History had taught that armed resistance requires a large size and the action must be swift, implications of failure are very high. As a visionary, Gandhi did not get influenced by the short term or opportunistic strategies, since the probability and consequence of failure was high, instead he focused on persistent mass movements that would eventually prove expensive to the British rule.

“I am endeavoring to show to my countrymen that violent non-co operation only multiplies evil and that as evil can only be sustained by violence, withdrawal of support of evil requires complete abstention from violence.” - Gandhi 1922
In some way, Gandhi transformed the concept of resistance for the generations to come, leaders around the globe, whether political or business acknowledge and considers him as their ideal.

Partition – creation of Pakistan

Many critics consider that the Gandhi’s leadership during the civil war between the Hindus and Muslims was tilted towards minority appeasement. However, a close study of the demographics might indicate that while it was feasible for the Hindus from Pakistan to migrate India, the Muslims in Indian territory was spread everywhere. It was logistically impossible to migrate every willing Muslim from India to Pakistan. British knew about this administrative difficulty and were quick to move out of India leaving it to the leadership of Gandhi (Congress) to handle the crisis. Hence among the three stakeholders, Pakistan, Britain and India, India got a worst hand, the religious conflict would have continued much longer in India than in Pakistan, the dream of freedom would have been lost in post conflict. Considerable muslim minority in India was a reality that had to be accepted, a country at civil war would have only strengthened the British propaganda that only they were capable of ruling the nation.

Although, to this day, the critics and fundamentalist discount Gandhi’s leadership during partition of India, his vision was valuable even in post independence.

Famous world leaders inspired by Gandhi

- President Barak Obama - “Throughout my life, I have always looked to Mahatma Gandhi as an inspiration, because he embodies the kind of transformational change that can be made when ordinary people come together to do extraordinary things"
- Martin Luther King Jr
- Steve Jobs (Apple Inc)
- Albert Einstein (Physicist who called Gandhi “a role model for the generations to come”)
- Aung San Suu Kyi (Burmese leader)
- Dalai Lama (Tibetan Buddhist Leader)
- Nelson Mandela (South African Leader)
- Al Gore (Vice President US)
- Cesar Chavez (Mexian American Farm leader who performed Gandhi style fast for 36 days in 1988)
- Rebiya Kadeer (Uyghurs, China)