

Source 1: Gandhi writes about Henry David Thoreau

Many years ago, there lived in America a great man named Henry David Thoreau. His writings are read and pondered over by millions of people... Much importance is attached to his writings because Thoreau himself was a man who practised what he preached. Impelled by a sense of duty, he wrote much against his own country, America. He considered it a great sin that the Americans held many persons in the bond of slavery. He did not rest content with saying this, but took all other necessary steps to put a stop to this trade. One of the steps consisted in not paying any taxes to the State in which the slave trade was being carried on. He was imprisoned when he stopped paying the taxes due from him. The thoughts which occurred to him during his imprisonment were boldly original.

[From Gandhi. *Indian Opinion*. Quoted in M.V. Kamath. *The United States and India 1776-1976*. Washington, D.C.: Embassy of India, 1976. 65.]

Source 2: Gandhi's Influence on Dr. Martin Luther King

When King arrived one cold day in New Delhi, as a guest of the Government of India, his first words were a tribute to Gandhi. "To other countries," King said, "I may go as a tourist, but to India I come as a pilgrim. This is because India means to me Mahatma Gandhi, a truly great man of the age."

King heard of Gandhi from Dr. Mordecai Johnson, President of Howard University, who had returned from a visit to India and was speaking at Philadelphia. Even prior to that, King had learnt of Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence in a course offered by Professor George W. Davis, but then it had not struck fire.

Professor Davis had lectured on Gandhi's concept of Satyagraha (civil disobedience) and his students had questioned him spiritedly on Gandhi's beliefs. But in Dr. Johnson's presentation, according to King's biographer, "Gandhi's spiritual leadership and pacifist techniques attained an immediate and luminescent dimension."

"His message was so profound and electrifying that I left the meeting and bought half a dozen books on Gandhi's life and works," King later admitted.

In a letter to the *Advertise*, a writer, Miss Juliette Morgan, described the boycott and related it to Gandhi's "Salt March" as an archetypal example of non-cooperation, in the first public words on the relevance of Gandhi to Black

America.

“Not since the first battle of the Marne,” wrote Miss Morgan, barely after the beginning of the bus boycott, “has the taxi been put to as good use as it has been this week in Montgomery. However, the spirit animating our Negro citizens as they ride the taxis or walk from the heart of Cloverdale to Mobile Road has been more like that of Gandhi than of the ‘Taxicab army’ that saved Paris.” During that historic bus boycott and after, Gandhi became to King the measuring rod of his own social philosophy. Especially after a three-day visit to Montgomery of the Gandhian disciple and scholar Ranganath Diwaker, the idea occurred to King, that he, too, must set an example of physical suffering.

Till then, King’s agony had been intellectual and psychological. After the visit of Mr. Diwaker, as Mrs. Coretta King later said, “we began to think more deeply about the whole philosophy of non-violence. We talked about how superficial and shallow our knowledge of the whole thing was.”

Following his near fatal stabbing in Harlem, says his biographer David L. Lewis, “King pondered the relevance of Gandhi to the American dilemma” and decided to accept a year-old invitation to visit India, land of Gandhi. It was there, in 1959, that King met many old disciples of Gandhi and studied at first hand the Gandhian techniques of non-violent non-cooperation. He also met Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru who explained to him that untouchability was punishable by imprisonment under the Indian constitution. Furthermore, in the case of the University admission, government institutions were required by law to give preference to the depressed segments of society.

Prof. Reddick who was accompanying King then asked if this was not discrimination. “Well, it may be,” he was told, “but this is our way of atoning for the centuries of injustice we have inflicted upon these people.” Nehru’s words made a profound impression on King.

The Indian visit undoubtedly quickened King’s formulation of a programme of governmentally promoted compensatory treatment for American blacks.

King would again visit foreign countries on several occasions, but for him, the Indian trip was a unique spiritual catharsis. Prof. Reddick observed the change in King. The visit to India, to King, had made the difference between an emotionally based intellectual conviction that non-violence was a superior and practical philosophy and certitude founded upon empirical and generalized observation of this philosophy in daily operation. King himself said: “I left India more convinced than ever before that non-violent resistance is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom. It was a marvelous thing to see the results of a non-violent campaign.”

Darshan.(New York: Consulate General of India)

Source 3: Political Cartoon



"THE ODD THING ABOUT ASSASSINS, DR. KING, IS THAT THEY THINK THEY'VE KILLED YOU."

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