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Gandhi: Non-Violence and the Struggle for Freedom

Instructor

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Institution

Wilfrid Laurier University
Provincial University; enrolment: 6000 undergraduates, 1000 graduates

Introduction

Apparently Einstein once wrote the following about Gandhi:

Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.

This course is a study of Gandhi, the man, and Gandhi, the myth. It is about colonial India and the life and times of Mahatma Gandhi, his struggles for personal freedom and for a free India. It is also about our memory of Gandhi.

The course will begin with a brief review of the processes that led to the colonization of India. Attention will be directed to the social and political background of India's Independence Struggle. This background provides the setting for Gandhi's role in the emergence of the modern Indian state. Next the class will go through Gandhi's biography, using his autobiography as a means of understanding the events and influences that were important in his personal formation and in the various campaigns he led first in South Africa and later in India.

In the study of Gandhi's activity in its historical context, we will look at Gandhi's philosophy, analyzing the sources and development of his use of religious concepts such as non-violence, fasting, non-attached action, in social transformation and political struggle. The course will also consider how effective that struggle was, and whether his methods of conflict resolution are applicable to other circumstances. Finally attention will be turned to Gandhi's legacy and the myths that surround it.

Course Objectives

This course has three different but related goals: 1) to learn about the man who has been called "one of history's great teachers"...a "man of infinite goodness, a seeker all his life of Truth" (William L. Shirer, Gandhi, A Memoir), 2) to understand and assess Gandhi's social and political philosophy, and 3) to put our understanding of Gandhi and his teachings in both historic and modern context.

Textbooks

M.K. Gandhi, An Autobiography Or the Story of My Experiments with Truth

M.K Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, Or Indian Home Rule

M.K. Gandhi, Satyagraha [Non-violent Resistance]

Anthology of readings available from WLU Bookstore

Material from your textbooks may be supplemented from time to time with class hand-outs or works placed on reserve in the library.

Other sources

You may wish to read more about the period of history in which Gandhi lived. I recommend the following introductory histories of India:

Cambridge History of India

Percival Spear, A History of India, vol. 2

Stanley Wolpert, A New History of India

There are numerous volumes that have been written on Gandhi. Your library contains a large number of these works. Many of them, such as Louis Fischer's well-known biography, Gandhi, His Life and Message for the World are unreliable. Others, such as Judith Brown's several works on Gandhi, are good examples of scholarship. Please exercise caution when reviewing works on Gandhi. You will, unfortunately, encounter many hagiographic accounts of his life and works. One work I recommend is Margaret Chatterjee's Gandhi's Religious Thought (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983). Another recent biography is Martin Green's Gandhi: Voice of a New Age Revolution (NY: Continuum, 1993).

Gandhi's own writings have been collected in the multi-volumed series, The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, published by the Government of India. The publication of this series is still in progress; it is expected to reach more than ninety volumes upon completion. Many short collections of his writings on specific topics, such as Hindu untouchability, the power of non-violence, etc., have been edited by Gandhi's secretary, J.D. Desai, and published by the Navajivan Trust. Your library has several of these short volumes. They are, on the whole, useful in that they bring together Gandhi's diverse statements on these topics. When consulting any of these volumes, however, you should remember that they by no means exhaust all of Gandhi's writings, and also that they were edited and compiled by people devoted to preserving the memory of Gandhi's saintliness.

Young India and Harijan, two of the newspapers that Gandhi published during his lifetime, have been reprinted in full. Mills Library of McMaster University, in Hamilton, has the complete set of the Harijan.

Reading Assignments

Please begin reading M.K. Gandhi's Autobiography. When you have finished it, please turn to some of the readings in the anthology. I will give you a schedule of readings next week. Though we will not begin our discussion of the Autobiography for a couple of weeks, the work requires some time to read. The second assigned book is Gandhi's Hind Swaraj, the closest Gandhi ever came to producing a political manifesto. The third assigned volume is Satyagraha, a compilation of Gandhi's statements on satyagraha. Assigned readings from course anthology are noted in attached schedule.

Course Requirements

- Short essay on Autobiography 25%
- Short essay on Satyagraha 25%
- Short research essay 25%

- Exam 25%
- Class participation

1. Short essay on Autobiography - worth 25% of final mark, due first Monday in February.

This note asks you to address Gandhi, the man, and not Gandhi, the myth. In this assignment, you are required to make a critical assessment of Gandhi's portrait of himself, as presented in his autobiography. Plan to have read both my article on Gandhi's autobiographical writings and Erik Erikson's chapter, "A Personal Word" (both in anthology) before beginning your paper. Erikson's chapter, "A Personal Word" (an essay of sorts in which he addresses Gandhi personally) may provide you with a model for your own writing. Though I recommend your reading of this material before writing your note, you are not required to follow Erikson's approach, but are free to adopt any style (or methodology) you choose as long as you demonstrate some critical thinking in the assignment.

Required reading for the assignment:

M.K. Gandhi, An Autobiography Or the Story of My Experiments With Truth

Please read Gandhi's autobiography and critically reflect upon what he says about himself with respect to a specific issue. Some suggestions are:

- his concept of truth
- his treatment of his wife
- his self-understanding
- his statements of what contributed to his development
- his religious experience
- his autobiographical act
- colonialism

These are just some suggestions. Please feel free to choose your own topic. Your paper should be between eight to ten typewritten pages.

2. Short note on Satyagraha - worth 25% of final mark, due first Monday in March.

Central to Gandhi's work is his formulation of satyagraha. Though Gandhi never undertook a sustained written discussion of satyagraha, he frequently published short statements and explications of its religious underpinnings, its techniques and applications. The assigned volume Satyagraha is a compilation of some of Gandhi's statements on the subject. For this assignment, you are required to use his statements to develop your understanding and assessment of satyagraha. Please cover the following areas in your discussion:

- what is satyagraha
- social, political, colonial context of Gandhi's development of satyagraha
- rhetorical style of Gandhi's statements on satyagraha
- its religious underpinnings
- dialectical techniques
- applications
- your assessment

Your paper should be between eight to ten pages in length.

3. Research essay - worth 25% of final mark, due last Monday in March.

You are to write a research paper for this assignment. I have listed some general topics below to give you some ideas. I want you to choose and research a topic related to Gandhi that interests you. You must clear your topic with me and present a bibliography that you will use.

Some topic suggestions are as follows:

- the antecedents of Gandhi's satyagraha movement
- Gandhi's untouchability campaign
- Indian perceptions of Gandhi
- Gandhi's influence on Martin Luther King
- Western perceptions of Gandhi
- the biographical process of a colonial Indian
- Gandhi's vision of India
- Gandhi on Hindu-Muslim relations
- Gandhi as a political activist
- Gandhi's interpretation of Hinduism
- Gandhian techniques of conflict resolution
- satyagraha as a political instrument in today's world

This paper should be a serious research paper. It must be carefully footnoted and include a bibliography. Please remember that plagiarism is a serious offense that can result in expulsion from the university. The paper should be between eight to ten pages in length. You will be penalized for a late paper.

4. Exam - 25% of final mark

The final exam is a formal exam, to be scheduled during examination period. It is worth 25% of your final mark. Textbooks and notes are not permitted in the examination room. The final exam is based on material presented in class. Lectures, films, guest speakers, class discussions, etc. are all fair game for the final examination.

Class Participation

As this course is, more than anything else, an exploration of what Gandhi has come to portray and represent in the twentieth century, your participation in class discussion is imperative. You, as students, will participate in that discussion through reading, listening to lectures, and contributing to the discussions that material will generate. Whatever you get out of this course is directly related to how much you put into it. Please do the assigned reading and come to class with ideas and thoughts that can help the class as a whole engage in meaningful discussion of the material.

Synopsis of Course

Week 1: Introduction

Introductory remarks

Course requirements

Exercise: What do we know of Gandhi? Where did we obtain this info?

Readings for Wk. 2: Optional reading in Percival Spear, History of India, vol. 2; begin reading Gandhi's Autobiography; review excerpt from LLOYD and Suzanne Rudolph, Modernity of Tradition, pp. 160-182.

Week 2: Colonial India

British arrival in India, colonialism

Rammohan Roy

Mutiny of 1857

Readings for Wk. 3: Finish Autobiography.

Week 3: Summary of Gandhi's Life

Early life, Britain

South Africa

India

Influences on Gandhi

Readings for Wk. 4: Koppedrayar, "Gandhi and Autobiography," pp. 73-113; Brown, "Fruits of Reflection: Roots of Identity," pp. 176-213; Erikson, "A Personal Word," pp. 229-254.

Week 4: Autobiography

Gandhi's Autobiographical act

Audience

Life-writing as commentary on Bhagavad Gita

Readings for Wk. 5: read Rudolphs, pp. 183-192; Brown, "South African Prelude: The Creation of a Leader and Idealist," pp. 1-15; begin Gandhi, Satyagraha.

Week 5: Satyagraha

Gandhi's "night on the mountain"

Early example of Gandhian style conflict resolution

Beginnings of satyagraha

Readings for Wk. 6: Bondurant, "Hindu Tradition and Satyagraha: The Significance of Gandhian Innovations," pp. 105-131; Raghavan Iyer, "The Doctrine of Satyagraha," pp. 269-92; Weber, "Satyagraha: The Gandhian Approach to Conflict Resolution," pp. 32-59.

Week 6: Satyagraha

Meaning of satyagraha & sources of "truth force"

Techniques and application

Spiritual terrorism

Readings for Wk. 7: continue readings from previous week; Gandhi, Hind Svaraj.

Week 7: Satyagraha, cont.

Assessment

Return to India

Readings for Wk. 8: Sharp, "Gandhi on Theory of Voluntary Servitude," pp. 43-59; Brown, "Conclusion," pp. 352-60; Brown, "Conclusion," 381-90.

Week 8: Return to India

Rejection of West

Indian political scene

Readings for Wk. 9: Chatterjee, "Gandhi and the Critique of Civil Society," pp. 153-95; Southward, "Feminism of Mahatma Gandhi," pp. 404-22.

Week 9: Campaigns in India

Social service

Untouchability

Gandhi on women

Readings for Wk. 10: Parekh, "Sex, Energy and Politics," pp. 172-205; Parekh, "Philosophy of Religion," 65-84.

Week 10: Gandhi on Religion

Sex, religion and politics

Gandhian Hinduism

Readings for Wk 11: Tickner, "Decentralized Democracy: The Political and Economic Thought of Mohandas Gandhi," pp. 135-65; Chatterjee (wk. 9).

Week 11: Gandhi on State

Gandhi's vision of modern India

Application of Gandhian principles

Readings for Wk. 12: Brown, "Epilogue," pp. 385-94; Sharp, "Gandhi's Evaluation of Indian Nonviolent Action," pp. 87-120; Parekh, "Critical Appreciation," pp. 195-225.

Week 12: Gandhi's legacy

Assessment of Gandhi, Gandhi's legacy in India and abroad

Select a location 

<http://www.wlu.ca/~wwaar/syllabi/gandhi-koppedrayer.html>

Latest update: August 02, 2002
Number of accesses since March 1, 1998: