

King Visits India In Search of Gandhi

Civil rights leader learns about the ways of Mahatma Gandhi

BY RON WEBER
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

In the late 1950's, an excited group of traveling companions packed for a trip to India. Among them were Coretta Scott and her husband Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Only a short distance from Iran and Afghanistan, India was bordered by China, Nepal and Pakistan. Though King and his entourage embarrassingly arrived two days late due to travel problems, a large crowd met them at Delhi's Airport.

Indian Prime Minister Nehru, who had planned a dinner in King's honor two days earlier at his sandstone castle, gladly rescheduled the celebration. Dr. King was now known throughout the world for his efforts at bringing all races together peacefully.

India's leaders were extremely honored that King had come all this way to learn more about the ways of Mahatma Gandhi, the late leader of peaceful resolutions to conflict. It was also a magnificent opportunity for them to share Gandhian styles of love and peace with the western world.

Showing great generosity and respect, the prime minister sat with Dr. King for nearly four hours discussing race, colonialism, Gandhi, communism and non-violence. Coretta and the others sat quietly and listened, cherishing the moment. King went on to talk to Gandhians of all walks of life, Muslims, mystics, rich industrialists, communists and cynical bureaucrats.

He also met many African students who were very committed to the ways of nonviolence. One of Dr. King's favorite visits was with a gentle, bearded

man named Vinoba Bhave who for years had been walking back and forth across India asking rich landowners to contribute one fifth of their holdings to landless peasants. Vinoba was called "The Walking Saint," and was India's most revered Gandhian.

King continued traveling throughout the country, speaking and listening. He was absorbing as much as he could of the Gandhian ways to bring back to the United States. Wherever he went, he was an object of extreme curiosity to the Indian people. Then King asked an extremely controversial question. It was a thought that had been tugging at him for some time. Being that India was so committed to the peaceful ways of Gandhi, King felt they should set an example for the rest of the world by disarming themselves.

His question became one of absurdity in the minds of many Indians, who feared total disarmament would make them an easy target for enemies like nearby Pakistan. With no weapons or military, they could be easily overrun. The press glossed over the idea,

paying it little attention as to not cause a nationwide panic.

On March 9, 1959, Dr. King gave a farewell address to a huge audience at India's largest airport,

thanking them for their hospitality and all he had learned about the Gandhian way of life. Nine days later, after going through Egypt and Greece on the way home, Dr. King stood at the pulpit of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Ala. Sharing his travels to a packed church, he referred to Gandhi as a saint and vowed to pursue his non-violence ways of bringing about much-needed change in America.



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1959 Feb. 2-March 10: Martin and Coretta King spent several weeks in India as guests of Prime Minister Nehru, studying Gandhi's techniques of nonviolence.

1960: King became co-pastor with his father at the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. Lunch counter sit-ins began in Greensboro, N. C. In Atlanta, King was arrested during a sit-in waiting to be served at a restaurant. He was sentenced to four months in jail, but after intervention by John Kennedy and Robert Kennedy, he was released.

1961: In November, the Interstate Commerce Commission banned segregation in interstate travel due to the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Freedom Riders. Congress on Racial Equality began the first 'Freedom Ride' through the South, in a Greyhound bus, after the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed segregation in interstate transportation.



1962 July 27: During the unsuccessful movement in Albany, Ga., King was arrested and jailed.

1963 April 12: On Good Friday King was arrested with Ralph Abernathy by Police Commissioner Eugene "Bull" Connor for demonstrating without a permit.

1963 April 13: The Birmingham campaign was launched. This would prove to be the turning point in the war to end desegregation in the South. During the eleven days he spent in jail, MLK wrote his famous 'Letter from Birmingham Jail.'

1963 May 10: The Birmingham agreement was announced. The stores, restaurants and schools are promised to be desegregated, hiring of blacks implemented and charges dropped.

1963 June 23: MLK lead 125,000 people on a Freedom Walk in Detroit.

1963 August 28: The March on Washington is held. To this day it is the largest civil rights demonstration in history with nearly 250,000 people in attendance. At the march, King makes his famous 'I Have a Dream' speech.

1963 Nov. 22: President Kennedy was assassinated.

1964 Jan. 3: King appeared on the cover of Time magazine as its Man of the Year.

1964 July 2: King attended the signing ceremony of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 at the White House. During the summer, King experienced his first hurtful rejection by black people when he was stoned by Black Muslims in Harlem.

1964 Dec. 10: King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. At age 35, Dr. King is the youngest person to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

1965 Feb. 2: King was arrested in Selma, Ala., during a voting rights demonstration. After President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act, Martin Luther King Jr. turned to socioeconomic problems.

1966 Jan. 22: King moved into a Chicago slum tenement to attract attention to the living conditions of the poor.

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