

Mark Levene: Gandhi

- Hello from a very sunny Welsh borders. I believe that this week, the subject of interest is fascinating characters from history or so I'm told, it began as I think when I talked this through with Trudy Gold, Icons and Heroes. And that's a tricky one because as you can see, I wanted to talk about Mahatma Gandhi, who I suspect would not have wanted to be considered either an icon or a hero, but he's somebody you will know the name of, I would be very, very surprised if you didn't know his name and I'm sure you'd probably, when you think of Gandhi, you probably put him in the same category as Martin Luther King or perhaps Nelson Mandela as those figures who have had a sort of significance on the world stage and who seem to do something against the grain of what is politically possible. He's a universal figure in that sense. And if you think about it, you'll know something about him probably from filmic or musical examples where, like me, you saw films probably years ago, which were about Gandhi, so for example, Lauren, yep, there's David, sorry, Dickie Attenborough, David Attenborough's brother, Richard Attenborough, film from 1982 which was a major box office success, I think, in which an Anglo Indian actor, Ben Kingsley, played the role of Gandhi, or next one, Lauren, maybe you'll even know Gandhi through an opera which was based on Gandhi's 21 years in South Africa, where he developed this concept called Satyagraha, which we'll be referring to a little bit more.

Just pursuing this for a minute, let's see the next picture. Now this is probably the image you have of Gandhi, rather sort of a frail, almost naked man doing what he did every day, which was spin cloth and I will be talking about Charkha a little bit later on but let's see the next one, here's a much earlier picture of Gandhi, and you can see with his dates, the name Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, 1869 to his assassination in 1948. And here, my initial reaction when looking at this picture are a rather dapper, well-dressed, well-suited young man which he clearly is, might fit more closely what Frantz Fanon rather acerbically referred to in one of his books, Frantz Fanon, a great anti-colonial activist and writer, particularly from the 1950s and '60s, you might think this is a classic example of what Fanon would call, "Black face, white mask." In other words, somebody who had imbued the cultural proclivities of the West, and Gandhi has some of those attributes certainly, originally, which of course then he dispensed with.

Now let's start with why am I doing this today? why have I picked not Elvis Presley or Marilyn Monroe as other people have? Why have I gone for this rather serious character? And it's not simply to reprise his life story in a sort of general narrative sense. In fact, this comes with a bit of a health warning because I'm going to be quite personal in my approach here and perhaps a bit controversial, what you may hear from me in terms of my direction of travel, you may not agree with. And that may be an example of us having to agree, to disagree, or at the end have a discussion. But as somebody who was for much of my adult life involved first in the peace movement and then in critical issues to do with climate change and the climate emergency, I think that Gandhi has an ongoing relevance and resonance which goes beyond his roles in South Africa and India as a figure we associate with fighting social and political prejudice and indeed in the Independence Struggle, the Great Independence Struggle which culminated in 1947 when India and Pakistan, that's something which will come in here, became independent.

So here we've got a character who is sort of revered on the world stage, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi became the great spiritual figure, Mahatma, or perhaps more gently somebody who was referred to, I think originally by his Jewish secretary, his very young Jewish secretary in South Africa when he was in Natal from the 1890s onwards, a lady called Sonja Schlesin who was with him for all those years with he was 21 years, with he was in South Africa, she referred to him as Bapu, daddy, and that was something which tended to stick. He was also referred to very often, in the very diminutive terms, gentle terms, not as some great figure but somebody who one could relate to as Gandhiji by his many followers. Now first of all, I think, how do we today relate to this figure? And in a way, I think one's got to sort of disentangle what he was not as much as what he was, and I think that's part of his uniqueness. So for example, can we compare him as part of that revolutionary movement of great leaders who were struggling not just for national independence as anti colonialists but for a revolutionary Marxism, people like Mao or Castro or Lennon, unequivocally not another great iconic figure, I suppose, of the 20th century, certainly of the 20th century, is Che Guevara, and you ask young people who you've got a poster of, or certainly in the past, a poster of Che Guevara with his beret and gun in hand?

No, this is a man who was utterly and totally committed from his very early years to nonviolence as part of his revolutionary struggle. Nor can I think can we compare him to other national figures who were in the more general anti-colonial national vein without necessarily than being revolutionary in the Marxist sense if we were to compare him with NASA, tinges of socialism there, of course, or Nkrumah or even the great Indian nationalist who was of course a friend, Nehru, again, the comparison falters. So what was he? He wasn't some died in the wool traditionalist, even though of course Hindus spirituality, again, more on that anon, is part and parcel of the background to our understanding of Gandhi. But he certainly wasn't a reactionary or some religious revivalist, he wasn't, for instance, somebody we could see as the forebear of today's BJP party in India today. Indeed, it was the forebears of that sort of way of thinking who were responsible for his assassination in January, 1948.

So who can we compare him to? Well, I'll give one figure from a Jewish context who I think has some parallels, but of course they also had some interesting disagreements, and that's the, how can one put him, don't want to start talking about him rather than Gandhi, the figure of Martin Buber who was somebody we associate with mid-20th century Zionism, but through a very Pacific non-violent lens, the founder of Brit Shalom, of course, but one who like Gandhi, and this is I think is the interesting point, and this is where I later want to sort of go off on a different direction, became somewhat marginal to the main political direction of travel, the trajectory of political movement. Buber, by the way, had his own arguments with Gandhi, they were in conversation in the '20s and '30s over what was happening to Jews in Europe. Buber did not think that Gandhi's position, but the Jews should be passive and should in effect sacrifice themselves for their integrity against Nazism, was one which Buber could accept. So I do, or in this initial introduction, want to suggest, but Gandhi does not come without critical commentary, and in some ways it's a bit like what we say about Marmite, you either love him or hate him.

So here's one example which I'm going to quote, but here's one example, next one, Lauren, of somebody who was remorselessly anti Gandhi, and this is the figure of Winston Churchill. You may know that Churchill hated, and I use that word carefully, but I think correctly Churchill hated Indians, but of all the Indians he hated most, this is a commentary on Gandhi at a time when he was involved in a series of very high level talks with the Raj, with the British imperial authorities, both in India and also in London to which he came, again more on that in a minute, but listen to this commentary which is just oozing with disgust, that this should be a man for Churchill, and other British ministers should have any contact with. "It is alarming and also nauseating to see Mr. Gandhi, a seditious Middle Temple lawyer, now posing as a fakir of a type well-known in the East, striding half naked up the steps of the Vice-regal palace, to parley on equal terms with the representative of the King Emperor." I think you get it. I think that's quite unadulterated, but it is also interesting that other figures have been, you might say, in revisionist terms, quite critical of Gandhi. One of them, for instance, is the famous and very radical writer, Arundhati Roy, who has referred to Gandhi in terms of his attitude, or no, not his attitude, his behaviour, towards the issue of caste in India. She has biheart referred to him as the saint of the status quo, which again has got for her some brick bats because of course Gandhi was somebody who struggled all his life against the caste system, particularly untouchability, but did so in a way where he tried to bring people on side, and this is of course part of the Gandhi position, how do you pragmatically go about bringing about change, one of the things we can talk about perhaps, but let's go on to the next one.

And that's the Marmite element here, the contrast, somebody else you will know, by the way, when Gandhi came to London to be in these discussions in the 1930 about the future of India, he came as himself, dressed as himself, he refused to be put up in the Ritz or the Savoy or whatever, and took a sort of garret in the east-end of London, and he was absolutely mobbed by the people of the East end when he arrived, they recognised his worth and others did too. And here's a character called Albert Einstein on Gandhi after his death in 1950. "I believe that Gandhi's views were the most enlightened of all the political men of our time. We should strive to do things in his spirit, not to use violence in fighting for our cause, but by nonparticipation in anything you believe is evil." So before I go on to why I think that is still relevant to now, however many years, what is it, getting on for 75, 80 years after Gandhi's death, I want to just quickly reprise something about the man so that we have a sense of him and I want to emphasise in that narrative a few aspects which I think are important.

Gandhi was born in Ahmedabad in Gujarat on the western side of India to a modest trading caste and trading background. He, however, was one of four children, he was the youngest, the youngest of four surviving children, he was obviously very, very clever and he did go to school in Ahmedabad and went on from there to study law and became remarkably a student at the Inner Temple in London, practising from the age of 22. And he was very quickly requested by an Indian living in South Africa to come and pursue a lawsuit in South Africa in Natal. And he did so for the next 21 years, and it's here in South Africa, but Gandhi, who may not necessarily have begun with particular notions of what he was going to be doing in the world very quickly through

personally what happened to him there, and through growing awareness of the situation in South Africa, initially in relation one should say of Indians in South Africa and the prejudice they faced.

He started honing his skills of nonviolence as a method for struggling against injustice. And this is where the development of Satyagraha, which sort of translates as truth force, became central to his campaign for Indian rights within the context of imperial British South Africa, but it's also something which one should note became something which got translated into a more general critique by Gandhi of racial prejudice, racial and religious prejudice against all the peoples, black, Indian mixed in South Africa. It's also here that he started developing his notion of Indians, of Hindushalas, of an autonomy, a home rule, or even an independence for India. Of course, he wasn't the first person to be involved in this, there was already an Indian National Congress but when he returned to India in 1915, many of the building blocks of his argument for how to prepare India for independence through non-cooperation with the British became central to his campaign. And even though he'd been on the outside in South Africa, very, very quickly, Gandhi, whose reputation went before him from South Africa, moved to becoming a leading figure in the Indian Independence Movement.

Now, I think there's something I want to particularly refer to here which is relevant to what makes Gandhi different from so many of the other figures I mentioned earlier in their various nationalist, anti-colonial struggles. In 1919, the British, in response to Gandhi's growing success of campaigning through civil disobedience, of non-cooperation with the British on all sorts of levels of social and political existence, the British responded, the British Raj responded by criminalising civil disobedience. This led to something Gandhi did not want, which was rioting in the streets of many, many cities in India, you will know that there was one incident which was not violent, which was became famous in the annals of the British in India, the Massacre at Amritsar in the Punjab in 1919. Again, I'm not going to talk about that too much here, but the interesting thing is that that set off in turn, a whole set of new riots and almost an insurrectionary response within large parts of the Indian population and it was against that, not against the British per se, that Gandhi began the first of his potential fast, sort of death, to stop people from acting out there, their feelings about the British through violence.

And this becomes a recurring feature, very often entirely when Gandhi resorts to this sort of method, he's not resorting to it against the British, that is Satyagraha, the personal fasts are as a reminder to fellow Indians, but this is not the way. So by 1921, Gandhi is head of the Indian National Congress, and again, what is significant, I think, which we should hone in on, that involves a programme of noncooperation, as I've already said with the British, it means not buying any British goods, very specifically clothing, cotton goods, but again that is developed in tandem with something else so we got the next picture actually, Lauren, yeah, go to the next one and we'll come back to this one.

Lovely, here's a good example of, of course Gandhi ended up lots of times in jail but here we have what becomes known as Swadeshi, a bit more about that later. Swadeshi is a notion of

self-reliance, by the way, I should throw in here, I am not an expert on things Indian, so please don't delve too deeply, I'm giving you a rather personal view here, the only area of Indian subcontinent I know something about is an area called the Chittagong hill tracts, so I'm not an expert but I am developing something which is sort of general common knowledge here. And you'll see this picture, if you look at the bottom, I'm going to put my glasses on, concentrate on Charkha and Swadeshi. Charkha is the spinning wheel. And here you can see something which Gandhi did every day. He spun his own cloth. And this is the other side of opposing the British, it's not enough to simply oppose the British, you have to do something which is self-reliant and resilient and self-sufficient for yourself, and of course, this is against the backdrop of an Indian society, particularly focused in the Bengal area where cotton was king before the British came along and wrecked it and took all the cotton from India to manufacture it in Lancashire cotton mills, and then to export it back to India.

Now this is the sort of thing which Gandhi is critically opposing and is also critically opposing the impositions, the very heavy and honours and totally unjust impositions which the British are making on ordinary Indian people to maintain their rules. So go back one, Lauren. So here we have perhaps the most famous example of how he went about this, the sort of movement he was involved in. And this is what was known as the Salt Satyagraha. The British had imposed a Salt tax. If you think about salt, it is central to all our culinary needs, they had imposed a salt tax on the Indians, again, classic example of Gandhi response. We are against the salt tax, what are we going to do? We're going to march to a place where you can make salt from salt pans, we are going to march there and we are going to make it ourselves. Again, significant aspect of the first of these salt marches, the first of them was in 1929, involved, as you can see here, 241 mile walk down through Gujarat to a place called Gandhi, and again, I think what's interesting about this, the modernism, not the traditionalism, the modernism of Gandhi is what invoked young people, old people and thousands of women. And of course when they arrived at some of these places where salt was being manufactured, they got bashed over the head by the British, something terrible, but they didn't respond violently. That was the whole point. This was a case of very brave Satyagraha.

Another thing I want to sort of focus on here in terms of understanding Gandhi, by the time in the second World War, he was in jail a lot because the British didn't know what to do with him, he became a figurehead for what was called the Quit India Campaign at the beginning of the second World War. The position here, of course, Gandhi was non-violent, but there was a pragmatism to this, his opposition to India entering the second World War was because it was entirely imposed. India did not have a say, even though there had been some degree of devolution to India, India did not have a say in whether it joined the war or not, because it was part of the empire. Gandhi's response was Quit India to the British, Quit India, for which of course again, he went into jail, his wife died in this period while in jail in 1944, I think.

And this has become an all India movement, now again, another aspect of Gandhi, which I think is very important here, which again shows not his uniqueness, but his direction of travel with Satyagraha at its head, and that is his support for an element of India's population, remember

this is India before partition, his particular support for Muslims, something which by the way got the eye of many Hindu nationalists. And of course it also went against a growing movement, enunciated by Muslims, Muslims are a very, very substantial part of the Indian population even today, there are I think more Muslims in India than there are in Pakistan, anyway, whereas the leader of this breakaway group, Jinnah, was enunciating Divide and Quit India, part of Gandhi's ethos about the subcontinent was that it was a melange of culturally distinct peoples, religiously, linguistically plural, and his concept of India was of an India which was whole, but was made up of many, many different parts.

So the interesting thing is, again, which makes him distinct, I think, is that when India came to be partitioned at very short notice and very rapidly by the British, setting up boundaries across India, which were really very problematic and divisive to turn India into a part-Muslim and a part-Hindu set of states and which of course as you I'm sure will know, led to the displacement, if not ethnic cleansing, of up to 12 million people in India. This is a huge set of population transfers with anything between 300,000 and 2 million deaths, violent deaths, we don't really know, the historians continue to argue about these actual figures. What is Gandhi doing? Gandhi is not supportive of any of this. He is actually fasting to stop the violence. And indeed, when Indian and Pakistani independence is declared on the night of August the 14th, 15th, 1947, Gandhi was not celebrating. He was both practising Charkha, he was spinning, and also on a fast to stop the violence which was particularly happening in the Punjab and in Bengal.

So I think we've got an interesting thing about Gandhi as this great nationalist figure, except I don't really think of him in those nationalist terms, he's a national figure. But I think there's a sort of question mark. There's a counterfactual question mark of what would Gandhi's position in India have been, had he not been assassinated, had he lived? And my reckoning is a bit like Martin Buber in the new state of Israel, he would've been moved to the sidelines. He would've been increasingly a marginal figure. He would've clearly had difficulty, I think with the fact that almost within months of India's independence, they were at war with China, he would've had problems with the ethnic conflicts which emerged particularly in Kashmir, and he also would've been in opposition to the direction of travel which we associate with his friend Nehru, namely Indian modernization, what we take to be modernization, and that's actually my starting point. My starting point is not this narrative, it's actually something else, something about his legacy for today, which I think we've lost a bit because it's almost easier to sort of put him in his place as a past figure, fascinating character from history, and not address those elements of what Gandhi was on about, which some of us might find extremely problematic, but which I personally find extremely relevant to today.

So what was Gandhi, again, not about? He was not about an economic growth model. So that puts him almost completely at odds with every national leader, revolutionary communist or standard western oriented nationalist for a start. He was not for an economic growth model, which was about, as it intrinsically is, from a national context, within an international system of nation states where nation states necessarily compete for a sort of position within that economic system of growth. As I said earlier along, Gandhi's economic philosophy is one of Swadeshi,

local self-reliance and self-sufficiency based on a peasant, an essentially peasant society, living locally, trading locally and marketing locally, growing what one needs, producing the goods one needs oneself, and of course, one could say that Gandhi's emphasis on Charkha was symbolic and performative on one level, he was trying to make a point about the imposition of British rule on India, not just in a political sense, but economically, but I think it was much more than that.

I mean, when one remembers, and this is where we got onto the very unsexy bit of Gandhi in terms of him himself. This is a man who was all about frugality, about abstinence, both sexual and in terms of what one ate, what one needed, he was of course a vegetarian. He's a conscious anti materialist. So who would we compare him to, and indeed where would we relate him to in terms of the influences upon him, from a Western canon would think of people like Farrow, Ruskin, and above all, Tolstoy. And if I can quote Tolstoy, who of course was in correspondence with Gandhi, Tolstoy's basic motto was, "The good life is one of simplicity and truth." And this is Gandhi but associated fundamentally with another much more Indian concept, and that is Ahimsa, nonviolence, do no harm at a very basic level, do no harm to anything, do no harm to ants, do no harm to earthworms. And this of course comes very much from his Indian upbringing, particularly through his mother, and in particular her adherence to the Jains, to Jainism which as you probably know, you do no harm to any living thing, but here it's turned into something transformative in its relationship to Satyagraha, to truth force, as a basis for what today we might call nonviolent direct action.

So what I want to do finally is I want to sort of put this into both a local and a historical context, but also a more updated context in terms of the legacy of Gandhi both in India and abroad. By the way, remember that Gandhi's starting point is, as I say, not just political, the political subjugation of India, but the economic subjugation of India through the taking of cotton and the manufacturing of them in the Industrial Revolution in effect, and what's interesting about this is that it puts the Indians who were displaced by the whole process alongside all the English people on the cusp of the Industrial Revolution, who somebody like Edward Thompson remembers as the poor Stockinger, the Luddite Cropper, the obsolete handloom weaver, the utopian artisan of the English working class, who were also displaced by these modernising processes. So the cotton industry which had existed in India is destroyed and the traditional outdoor home-based cottage industry of English people which helps sustain them on the cusp of the English Revolution is also lost.

So I think it's interesting that Gandhi, in terms of directions of travel, he's for nonviolence, he's for a certain sort of very basic existence, which is based on frugality, as I said, very unsexy. And he is utterly against not just the economic growth model, but in essence the technological assumptions that you can change the world through some sort of technological fix. So I don't know what Gandhi himself would've said about the so-called Green Revolution in which you solve problems of supposed hunger and starvation by technical revolution, his response would've been as often quoted by one of his great acolytes, who some of you may know from a British scene, a man called Satish Kumar. He always is repeating this, "The world has enough

for everybody's needs, but not for everyone's greed." Enough for everyone's needs, not for everyone's greed.

So let's just take just a couple of examples of how this developed in an Indian context after Gandhi's death, how actually Gandhi's legacy was fundamentally a local environmental legacy. Now here you've got an example of women who are, it looks a little bit set peace, women who are hugging trees and hugging trees is associated with something called the Chipko Movement, which developed particularly in the 1970s in India, particularly associated with one of Gandhi's key Satyagraha followers, a man called Sunderlal Bahuguna but the main practitioners of Chipko were actually ordinary women, particularly Adivasi women from the lowest castes, untouchables, who found that their lands were being logged, without in a deforested, raked, destroyed, particularly in the Himalayan region. And that this was leading not just to destruction of the forests, it was leading to leeching of soil, to downriver flooding as all the alluvium was swept down from the forests which had held the soil. And as we also know today, this is also disastrous from a climate point of view because trees sequester carbon in great quantity.

So what was happening in India was a microcosm in the 1960s, '70s, '80s of what was actually happening throughout the particularly tropical world, and of course in areas like the Amazon is, and not just the Amazon in Southeast Asia continues to be rampant today, and here you had a movement, Chipko Movement, huggers of trees who were using Gandhi method in terms of Ahimsa to end hunger strikes, and sitting down in front of bulldozers and loggers to stop this and it gotten to national and international attention. By the way, there was interestingly, one of the early advocates of this was a lady whose initial name was Madeleine Slade, she was the daughter of I think a rear admiral or something like that who was stationed in India, and she became an absolute acolyte of Gandhi's ideas and methods. She became somebody who went and lived her life very, very frugally. And as late as Mirabehn, that was the name she adopted, she was one of the first people to see that this deforestation was going ahead at such a rate.

Anyway, under Indira Gandhi, of course a relative of Nehru, not of Mahatma Gandhi, this was actually slowed down and stopped, because the whole deforestation programme, it began to be recognised its danger. Next one, another figure, yes. So this is the last figure I want to sort of, again, the legacy of Gandhi, and some of you may know this name, Vandana Shiva, from the Navdanya Movement. And again, it's so very Gandhian in terms of what she is about and of course she's inspired by Swadeshi. She's intrinsically a Gandhian, but her method and action is twofold just like Gandhi's. On the one hand, it's against what we call the Green Revolution, the control, the commodification of seeds, the imposition of fertilisers on peasant farmers, imposition through corporate companies like Monsanto, she's intrinsically against fossil fuels, she's for local produce, people doing things themselves, and she also has been arguing and showing, demonstrating that it's perfectly possible to grow food through developing water cultural projects based on what she calls grandma wisdom. In other words, a woman who remember the seeds they used to use for dry conditions, for wet conditions, developing soil fertility, water health, these are the fundamentals of Navdanya Movement, which has spread from India all over the world.



So let me, as I've spoken too long, let me summarise what I think are the marginalised legacies of Gandhi and I'm going to end up with something which very often when I talk along this theme which intrinsically relates to climate change, I just want to finish on. This is somebody who we remember through Gandhi's nonviolence and in that sense, he's the progenitor in some ways of the civil resistance campaigns, which take us through Martin Luther King, through the peace movements, right through to present day climate change movements like extinction, rebellion, and which are fundamentally not party politically based or within the political box of the state but our grassroots and are oppositional, they have to be oppositional because they're struggling against something which in Gandhian terms is unjust, is fundamentally unjust, and of course destroying, lethal, in terms of what it does to the earth. It's paradoxical of course, because it's essentially anti-capitalist, it's anti-materialist. Gandhi's philosophy was one of Sarvodaya which is the upliftment, the welfare of all, so it's intrinsically about making all people's lives sound and healthy from the grassroots up. It's therefore rather relevant to today in terms of this thinking outside the box, when activists in the West talk about, speak of another world as possible, it's perhaps to Gandhi, but then we might turn for inspiration, for actually enacting another world as possible.

Now I want to just leave us with one final thing, let's have the final picture. Now, what people very often say at the very end of talks like this is they say, "Yeah, but you're leaving something out of the equation, you're leaving out of the equation the issue of population. And if we're living in a time of crisis, it's because there's too many mouths to feed in the world." Remembering, of course, what Gandhi said and what Satish Kumar said, "There is enough for everybody's need, there is not enough for everybody's greed." And this is put back in sort of what one would call neo-Malthusianism terms, where if there's too many people to feed, then you are going to have an environmental crisis. Now what I've done here, and this is I think Gandhi would approve of this, this is from Oxfam and it's demonstrating CO2 emissions in terms of world population, in terms of wealth. And you can see that mushroom in the top compared with poverty or how could we put it, frugality, simplicity at the bottom.

So here we've got a graph in which 49% of the world's CO2 is emitted by the top 10% and you could go actually more specifically, the top 1% of the world's population. The people at the bottom, the subsistence peasants, the pastoral nomads, the fishermen, the slash and burn or Sweden agriculturalists, let alone the remaining hunter gatherers of places in parts of India, still and elsewhere, are not responsible for this, they are not responsible because their emissions are nil, are negligible. So I want to end with this, Gandhi's legacy is of a path not taken in which we don't like the look of because he's not on about economic growth, he's not on about technological fixes, which will allow materialist man to eat up more and more planet Earth's than are available, and instead he's offering us a recipe which may be rather difficult for us, in the West particularly, or rich people everywhere in the world to actually come to terms with which actually this is about a much more holistic social cultural practise, and with it, our willingness or not to forego all that material stuff, which we time come to take for granted. The question is, do we want a world for our children and our children's children, one which is going to be tolerable

and sustainable for them and unforeseen generations to come? And I think Gandhi has something to say to us, which is difficult but rather important. Thank you and I've talked too long, for which, apologies.

Q&A and Comments:

- [Host] Mark, do you have time to take a couple questions?

- Of course I do but remembering what I said earlier, but I'm not going to give you expert advice on all aspects of India.

Q: [Host] Romana is asking if there is any comparison to Mandela?

A: Mandela of course became a revered figure, and of course Mandela had the legacy of Gandhi in South Africa behind him. Mandela of course, rather critically went for an armed wing of the ANC as far as I remember, which doesn't quite put him in the same category as Gandhi, but clearly he has become iconic as a figure of repute, and I suppose the sadness about Mandela, as with Gandhi is that these figures are, I think in terms of where both India is today and alas South Africa, are rather marginal figures to that legacy, the legacy which might have been theirs is not carried through into today's practise.

Q: [Host] Shelly is asking, "What did Einstein feel about Gandhi's view that the Jews sacrificed themselves rather than fight back against the Nazis?"

A: Well, I don't know actually, and of course this is a controversial position, which as I explained, Martin Buber who was a great supporter of Gandhi, as were of course many Jewish figures, this is something they had a problem with, as do I of course, because Gandhi is a visionary figure, he didn't necessarily understand politically or culturally all the sort of issues which were necessarily going on in the world, at the same time, he attempted to apply his own standard to a situation which was very, very different, so it didn't stop Einstein though seeing Gandhi as really one of the great political, cultural figures of our time and of course, I think the point I would add here is that by the time one got to the Nazis, it was too late, you have to use truth force, Satyagraha not to arrive at that position, it's a sadness but too often we arrive there, but Gandhi was against violence, this is at all levels, and this may be very problematic within the context of the second World War and the fate of Jewish people, but it's nevertheless was his position, he got it wrong in this particular instance.

Q: [Host] Lauren's asking if you would describe him as religious.

A: Well, I think as I said, I think I would describe him as a spiritual figure who encompassed spirituality in a very broad sense, that's how I would sort of see Gandhi. And he's applying that spirituality to practical issues, so people like Satish Kumar or Vandana Shiva, they're not outwardly religious, but they're practising a form of inner spirituality as it relates to the world

around them.

Q: [Host] A couple people are asking why he was killed and who killed him.

A: He was killed because he was considered too soft on the Muslims by Hindu nationalists. And as I said, these are the four bears of elements of today, what would be associated with the BJP, the party in power today, I'm not saying there's a direct connection, but nevertheless, there has been a whole history of spasms, of sequences post 1947 India, which have involved attacks on Muslims, I think, what's that film, oh, I can't think of sort of very popular film, setting bomb in Mumbai, I'll think of it in a minute where this happens. And why he was killed, he was killed because rather than condoning Hindu violence against Muslims, of course there was also Muslim and Sikh violence against other communities as well and this great trauma of unravelling which was from a Gandhian point of view was totally unnecessary, this is the great sin in the creation of modern India and Pakistan, but this could have been avoided. And he was, this is why I've said, he would've been a marginal figure had he survived because he did not represent a Hindu nationalism or a Muslim nationalism, he represented something which was about plurality, in that sense, of course there is a connection with Mandela when I think about it, but even more so that this was somebody who was for a plurality of all peoples who lived in India, Jews, Jains, Muslims, Sikhs, different linguistic and other groups, an ending to the caste system and so on, women and men, it was a very different form of modernity, and of course it was one which some nationalists didn't like and in that sense, I think this is an important moment, his assassination because it tells us what happens when people who are ultra nationalists get the upper hand.

- [Host] Great, thank you so much. I think that's all we have time for today.

- Okay.

- [Host] But we'll see you again soon.

- Thank you very much for listening.

- [Host] Great.

- Okay.

- [Host] Thank you everyone for joining us.