



Mohandas Gandhi - also known as Mahatma ("Great Soul") Gandhi - knew about racial discrimination. He'd experienced it in South Africa, as a young lawyer, when he protested against discriminatory laws.

After returning to India, his birth country, he lived a simpler life and followed traditional Indian ways. His clothes were simple, his dwelling was simple and his food was vegetarian.

Gandhi had a heart for people who were born into India's lower-caste system. He did not agree that the "untouchables" - the name given to people of the lowest caste - should have inferior political representation (or a different political system altogether).

By 1931, after a series of disagreements with the ruling British authorities who ran India, Gandhi and Lord Irwin (then a representative of the British government) made a pact. Both men agreed to give-up something significant:

- The government would give-up all Indian political prisoners then in custody
- Gandhi, and his followers, would give-up their ongoing civil disobedience

To sweeten the deal, Irwin invited Gandhi to attend Round Table Discussions, in London, as a representative of the Indian Congress.

Things seemed to go well for about a year, until the British government replaced Lord Irwin with Lord Willingdon who had a dim view of Indian nationalism. Gandhi - who was a member of the Vaisya, or merchant caste - was arrested, again, in January of 1932.

From his cell at Yerovda Jail near Bombay (today's Mumbai), Gandhi learned about a new British-backed plan which featured Indian independence. The plan, however, was unfair for India's lowest-caste people.

Seemingly fair, because it addressed Indian independence, the plan called for a separate system of political representation - lasting seventy years - for members of the lowest castes. Gandhi found this offensive because it would likely cause a permanent separation between India's social classes.

On September 16, 1932, Gandhi started a hunger strike to protest this British-backed plan. He called it his "fast until death" for the "downtrodden" of India.

About six days into Gandhi's to-the-death fast, British authorities changed their minds and agreed to accept a proposal reached between India's higher and lower castes.

What was that proposal? Members of India's higher and lower castes agreed to reverse the constitutionally built-in separation of the castes.

That such an event happened at all is a testament to Gandhi's growing influence in his country. He was now being supported by members of the higher castes as well as the lower castes.

In short ... not only was Gandhi fighting for independence from Britain, he was also fighting for equality among the Indian people.

Credits:

Image, depicting Gandhi in his prison cell during September of 1932, online via the History Channel. The image is a still shot from historical footage.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Gandhi-and-His-Fast-until-Death>

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