



Remembering Mandela: An Icon of Reconciliation and Empowerment

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Nelson Mandela, 'Madiba' as he is affectionately known, turns 95 today. He is revered among South Africa's 53 million people, as the architect of the 1994 transition to multi-racial democracy after three centuries of the apartheid regime. He is known as the father of 'African Renaissance' and respected across the world as a symbol of peace and forgiveness. Playing a leading role in the movement for peace and reconciliation, he has made immense contributions to not only South Africa but to Africa and the world.

Mandela's contributions to new South Africa are incomparable reaping accolades and admiration from his peers as well as the international community. His job, though a daunting task, reflects a successful fusion of collaborative but firm leadership. Within South Africa, Mandela is widely considered to be 'the father of the nation' and 'the founding father of democracy.' As a leader, Mandela also recognized his limits and set forth the smooth transition to new leadership when the time came for him to welcome his successor.

His distinctive diplomatic style and leadership, often referred to as 'Mandiba Magic' courts both friend and foe towards a diplomatic approach to resolve the South African paradox. Despite being imprisoned for 27 years during the apartheid regime, the elderly statesman bore no grudge against his oppressors. The Truth and National Reconciliation initiated in South Africa by

Mandela buried the dreadful era of apartheid and saw the former oppressors and oppressed holding hands for betterment of the new South Africa. He encouraged everyone to join hands in reconciliation and unity.

Mandela has dedicated his life to the struggle of African people. Embedded in the footprints of his struggle are his values of ubuntu (I am because you are), integrity, inspiration and learning. He cherished the ideals of democratic and free society. In one of his speeches, he remarked, “The ideal of a democratic and free society ... is one ... for which I am prepared to die... It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve.” In that speech, he further added, “These are the ideal that.... pushes us forward as a people to better heights against intransigent forces and their newly found sophistication which seeks to undermine our constitutionalism, democratic gains and respect for human dignity.”

In Africa much of the democratic progress that is seen across the continent can be tied in some way to the inspiration that Nelson Mandela has set. Mandela has encouraged African nations to resolve conflicts through diplomacy and reconciliation. He has been involved in various peace deals and political negotiations including Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Nigeria and other countries in Africa and elsewhere. In South Africa's first post-apartheid military operation, Mandela ordered troops into Lesotho in September 1998 to protect the government of Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili after a disputed election prompted opposition uprisings.

As a believer of the principle of Democratic Socialism, Nelson Mandela has championed the cause of the Global South. His approach to deal with international issues is based on the norms of non-confrontation and negotiation, coupled with the commitment for global equity. The establishment of a peaceful and equitable world order, therefore, constitutes the template of his world-view. Though he was criticized by the West for his sympathy and solidarity with the leading revisionist voices from the South, he was an effective channel of communication between the Western powers and their so called ‘pariah’ counterparts on various contested issues.

Mandela's sustained effort to live up to his cherished ideals of global equity has made him an inspirational figure across the rest of the world. He is also a man impacted by inspiration of others, such as Nehru and Gandhi. Mandela's very trust with the empowerment of the Global South has drawn its sustenance from the Nehruvian ideas of anti-colonial solidarity. One of Mandela's most famous phrases and book titles, No Easy Walk to Freedom, was a quote from Nehru's work. At the philosophical level, Mandela's 'method of reconciliation' to address the socio-political issues carries reflection from the Gandhian thought of non-violence with truthfulness as a common source of motivation for both the thinker-activists.

A recipient of several Indian awards and honours, Mandela has time and again appreciated and expressed gratitude for India's active role in the anti-apartheid struggle, particularly internationalizing the racial oppression in South Africa in different fora, including the United Nations, the Commonwealth and Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). In the words of Mandela, "India came to our aid when the rest of the world stood by or gave succour to our oppressors." India was the first country to sever trade and diplomatic relations with Pretoria in 1946 in protest against its racial policies. India also granted diplomatic status to the Mandela-led African National Congress (ANC), which opened an office in New Delhi in 1967.

After Mandela became the first President of the post-apartheid South Africa in 1994, he undertook two significant visits to India in the year 1995 and 1997. During his first visit, the possibility of an Indian Ocean trading bloc, Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC), consisting of several nations was conceptualised, wherein discussions were held on the proposed charter and objectives of the organization. The second visit was significant in terms of transforming India-South Africa friendly relations into a strategic partnership, with economic content given primacy.

However, during Mandela's leadership, India-South Africa relationship also witnessed short-lived tensions. New Delhi took strong exception to Mandela's reference to resolving Kashmir issue in the Durban NAM Summit and his stance against India's nuclear tests in 1998. Nevertheless, bilateral understanding was restored and Mandela's progressive world view substantially strengthened the relationship between both the countries.

Mandela's interface with India has shaped South-South solidarity that remains an empowering discourse in the global politics. His ideas of achieving equity through peaceful coexistence, dialogue and reconciliation have been a source of African empowerment, which has become an inspiration for the world at large. Africa, however, is yet to achieve its holistic emancipation, which lies in the optimal realization of Mandela's ideals by the current leaderships.

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