

## "During Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary year, India has an opportunity to show its humane side."

Since Mahatma Gandhi's assassination on January 30, 1948, the world has witnessed some horrific instances of mass violence as well as a few remarkable acts of contrition, forgiveness and grace.

First, consider the inhumanities inflicted on people. The 1958-1961 famine during Chairman Mao Zedong's time killed 20-40 million, according to some estimates, in the People's Republic of China. The 1971 campaign of the Pakistani Army in East Pakistan resulted in the deaths of an estimated three million Bengalis. The Cambodian genocide (1975-79) saw two million Cambodians killed. And the mass killings of 1994 in Rwanda left a million Tutsis dead.

### Forgiveness and compassion

In almost the same period the world also witnessed some stunning instances of mankind's more forgiving and compassionate side. The Indian Constitution was framed at a period of intense religious polarisation and the assassination of Gandhi. The founding document of the Indian Republic turned India's back on religious divisions at a time when that looked impossible, while giving a leg up to the historically wronged. Similarly, South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, set up in 1996, ensured the country's bloodless transition to popular democracy by giving a voice to both the victims and perpetrators of apartheid.

The German acceptance of responsibility for crimes against the Jews was no less impressive. In a prominent part of Berlin, in a space spread across 200,000 sq ft, one can 'experience' the world's largest and most powerful monument to national penitence. Opened in 2005, the German memorial to the Jewish dead resembles a vast graveyard of unburied coffins — a reminder to all Germans of the crimes perpetrated against the Jews by their ancestors. That the German government supported this vast memorialisation is unique in history and a logical culmination of an exceptional act of repentance by a head of state.

After laying a wreath at a memorial at the Jewish Ghetto in Warsaw on December 7, 1970, German Chancellor Willy Brandt, in a typically Gandhian gesture, spontaneously got down on his knees for half a minute. In that moment of atonement he unreservedly assumed responsibility for the Holocaust and lifted a terrible burden off Germany's shoulders. Brandt's 'Warsaw genuflection' led to the memorial in Berlin and contributed years later to German Chancellor Angela Merkel's magnanimous 2015 gesture allowing a million refugees, fleeing lands overrun by the Islamic State, into Germany. Ms. Merkel's decision, taken in the face of a Europe hit by multiple attacks by Islamic militants and steeped in Islamophobia, ranks as the most courageous humanitarian decision any leader has ever taken.

## Missed chances

However, there were missed chances too. Presented with an opportunity to stand up for the Rohingya, Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi has chosen to prevaricate and even justify their persecution in her country. Neighbouring countries, such as India, are also turning their backs on the Rohingya refugees.

The biggest tragedy is unfolding in India. The ham-handed application of the National Register of Citizens in Assam is forcing hundreds of thousands into internment camps indefinitely with no hope of repatriation to Bangladesh from where they are said to have fled many years ago. Now there is the threat of the NRC being extended across the country. India has an opportunity to end this farce by giving citizenship to all those identified as foreigners everywhere, if required by proportionately assigning them to all states of the Union for voting rights. In the 150th year of Gandhi's birth anniversary it even has the right occasion to show such grace.

### Expected Questions (Prelims Exams)

1. Choose the incorrect statement from the following statements: -

- (a) As a result of the operation of the Pakistan Army in East Pakistan in 1971, nearly three million Bengalis were killed.
- (b) In 1996, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established in South Africa.
- (c) The German monument for the deceased Jewish opened in 2005 resembles the massive cemetery.
- (d) In 2017, at the behest of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, one million refugees were allowed to live.

### Expected Questions (Mains Exams)

Q. Does Gandhian principles currently have any relevance in fighting the human rights challenges associated with NRC? Give an argument in favor of your opinion.

(250 Words)

**Note:** Answer of Prelims Expected Question given on 5 Oct., is 1 (d).