Leo Tolstoy, died 20 November 1910 – the Russian who shaped Gandhi

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Why in news: 20 November is the death anniversary of Leo Tolstoy, the Russian writer whose ideas on non-violence deeply influenced Mahatma Gandhi. Their letters, Gandhi's 'Hind Swaraj' and the Tolstoy Farm near Johannesburg (1910) are favourite questions on Gandhi's South African years.

Key points

- Tolstoy: Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), the Russian novelist of 'War and Peace' and 'Anna Karenina', later preached a Christian ethic of non-resistance to evil by force in 'The Kingdom of God Is Within You' (1894). He died on 20 November 1910 (7 November by the old Russian calendar) at Astapovo railway station, aged 82.
- Gandhi's debt: in his Autobiography Gandhi names three moderns who left a deep impress on his life – Raychandbhai by his living contact, Tolstoy by his book 'The Kingdom of God Is Within You', and Ruskin by 'Unto This Last'. He wrote that Tolstoy's book 'overwhelmed' him.
- Letters: Tolstoy's 'A Letter to a Hindu' (14 December 1908, written to Taraknath Das) urged Indians to reject violence and rely on the law of love. Gandhi sought his permission to reprint it in 'Indian Opinion' and wrote to him from London in October 1909. In April 1910 he sent Tolstoy 'Indian Home Rule', the English version of 'Hind Swaraj' (written in Gujarati aboard the ship Kildonan Castle in November 1909). Tolstoy's reply of September 1910, one of his last letters, said that passive resistance mattered not only for India but for the whole of humanity.
- Tolstoy Farm: Hermann Kallenbach, a German-born architect and Gandhi's friend, bought a farm of about 1,100 acres near Lawley, some 21 miles from Johannesburg, for the families of satyagrahis in the Transvaal struggle; it was named Tolstoy Farm, and Gandhi and Kallenbach settled there in June 1910. Life there meant manual work, self-help, a simple diet and schooling for the children. The earlier Phoenix Settlement near Durban (1904) was inspired by Ruskin's 'Unto This Last'.
- Tamil Nadu link: Tamil workers were the backbone of the South African satyagraha. Thillaiyadi Valliammai (born 1898 in Johannesburg; her family came from Thillaiyadi, now in Mayiladuthurai district) joined the 1913 struggle against the Searle judgment, which refused to recognise marriages not performed by Christian rites; she was jailed with hard labour and died on 22 February 1914, aged 16. Gandhi paid tribute to her in 'Satyagraha in South Africa'.

In the exam: TNPSC – Gandhi in South Africa (Indian Opinion 1903, Phoenix Settlement 1904, Hind Swaraj 1909, Tolstoy Farm 1910), influences on Gandhi (Tolstoy, Ruskin, Raychandbhai), Thillaiyadi Valliammai. UPSC Prelims – Gandhi's early experiments and writings; Mains GS-I (freedom struggle – Gandhian ideas) and GS-IV (thinkers who influenced Gandhi).

Questions

1. Tolstoy Farm (1910), near Johannesburg, was bought and offered for the families of satyagrahis by which friend of Gandhi?

A. Henry Polak

B. Albert West

C. Hermann Kallenbach

D. C.F. Andrews

2. In his Autobiography, Gandhi names three moderns who left a deep impress on his life. Which work of Tolstoy does he name?

A. War and Peace

B. The Kingdom of God Is Within You

C. Anna Karenina

D. Resurrection

Answers with explanations

1. **C) Hermann Kallenbach** – Hermann Kallenbach, a German-born architect, bought a farm of about 1,100 acres near Lawley and named it after Tolstoy; Gandhi and Kallenbach settled there in June 1910. Henry Polak and Albert West worked with Gandhi on 'Indian Opinion' and at the Phoenix Settlement; C.F. Andrews came to South Africa only in 1914.

2. **B) The Kingdom of God Is Within You** – Gandhi writes that Raychandbhai influenced him by his living contact, Tolstoy by 'The Kingdom of God Is Within You', and Ruskin by 'Unto This Last'.

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