



Mandela: the greatest cultural icon in modern history, And the end of his eventful and fruitful journey

Nelson Mandela, the towering figure of inspiration, reconciliation, unity, humility, human rights, justice and love, who mounted these noble qualities on the pinnacle of a colossal, non-collapsible pillar of peace, serenity and unity among the various sections of people of South Africa, radiates beams of various colours over his own country – the "Rainbow Nation" – and the world despite the irreparable loss of his life on December 5, 2013 at the age of 95.

A person, who was 6 ft.1 inch tall, always stood upright, wearing colourful decorative shirts, light on his face, adorned with a beaming smile, which conveys warmth and generosity; wisdom and power, understanding and forgiveness, not only attracted women and men towards him from across the world but also members of the royal family. It was reported that Queen Elizabeth was shocked at the death of Mandela as, according to her, Prince William and Princess Catherine were at the film – Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom – clapping like mad when it was secretly revealed to them that Mandela had died. It was the first night the film was screened in UK.

Mandela spent 27 years of his precious life in an apartheid prison on Robben Island before he became the President and unified the country after the end of the white minority rule.

Most of the white South Africans fled to Australia, UK and other European countries as they expected disaster and oblivion in a country under a black President but they proved themselves deadly wrong as Mandela embraced everyone as equals and united a divided, battle-scarred land into one nation. Things were made easier for him as there were no demands or requests to divide the country between the blacks and the whites. While the blacks sought his support, the whites sought his protection that Mandela provided in abundance to dispel their fears.

Mandela was remembered as a man who forgave the apartheid rulers who held him in prison for 27 years, but held in such respect by the "Rainbow Nation" enshrined in unity of race-blind multiculturalism championed by him for South Africa that he was able to command his countrymen not to punish them with violence when the minority white regime fell.

Mandela greeted people, he was not greeted by them; he was always the host and never the guest. These characteristics endeared people towards him to pave the way to become the most endearing and acceptable person in the world.

Tributes from other countries such as Israel, Palestine, Beijing, Washington, Teheran, North Korea, Sri Lanka, describing Mandela as one of the towering figures of the 20th century, kept on flooding South Africa now in mourning.

Flags flew at half mast in many countries including US, France, Britain and the UN Headquarters in New York. In Paris, the Eiffel Tower lit up in green, red, yellow and blue to symbolise the South Africa flag; while India declared five days of mourning for a man the Prime Minister labelled as a "true Gandhian." Sri Lanka government declared two days of mourning and flew flags half-mast.

In Brazil, the organisers of the 2014 football World Cup flashed Mandela's image up on a screen and held a minute's silence before the groups' draw. So were the players of the Australian and English cricket teams playing the Ashes Second Test in Adelaide, Australia, who observed a minute's silence to honour this great sports enthusiast.

Among the famous guests, who shared the podium of the FNB Stadium in Soweto (near Johannesburg) – the biggest gathering of world leaders in history - to acknowledge the legacy of reconciliation that Nelson Mandela gifted to South Africa and the world, were the US President Obama and his wife Michelle, former Presidents George Bush and his wife Laura, Bill Clinton and his wife Hillary who was also the former US Secretary, and Jimmy Carter, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott and the Opposition Leader Bill Shorten, Cuban President Raul Castro, British Prime Minister David Cameron and three former Prime Ministers, Gordon Brown, Tony Blair and Sir John Major, Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe, Chinese Vice President Li Yuanchao, French President Francois Hollande, Prince Charles, Oprah Winfrey, Sir Richard Branson, U2 singer Bono and musician Peter Gabriel.

Of the speeches, eulogies and tributes delivered for the black president of South Africa Nelson Mandela by the first black president of the United States Barack Obama whose moving eulogy for Mandela stood out, brightening the rain-swept stadium by his inimitable oratory and the well-crafted speech.

Commencing his eulogy, Obama described Mandela "as the last great liberator of the 20th century" who followed in the footsteps of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. "As an icon smiling and serene detached from the tawdry affairs of lesser men, he himself strongly resisted such a lifeless portrait. Instead, he insisted on sharing with us his doubts and fears; his miscalculations along with his victories. "I am not a saint," he said,

"unless you think of a saint as a sinner who keeps on trying."

Obama traced Mandela's life from childhood herding cattle, to his trial in 1964, when he made perhaps his most famous statement:

"I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die";

And his incarnation in a dark solitary cell for 27 years on the Robben Island, 11 km across the bay from Cape Town, his release and his great effort in reconciliation by asking his countrymen not to resort to violence and punishment against the oppressors.

Obama went on to say that "Mandela understood the ties that bind the human spirit referring to the word in South Africa –

our reach - think of Madiba, and the words that brought him comfort within the four walls of a cell

It matters not how strait the gate, How charged with punishments the scroll, I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul."

As the body of Mandela lay in state for three days in the capital Pretoria sheltered by "the famous jacaranda trees," long lines of mourners snaked through to get a glimpse of his body, reminiscent of the miles-long queues of voters who waited patiently to cast their ballots during South Africa's first all-race elec-



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tions in 1994 when he was elected the country's first black president.

Mandela was laid to rest on December 15 at a traditional African service in the village of Qunu where he was born, in keeping with his wish to be buried in the soil that that he had walked on barefoot as a boy herding cattle.

A 21-canon welcomed his flag-draped coffin on the top of a gun carriage as it travelled to his family's estate at Qunu. It was a family funeral confined to the members of his family as well as dignitaries and royals from around the world. It closed the final chapter on a towering statesman whose courage and moral fortitude turned him into a global symbol of freedom and hope .

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"හලෝ... ඔව්වොව්. මේ මහරාජ පක්ෂ නමයි ලොකු අයිදේ." "වේගම් එක කොතොමෙයි මල්ලියෝ?" "ටොපට කෙරුණානේ ලොකු අයිදේ. ඔයා හැකි අඩුව විතරමයි තිබුණෝ"

"මාය දෙක තුනකට කලින් හැඳුව කොළඹ පේමන්ට් රික ඔක්කොම ලෙව්ලා කෝට්ටා ගානක් වියදම් කරලා ඩොකට්මේන් ගල් ඇල්ලුවයි කියන්නේ?" "ඉං, එහෙනං"

"ඒ විදිහටම ඔස් හෝල්ට් සියක් විතර අලුතින් හැඳවල නේ?" "හැකුව. හැකුව"

"කොළඹ පාරවල් මදිට මදිවෙයි මාර්ගන් පැය ගානක් වහගන දැනලුවල කියන්නේ?" "හිං හිං මව් ඉතිං."

"දවස් දෙකේ වැඩේට කෝට්ටා ගානක් වියදම් කරලා අලුතින් කාර් ගොනේකුන් ගොනා-වැඩි?" "වෑන් ලොව් එකකතුන් ගෙන්නුවා අයිදේ."

"නවත් කෝට්ටා ගානක් වියදම් කරලා පාරවල් දියේ රූ පෙන්නොන් හයි කලාල නේද?" "මගේ අතින් වියදම් වෙන එකක්ය අයිදේ"

"ප්‍රයෝගී ගායනාවලට ගෙන්නු හැඳයෙකුටත් රුපියල් කෝට්ටා ගානක් ගෙව්වද?" "ඩොලර්වලින් ඇතින්දයි අයිදේ"

"චාර විභාගත් කල්දාල ඉස්කෝල රිකත් වහලා දැමීමෙව්වයි කියන්නේ?" "ඡු"

"ඒ මදිට විශ්වවිද්‍යාලත් සසියකට වැනුවල නේ?" "ආරක්ෂාවටනේ අයිදේ"

"ඉතිං මල්ලියේ ඔය කෙළලා හියන පිය්සුවේ හැටියට සැමුවේ නමත් රිකත් වෙනස් කරන්න නොවැ තිබුණෝ"

"එ ඒ කිව්වේ අයිදේ?" "ශ්‍රී ලංකා හෝ-ගොන් කියලා. හැන් හැන් හැන්"

ම.රා. සාදී.