



Mains Practice Question

Q. Gandhiji was not merely a political leader who organised mass movements, but a thought, an ideology that shaped the very foundations of modern day democracies. Analyse (150 words)

18 Dec, 2018 GS Paper 1 History

Approach:

- Briefly mention Gandhiji's contribution to India's freedom struggle.
- Explain his role as a political leader.
- Explain the impact of his ideologies that separated India from the western democracies.

Introduction

- As a political leader Mahatma Gandhi emphasized the active participation of the people along with the sympathy and support of the non-participating masses.
- He employed non-violence to resist not only colonialism but any other authoritarian structure of power. His idea of democracy was based on the ideals of truth and justice.
- Unlike a violent revolution, which could be waged by a minority of committed cadres and fighters, he focused on a non-violent revolution that focussed on the power of inner conscience and morality. It was based on the political mobilization of millions and the passive support of the vast majority. He was the moral and ethical custodian of the movement.

Body

Ideologies and impact

- **Non-violence:** The consensus on the practice of non-violence during the national movement contributed to the creation of a temper of democracy in the country. Discussion, debate, and persuasion, backed by public opinion, were emphasized for bringing about political and social change.
- **Satyagraha:** The idea of satyagraha emphasised the power of truth and the need to search for truth. It suggested that if the cause was true, if the struggle was against injustice, then physical force was not necessary to fight the oppressor. Without seeking vengeance or being aggressive, a satyagrahi could win the battle through nonviolence. This could be done by appealing to the conscience of the oppressor. Gandhi had the ability to invoke Satyagraha globally as a transformative and emancipative methodology.
- **Decentralisation and grassroots representation:** His ideas on representative democracy and the full range of civil liberties for the individual became an integral part of India's political thinking. It brought democracy at the grassroots level through a focus on the Panchayati Raj. This was also reflected in the division of Congress Working Committees on the basis of language during the struggle for Independence.
- **Swaraj or 'self-rule'** right from the village level expanded representativeness in the Indian democracy. Eradication of poverty by a revival of village economy laid emphasis on intensive, small-scale, individual and diversified farming and a cattle-based economy. This laid foundation stone for Directive Principles of State Policy.
- **Religion:** His ideas on communal harmony paved the way for secular character of Indian

democracy. He believed that religion was a personal practice and this was reflected in the separation of Indian political structure from religion which defined secularism for the society.

- **Social empowerment of marginalised communities:** Gandhian ideals were reflected in the Indian national movement's opposition to all forms of inequality, discrimination, and oppression based on gender and caste. His **concept of 'Sarvodaya'** incorporated the social liberation of women and the lower castes through opposition to child marriage and abolition of untouchability.
- **Impact on other democracies:** In South Africa Nelson Mandela was inspired by the Gandhian virtues of forgiveness and compassion which were first practiced by Gandhi himself during his stay in the country. In West Africa, nationalist leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah in the British colony of the Gold Coast were inspired by Gandhi's success. In Poland, Lech Walesa consciously tried to incorporate elements of Gandhian strategy in the Solidarity Movement. Apart from democracies, Gandhian ideologies impacted the mass movements like Arab Spring.
- **Racism:** Gandhi's resistance did not only become a significant part of the Indian independence struggle but also played an important role in South African struggle against apartheid.

Conclusion

Gandhian ideologies shaped the creation of institutions and practices where the voice and perspective of everyone can be articulated, tested and transformed. According to him, democracy provided the weak with the same chance as the strong. Functioning on the basis of voluntary cooperation and dignified and peaceful co-existence was replicated in several other modern democracies. Also, his emphasis on political tolerance and religious pluralism holds relevance in contemporary Indian politics.

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