



# Gandhian Ideologies

## What is Gandhian ideology?

- Gandhian ideology is the set of religious and social ideas adopted and developed by Mahatma Gandhi, first during his period in South Africa from 1893 to 1914, and later in India.
- Gandhian philosophy is not only simultaneously political, moral and religious, it is also traditional and modern, simple and complex. It embodies numerous Western influences to which Gandhiji was exposed, but is **rooted in ancient Indian culture** harnessing universal moral & religious principles.
- The philosophy exists on several planes - the spiritual or religious, moral, political, economic, social, individual and collective.
  - The spiritual or religious element, and God, are at its core.
  - Human nature is regarded as fundamentally virtuous.
  - All individuals are believed to be capable of high moral development, and of reform.
- Gandhian ideology emphasises not on idealism, but on **practical idealism**.
- Gandhian philosophy is a **double-edged weapon**. Its objective is to transform the individual and society simultaneously, in accordance with the principles of truth and non-violence.
- Gandhiji developed these ideologies from various inspirational sources vis **Bhagvad Geeta**, Jainism, Buddhism, Bible, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Tolstoy, John Ruskin among others.
  - Tolstoy's book '**The Kingdom of God is within you**' had a deep influence on Mahatma Gandhi.
  - Gandhiji paraphrased Ruskin's book '**Unto this Last**' as '**Sarvodaya**'.
- These ideas have been further developed by later "Gandhians", most notably, in India by, Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan and outside of India by Martin Luther King Jr. and others.

## Major Gandhian Ideologies

- **Truth and nonviolence:** They are the twin cardinal principles of Gandhian thoughts.
  - For Gandhi ji, truth is the relative truth of truthfulness in word and deed, and the absolute truth - the ultimate reality. This **ultimate truth is God (as God is also Truth) and morality** - the moral laws and code - **its basis**.
  - **Nonviolence**, far from meaning mere peacefulness or the absence of overt violence, is understood by Mahatma Gandhi to **denote active love** - the pole opposite of violence, in every sense. Nonviolence or love is regarded as the highest law of humankind.
- **Satyagraha:** Gandhi ji called his overall method of nonviolent action Satyagraha. It means the exercise of the purest soul-force against all injustice, oppression and exploitation.
  - It is a method of securing rights by personal suffering and not inflicting injury on others.
  - The origin of Satyagraha can be found in the Upanishads, and in the teachings of Buddha, Mahavira and a number of other other greats including Tolstoy and Ruskin.
- **Sarvodaya-** Sarvodaya is a term meaning '**Universal Uplift**' or '**Progress of All**'. The term was first coined by Gandhi ji as the title of his translation of **John Ruskin's** tract on political economy, '**Unto This Last**'.
- **Swaraj-** Although the word swaraj means self-rule, Gandhi ji gave it the content of an integral

revolution that encompasses all spheres of life.

- For Gandhi ji, swaraj of people meant the sum total of the swaraj (self-rule) of individuals and so he clarified that for him swaraj meant freedom for the meanest of his countrymen. And in its fullest sense, swaraj is much more than freedom from all restraints, it is self-rule, self-restraint and could be equated with moksha or salvation.
- **Trusteeship-** Trusteeship is a **socio-economic philosophy** that was propounded by Gandhi ji.
  - It provides a means by which the wealthy people would be the trustees of trusts that looked after the welfare of the people in general.
  - This principle reflects Gandhi ji's spiritual development, which he owed partly to his deep involvement with and the study of theosophical literature and the Bhagavad Gita.
- **Swadeshi** The word swadeshi derives from Sanskrit and is a conjunction of two Sanskrit words. 'Swa' means self or own and 'desh' means country. So swadesh means one's own country. Swadeshi, the adjectival form, means of one's own country, but can be loosely translated in most contexts as self-sufficiency.
  - Swadeshi is the **focus on acting within and from one's own community**, both politically and economically.
  - It is the interdependence of community and self-sufficiency.
  - Gandhi ji believed this would lead to independence (swaraj), as British control of India was rooted in control of her indigenous industries. Swadeshi was the key to the independence of India, and was represented by the charkha or the spinning wheel, the "center of the solar system" of Mahatma Gandhi's **constructive program**.

## Relevance in Today's Context

- The ideals of truth and nonviolence, which underpin the whole philosophy, are relevant to all humankind, and are considered as universal by the Gandhians.
- More than ever before, Mahatma Gandhi's teachings are valid today, when people are trying to find solutions to the rampant greed, widespread violence, and runaway consumptive style of living.
- The Gandhian technique of mobilising people has been successfully employed by many oppressed societies around the world under the leadership of people like **Martin Luther King in the United States, Nelson Mandela in South Africa, and Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar**, which is an eloquent testimony to the continuing relevance of Mahatma Gandhi.
- **Dalai Lama said**, "We have a big war going on today between world peace and world war, between the force of mind and force of materialism, between democracy and totalitarianism." It is precisely to fight these big wars that the Gandhian philosophy needed in contemporary times.

*In my life, I have always looked to Mahatma Gandhi as an inspiration, because he embodies the kind of transformational change that can be made when ordinary people come together to do extraordinary things." -Barack Obama*

## 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 & 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.
- Truth, nonviolence, Sarvodaya and Satyagraha and their significance constitute Gandhian philosophy and are the four pillars of Gandhian thought.

[For Mind Map](#)

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