



Ambedkar and Gandhi: Ideological Similarities & Differences

For Prelims: [Dr. B.R. Ambedkar](#), [Indian Constitution](#), [Reserve Bank of India](#), [Drafting Committee](#), [Communism](#), [Buddhism](#), [Karl Marx](#), Round Table Conferences, Poona Pact, Drafting Committee, Buddhism, Bharat Ratna.

For Mains: Similarities and Difference Between Mahatma Gandhi & BR Ambedkar, Impact of Gandhi and Ambedkar on India's constitution, Contribution of Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar, Relevance of Ambedkar in Present Times

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Why in News?

As India reflects on the legacy of **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, on his 135th birth anniversary**, revisiting his ideas on caste, democracy, and social reform offers valuable insights for building an inclusive and just society.

- His vision often converged with that of **Mahatma Gandhi** on the need for upliftment of the oppressed, yet differed sharply in approach.

What are the Key Areas of Ideological Convergence between B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi?

- **Rejection of Violent Revolution and Communism:**
 - Both Ambedkar and Gandhi **opposed communism's** focus on **class struggle and violence**.
 - **Gandhi criticized "Bolshevism"** for its violent methods, advocating non-violence and moral persuasion.
 - Similarly, **Ambedkar condemned communism** for seeking "**short cuts**" to **progress**, stressing the need for a sustained, non-violent struggle for justice and equality.
 - Ambedkar, in ***Buddha or Karl Marx (1956)***, prioritized Buddha's message of **compassion and moral progress** over Marxist coercion, while Gandhi emphasized **non-violence as the highest principle, stating, "There is no road to peace, peace is the road."**
 - **Gandhi emphasized that the means must align with the ends**, rejecting the idea that "**the ends justify the means.**"
- **Emphasis on Human Dignity and Social Justice:**
 - Both Gandhi and Ambedkar aimed for a **just society grounded in dignity and compassion**, though through **different approaches**.
 - Gandhi focused on **Sarvodaya (upliftment of all)**, while Ambedkar emphasized

***Bahujan Hitay* (welfare of the majority).**

▪ **Role of Ethics in Public Life:**

- Both Gandhi and Ambedkar emphasized the importance of **ethics in public life**. Gandhi's politics were based on **moral idealism**, while Ambedkar, though a **rationalist**, recognized the **role of ethics in governance**.
 - Both believed that **character and morality** were essential for **public service and leadership**.

▪ **Moral Politics:**

- Initially, Ambedkar criticized **Gandhi's moral politics**, calling them "**hollow and noisy**" and "**dishonest**." However, later Ambedkar recognized the importance of **individual morality**, quoting Buddha on self-upliftment and non-violence, a principle similar to Gandhi's vision of *swaraj*.

What were the Ideological Differences between Gandhi and Ambedkar?

▪ **Caste and Varna System:**

- **Ambedkar** called for the **total annihilation of caste** and strongly criticized Hindu texts like ***Manusmriti*** for legitimizing caste oppression. In "***Annihilation of Caste***" (1936), he described the Hindu social order as a "veritable chamber of horrors."
 - Gandhi acknowledged the social harm caused by the caste system, but **didn't fully reject Manusmriti** as he considered the caste system as a distortion of true Hinduism, viewing the ***Manusmriti*** as a text with both valuable and flawed aspects.
- Gandhi **opposed untouchability** and **initially supported a reformed varna system**, later **advocating for the abolition of caste in *Harijan* (1936)**, stating "**caste has to go**."
 - He coined the term *Harijans* for Dalits, which Ambedkar rejected as patronizing.

▪ **Separate Electorates for Dalits:**

- **Ambedkar** supported **separate electorates for the Depressed Classes** to secure their political representation and rights.
- **Gandhi** opposed it, fearing it would divide Hindu society. His **fast unto death led to the *Poona Pact* (1932)**, which replaced separate electorates with **reserved seats for Dalits in joint electorates**.
 - In "*What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*," Dr **Ambedkar criticizes Gandhi and the Congress** for failing to address the structural inequalities faced by Dalits.
 - He argues that Gandhi's focus on moral reforms **overlooked the need for legal and political measures** to ensure Dalit emancipation.

▪ **Religion and Social Reform:**

- **Ambedkar** saw Hinduism as **inherently discriminatory** and converted himself to **Buddhism in 1956**, advocating liberty, equality, and fraternity.
- **Gandhi** treated religion as a **moral guide**, championing ***Sarva Dharma Sambhava* (equal respect for all religions)**, but his **defense of some Hindu traditions (such as Varna system, the term *Harijan* for Dalits, and *Manusmriti*)** was criticized by reformers like Ambedkar.
 - While Gandhi, Aurobindo, and Tagore drew inspiration from Hinduism, Ambedkar's ideas were rooted in Buddhism.
- **Navayana Buddhism** was founded **by Ambedkar in 1956** as a **Dalit Buddhist movement** in India.

▪ **Means of Social Transformation:**

- **Ambedkar** advocated for **social reforms through legal and constitutional means**, asserting that **true political freedom** could only be achieved **after establishing social equality and justice**.
- **Gandhi** emphasized **personal morality, non-violence (*ahimsa*), and spiritual awakening (*Swaraj*)** as means of societal transformation.

▪ **Role of the State and Constitution:**

- Ambedkar supported **state-led affirmative action to rectify historical**

injustices, emphasizing that "**Democracy is not a form of government, but a form of social organization.**"

- **Gandhi** advocated for **Gram Swaraj (village self-rule)** and **minimal state intervention**, emphasizing **community self-reliance and moral development** over bureaucratic governance.
- **Economic Models:**
 - **Ambedkar** advocated for **state socialism, planned development**, and **economic rights** like land reforms and equal wages. He proposed state ownership of key industries in the **States and Minorities memorandum (1947)**.
 - **Gandhi:** Propounded **trusteeship theory**, where the **wealthy act as custodians of public wealth**. Favoured **small-scale industries** and **swadeshi** over **Western industrialism**.

Read More:

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar [Who was Dr. BR Ambedkar?](#), [What are Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Contributions?](#)

Mahatma Gandhi: [What are the Major Gandhian Ideologies & Its Role in Today's Context?](#)

Government's Tribute to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

- **Bharat Ratna (1990):** Conferred posthumously as **India's highest civilian award** for his immense contribution to nation-building.
- **Ambedkar Circuit (Panchteerth):** Development of five key sites linked to his life—Mhow (birthplace), London (Shiksha Bhoomi), Nagpur (Deeksha Bhoomi), Mumbai (Chaitya Bhoomi), and Delhi (Mahaparinirvan Bhoomi).
- **BHIM App:** Launched in his name to promote digital payments and financial inclusion.
- **Dr. Ambedkar Centres of Excellence (DACE):** Set up in 31 Central Universities to offer free UPSC coaching to Scheduled Caste students.
- **ASIIM Scheme:** Ambedkar Social Innovation and Incubation Mission supports SC youth entrepreneurs through startup funding.
- **National Monuments:** Sites like **Sankalp Bhumi (Vadodara)** and his school in Satara proposed for national monument status.
- **Constitution Day (26th Nov):** Observed since 2015 to honor his legacy as the chief architect of the Indian Constitution.
- **Ambedkar Jayanti:** His birth anniversary, 14th April is observed as Ambedkar jayanti, a national holiday honoring his contributions to social justice, Dalit rights, and the Indian Constitution.

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar



Babasaheb Ambedkar-
The Father of Indian Constitution

14 April 1891- 06 December 1956

1. Brief Profile

- A social reformer, jurist, economist, author and thinker of comparative religions
- Labour member in the **Executive Council of Viceroy (1942)**
- **Chairman** of the **Drafting Committee** for the new Constitution
- **First Law Minister** of India
- Posthumously awarded **Bharat Ratna (1990)**

2. Contributions

- Led the **Mahad Satyagraha in 1927** against Hindus
- Participated in **all three Round Table Conferences**
- Signed the **1932 Poona pact with Mahatma Gandhi** to abandon the idea of separate electorates for the depressed classes

The reserved seats for depressed classes were increased from 71 to 147 in provincial legislatures and to 18% in the Central Legislature.

- **Opposed the special status of J&K (Article 370)**
- Supported **Uniform Civil Code**
- Referred **Article 32** as "**soul of the Constitution and very heart of it**"

3. Resignation and Buddhism

- Differences over **Hindu Code Bill** led to his resignation from Cabinet in **1951**
- Converted to Buddhism; his death is observed as **Mahaparinirvan Diwas**

4. Important Journals

- Mooknayak (**1920**)
- Bahishkrit Bharat (**1927**)
- Samatha (**1929**)
- Janata (**1930**)

5. Books

- Annihilation of Caste
- Buddha or Karl Marx
- **The Untouchable: Who are They and Why They Have Become Untouchables**
- The Rise and Fall of Hindu Women

6. Organisations

- Estd. '**Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha**' (**1923**)
- Founded **Independent Labour Party (1936)**
- Founded **Scheduled Castes Federation (1942)**





Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi



“The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.”

Brief Description

Birth: 2nd October 1869, Porbandar (Gujarat).

2nd October is observed as **International Day of Non-Violence**.

Profile: Lawyer, Politician, Social activist, Writer and led Nationalist Movement.

Father of the Nation (first called by Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose).

Ideology: Believed in the ideas of non-violence, Truth, Honesty, Care for Mother Nature, Compassion, Welfare of Down-trodden etc.

Political Mentor: Gopal Krishna Gokhale

Death: Shot dead by Nathuram Godse (30th January, 1948).

30th January is observed as **Martyrs' Day**

Nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize five times.



Gandhi in South Africa (1893-1915)

Used satyagraha against racist regime (Native Africans and Indians were discriminated).

Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) is celebrated every year on 9th January, to commemorate his return from South Africa.

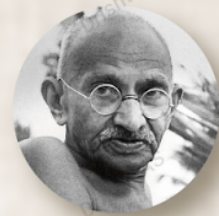
Contribution in India's Freedom Struggle

Small-scale movements like Champaran Satyagraha (1917)—First Civil Disobedience, Ahmedabad Mill Strike (1918)—First Hunger Strike, and Kheda Satyagraha (1918)—First Non-Cooperation.

Nationwide Mass Movements: Against Rowlatt Act (1919), Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-22), Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-34), Quit India Movement (1942).

Gandhi-Irwin Pact (1931): Between Gandhi and Lord Irwin that marked the end of a period of civil disobedience.

Poona Pact (1932): Between Gandhi and **B.R. Ambedkar**; this abandoned the idea of separate electorates for the depressed classes (Communal Award).



Books Written

Hind Swaraj, My Experiments with Truth (Autobiography)

Weeklies

Harijan, Navjivan, Young India, Indian Opinion.

Gandhi Peace Prize

is given by India for social, economic, and political transformation through Gandhian methods.

“Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony.”

“You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty”

Conclusion

Gandhi and Ambedkar, despite differing in methods, aimed for a **just and inclusive India**. Fundamental differences in means **remained: Gandhi sought reform via moral appeal**, while **Ambedkar advocated for state-led social engineering**. Together, their legacies offer a **balanced lens to address caste, inequality, and democratic values today**.

Drishti Mains Question:

Gandhi and Ambedkar had differing ideologies but shared a commitment to social justice. Compare their approaches and assess their impact on India's constitutional and social vision.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Which of the following parties were established by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar? (2012)

1. The Peasants and Workers Party of India
2. All India Scheduled Castes Federation
3. The Independent Labour Party

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (b)

Mains:

Q. Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, despite having divergent approaches and strategies, had a common goal of amelioration of the downtrodden. Elucidate. (2015)