

Gandhi's Political and Educational Thoughts: Applicability and Significance in the Modern Era

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Abstract

This essay examines the political and educational ideas of Mahatma Gandhi, as well as their relevance in the modern day. Gandhi's nonviolent philosophy, swaraj (self-rule), and gram swaraj (village self-reliance) influenced international movements for justice and human rights in addition to India's freedom struggle. In a similar vein, his educational philosophy, as expressed in Nai Talim or Basic Education, placed a strong emphasis on manual labor, moral development, and holistic learning. Gandhi's theories have served as an inspiration to leaders and movements around the world, but they have also come under fire for being unrealistic and idealistic in a technologically advanced, globalised world. This essay argues that Gandhi's ideas, despite their historical context, remain relevant today as a framework for moral reasoning in addressing issues such as inequality, violence, climate change, and commercialization.

Keywords: Basic Education, Swaraj, Ahimsa, Philosophy

Introduction

One of the most important people in modern history is still Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948). His ideas of self-rule (swaraj), truth (satya), and nonviolence (ahimsa) influenced India's fight for independence and served as an inspiration for innumerable international movements for peace and justice. Gandhi was not only a political figure but also a teacher and philosopher whose ideas touched on every facet of human existence. His philosophy is especially important in the pursuit of comprehensive solutions to the problems of modernity because he believes that politics, ethics, and education are all interconnected.

In the political sphere, Gandhi advocated for nonviolent resistance as a means of challenging oppression and injustice. His strategies of *satyagraha* (truth-force) and civil disobedience became powerful tools for mobilizing mass movements without resorting to violence. At the same time, he rejected centralized, industrialized models of development, instead envisioning decentralized, self-reliant communities based on cooperation and sustainability.

The virtues of truth, non-violence, bread and work, non-stealing, non-possession, brahmacharya or chastity, swadeshi, untouchability, worship and prayer, fasting, and service to mankind were the cornerstones of Gandhi's educational philosophy. Gandhiji believed that education encompassed more than just learning letters; it also involved developing one's character. Gandhi's views on education are reflected in the current educational expenditures made by the Centre and the state government. Religious education, adult education, women's education, or vocational education are some examples.

In the realm of education, Gandhi was critical of colonial systems that emphasized rote learning and alienated students from their cultural roots. He proposed *Nai Talim* (Basic Education), a system grounded in craft, manual labor, and value formation, which aimed to prepare students to be self-reliant, ethical, and socially responsible citizens.

The present era, marked by globalization, ecological crises, violent conflicts, and educational commercialization, invites renewed engagement with Gandhi's political and educational thought. While some aspects of his philosophy may appear utopian, this paper argues that Gandhi's ethical principles remain deeply relevant for shaping humane futures.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the educational contribution of Mahatma Gandhi and their relevance in the present era.
2. To study the Political contribution of Mahatma Gandhi and their relevance in the present era.
3. To explore the impact of Gandhian educational and political thought on the present generation.

Methodology

This study's goal has been achieved via the use of a thorough and historical methodology. Primary as well as secondary sources were consulted for this. Primary sources included speeches, articles in various newspapers and periodicals, and the collected works of Mahatma Gandhi. The research method has included the analysis and evaluation of periodicals in addition to the secondary sources that are available in the form of books and national and international publications.

1. Gandhi's Political Views

1.1 Core Principles of Gandhian Politics

Gandhi's political philosophy was rooted in ethics and spirituality. For him, politics could not be separated from morality. His central principles included:

Truth (*Satya*) – Gandhi believed that truth was absolute and the ultimate goal of political life. All political actions had to be aligned with the truth. Mahatma relied on the concept of Truth as the foundation for his "Satyagraha" approach, which highlighted the need to seek Truth. According to Gandhi, there is only the Truth in the world. The only explanation for a person's existence is their commitment to the truth. Truth is often understood to mean just that one must express the Truth. However, Mahatma is more broadly associated with the term Satya/Truth. One must live up to the Truth in one's thoughts, actions, and statements.

Nonviolence (*Ahimsa*) – Violence, according to Gandhi, was both morally wrong and politically counterproductive. Nonviolence was not merely the absence of violence but an active force of love, compassion, and moral persuasion. Non-violence is a broad translation of the term Ahimsa. "Lacking any desire to kill" is the definition of ahimsa. Being innocuous to oneself, other people, and all living things is what it implies. However, that is but a partial

explanation of his meaning of Ahimsa, or non-violence. Gandhi's introduction to Hinduism and Jainism during his early years may have been the key factor that enabled him to promote Ahimsa. His decision to end the Non-Cooperation Movement at its height, following a nonviolent rally that descended into violence in Chauri Chaura in Gorakhpur, was evidence of his conviction in non-violence.

Self-rule (*Swaraj*) – For Gandhi, swaraj went beyond political independence; One of the core ideas of Gandhi's philosophy is "swaraj." "Swaraj is a state of being of individuals and the nation," according to Gandhi. The Sanskrit term "swaraj," which combines the words "swa" and "raj," meaning "self-rule." The word "swaraj" is Vedic. Ancient shastras and other literary works often contain it. It denotes the ultimate mental and spiritual condition. "Independent Domain" or "Sovereignty" are the meanings of "Swarajya." The idea of "Swaraj," or "Self-Rule," was linked to the concept of "Swarajya," which denoted a specific method of ensuring self-determination in a polity made up of several separate sectors, according to ancient Indian political philosophy. The term "Swaraj" was only used in contemporary India by Swami Vivekananda, Dadabhai Naoroji, and B. G. Tilak. It meant self-governance at the individual, community, and national levels, rooted in self-discipline, ethics, and responsibility.

Decentralization and Village Republics (*Gram Swaraj*) – Gandhi envisioned India as a network of self-sufficient villages. Politically speaking, swaraj means self-governance, where each person can govern themselves and exercise self-control by taking part in decision-making. Thus, political acceptance of Swaraj entails the establishment of a system in which the people have the authority and the state apparatus plays a lesser role. He asserts that the finest governments are those that exercise the least amount of control. Gandhi, therefore, placed greater value on the economic linkages that exist between people and economic micro groups, such as village communities, in which the state plays relatively little part in the process of development, practicing participatory democracy, cooperation, and sustainable living.

Civil Disobedience and Satyagraha – Gandhi pioneered the use of mass nonviolent resistance to unjust laws. Satyagraha was not a mere protest but a moral appeal to awaken the conscience of the oppressor. Gandhi created a comprehensive method and viewpoint on the idea of life itself based on his tests and experiences. His unrelenting pursuit of truth led him to develop concepts that became known as his philosophy. One the social, political, cultural, economic, and psychological factors that shaped Gandhi's life and character are connected to the idea of satyagraha. To combat all of the factors that put physical and psychological strain on him, he chose to choose nonviolence. He held that love and nonviolence are the ultimate laws that govern the cosmos and all living things. Gandhi firmly believed that the rule of love was the foundation of all global faiths.

1.2 Political Practices

Gandhi's political beliefs were put into practice throughout the Indian liberation movement. The effectiveness of mass mobilisation via nonviolence was exemplified by movements like the Quit India Movement (1942), the Salt March (1930), and the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920–22). The nationalist movement was converted into a broad-based battle by Gandhi's stress on inclusiveness, which mobilised women, peasants, workers, and marginalised groups.

2. Gandhi's Educational Views

2.1 Critique of Colonial Education

Gandhi was adamantly against the elite curriculum, English language domination, and rote memorisation that characterised the British colonial educational system. He maintained that this kind of schooling failed to create responsible citizens and estranged Indians from their culture.

2.2 Nai Talim (Basic Education)

Gandhi's alternative, *Nai Talim*, was designed to integrate intellectual, manual, and moral development. Its key features included:

Learning by Doing – Education should be linked with productive work, such as spinning, weaving, or agriculture, fostering the dignity of labor. Gandhiji emphasized the concept of "learning by doing," as it encourages people to think critically and creatively. To enable students to begin creating as they studied, he placed a strong emphasis on work culture from the very beginning. Therefore, rather than concentrating just on reading or writing, the primary objective of his basic education was to employ his hands, heart, and intellect. Gandhiji once said, "By education I mean bringing out the best in the child and man: body, mind, and spirit." The primary goal of education could not be literacy.

Mother-Tongue Instruction – Students should be taught in their native languages to enhance comprehension and preserve culture. The fact that instruction is provided in a foreign language is one of the glaring flaws in the current educational system. Gandhiji, therefore, placed a strong emphasis on the mother language as a subject of study and as a teaching tool. This makes a lot of sense and is scholarly. Increases one's capacity to comprehend and communicate novel ideas in the realm of education. It also improves mental clarity.

Value-Based Education – Schools ought to place a strong emphasis on collaboration, self-control, truth, and nonviolence. Gandhi believed that education might bring about peace, which is vital to human existence. Ethics and morals are the only ways to bring about peace. Morality and ethics ought to be the cornerstones of education, he said. As fundamental components of his education, Gandhiji counselled all pupils to value morality and honesty.

Self-Sufficiency – Education should prepare students to contribute to local economies and meet their basic needs without exploitation. The medium or means of basic education was local crafts. The primary topic was the craft, which served as a medium for disseminating information about the other disciplines. The youngster and the real world were connected through the craft. Gandhiji placed a strong emphasis on education that was craft-focused, which was crucial in the Indian context. Since it is not feasible to educate every person and offer them government employment, crafts would enable education to be self-sufficient in the Indian context. As a result, vocational education would assist all residents to become self-sufficient and offer work prospects. Gandhiji believed that a disciplined mind would be developed by training the mind via the crafts of the people from the very beginning.

2.3 Holistic Vision

Gandhi believed that education was a lifelong process of character development and nation-building, not merely a means of preparing people for the workforce. He saw schools as hubs of communal life that combined education with volunteer work and moral development.

3. Relevance of Gandhi's Political Thought in the Present Era

3.1 Nonviolence in Contemporary Movements

Gandhi's nonviolent ideology still serves as an inspiration for movements throughout the world. Gandhian tactics have been used by Nelson Mandela in South Africa, Martin Luther King Jr. in the United States, and current peace movements throughout the globe. Campaigns for gender equality, climate justice, and indigenous rights frequently use peaceful protest as a moral and political tool in the twenty-first century.

3.2 Decentralization and Sustainable Development

Gandhi's idea of gram swaraj is still relevant in discussions about sustainability, participatory democracy, and local government today. Gandhian ideals of independence and ecological balance are echoed by movements supporting cooperative economies, local food systems, and renewable energy.

3.3 Global Relevance

Gandhi's insistence on dialogue and nonviolence is still a crucial counter-narrative in a time of authoritarianism, militarisation, and terrorism. The cynicism and opportunism of the modern world are challenged by his view of politics as an ethical service.

4. Relevance of Gandhi's Educational Thought in the Present Era

4.1 Alternative Education Movements

Gandhi's Nai Talim remains a source of inspiration for educators worldwide. His vision is embodied in schools that prioritise values-based education, vocational training, and experiential learning. Craft and community service are still incorporated into the curricula of a number of rural education programs in India, including ashram schools that are modelled after Nai Talim.

4.2 Relevance for Contemporary Challenges

Character Formation – Gandhi's focus on values serves as a reminder that education must produce moral citizens in a society where materialism rules.

Experiential Learning – Gandhian ideas are reflected in project-based learning, progressive educational approaches, and community involvement.

Equity and Inclusion– Gandhi's demands for local empowerment and mother language instruction are still pertinent in discussions about inclusive and culturally sensitive education.

4.3 Adaptation for the Digital Age

Gandhi's criticism of industrial modernity may seem archaic, but his ideas about holistic education can direct the incorporation of technology in ways that empower students rather than

alienate them. Experience-based, value-based education can enhance the competencies required in knowledge economies.

5. Critical Discussion

5.1 Political Thought: Critiques

Limits of Nonviolence – When it comes to terrorism or authoritarian governments, nonviolent resistance might not be as effective.

Gram Swaraj and Modern Economies -Gandhi's focus on the village might seem unrealistic in today's urbanised, globalised economies.

Ambiguities in Strategy – Gandhi's political philosophy, which is frequently situation-specific, might not be universally applicable.

5.2 Educational Thought: Critiques

Basic Education vs. Global Demands – Gandhi's emphasis on careers might not sufficiently prepare students for the digital and globalised economies.

Language Dilemmas – Global mobility may be hampered by an exclusive focus on mother tongue education.

Values vs. Market Pressures – Gandhian models are challenged by neoliberal systems that place a higher priority on employability than moral growth.

5.3 Philosophical Critiques

Idealism vs. Pragmatism – Gandhi is frequently criticised for being unduly utopian and idealistic.

Selective Application – After independence, Gandhi's holistic vision was diluted by India's selective adoption of his ideas.

5.4 Continuing Relevance

Gandhi's ideas—nonviolence, justice, sustainability, and value-based education—remain incredibly relevant in spite of criticism. They steer societies towards more compassionate futures by offering moral frameworks as opposed to strict blueprints.

Conclusion

Gandhi's political and educational ideas are timeless and continue to provide moral guidance for the modern world. His advocacy for decentralisation informs sustainable development, his insistence on nonviolence opposes militarism, and his concept of value-based education opposes the commercialisation of education.

Gandhi's philosophy endures despite being frequently criticised for being idealistic because it addresses issues that all people have: justice, peace, dignity, and community. His theories are best understood as flexible principles that encourage critical thought and innovative application

rather than as rigid prescriptions. Gandhi's legacy continues to be a vital moral compass in a world beset by violence, inequality, ecological crisis, and alienation.

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