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The Political Views of Mahatma Gandhi: A Brief Outline

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ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi, one of the 20th century's most influential leaders, transformed India's struggle for independence and reshaped global political and ethical paradigms. His political philosophy, a synthesis of Eastern and Western ideologies, centered on morality, religion, truth, and non-violence as essential elements of political life. For Gandhi, politics was not merely a pursuit of power or governance; it was a tool for moral and spiritual progress, both at the individual and societal levels. Central to Gandhi's philosophy was the concept of Dharmik Rajniti, or ethical politics, which underscored the inseparability of ethics and politics. He envisioned a political system where truth and non-violence guided decision-making, and leaders prioritized the welfare of all, especially the marginalized. Gandhi's critique of Western civilization highlighted its materialistic tendencies, contrasting it with what he viewed as the spiritual and ethical foundations of Indian culture. He believed that true progress was not measured by industrial or technological advancements but by the moral development of individuals and the harmony within society. Gandhi also championed political equality, advocating for the eradication of caste discrimination, untouchability, and economic disparities. He emphasized Swaraj (self-rule) as both a political objective and a broader philosophy of self-reliance, responsibility, and ethical living. Religion, for Gandhi, was integral to politics—not as a divisive force but as a unifying principle rooted in shared moral values and universal truths.

This paper examines Gandhi's political philosophy, focusing on Dharmik Rajniti, his critique of Western civilization, his commitment to political equality, and his views on religion in politics. By exploring these dimensions, it seeks to illuminate Gandhi's enduring legacy and the relevance of his principles in addressing contemporary political and ethical challenges.

Keywords: Truth, Non-Violence, Satyagraha, Gandhian Equality, Political Philosophy, Western Civilization

INTRODUCTION

The concept of politics, often perceived as a mere power game or an academic discipline, has been explored and analyzed by various thinkers across the globe. In the Indian context, the understanding of politics has evolved through centuries, drawing from diverse traditions, including ancient Indian texts and modern political philosophies. However, Mahatma Gandhi's political views transcend conventional understandings of politics. Gandhi did not consider himself a political philosopher in the traditional sense, nor did he subscribe to any fixed ideology. His political thoughts were shaped by his experiences, emotions, and spiritual beliefs, making his views unique and multifaceted. Gandhi's political ideology emerged as a critique of both colonialism and Western civilization. While deeply influenced by the religious and philosophical traditions of India, he also absorbed ideas from Western thinkers like Tolstoy and Ruskin.

Gandhi believed that true politics was not about the acquisition of power but about the moral and spiritual welfare of individuals and society. He sought to integrate politics with religion and morality, proposing a model of governance that was grounded in truth, non-violence, and justice. This paper aims to examine the various facets of Gandhi's political views, offering insights into his approach to politics, equality, and the role of religion in governance.

GANDHI'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: A SYNTHESIS OF EASTERN AND WESTERN THOUGHT

Gandhi's political thought was a fusion of Eastern and Western traditions, yet it did not conform to the rigid doctrines of either. He did not claim to be an original thinker, but his ideas were deeply rooted in the ancient Indian concepts of truth (Satya) and non-violence (Ahimsa), which he elevated to central pillars of his political ideology. Gandhi's understanding of politics was not just limited to governance or statecraft; it extended to every aspect of life, including social, economic, and spiritual dimensions.

His early experiences in South Africa, particularly his struggles against racial discrimination, were pivotal in shaping his political worldview. It was here that he first articulated the concept of *Satyagraha* (truth-force), a non-violent method of resistance that became the cornerstone of his political campaigns. Gandhi's belief in *Satyagraha* was deeply influenced by the teachings of the Upanishads, Buddha, and other great moral philosophers, as well as by the Christian concepts of love and sacrifice.

However, Gandhi was not an unquestioning follower of any tradition. His political views were shaped by his engagement with various political and philosophical ideologies. From Western thinkers like Leo Tolstoy and John Ruskin, he drew the idea of social and economic justice. His critique of Western civilization, particularly its materialism and emphasis on individualism, shaped his vision of a just society. Gandhi believed that the Western model of development, with its emphasis on industrialization and consumerism, was not only detrimental to the environment but also to the moral fabric of society.

THE CONCEPT OF DHARMIKRAJNITI: POLITICS WITH MORALITY AND RELIGION

One of the most important aspects of Gandhi's political thought was his concept of *DharmikRajniti* (ethical politics). For Gandhi, politics was inseparable from morality and religion. Unlike the modern secular state, which separates politics from religion, Gandhi's vision of politics was grounded in the belief that governance should be a reflection of moral and spiritual principles.

Gandhi was clear in his opposition to the secularization of politics, arguing that politics without religion would lead to moral decay. For him, religion was not a matter of dogma or ritual; it was the pursuit of truth and the realization of moral values. He believed that politics should be a tool for the upliftment of humanity and the realization of justice, equality, and freedom for all individuals. This belief led him to emphasize the need for politicians to adhere to principles of truth, non-violence, and self-restraint, ensuring that their actions were in service of the common good rather than personal or sectarian interests.

Gandhi's approach to *DharmikRajniti* was not a call for religious theocracy but rather a call for a politics rooted in universal moral values. He believed that every individual, regardless of their religious background, could contribute to a just and equitable society by adhering to the principles of truth, non-violence, and love. In this sense, Gandhi's politics was deeply spiritual, yet inclusive and universal in its application.

GANDHI'S CRITIQUE OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION AND ITS IMPACT ON INDIAN POLITICS

One of the most significant aspects of Gandhi's political thought was his critique of Western civilization, which he saw as rooted in materialism, individualism, and exploitation. Gandhi argued that the British colonization of India was not only a political domination but also an imposition of a morally bankrupt civilization. He saw the British as bringing to India a system of governance that was based on power, exploitation, and inequality.

In *Hind Swaraj* (Indian Home Rule), Gandhi criticized the Western model of industrialization, which he believed led to the degradation of human values and the environment. He argued that Western civilization's emphasis on material progress and the pursuit of wealth was inherently destructive and incompatible with the moral and spiritual ideals of India. Instead, Gandhi advocated for a return to a simple, self-sufficient, and morally responsible way of life, which he believed was exemplified by the Indian village system.

Gandhi's critique of Western civilization was also reflected in his approach to Indian politics. He believed that India's political and social

problems could not be solved by merely adopting Western-style institutions or systems of governance. Instead, he called for a revitalization of Indian traditions and values, particularly those related to self-rule, non-violence, and social justice. This approach to politics, which emphasized spiritual and moral renewal, was at the heart of Gandhi's vision for a free and just India.

GANDHIAN EQUALITY: A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE

Equality was a central theme in Gandhi's political philosophy. However, his understanding of equality differed significantly from the conventional notions of equality prevalent in Western political thought. In the West, equality is often understood in terms of equal treatment, equal rights, and equal opportunities. Gandhi's concept of equality, while encompassing these aspects, went deeper. For him, equality was rooted in the idea of universal human dignity and the recognition of the interconnectedness of all individuals.

Gandhi rejected the notion of equality based solely on external characteristics, such as wealth, power, or social status. He believed that true equality could only be achieved when individuals recognized their shared humanity and acted with compassion and respect for one another. This was reflected in his efforts to eradicate untouchability and caste discrimination, which he saw as a violation of the fundamental principles of equality and human dignity.

Gandhi's notion of equality also extended to the relationship between individuals and the state. He believed that the state should serve the needs of all its citizens, ensuring that no one was left behind or marginalized. In this sense, Gandhi's political thought was deeply democratic, as it sought to empower the people and ensure their participation in the political process.

GANDHI'S KEY IDEOLOGIES:

At the heart of Gandhi's political philosophy were two key principles: truth (Satya) and non-violence (Ahimsa). These principles were not merely moral ideals; they were also practical tools for political action. Gandhi believed that by adhering to truth and non-violence, individuals could achieve both personal and collective liberation.

- **Truth (Satya)**: For Gandhi, truth was the ultimate principle of life. He believed that truth was divine and that it could only be realized through a commitment to moral and spiritual values. In the political sphere, truth was essential for building trust, justice, and integrity. Gandhi believed that political leaders should be committed to truth and that any deviation from truth led to corruption and injustice.

- **Non-Violence (Ahimsa)**: Non-violence was Gandhi's most powerful tool for political resistance. He believed that non-violence was not just the absence of physical violence but also the absence of hatred, greed, and exploitation. Non-violence, for Gandhi, was a way of life that required self-discipline, compassion, and a deep commitment to human dignity. He used non-violent resistance to challenge colonial rule and social injustices in India, demonstrating its effectiveness as a means of political change.

- **Satyagraha**: Gandhi's concept of *Satyagraha* was rooted in the belief that individuals should resist injustice through non-violent means, even at the cost of personal suffering. *Satyagraha* was a form of moral resistance that sought to awaken the conscience of the oppressor and the oppressed. It was a central method in Gandhi's campaigns for social and political change, from his struggle against British colonial rule to his efforts to eradicate untouchability and promote communal harmony.

CONCLUSION

Mahatma Gandhi's political views were revolutionary not only in their time but also in their enduring relevance today. His belief in a politics grounded in truth, non-violence, and moral values offers a profound critique of modern political systems that prioritize power and material gain over human dignity and social justice. Gandhi's emphasis on the integration of politics with religion and morality challenges the conventional separation of the two and provides an alternative model for governance that seeks to uplift humanity in all its aspects—social, economic, moral, and spiritual.

While many of Gandhi's ideas remain aspirational, his vision of *DharmikRajniti* continues to inspire political thinkers and activists worldwide. In a world increasingly divided by materialism, violence, and inequality, Gandhi's political philosophy offers a timeless blueprint for a more just, compassionate, and peaceful society. Politics, for Gandhi, was not an end in itself but a means to the greater goal of human welfare and moral progress. His legacy remains a guiding light for

those who seek to create a world based on truth, love, and non-violence.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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