

M.A. Sociology, Semester II, Indian Social Thought

Unit-4

MAHATMA GANDHI: LIFE SKETCH, SARVODAYA, SOCIALISM, CONCEPT OF SATYAGRAHA

Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi occupies a very significant place in Indian social and political thought. He was not only the leader of the Indian freedom movement but also a social reformer, moral philosopher, economist, and spiritual thinker. Gandhi attempted to integrate morality, spirituality, politics, economics, and social reform into a unified philosophy of life. His ideas were based upon truth, non-violence, equality, self-discipline, human dignity, and social justice.

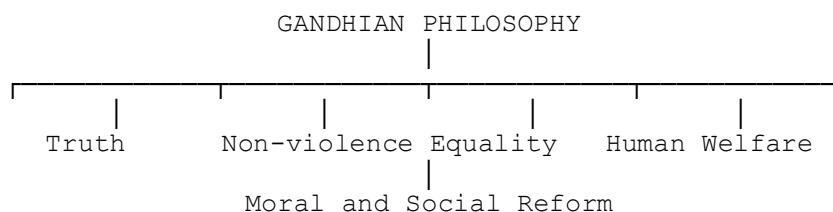
Gandhi believed that political and social transformation should be achieved through peaceful means rather than violence and hatred. He emphasized moral purity, simplicity, rural development, self-reliance, and welfare of all people. His philosophy influenced not only India but also several peace movements and civil rights movements throughout the world.

The major concepts associated with Gandhi include:

- Sarvodaya
- Satyagraha
- Non-violence
- Trusteeship
- Rural development
- Social equality

His ideas continue to remain relevant in contemporary society because they emphasize peace, justice, democracy, and human welfare.

Flowchart: Gandhian Philosophy



Life Sketch of Mahatma Gandhi

Mahatma Gandhi was born on 2 October 1869 in Porbandar, Gujarat. His full name was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. His father Karamchand Gandhi was a political administrator, and his mother Putlibai was deeply religious and greatly influenced Gandhi's moral and spiritual values.

Gandhi went to England to study law and later travelled to South Africa, where he experienced racial discrimination. These experiences had a deep impact on his personality and philosophy. In South Africa, Gandhi developed the principles of non-violence and Satyagraha while fighting against racial injustice and oppression.

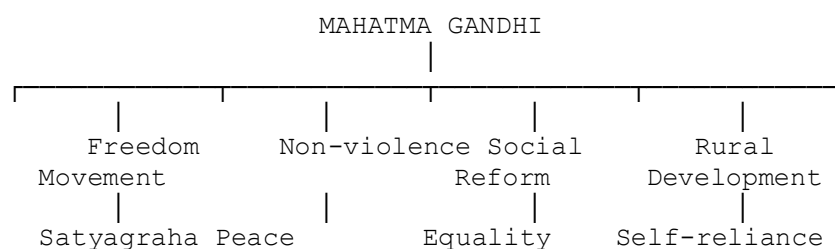
After returning to India in 1915, Gandhi became actively involved in the Indian national movement. He transformed the freedom struggle into a mass movement by involving peasants, workers, women, and ordinary citizens. Gandhi organized important movements such as the Champaran Movement, Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, Salt Satyagraha, and Quit India Movement.

Apart from political activities, Gandhi also worked for:

- Removal of untouchability
- Hindu-Muslim unity
- Women's upliftment
- Promotion of Khadi
- Rural development

He was assassinated on 30 January 1948, but his ideas continue to inspire people across the world.

Flowchart: Life and Contributions of Gandhi



Gandhi's Social Philosophy

Gandhi's social philosophy was deeply rooted in morality, spirituality, and truth. According to Gandhi:

“Truth is God.”

He believed that truth and non-violence are the highest principles of life. Gandhi emphasized that politics should be guided by ethics and morality rather than selfishness and power.

His philosophy stressed:

- Simplicity
- Self-discipline
- Moral purity
- Service to humanity
- Equality
- Social justice

Gandhi believed that modern industrial civilization encourages greed, exploitation, violence, and inequality. Therefore, he advocated a decentralized economy based upon villages, cottage industries, and self-sufficiency.

He also believed that social change should begin from the individual level. According to him, moral transformation of individuals is necessary for social transformation.

Sarvodaya

The concept of Sarvodaya occupies an important place in Gandhi's social philosophy. The word Sarvodaya means:

“Welfare of all” or “Rise of all.”

Gandhi developed this idea after reading John Ruskin's book *Unto This Last*. However, Gandhi interpreted the concept in a broader moral and social sense.

Sarvodaya aims at creating a society based on:

- Equality
- Cooperation
- Justice
- Non-violence
- Collective welfare

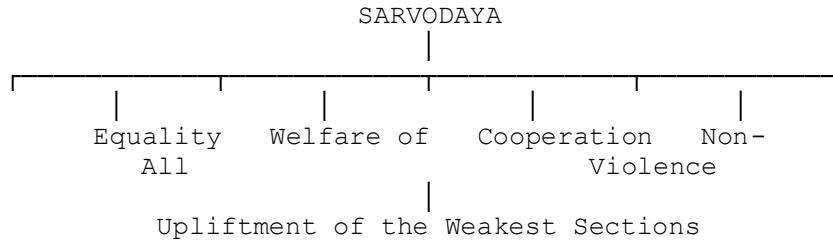
According to Gandhi, true social progress can be achieved only when the weakest and poorest sections of society are uplifted. Therefore, Sarvodaya emphasizes the welfare of peasants, labourers, lower castes, women, and marginalized communities.

Sarvodaya opposed:

- Exploitation
- Violence
- Economic inequality
- Social discrimination
- Class conflict

Gandhi believed that society should function on the basis of cooperation and mutual service rather than competition and greed.

Flowchart: Sarvodaya



Gandhi's Views on Socialism

Gandhi supported social and economic equality, but his socialism differed significantly from Marxist socialism. Gandhian socialism was based upon morality, non-violence, trusteeship, cooperation, and human welfare.

He opposed concentration of wealth and economic exploitation. According to Gandhi, wealthy individuals should use their wealth for the welfare of society. He rejected violent revolution and class conflict because he believed violence creates hatred and destruction.

Instead of class struggle, Gandhi emphasized:

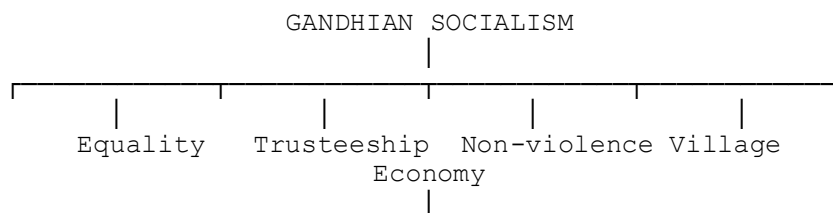
- Moral transformation
- Social responsibility
- Decentralized economy
- Village development
- Self-reliance

Gandhi believed that industrial capitalism creates unemployment, exploitation, and inequality. Therefore, he promoted village industries, Khadi, and small-scale production systems.

His socialism focused on:

- Human welfare
- Economic justice
- Equality
- Peaceful social change

Flowchart: Gandhian Socialism



Trusteeship Theory

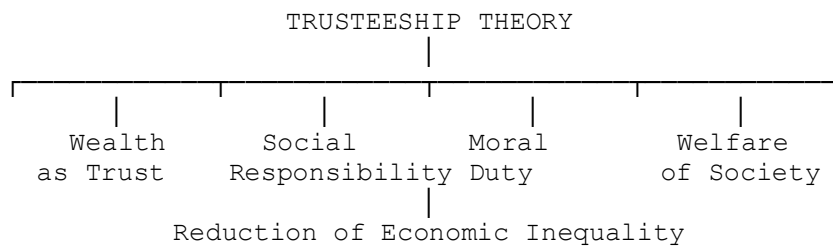
The theory of trusteeship is one of Gandhi's important economic ideas. According to this theory, wealth does not belong exclusively to individuals. Wealthy people should act as trustees of society and use their resources for social welfare.

The theory aimed at reducing economic inequality without violent revolution or confiscation of private property. Trusteeship emphasized:

- Social responsibility
- Moral obligation
- Welfare of society
- Economic equality

Gandhi believed that class harmony could be achieved through cooperation and ethical conduct rather than class conflict.

Flowchart: Trusteeship Theory



Concept of Satyagraha

Satyagraha is one of Gandhi's greatest contributions to social and political thought. The word Satyagraha is derived from:

- Satya = Truth
- Agraha = Firmness or insistence

Thus, Satyagraha means:

“Insistence on truth.”

Gandhi developed Satyagraha as a method of peaceful resistance against injustice, exploitation, and oppression. Satyagraha is based upon truth, non-violence, moral courage, self-sacrifice, and love.

According to Gandhi, violence creates hatred and destruction, whereas non-violence transforms the opponent morally and spiritually.

Satyagraha aimed at:

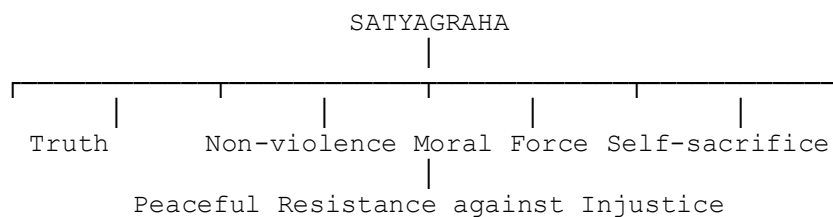
- Moral persuasion
- Peaceful protest
- Social justice
- Resistance against oppression

Features of Satyagraha

The major features of Satyagraha include:

1. Non-violent resistance
2. Faith in truth and justice
3. Self-discipline and sacrifice
4. Moral force instead of physical force
5. Peaceful opposition to injustice

Flowchart: Satyagraha



Non-Violence (Ahimsa)

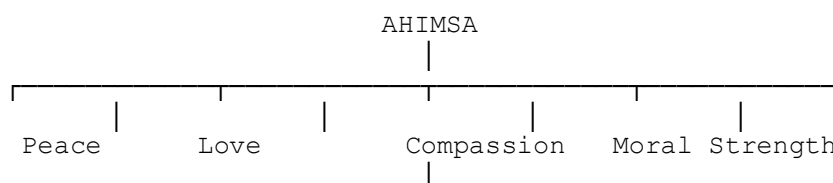
Non-violence or Ahimsa was the foundation of Gandhi's philosophy. Gandhi believed that violence destroys humanity and creates hatred, whereas non-violence promotes peace, cooperation, and moral progress.

According to Gandhi:

“Ahimsa is the highest moral virtue.”

Non-violence does not mean weakness or cowardice. It requires courage, patience, self-control, and moral strength. Gandhi believed that non-violence is the most powerful instrument for social and political transformation.

Flowchart: Ahimsa



Gandhi's Views on Village and Rural Development

Gandhi considered villages as the foundation of Indian society. According to him:

“India lives in villages.”

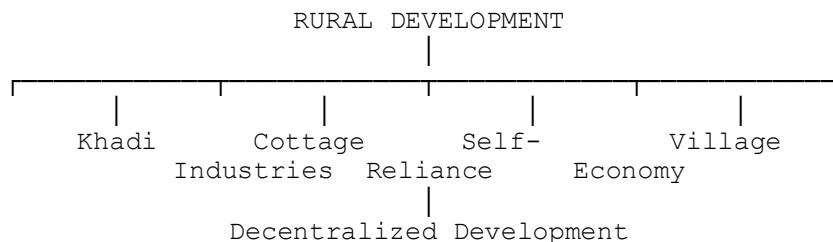
He believed that rural development is essential for national progress and social welfare. Gandhi advocated:

- Village self-government
- Cottage industries
- Khadi
- Rural employment
- Local self-reliance

He opposed excessive industrialization because it leads to exploitation, concentration of wealth, and unemployment.

Gandhi's model of rural development emphasized decentralized economy and sustainable living.

Flowchart: Rural Development



Gandhi and Social Reform

Gandhi strongly opposed social evils such as untouchability, caste discrimination, alcoholism, and communalism. He referred to untouchables as “Harijans,” meaning children of God.

He advocated:

- Equality
- Human dignity
- Social justice
- Women's empowerment
- Religious harmony

Gandhi believed that social reform is essential for national unity and moral progress.

Sociological Significance of Gandhi's Thought

Gandhi's ideas have immense sociological significance because they contributed to:

- Social reform
- National integration
- Peaceful social movements
- Rural development
- Democratic participation
- Human rights

His philosophy inspired several global movements such as:

- Civil Rights Movement
- Anti-colonial movements
- Peace movements
- Environmental movements

Gandhi demonstrated that morality and non-violence can become powerful instruments of social transformation.

Critical Evaluation

Mahatma Gandhi is widely respected for promoting non-violence, peace, social justice, and human dignity. His philosophy inspired millions of people across the world.

However, some critics argue that Gandhi's economic ideas were idealistic and difficult to implement in modern industrial society. Others criticize his views on caste because although he opposed untouchability, he did not completely reject the Varna system.

Despite these criticisms, Gandhi remains one of the most influential thinkers of modern India whose ideas continue to inspire humanity.

Conclusion

Mahatma Gandhi occupies a central place in Indian social thought because he successfully integrated morality, spirituality, politics, and social reform. His philosophy emphasized truth, non-violence, equality, self-reliance, and welfare of all people.

Through concepts such as Sarvodaya, trusteeship, Satyagraha, and Ahimsa, Gandhi provided an alternative model of social transformation based upon peace, morality, and justice. His ideas continue to remain relevant in contemporary society for promoting democracy, harmony, social justice, and human welfare.