INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

M. K. Gandhi: Political Thought

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Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869–1948) was not a systematic political philosopher; he called himself a “practical idealist” and said his life was his message. Yet his ideas on **truth, non-violence, satyagraha, swaraj, the state, decentralisation, trusteeship and sarvodaya** form one of the most original bodies of political thought of the twentieth century. Gandhi offered a **radical critique of modern Western civilisation** and an alternative vision rooted in Indian traditions, while drawing freely on Tolstoy, Ruskin, Thoreau and Christianity. For CC-301, he is the classic case of the question “rejection or creative transformation?”: he **rejected** modern civilisation, but **transformed** both Indian and Western moral ideas into a new theory of politics.

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Life and Works

- Born at **Porbandar** (Gujarat), 2 October 1869; studied law in **London** (1888–91); lawyer and political leader in **South Africa** (1893–1914), where he developed **satyagraha**; returned to India in 1915 and led the national movement (Champaran, Non-cooperation, Civil Disobedience, Quit India).
- Founded ashrams at **Phoenix** and **Tolstoy Farm** (South Africa), **Sabarmati** and **Sevagram (Wardha)**.
- Assassinated on **30 January 1948**.

Major writings:

- ***Hind Swaraj*** (1909) — written on board the *Kildonan Castle* from London to South Africa, in Gujarati, as a dialogue between a "Reader" and an "Editor"; his basic text of political philosophy.
- *Satyagraha in South Africa* (1924–25)
- ***An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*** (1927–29)
- *From Yeravda Mandir* (1930) — the ashram vows
- ***Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place*** (1941)
- Journals: *Indian Opinion*, ***Young India***, *Navajivan*, ***Harijan***.

Influences

- **Indian**: the *Bhagavad Gita* (anasakti, selfless action), Jainism (through **Raychandbhai**), Vaishnavism, Narsinh Mehta's bhajan *Vaishnava Jana To*, the Upanishads.
- **Western**: **Leo Tolstoy** (*The Kingdom of God is Within You*; non-resistance, anarchism), **John Ruskin** (*Unto This Last* — dignity of labour, "the good of the individual is contained in the good of all"; Gandhi translated it as *Sarvodaya*), **Henry David Thoreau** (*Civil Disobedience*), the **Sermon on the Mount**, Edward Carpenter (critique of civilisation).

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- **Experience**: racial discrimination in South Africa, the condition of Indian peasants and the poor.

Truth (Satya)

- Truth is the **supreme value** and the foundation of all Gandhi's thought. *Satya* comes from *sat*, "being": truth is what really exists.
- Gandhi first said "**God is Truth**", but later (1931) preferred "**Truth is God**", because even atheists accept truth; this made his ethics universal.
- **Absolute truth** is beyond human reach; humans can only know **relative truth**. Hence no one has the right to impose his truth on others by violence — a key link between truth and non-violence, and the basis of **tolerance**.
- Truth must be pursued through **experiment**, self-purification and action — his life was a series of "experiments with truth".

Non-violence (Ahimsa)

- Ahimsa is the **means** to truth; truth is the **end**. They are "like the two sides of a coin".
- Ahimsa is not merely the absence of violence (negative) but **active love** and goodwill towards all, including the opponent (positive). It means not hurting by thought, word or deed.
- Gandhi distinguished:
  - **non-violence of the brave** — the highest, based on inner strength and readiness to suffer;
  - **non-violence of the weak** — passive resistance adopted out of helplessness, as a policy;
  - **cowardice** — worse than violence: "where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence".

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- Non-violence is a **law of the human species**, as violence is the law of the brute; it is applicable not only to individuals but also to **groups, nations and international relations**.
- It requires **self-suffering** (*tapasya*) to convert the opponent's heart.
- **Ahimsa**: not only non-killing but the absence of ill-will; in its positive form, love and suffering for others; the non-violence of the brave, not of the weak or coward.
- **Satyagraha**: truth-force or soul-force; resisting injustice by self-suffering, not by inflicting suffering; the aim is to convert the opponent. Techniques: non-cooperation, civil disobedience, fasting, hijrat, picketing, strike. Rules: truthfulness, openness, no hatred, willingness to negotiate, accepting punishment.
- Distinguished from 'passive resistance', which may be a weapon of the weak and can admit violence.

Satyagraha

Meaning

Satyagraha ("holding firmly to truth" / "truth-force" / "soul-force") is the method of resisting injustice through non-violent action and self-suffering. Gandhi coined the term in South Africa (1906–08) to distinguish it from **passive resistance**.

Satyagraha	**Passive resistance**
Weapon of the strong	Weapon of the weak
No hatred; love for the opponent	May involve hatred and intention to harass
Excludes violence in all circumstances	May use violence if possible
Aims to **convert** the opponent	Aims to **coerce** the opponent
Based on truth and self-suffering	Political expedient

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Forms of satyagraha

- **Non-cooperation**: withdrawing co-operation from an unjust system (boycott, strikes, hartals, resignation from offices).
- **Civil disobedience**: deliberate, open, non-violent breaking of unjust laws and acceptance of punishment (e.g., Salt March).
- **Fasting**: a form of self-suffering to appeal to the conscience (not to coerce); to be used only against those bound by love.
- **Hijrat**: voluntary migration from a place of oppression.
- **Picketing**, **dharna**, social boycott (non-violent).

Qualifications of a satyagrahi

A satyagrahi must have faith in truth and non-violence, live a life of **self-discipline** (the ashram vows: truth, non-violence, non-stealing, brahmacharya, non-possession, bread labour, control of palate, fearlessness, equal respect for all religions, swadeshi, removal of untouchability), be ready to suffer, obey leaders, and harbour no ill will.

Satyagraha as a theory of political obligation

Gandhi held that citizens have a **duty to obey just laws** and a **right and duty to disobey unjust laws**, provided they do so openly, non-violently and accept punishment. Thus satyagraha is a theory of **conditional obligation** and a check on the state from below.

Rights and duties

- Gandhi held that rights flow from duties. In his 1947 reply to UNESCO (and earlier to H. G. Wells, who had drafted a charter of rights), he wrote that he had learnt from his illiterate but wise mother that all rights to be deserved and preserved came from duty well done; even the right to live accrues only when we do the duty of citizenship of the world.

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- **Reasoning**: if everyone does his duty, the rights of others are automatically protected; rights claimed without duty lead to conflict and selfishness.
- **Roots**: the Gita's idea of *svadharma* and *nishkama karma*; the Indian duty-centric tradition (compare the Dharmashastra question, UPSC 2024).
- **Contrast with Western liberalism**: Locke and the liberal tradition begin with natural rights; Gandhi begins with duty and community.
- **Critique**: duties can be used to justify hierarchy (Ambedkar's caution); the weak need rights against the powerful. **Relevance**: Fundamental Duties (Article 51A, 1976); the balance of rights and responsibilities in citizenship.

Ends and Means

- Gandhi rejected the idea that the end justifies the means. "**The means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree; and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree.**" (*Hind Swaraj*)
- Impure means corrupt the end: violent revolution produces a violent state. This is a central difference from **Machiavelli**, **Marx** and **Lenin**.
- "Take care of the means and the end will take care of itself."
- "The means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree; and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree" (*Hind Swaraj*).
- Impure means corrupt the end; violence produces only more violence. Hence non-violent satyagraha even for freedom; he withdrew Non-cooperation after Chauri Chaura (1922).
- Contrast: Machiavelli and the Marxists judge means by ends.

Hind Swaraj: Critique of Modern Civilisation

In *Hind Swaraj* (1909), Gandhi argued that India's real enemy was not the British but **modern civilisation** itself:

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- Modern civilisation measures progress by **bodily welfare** and material comfort; it multiplies wants, breeds greed and violence, and has no place for morality or religion. Gandhi called it “a disease” and “Satanic”.
- **Railways** spread plague, famine and evil; **lawyers** profit from quarrels and helped the British to rule; **doctors** encourage indulgence; **machinery** made Europe hungry for colonies and destroyed Indian crafts.
- The **British Parliament** is criticised as a body that does nothing without outside pressure and whose members follow their party rather than conscience.
- India’s true civilisation, based on **self-control, duty and morality** (“good conduct”), is superior.
- **Swaraj** is not merely getting rid of the British (“English rule without the Englishman”) but **self-rule** — rule over oneself.

Scholars (Anthony Parel, Partha Chatterjee, Ashis Nandy) see *Hind Swaraj* as a **critique of modernity** from outside its framework; Partha Chatterjee described Gandhian thought as a “**moment of manoeuvre**” in the development of Indian nationalist thought, standing outside the “thematic” of post-Enlightenment thought.

Gandhi’s critique of modernisation

- *Hind Swaraj* (1909) calls modern civilisation a disease: it makes bodily comfort the object of life and is irreligious.
- **Targets**: railways (spread plague, famine and the British hold), lawyers (profit from quarrels, sustain British rule), doctors (encourage indulgence), machinery and industrialism (exploitation, unemployment, imperialism), parliament (“a sterile woman and a prostitute” — his famous harsh image of the British Parliament).
- **True civilisation**: “that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty” — control of the mind and passions.
- **Alternative**: simple living, village economy, swadeshi, bread labour, limited machines (he accepted the sewing machine).

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- **Interpretations**: Ashis Nandy and Bhikhu Parekh see a critical traditionalist and an anti-colonial critique of modernity; Partha Chatterjee sees the ‘moment of manoeuvre’. Nehru disagreed (letters of October 1945), wanting industrialisation and science.
- **Relevance**: ecological crisis, sustainable development, appropriate technology (Schumacher’s *Small is Beautiful*).

Swaraj

Gandhi used swaraj in several senses:

- **Individual self-rule**: mastery over one’s passions; moral autonomy.
- **National independence**: freedom from foreign rule (Purna Swaraj).
- **Economic swaraj**: freedom from hunger and exploitation for the poorest.
- **Political swaraj**: government by the consent of the people, including the lowliest.
- “The swaraj of my dream is the **poor man’s swaraj**.”

Swaraj: a fuller view and A. J. Parel’s interpretation

- **Meanings**: (i) self-rule — rule over oneself, control of the senses; (ii) home rule — political independence; (iii) swaraj of the poor — economic freedom; (iv) social swaraj — removal of untouchability, communal unity, equality of women.
- “It is swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves” (*Hind Swaraj*); real swaraj comes not by acquiring authority by a few but by the capacity of all to resist authority when abused.
- **A. J. Parel** (editor of *Hind Swaraj*, 1997; author of *Gandhi’s Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony*, 2006) reads swaraj through the four purusharthas: Gandhi restores artha (politics and economics) and kama to a legitimate place, guided by dharma and aimed at moksha — swaraj harmonises the spiritual and the political. Parel also distinguishes political swaraj (home rule, with modern institutions) from spiritual swaraj (self-rule).
- **Conclusion**: swaraj is a multi-dimensional idea joining individual, nation and society — Gandhi’s most original concept.

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The State

Critique of the state

- The state represents **violence in a concentrated and organised form**; “the individual has a soul, but as the state is a **soulless machine**, it can never be weaned from violence”.
- Gandhi feared the increase of state power, even for welfare, because it destroys individuality, the root of progress.
- He has been called a **philosophical anarchist**: the ideal is a **stateless society** of self-regulating individuals — “**enlightened anarchy**“, in which each person rules himself so that he is never a hindrance to his neighbour.
- He endorsed Thoreau’s maxim: “**That government is best which governs the least.**“

The practical ideal: a minimal, non-violent state

- Since a stateless society is not immediately possible, Gandhi accepted a **predominantly non-violent state** with minimum coercion, based on decentralisation and consent.
- His ideal of **Ram Rajya** meant the sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority — justice for the poorest — not a Hindu state.
- Police would be reformers, not oppressors; armies would be minimal or replaced by non-violent “peace brigades” (Shanti Sena).

Gandhi’s views on the State, democracy and anarchism

- **State as violence**: “The State represents violence in a concentrated and organised form” (interview with N. K. Bose, 1934–35). The individual has a soul; the state is a soulless machine.
- **Fear of centralisation**: even well-meaning state power destroys individuality; hence Gandhi distrusted state socialism.

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- **Ideal**: ‘enlightened anarchy’, a stateless society where everyone rules himself; he accepted Thoreau’s view that the government is best which governs least.
- **Practical ideal**: since the ideal is unattainable, a minimal, decentralised, predominantly non-violent state — village republics, police as reformers, a small army.
- **Democracy**: true democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre; it must be worked from below by the people of every village. Democracy means the weakest has the same opportunity as the strongest; it is possible only through non-violence.
- **Relationship to anarchism**: like Tolstoy and Kropotkin, he rejected coercive authority; but his anarchism is spiritual and non-violent, based on self-discipline and duty, not on class war.
- **Critique**: utopian; ignores the need for a strong state for development and security (Nehru and Ambedkar disagreed).

Decentralisation and Gram Swaraj

- “**True democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village.**“
- Each village should be a **self-sufficient, self-governing republic**, with its own panchayat, producing its food, cloth, and meeting basic needs, but interdependent where necessary.
- **Oceanic circle** (Harijan, 1946): society would not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom, but an **oceanic circle** whose centre is the individual, ready to sacrifice for the village, the village for the circle of villages, and so on, until the whole becomes one life of individuals; the outermost circle does not crush the inner circle but gives strength to all.
- This vision influenced **Article 40** (village panchayats) of the Directive Principles and the **73rd Amendment** (1992).

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Village community, gram swaraj and Panchayati Raj

- **Gram swaraj**: “every village will be a republic or panchayat having full powers” (*Harijan*, 1942) — self-sufficient for its vital needs (food, cloth, water, education, health) and interdependent for others.
- **Oceanic circle** (*Harijan*, 1946): society not as a pyramid but as an ever-widening circle, with the individual at the centre, ready to sacrifice for the village, the village for the circle of villages — the outer circle does not crush the inner.
- **Features**: panchayat of five elected annually; non-violent self-defence; khadi and village industries; *nai talim* (basic education); no untouchability.
- **Gram swaraj in local planning**: panchayats with gram sabhas should identify locally available resources and plan their use — this is gram swaraj in action: planning from below, local resource use (swadeshi), people’s participation.
- **Constitutional follow-up**: Article 40 (Directive Principle); the 73rd Amendment (1992) — gram sabha, three-tier panchayats, reservation for women and SC/ST, State Finance Commissions, 29 subjects in the Eleventh Schedule; PESA 1996 gives gram sabhas control over local resources in Fifth Schedule areas.
- **Critique**: Ambedkar called the village “a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism”; panchayats suffer from weak funds, functions and functionaries.

Democracy and Rights

- Democracy is the art and science of mobilising **the entire physical, economic and spiritual resources** of all the people in the service of the common good.
- Real democracy requires **non-violence**; a democracy based on violence cannot protect the weak.
- Gandhi emphasised **duties** over rights: “the true source of rights is duty”; rights flow from duties well performed.

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- He opposed majority tyranny: in matters of conscience, “the law of majority has no place”.

Economic Ideas

- **Swadeshi**: the use of local goods and services; serving one’s immediate neighbours before those far away. It applies to economics, politics and religion.
- **Khadi and village industries**: the charkha symbolised self-reliance, dignity and employment for the masses.
- **Bread labour** (from Tolstoy and Ruskin): everyone must do physical labour for his bread.
- **Machinery**: Gandhi objected not to machinery as such but to the **craze for labour-saving machinery** that throws people out of work and concentrates wealth. He accepted machines that serve the masses (like the Singer sewing machine).
- **Non-possession** (*aparigraha*): limiting wants.
- **Trusteeship**: the rich should regard their surplus wealth as held **in trust** for society, keeping only what they need. If they refuse, non-violent non-cooperation can be used. Trusteeship was a non-violent alternative to both capitalism and class war; a **Trusteeship Formula** (1942, drafted with Kishorelal Mashruwala and others) envisaged legal regulation of ownership and a ceiling on income.
- **Sarvodaya** (“welfare of all”): the good of the individual lies in the good of all; all work has equal value; a life of labour is the life worth living (from Ruskin).

Gandhi’s talisman (1947)

When in doubt, recall the face of the poorest and weakest person you have seen, and ask whether the step you contemplate will be of any use to him — whether it will restore him to control over his own life and destiny.

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Religion and Politics

- “Those who say religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.” For Gandhi, **politics must be spiritualised**; politics without morality is a death-trap.
- By religion he meant not sectarian dogma but **ethical religion** — truth, non-violence and service.
- **Sarva dharma sambhava**: equal respect for all religions; all religions are true and all are imperfect.
- **Hindu–Muslim unity** was a lifelong goal; he gave his life for it.
- This differs from Nehru’s **secularism** (separation of religion and politics), but both rejected a theocratic state.

Caste and Untouchability

- Gandhi called **untouchability** a “sin” and “the greatest blot on Hinduism”; he founded the **Harijan Sevak Sangh** (1932) and the weekly *Harijan* (1933), and made temple entry a cause.
- His early defence of **varnashrama** (varna as hereditary occupation without hierarchy) was criticised by Ambedkar. In later years he advocated **inter-caste marriage** and said he would attend only weddings where one partner was a Dalit.
- His approach relied on **change of heart** among caste Hindus rather than on legal and political power for Dalits.

Women

- Women are **equal** to men in soul and capacity; he opposed child marriage, purdah, dowry, enforced widowhood and the devadasi system.
- He saw women as the embodiment of **non-violence, sacrifice and endurance**, and drew them into the national movement in large numbers.

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- Feminist critics note that he valorised traditional roles (sacrifice, motherhood, chastity) and his own experiments with brahmacharya have been criticised.

Nationalism and Internationalism

- Gandhi's nationalism was **humanist and non-exclusive**: "My patriotism includes the good of humanity"; "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides... I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any."
- He opposed **imperialism** and **racism** everywhere, and argued for a non-violent world order.

Ideological components of Gandhism

- Gandhi said there is no such thing as 'Gandhism'; he only applied eternal truths to daily life. Still, its components are: truth (God is truth, and later truth is God); ahimsa; satyagraha; purity of ends and means; swaraj; sarvodaya; swadeshi; trusteeship; decentralisation and gram swaraj; bread labour; religion as ethics in politics; equality of religions; removal of untouchability; constructive programme.
- **Gandhi and M. N. Roy compared**: both rejected the centralised state and party dictatorship and stressed the individual and moral values; Gandhi's base is spiritual and religious, Roy's is rationalist and scientific humanism (radical humanism, partyless organised democracy).

Critical Assessment

Contributions:

- **Satyagraha**: a new technique of mass political action, used worldwide (Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, Cesar Chavez).
- A unique **moral theory of politics** joining truth, non-violence and ends–means.

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- A **radical critique of modernity**, industrialism and centralised power, anticipating environmentalism and alternative development (E. F. Schumacher's "small is beautiful").
- **Decentralised democracy** and gram swaraj; influence on Panchayati Raj.
- Ethical economics: **trusteeship, sarvodaya, swadeshi**.

Criticisms:

- **Ambedkar**: Gandhi's defence of varna and reliance on change of heart perpetuated caste; the Poona Pact denied Dalits independent political power.
- **Marxists** (M. N. Roy, R. Palme Dutt, E. M. S. Namboodiripad): Gandhism served the interests of the Indian bourgeoisie and landlords; trusteeship protected property; non-violence restrained mass radicalism.
- **Modernists** (including **Nehru**): his rejection of industrialisation and science was impractical for a poor country; *Hind Swaraj* is utopian.
- **Feminist critics**: valorisation of sacrifice and traditional roles.
- **Realists**: non-violence may fail against totalitarian regimes.
- **Religion in politics**: critics argue that his religious idiom (Ram Rajya, Khilafat) unintentionally strengthened communal identities.

Defences: Scholars like **Bhikhu Parekh**, **Raghavan Iyer**, **Joan Bondurant**, **Dennis Dalton** and **Anthony Parel** show the philosophical depth of Gandhi's ideas — for example, Bondurant's analysis of satyagraha as a method of conflict resolution, and Parekh's view of Gandhi as a critical traditionalist who reinterpreted Hinduism.

Gandhi and Nehru: A Comparison

Point	Gandhi	Nehru
Civilisation	Critique of modern civilisation	Champion of modernity, science and technology

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Economy	Village industries, khadi, trusteeship	Planning, heavy industry, socialism
State	Minimal, decentralised	Strong developmental state
Religion	Spiritualised politics; sarva dharma sambhava	Secularism; scientific temper
Method	Satyagraha, moral persuasion	Parliamentary democracy, planning
Common ground	Non-violence (in politics), democracy, anti-imperialism, communal harmony, concern for the poor	

Conclusion

Gandhi's political thought begins with the individual's moral life — truth, non-violence, self-control — and builds outwards to the village, the nation and the world. He rejected modern industrial civilisation and the centralised state, and proposed instead a decentralised, non-violent society based on swaraj, swadeshi, trusteeship and sarvodaya, with satyagraha as the means of resisting injustice. Though many of his economic and social ideas were set aside by independent India, his ethics of non-violent resistance, his critique of modernity and his vision of decentralised democracy remain powerful resources for political theory. For CC-301, Gandhi illustrates **innovative transformation**: drawing on both Indian and Western sources, he created a political philosophy that cannot be reduced to either.

Quick Revision

Concept	Key point
Hind Swaraj	1909; critique of modern civilisation; dialogue form
Truth	"God is Truth" → "Truth is God" (1931)
Ahimsa	Active love; non-violence of the brave
Satyagraha	Truth-force; differs from passive resistance
Forms	Non-cooperation, civil disobedience, fasting, hijrat

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Ends–means	Seed and tree
State	Soulless machine; enlightened anarchy
Gram swaraj	Village republics; oceanic circle (1946)
Economy	Swadeshi, khadi, bread labour, trusteeship, sarvodaya
Influences	Gita, Tolstoy, Ruskin, Thoreau, Raychandbhai

Memory aid: Gandhi's "**5 S**" — **S**atya, **S**atyagraha, **S**waraj, **S**wadeshi, **S**arvodaya.

Exam Practice

Long-answer questions

- Explain Gandhi's concepts of truth and non-violence and their relationship.
- What is satyagraha? Discuss its forms and its significance as a political technique.
- Critically examine Gandhi's critique of modern civilisation in *Hind Swaraj*.
- "Gandhi was a philosophical anarchist." Discuss his views on the state.
- Explain Gandhi's ideas of decentralisation and gram swaraj.
- Discuss the theory of trusteeship and its relevance today.
- Compare the views of Gandhi and Ambedkar on caste.

Short-answer questions

- Distinguish satyagraha from passive resistance.
- What did Gandhi mean by "Truth is God"?
- What is the "oceanic circle"?
- What is Gandhi's talisman?
- What is sarvodaya and where does the term come from?
- What did Gandhi say about ends and means?
- What are the three kinds of non-violence?

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- What did Gandhi mean by swaraj?
- What is bread labour?
- What was Gandhi’s view of machinery?

Multiple-choice questions

- **Hind Swaraj was written in:** (a) 1906 (b) 1909 (c) 1915 (d) 1921. *Answer: (b)*
- **Gandhi translated Ruskin’s *Unto This Last* as:** (a) Hind Swaraj (b) Sarvodaya (c) Anasakti Yoga (d) Navajivan. *Answer: (b)*
- **“The state is a soulless machine” was said by:** (a) Nehru (b) Gandhi (c) Lohia (d) Ambedkar. *Answer: (b)*
- **Which is NOT a form of satyagraha?** (a) Fasting (b) Hijrat (c) Sabotage (d) Civil disobedience. *Answer: (c)*
- **The idea of the “oceanic circle” relates to:** (a) Foreign policy (b) Decentralised village republics (c) Trusteeship (d) Truth. *Answer: (b)*
- **Match the following:** (A) Tolstoy – (B) Ruskin – (C) Thoreau – (D) Raychandbhai. (1) Civil Disobedience (2) Unto This Last (3) The Kingdom of God is Within You (4) Jain influence. Correct code: (a) A-3, B-2, C-1, D-4 (b) A-2, B-3, C-1, D-4 (c) A-3, B-1, C-2, D-4 (d) A-4, B-2, C-1, D-3. *Answer: (a)*
- **Assertion (A):** Gandhi held that no one may impose truth on others by force. **Reason (R):** Human beings can know only relative truth. (a) Both true, R explains A (b) Both true, R does not explain A (c) A true, R false (d) A false, R true. *Answer: (a)*
- **Gandhi’s theory of trusteeship applies to:** (a) Land only (b) Surplus wealth of the rich (c) State property (d) Temple funds. *Answer: (b)*
- **Which Directive Principle reflects Gandhi’s ideas on village government?** (a) Article 39 (b) Article 40 (c) Article 44 (d) Article 51. *Answer: (b)*
- **“The moment of manoeuvre” is a phrase used for Gandhian thought by:** (a) Bhikhu Parekh (b) Partha Chatterjee (c) Ashis Nandy (d) Rajni Kothari. *Answer: (b)*

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Previous Years' Questions

These are questions actually set in earlier examinations. UPSC questions are from the Civil Services Mains, PSIR Optional, Paper I; the year is given in brackets. Gandhi is the most frequently examined Indian thinker in PSIR Paper I.

UPSC Civil Services Mains (PSIR)

- What are the major components of Modern Indian Political Thought? Examine them with reference to Gandhi and M. N. Roy. (2001)
- Comment: "The true source of right is duty. If we all discharge our duties, rights will not be far to seek." — M. K. Gandhi. (2002)
- Explain Gandhi's ideas regarding State and highlight their relationship with modern democracy and principles of anarchism. (2006)
- Comment: "Real rights are a result of performance of duty." — Mahatma Gandhi. (2008)
- Examine the Gandhian idea of village community as an ideal unit of self-governance. (2012)
- Comment: Gandhi's views on State. (2015)
- Examine Gandhi's critique of 'Modernisation'. (2016)
- Comment: M. K. Gandhi's concept of Swaraj. (2019)
- Explicate the ideological components of Gandhism. (2020)
- "The Panchayats with Gram Sabhas should be so organised as to identify the resources locally available…" Examine this statement in the context of Gram Swaraj. (2022)
- Discuss Gandhi's approach to property in relation to trusteeship. (2026)

University examinations

- Evaluate Gandhi's notion of Swaraj with special reference to A. J. Parel. (University of Delhi, B.A. (Hons.), Indian Political Thought–II)

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- Examine Gandhi’s philosophy on ‘ends and means’. (Uttarakhand Open University, M.A. Political Science, MAPS-201, June 2024)
- Write a short note on Gandhi’s view on non-violence and satyagraha. (University of Delhi, B.A. (Hons.), Indian Political Thought–II)
- Comparatively examine the views of Nehru and Gandhi on religion and secularism. (University of Delhi, B.A. (Hons.), Indian Political Thought–II)

Answer pointers: Gandhi’s approach to property and trusteeship (UPSC 2026)

- **Problem**: Gandhi rejected both capitalist accumulation and state socialism’s expropriation by force; both violate ahimsa.
- **Trusteeship**: the rich hold wealth beyond their reasonable needs in trust for society; they keep a reasonable commission and use the rest for public good. Based on *aparigraha* (non-possession) and the Isha Upanishad ideal of enjoying through renunciation.
- **Method**: change of heart through persuasion; if that fails, non-violent non-cooperation; the state may regulate, but legislation should come from below. The ‘Practical Trusteeship Formula’ (1942, drafted with Kishorelal Mashruwala and Pyarelal) allowed for state regulation of income and ceilings.
- **Link to other ideas**: bread labour, swadeshi, sarvodaya, the Talisman (the poorest person test), decentralised village economy.
- **Critique**: Ambedkar and Marxists saw it as protecting the rich; utopian about human nature. **Relevance**: corporate social responsibility (Companies Act 2013), ESG, stakeholder capitalism, Vinoba’s Bhoodan.
- Conclude: trusteeship is a moral, non-violent alternative to both capitalism and communism — an innovative Indian contribution.

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Suggested Readings

- M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, ed. Anthony J. Parel (Cambridge, 1997; centenary ed. 2009).
- M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography* (Navajivan); *Constructive Programme* (1941).
- Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy: A Critical Examination* (Macmillan, 1989).
- Raghavan Iyer, *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi* (OUP, 1973).
- Joan V. Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict* (Princeton, 1958).
- Dennis Dalton, *Mahatma Gandhi: Nonviolent Power in Action* (Columbia, 1993).
- Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (Zed/OUP, 1986).
- Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy* (OUP, 1983).

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