

Relevance of Gandhi's Ideas Today

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INTRODUCTION

The social justice enshrined in the Constitution, which serves as the pillar of Indian society, is inclusive and based on the concept of *Sarvodaya*—the welfare of all. Since *Sarvodaya* signifies the upliftment of everyone, it is evident that India's progress lies in the well-being of all its people. This idea was central to Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy, and he played a significant role in uplifting grassroots communities. Gandhiji sought solutions to India's problems, and among them, the concept of *Gram Swarajya* remains unforgettable. Since India is fundamentally a nation of villages, the credit for envisioning a sustainable development model for rural India goes to Gandhiji.

How can we forget Mahatma Gandhi, who awakened Indians from the slumber of British slavery? Many believed the British were invincible, but Gandhiji, with his slogan "You, the seven Indians, are freedom-loving," instilled the spirit of independence. Through his unwavering commitment to truth and non-violence, he became the lifeblood of India's freedom struggle. Though Gandhi's physical presence faded like camphor burning before our eyes, his legacy lingers like an eternal fragrance. Even today, he lives on—through thousands of poems, stories, statues, and films in numerous languages across the world. Gandhi is more relevant today than ever. When national crises arise or disasters strike, his ideals are remembered.

After independence, the value of life in India has diminished due to various factors—globalization, population explosion, obsession with the English language, focus on numerical education, commercialization of education, corruption among voters, unprincipled politics, rampant dishonesty, blind modernization, caste divisions, communalism, gender discrimination, and terrorism. These issues continue to plague modern India, making Gandhian ideas increasingly relevant. His principles not only offer solutions for India but also serve as a beacon of hope for global challenges.

Social Justice

Meaning of Social Justice

Social justice aims to integrate socially, economically, and politically disadvantaged communities into the mainstream by providing necessary resources and implementing policies that empower weaker sections of society.

Gandhiji's Perspective on Social Justice

Mahatma Gandhi dedicated his life to uplifting the oppressed. He initiated numerous programs for the exploited, the downtrodden, and the *Harijans*, particularly in his later years. His concepts of *Sarvodaya* and *Gram Swarajya* sought to empower grassroots communities, and his vision of self-reliance remains central to India's development.

Swarajya

Gandhiji defined *Swarajya* as a form of governance accepted by the people of India—where justice prevails for all. *Hind Swarajya* means "rule of all," emphasizing a just and equitable society. He had immense faith in village self-reliance, but today, that dream remains unfulfilled. Political negligence, the plight of farmers, and rural-to-urban migration have weakened village self-governance. Factionalism, political chaos, oppression of women, alcoholism, and ignorance have turned democracy into a state of disorder. Political degradation has engulfed the nation, reminding us of Gandhi's teachings.

Participation of Women

Gandhi firmly believed that social justice should begin at home. He advocated for gender equality, emphasizing that men and women are equal in rights, opportunities, and responsibilities. He exemplified this belief in his own life, treating his wife, Kasturba, as an equal partner. At the age of 37, he embraced celibacy and continued to support her involvement in the national movement. Kasturba played a significant role in the women's movement

in Africa, adopted a *Harijan* girl, and embraced poverty in service of humanity.

Gandhiji opposed calling women weak, insisting that they are symbols of sacrifice, patience, and resilience. However, while women have gained political freedom today, the rising violence, gender discrimination, female foeticide, and abuse in society indicate that the respect Gandhi envisioned for women is yet to be fully realized.

Peace and Non-Violence

Gandhi made peace and non-violence the foundation of his philosophy. Through these principles, he secured India's freedom. He emphasized that truth is unattainable without non-violence, declaring that they are two sides of the same coin. He stated, "*I have not taught any new idea or principle. Truth and love are universal; where there is love, there is God.*"

However, in today's world, peace is diminishing while violence escalates. Humanity seems to be caught in an illusion, unaware that the very fabric of life is at risk. Gandhian principles offer a timeless remedy for achieving world peace.

Sarvodaya Vision

During his early years in South Africa, Gandhi was profoundly influenced by John Ruskin's book *Unto This Last*. Three key ideas from this book shaped his vision of *Sarvodaya*:

1. The welfare of an individual is linked to the welfare of all.
2. The work of a farmer is as valuable as that of a lawyer.
3. Labor based on hard work is the most noble.

Inspired by these principles, Gandhi envisioned a society where the prosperity of the last person signified the prosperity of all. However, today's consumerist culture has widened the gap between the rich and the poor. While one section struggles for a meal, another indulges in excess. Gandhi's ideals remind us that a just society must prioritize equality.

Swadeshi

Gandhiji's call for *Swadeshi* played a crucial role in India's independence. He believed in self-reliance and economic independence. However, today,

Indians are increasingly dependent on foreign goods, turning the country into a marketplace for global capitalist interests. If this trend continues, India risks becoming a colony of economic imperialism once again.

Villages, Agriculture, and Cottage Industries

India, home to over six lakh villages, has traditionally thrived on agriculture. In the past, villages enjoyed social harmony, and agriculture was central to life. After independence, agriculture should have been prioritized as a national craft, attracting youth and educated individuals. However, industrialization was given greater emphasis, sidelining rural development. As a result, village industries declined, and rural populations migrated to cities in search of livelihood. The agricultural sector now struggles in the shadow of urban industrial expansion.

Cottage Industries

Gandhiji strongly encouraged cottage industries such as putty making, pottery, and fan making. These small-scale industries, which once sustained village economies, are now disappearing due to rapid urbanization and the rise of large industries. The shift from small-scale to large-scale industries has undermined Gandhiji's vision, turning his dream into a distant memory.

There is no subject Gandhi did not contemplate. His thoughts are as vast as an ocean—timeless, limitless, and universal. His ideals—non-violence, nationalism, village self-governance, decentralization of power, self-reliance, secularism, *Swaraj*, women's empowerment, education, and prohibition of alcohol—remain essential for today's troubled society. His philosophy continues to inspire intellectuals and offers solutions to contemporary problems. A country that ignores Gandhian principles risks moral and ethical bankruptcy. His vision of a just and peaceful India is more relevant today than ever before.

CONCLUSION

Gandhi's contributions to uplifting the oppressed, particularly through *Sarvodaya*, remain significant. In Karnataka, the Congress-led government has made efforts to realize his vision through the *Gram Swaraj Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act 2015*, ensuring comprehensive rural development. India,

as a diverse democracy, must continue integrating economically, socially, and politically backward communities into the mainstream. The Congress government in Karnataka has implemented welfare schemes for minorities, backward classes, and Dalits, reflecting *Ahinda* ideology. These efforts, championed by Siddaramaiah, have been termed *Sidda Social Justice* or *Sidda Socialism*. It appears that Congress is positioning itself as the guardian of marginalized communities.

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