

Key concepts

- Mahatma Gandhi is arguably the most famous follower of Advaita Vedanta, one of the classical Hindu paths to self-realisation. The name, 'Advaita' means 'non-duality', signifying that this is the path for those who see the true self (Atman) as the same as the infinite metaphysical reality (Brahman).
- He also developed the religious concept of satyagraha which ultimately influenced his political philosophy. This was the belief that truth has an inherent force and that those who speak and act with truth have a particular strength and authority because they are being truthful. This influenced his political campaign since truth force would lose its moral coherence if it degenerated into violence and would no longer be true. He re-interpreted the concept of ahimsa and used it politically. In this context, he was influenced by the pacifist teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount to practice agape love, and to turn the other cheek when assaulted.
- His allegorical interpretation of the Bhagavad Gita's advice to join battle for what is right influenced many – the battle is not outside, but within each person. The enemy to be fought against and overcome is individual greed and self-interest. This reflects his interpretation and application of brahmacharya. His interpretation of the ashramas, especially the brahmacharya stage influenced many Hindus. The ideal life for a brahmacharya is being without possessions and the desire for possessions. Living according to need not want.
- Gandhi saw the impact of Colonial Rule on the livelihood and well-being of India and Indians. Therefore in 1906 he finally called for Indian self-rule or Swaraj. Gandhi's vision for the new national identity of India was profoundly universalist and this came from his religious belief of sarvodaya. This is why he opposed partition.
- He spoke out against the mistreatment of women and the universal discrimination against the Dalits. He vehemently rejected Casteism and untouchability as not only against Sarvodaya, but also not part of Hinduism, despite their entrenchment in Indian society. Gandhi's Sarvodaya movement, advocated equal dignity for all irrespective of their trade, valued manual work as divine action, and viewed collective flourishing as key to individual flourishing.

Key quotes

One becomes fit to attain Brahman when he or she possesses a purified intellect and firmly restrains the senses, abandoning sound and other objects of the senses, casting aside attraction and aversion. Such a person relishes solitude, eats lightly, controls body, mind, and speech, is ever engaged in meditation, and practices dispassion. Free from egotism, violence, arrogance, desire, possessiveness of property, and selfishness, such a person, situated in tranquillity, is fit for union with Brahman (i.e. realization of the Absolute Truth as Brahman). **Bhagavad Gita Chapter 18: 52-53.**

Seeing thine own duty thou shouldst not shrink from it: for there is no higher good. **Bhagavad Gita Chapter 2 verse 31.**

The word Satya is derived from Sat, which means 'Being'. Nothing is or exists in reality except Truth. That is why Sat or Truth is perhaps the most important name of God. In fact, it is more correct to say that Truth is God than to say God is Truth. **Gandhi M.K. 'The selected works Vol. 5', Independently Published, (2018).**

What I want, what I am looking for and what I should delight in dying for is the eradication of untouchability, root and branch... If untouchability is rooted out it will only purge Hinduism of a terrible blot, but its repercussions will be world-wide; my fight against untouchability is a fight against the impurity in humanity. **Tendulkar, D 'Mahatma', Publications Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of the Govt of India, (2016).**

Key words

Advaita Vedanta	Atman	swaraj	brahmacharya	non-duality	casteism
Bhagavad Gita	Sarvodaya	Brahman	untouchability	ahimsa	

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key arguments/debates

Some would argue that Gandhi's contributions were more political than religious.
Others would argue that his politics were deeply rooted in his religious beliefs.
Some would argue that his achievements must be taken as a whole.

Key questions

Do Gandhi's successes outweigh his failures?
What was Gandhi's greatest contribution to Hinduism?
What was his greatest failure?