

Influence of Gandhian Thought on the Framing of the Indian Constitution

*¹Nur Mohammad Al Aman

*¹Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Chhamaria Anchalik College, Chhamaria, Assam, India.

Abstract

The Indian Constitution, a comprehensive document reflecting the aspirations of a newly independent nation, was significantly influenced by the moral and philosophical ideals of Mahatma Gandhi. Though not a formal member of the Constituent Assembly, Gandhi's ideas rooted in truth, non-violence, decentralization, swaraj, and upliftment of the marginalized deeply permeated the minds of many constitution-makers. This paper explores how Gandhian philosophy played a vital role in shaping key constitutional principles such as fundamental rights, directive principles of state policy, village panchayats, and the socio-economic objectives of justice and equality. The study also evaluates the extent and limitations of Gandhian influence in the final draft of the Constitution.

Keywords: Gandhism, Indian Constitution, Swaraj, Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles.

Introduction

Adopted in 1950, the Constitution of India stands as the supreme law of the land, laying the groundwork for democratic governance and social justice. While it draws upon the constitutional traditions of nations such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and Ireland, its moral and philosophical essence is deeply anchored in India's own cultural and spiritual heritage. Among the most influential indigenous inspirations is the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation. His enduring principles truth (satya), non-violence (ahimsa), Swaraj, and Sarvodaya shaped not only the freedom movement but also the socio-political consciousness of the country's leadership.

Though Gandhi did not serve as a formal member of the Constituent Assembly, his values guided many of its key architects, including Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Sardar Patel, and even Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who, despite ideological differences, were influenced by Gandhi's vision of an equitable and self-reliant India. His advocacy for decentralized governance, ethical leadership, a village-based economy, and upliftment of marginalized communities significantly shaped constitutional debates on how to build an independent, pluralistic, and democratic nation.

Gandhi's influence is most clearly reflected in the Directive Principles of State Policy (Part IV), which outline goals for social and economic justice. Provisions such as Village Panchayats (Article 40), promotion of cottage industries (Article 43), public health (Article 47), and prohibition echo his philosophy, even if they remain non-justiciable. Later, his emphasis on duties as well as rights inspired the incorporation of Fundamental Duties (Part IVA) through the 42nd Amendment in 1976. While not always explicitly credited, Gandhi's ideals remain woven into the very fabric of India's constitutional vision.

This study examines the depth and nature of Gandhian influence on the Indian Constitution, exploring how his ideas were interpreted, adapted, and institutionalized by the

framers. It identifies key provisions shaped by his philosophy, evaluates their implementation, and considers their relevance in modern governance. At a time when India strives to balance rapid modernization with social justice and sustainable development, reflecting on Gandhi's constitutional legacy offers valuable guidance for the present and future.

Significance of the Study

- **Understanding Ideological Foundations:** By highlighting the Gandhian roots of the Indian Constitution, this study reveals how truth, non-violence, and ethical governance provided an indigenous alternative to purely Western constitutional models. Recognizing these influences deepens our understanding of the Constitution's spirit and intent.
- **Linking Past Ideals with Present Governance:** In an era when democratic institutions face challenges, Gandhian principles remain a source of moral and ethical direction. This work connects the foundational values of the Constitution to current governance issues such as corruption, inequality, and power decentralization.
- **Highlighting Rural Governance:** Gandhi's vision of Gram Swaraj underpins India's approach to rural development. Article 40's provision for village panchayats directly reflects his thinking, underscoring the need for empowered, self-reliant rural communities.
- **Reinforcing the Relevance of Directive Principles:** Although not legally enforceable, the Directive Principles hold moral authority, encapsulating Gandhian ideals like social justice, prohibition, promotion of village industries, and support for the poor. This study encourages renewed political commitment to these guiding values.
- **Influence on Political Ethics:** Gandhi's call for purity in public life, service to the poor, and leadership by moral

example forms the ethical foundation of a healthy democracy. This research reminds political leaders and institutions of their moral responsibilities, essential for sustaining public trust and institutional integrity.

Objectives

- i). To explore the fundamental principles of Mahatma Gandhi concerning statecraft and governance.
- ii). To evaluate how Gandhian philosophy is reflected in the provisions of the Indian Constitution.
- iii). To assess the practical application and contemporary relevance of these principles in modern India.

Review of Related Literature

Granville Austin (1966), in *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*, argued that the Indian Constitution strikes a careful balance between individual rights and the objectives of a welfare state. He observed that the Directive Principles of State Policy resonate with Gandhian ideas particularly in promoting the welfare of weaker sections, encouraging decentralization, and ensuring socio-economic justice. Although Austin primarily approached the subject from the perspective of liberal constitutionalism, he acknowledged Gandhi's philosophical imprint on several constitutional ideals.

Raghavan Iyer (1973), in *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, provided a detailed analysis of Gandhian philosophy and its influence on political ethics and governance. Iyer stressed that Gandhi's concept of Swaraj extended beyond mere political independence to encompass moral self-rule. This moral dimension, he argued, shaped the ethical tone of the Constitution, notably through the Directive Principles and the emphasis on public duty.

B.R. Ambedkar's writings and speeches during the Constituent Assembly debates reveal a complex and sometimes contentious relationship with Gandhi. While Ambedkar rejected certain Gandhian views on caste and varna, he supported the principles of decentralization and inclusive governance. The constitutional provisions on panchayats and moral duties thus reflect a negotiated middle ground between Gandhian idealism and Ambedkarite pragmatism.

Bipan Chandra, in *India after Independence*, explored the ideological interplay between Nehruvian socialism and Gandhian rural idealism. He noted that although Nehru favored centralized planning, the constitutional incorporation of Panchayati Raj and rural industries acknowledged Gandhi's influence particularly among Congress members and grassroots leaders.

Jawaharlal Nehru's Constituent Assembly speeches further illustrate Gandhi's enduring influence. Nehru's advocacy for equality, secularism, and peaceful coexistence closely aligned with Gandhian principles. His strong support for the Directive Principles underscored the moral and philosophical debt owed by the Constitution's framers to Gandhi's vision.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative and analytical approach, examining the philosophical and ideological impact of Mahatma Gandhi on the Indian Constitution. The study relies primarily on secondary sources, including the Constituent Assembly Debates, Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, scholarly books, academic journals, and legal commentaries. The analysis follows a thematic content method to identify and trace Gandhian principles such as non-violence, Gram

Swaraj, trusteeship, and moral governance within constitutional provisions, particularly the Directive Principles of State Policy, Article 40, and the Fundamental Duties. The research is descriptive in nature and does not involve fieldwork or empirical surveys.

Analysis

The Indian Constitution is often called a blend of Western democratic ideals and India's own philosophical traditions. Among the deepest influences on its moral and ideological foundation is Mahatma Gandhi. While Gandhi was not a formal member of the Constituent Assembly, his legacy left a strong imprint on many of the Constitution's framers and shaped the vision they adopted for the Republic of India.

Gandhi saw Swaraj (self-rule) as more than just political freedom from colonial rule. For him, it meant a broader sense of social, moral, and economic self-determination. This idea comes through in the Directive Principles of State Policy especially Articles 40 (village panchayats), 43 (cottage industries), and 47 (public health and prohibition) which reflect his commitment to rural self-reliance, economic decentralization, and social justice. These principles, though not legally enforceable, act as a key moral compass for governance, rooted in the concept of Sarvodaya, or the upliftment of all.

One of the clearest reflections of Gandhian ideals is in Article 40, which directs the State to strengthen village-level governance through Panchayati Raj Institutions. Gandhi strongly supported Gram Swaraj, the idea that each village should function as a self-sufficient republic. Although this vision was slow to take root in the early decades, it gained constitutional backing with the 73rd Amendment Act (1992), which formally established the Panchayati Raj system. This shows how Gandhi's vision was eventually embedded into India's democratic framework.

Gandhi's influence is also seen in the push for cottage and village industries in the Directive Principles. He believed in the dignity of labor and in self-employment through Khadi and village-based enterprises. Article 43 captures these ideas, and they shaped early rural economic policies. However, industrialization and globalization over time have diluted this vision, revealing a gap between philosophical ideals and practical policies.

The Constitution's moral and ethical tone also reflects Gandhian thinking. Although Gandhi placed greater importance on duties than rights, the Constitution initially emphasized Fundamental Rights. The 42nd Amendment in 1976 added Fundamental Duties in Part IVA, many of which echo Gandhian values respect for national symbols, promoting harmony, protecting the environment, and a spirit of service. This was an important posthumous inclusion of Gandhi's ethical vision into the framework of citizenship.

Gandhi's ideals of non-violence, harmony, and moral leadership are also subtly present in the Preamble, which speaks of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity. While not directly credited to Gandhi, these principles align with his worldview. Indian courts have often referred to Gandhian principles in key rulings on social justice, environmental issues, and human dignity, showing how his legacy continues to guide constitutional interpretation.

Yet, the real-world application of Gandhian ideals remains incomplete and often symbolic. Prohibition, for instance, is constitutionally encouraged but unevenly enforced. Similarly, Gram Swaraj has not been fully realized due to bureaucratic control, limited resources, and lack of political will. This

shows the difficulty of turning vision into reality in a rapidly modernizing nation.

In short, while the Indian Constitution does not make Gandhian thought its central pillar, it clearly weaves many of his values into its moral and guiding principles. The real challenge is not in recognizing his influence, but in bringing his principles back into active practice in governance, law, and public life. In an era marked by inequality, moral decline, and rural hardship, Gandhi's ideas still offer a powerful and necessary guide for reform.

Findings

- **Gandhian Ideals in Directive Principles:** The Directive Principles of State Policy (Part IV) in the Indian Constitution strongly reflect Gandhian values, particularly in promoting social justice, rural development, prohibition, and the encouragement of cottage industries. Although these principles are not legally enforceable, they serve as a moral guide inspired by Gandhi's vision of a fair and harmonious society.
- **Rural Self-Governance (Gram Swaraj):** Article 40 of the Constitution instructs the state to establish Village Panchayats, directly mirroring Gandhi's concept of Gram Swaraj a decentralized and participatory system of rural self-rule. This demonstrates the Constitution's effort to embed Gandhi's belief in empowering rural communities.
- **Ethical and Moral Governance:** Gandhi's principles of truth, non-violence, and moral responsibility shaped the ethical foundation of the Constitution. His influence is evident in the Fundamental Duties (Part IVA, introduced in 1976), which encourage citizens to uphold national values, embrace diversity, and serve the nation conscientiously.
- **Economic and Social Policy:** Gandhi's vision of economic self-reliance, trusteeship, and support for cottage industries subtly informed constitutional measures promoting equitable resource distribution and protection for vulnerable groups reflecting his goal of building an inclusive and sustainable economy.
- **Lasting Impact on Law and Policy:** Even decades after independence, Gandhian ideals continue to influence judicial interpretations and government policies, especially in areas like environmental protection, prohibition, rural development, and social welfare. This underlines the enduring relevance of his philosophy in India's constitutional and legal framework.

Suggestions

- **Stronger Implementation of Directive Principles:** The government should take more decisive legislative and policy actions to bring the Directive Principles of State Policy into practice, especially those linked to rural development, prohibition, and the promotion of village industries key elements of Gandhian philosophy.
- **Empowering Panchayati Raj Institutions:** To fulfill Gandhi's vision of Gram Swaraj, local self-government bodies need greater autonomy, financial backing, and administrative authority so they can operate independently and effectively.
- **Integrating Gandhian Thought in Education:** School and college curricula should include Gandhian philosophy, ethics, and its constitutional significance, helping young people develop awareness and values rooted in his ideals.
- **Boosting Rural and Cottage Industries:** Policies should

actively support Khadi, handicrafts, and other rural-based industries that Gandhi championed, creating sustainable jobs and reducing the need for migration to cities.

- **Fostering Ethical Leadership and Citizenship:** Political leaders and public servants should be encouraged to uphold truth, non-violence, and integrity, fostering a transparent, accountable democracy that reflects Gandhian values.

Conclusion

The Indian Constitution, though primarily shaped by liberal democratic principles and modern legal structures, carries a clear and lasting imprint of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy. While Gandhi did not take part directly in drafting the Constitution, his ideas on non-violence, self-governance, moral responsibility, and rural development deeply influenced many of its framers. His vision of Gram Swaraj, Sarvodaya (welfare of all), and trusteeship is reflected in important constitutional provisions, particularly the Directive Principles of State Policy and the recognition of village panchayats.

Gandhi's focus on ethical governance and social responsibility continues to guide India's political debates and judicial interpretations. Yet, several of his ideals remain only partially implemented, especially in areas like rural development, decentralization, and moral leadership. In today's fast-changing economic and social landscape, returning to Gandhian values can help build a more inclusive, fair, and harmonious society.

The influence of Gandhian thought on the Indian Constitution is therefore not just a chapter in history it is a living legacy that calls for renewed dedication in governance, policy-making, and civic life.

References

1. Austin G. *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*. Oxford University Press; 1966.
2. Iyer RN. *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*. Oxford University Press; 1973.
3. Chandra B. *India after Independence (1947–2000)*. Penguin Books; 2000.
4. Mehta US. *Gandhi and the Common Good: The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*. Columbia University Press; 2011.
5. Shukla VN. *Constitution of India*. Eastern Book Company; 2013.
6. Jain MP. *Indian Constitutional Law*. LexisNexis Butterworths Wadhwa; 2014.
7. Ambedkar BR. *Speeches in the Constituent Assembly*. Government of India Publication; 1950.
8. Gandhi MK. *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*. Navajivan Publishing House; 1946.