

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2020 · 20 marks

Explicate the ideological components of Gandhism

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 Note that Gandhism is not a systematic doctrine (**Humayun Kabir**: a practical idealist) yet forms a coherent ethical-political whole.

R2 Anchor the answer in its foundations — Satya and Ahimsa — from which every component flows.

Body flow

Ethical base — inseparability of means & ends (truth as goal, non-violence as means) → Satyagraha — active soul-force; "hate the sin, not the sinner" → **Dashrath Singh**, *Gandhism: A Quest for New Civilization* — Sarvodaya, Swaraj, Ahimsa, Swadeshi → Swaraj — self-rule with self-restraint → Sarvodaya — from **Ruskin's** *Unto This Last*: progress of all → economic core — Trusteeship & Swadeshi → critique of modern civilisation — **Tolstoy, Thoreau, Ruskin** → **Ram Rajya** — decentralised moral self-rule, not theocracy

Counter-view

Often read as unsystematic and anti-modern — resting on moral conversion and a rejection of industrial civilisation rather than on institutional power.

Conclusion routes

R1 Gandhism is a comprehensive ideology where ethics, economics and politics are inseparable.

R2 Its enduring claim is a moral alternative to the coercive modern state.

Gandhism is not a systematic political philosophy in the conventional sense. As Humayun Kabir noted, Gandhi was a practical idealist deeply aware of mass psychology rather than a theorist building abstract doctrine.

The foundation of Gandhism rests on the inseparability of means and ends. For Gandhi, truth is the goal and non-violence is only legitimate means to reach it. Satyagraha - truth force or soul force - is the political instrument this produces. It is not passive submission; it is active, disciplined resistance grounded in courage and moral conviction. "Hate the sin and not the sinner" captures this distinction: the opponent is not an enemy to be destroyed but a person to be converted.

Dashrath Singh, in *Gandhism: A Quest for New Civilization*, identified Sarvodaya, Swaraj, Ahimsa, social harmony & Swadeshi as the core elements. Swaraj is not mere transfer of British power to Indian hands; it is self-rule combined with self-restraint. Sarvodaya Gandhi's rendering of John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, means progress of all, not benefit of a few.

The economic dimension is expressed through Trusteeship and Swadeshi. Wealthy individuals are not absolute owners but trustees of social resources, obligated to use wealth for public good. Swadeshi demands self-reliance and local rootedness, opposing the exploitative logic of colonial markets and industrial homogenisation.

Underlying all this is Gandhi's critique of modern civilisation. He rejected utilitarianism for reducing persons to animal appetite, mechanisation for destroying ecological & human balance & the endless multiplication of wants. He drew on dissenting Western thinkers - Leo Tolstoy, Henry David Thoreau and Ruskin - alongside Indian ethical traditions, allowing him to challenge empire without retreating into cultural isolation.

His political ideal, Ram Rajya was not theocratic; it meant decentralised moral self-rule, minimal coercion and justice for all - an alternative to the modern coercive state.