

## From Swaraj to Social Contract: Perspectives on Political Education by Gandhi and Rousseau

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### Abstract

In the realm of political thought, Mahatma Gandhi and Jean-Jacques Rousseau stand as towering figures whose ideas have profoundly shaped our understanding of governance, individual liberty, and social responsibility. While separated by time and cultural context, their philosophies share a common thread: a deep concern for the human condition and a belief in the transformative power of education. This article explores the interconnectedness of their ideas, focusing on how their concepts of Swaraj (self-rule) and the Social Contract have influenced political education.

**Keywords-** Gandhi, Swaraj, social contract, self-government, political education, Rousseau.

**Introduction-**This paper explores the profound influences of Mahatma Gandhi's concept of Swaraj and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Social Contract on political education. It delves into how Gandhi's vision of self-rule and grassroots democracy aligns with and diverges from Rousseau's theoretical framework of a consensual social contract. The paper examines the ethical, spiritual, and civic dimensions both thinkers brought to their understanding of governance, and how these dimensions continue to shape modern political education. By juxtaposing Gandhi's emphasis on moral autonomy and community-centric governance with Rousseau's advocacy for collective will and direct democracy, this study highlights the complementary and sometimes conflicting philosophies that contribute to a holistic political education. This study seeks to demonstrate the relevance of their timeless ideas in fostering an engaged, ethically-minded, and politically conscious citizenry in contemporary educational contexts.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, an 18th-century philosopher, introduced the social contract theory in his seminal work "The Social Contract" where he argued that individuals come together to form a collective body politic, governed by the general will. Rousseau believed that the government should serve the common good, and that education plays a crucial role in shaping citizens who can participate in this social contract. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's educational philosophy, as articulated in "Emile, or On Education," is grounded in naturalism and emphasizes the inherent goodness and potential of children. Rousseau argues that education should align with the natural development of the child, promoting personal growth and self-discovery. He believes that formal schooling, characterized by rigid structures and rote memorization, often stifles children's curiosity and natural development. Instead, Rousseau advocates for an educational approach that allows children to learn through direct interaction with their environment. His method is less structured and more exploratory, encouraging children to engage with the world around them and learn at their own pace.

On the other hand, Mahatma Gandhi, a 20th-century Indian leader, developed the concept of swaraj, (self rule). Gandhi's vision of swaraj extended beyond political independence to encompass self-discipline and self-education. He believed that true freedom requires individuals to cultivate moral and spiritual virtues, and that education should empower people to contribute to the welfare of society.

Mahatma Gandhi's educational philosophy, known as "Nai Talim" or "Basic Education," aims to transform the Indian education system to better serve the needs of the country. Gandhi's approach to education is holistic, focusing on the development of the body, mind, and spirit. He believes that education should extend beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge and should cultivate character, self-reliance, and ethical values. Central to Gandhi's educational theory is the integration of productive work with academic learning. He advocates for a work-centered curriculum, where students engage in manual labor and crafts as part of their education. This approach aims to develop practical skills and an appreciation for self-sufficiency, fostering a sense of dignity and respect for labor.

**Objectives-** This paper explores the philosophical principles of Gandhi's Swaraj and Rousseau's Social Contract. By examining these ideas, the paper advocates for integrating self-governance and social contract theories into educational frameworks to foster civic and ethical values, critical thinking, and reflective practices. It underscores the relevance of Gandhi's and Rousseau's teachings in promoting a holistic approach to political education.

**Methodology-** The data required for the study is collected from secondary sources. Various books, journals, magazines, articles are used as the secondary data. To study the objectives three methods have been applied. They are analytical method, descriptive method and comparative method.

**Comparative analysis of Rousseau and Gandhi's Educational Philosophy-** A central tenet of Rousseau's educational theory is the concept of experiential learning. Rousseau emphasizes the importance of hands-on activities and real-world experiences, believing that children learn best by doing. He outlines distinct stages of human development, each with specific educational needs and approaches. For instance, he suggests that young children should learn through sensory experiences and exploration rather than formal instruction. Rousseau also highlights the significance of moral education, asserting that children develop empathy and a sense of justice naturally when placed in nurturing environments. Through meaningful relationships and personal experiences, children acquire the moral compass necessary for contributing to a just and harmonious society.

Gandhi's vision of education is deeply rooted in his socio-political ideals of Swaraj (self-rule) and Sarvodaya (welfare of all). He emphasizes the importance of accessible education for all, particularly marginalized and rural communities. According to Gandhi, education should be community-based and relevant to the local context, promoting social responsibility and collective well-being. Gandhi's educational approach is also infused with ethical and spiritual values, such as truth, nonviolence, and compassion. These principles align with his broader

philosophy of creating a just and equitable society, where individuals are empowered to contribute to the common good.

While both Rousseau and Gandhi prioritize the moral and holistic development of individuals, their educational philosophies differ significantly in their approaches and underlying principles. Rousseau's philosophy is primarily theoretical and focuses on the natural progression of the child, emphasizing personal growth and self-discovery. His individual-centric approach contrasts with Gandhi's practical and community-oriented philosophy, which addresses the socio-economic realities of his time. Gandhi's work-centered curriculum and emphasis on accessible education for all reflect his commitment to social justice and inclusivity, while Rousseau's model, although revolutionary, is less explicitly concerned with these issues.

By comparing Rousseau's naturalistic and individual-centric approach with Gandhi's practical and community-oriented philosophy, we gain a deeper understanding of how these thinkers' educational theories reflect their broader views on society and governance. Their differing perspectives offer valuable insights into the diverse ways education can shape engaged, ethically-minded, and politically conscious citizens. In the context of political education, both Rousseau and Gandhi's ideas contribute to a nuanced understanding of how education can foster civic engagement and promote the common good.

**Comparative analysis of Political Philosophies of both thinkers-** Rousseau and Gandhi are renowned for their influential political philosophies, each offering distinct perspectives. In his seminal work, Rousseau posits that a state's legitimacy arises from the collective will of its citizens. He argues that states are formed through social contracts rather than divine right, suggesting that individuals give up certain freedoms to create a society governed by the general will. Rousseau's ideas advocate for direct democracy and the notion that true sovereignty lies with the people, making his work a cornerstone of modern political thought.

Conversely, Gandhi's philosophy, articulated in *Hind Swaraj*, emphasizes non-violence, equality, and addressing social issues such as caste discrimination and colonial oppression. Gandhi's principles of non-violent resistance and social justice have profoundly influenced political movements around the world. Both philosophers, while differing in their approaches, underscore the importance of ethical and civic dimensions in political education and governance, leaving an enduring legacy on how societies understand and enact political authority.

Rousseau's philosophies were pivotal in shaping France into a Republic. His ideas stirred political awakening among oppressed groups, leading them to resist foreign despotism. Rousseau highlighted the importance of freedom, viewing the freedom to choose as the foundation of all moral actions. In "The Social Contract," he connects freedom of choice with morality, arguing against despotic governance. He contends that giving up one's freedom contradicts human nature and that surrendering freedom to another's control strips actions of their morality. Rousseau differentiates between sovereignty and government, asserting that sovereignty, comprising the collective will of the people, enacts laws reflecting this general

will. The government, a more confined body, manages the state within legal boundaries and enforces laws in specific instances. He believed democracy was essential for the general will to prevail. The invention of private property, according to Rousseau, led to societal misery and oppression, causing war and conflict and necessitating a civil state. In the natural state, he observed, inequality was minimal among people.

Rousseau argued that societal reform was possible only if every individual contributed equally to law-making for collective happiness. He emphasized that sovereign authority should lie in the general will, as individuals recognize that justice adherence to laws that protect their freedom from private violence and personal dominance.

Rousseau advocated for the surrender of individual rights to the community to ensure civil liberty and property protection. He emphasized that the supposed innate characteristics of human nature are actually outcomes of social influences. His political theory laid out a framework for a harmonious, democratic society comprising free and equal citizens. In "The Social Contract," Rousseau aimed to reconcile individual freedom with state authority, asserting that society's evolution necessitates cooperation among individuals to meet their needs. This increasing interdependence is further elaborated in his "Discourse on the Origins of Inequality."

Gandhi, on the other hand, viewed political power as a means to improve people's lives across various dimensions rather than an end in itself. He believed that if a nation reached a level of perfection where life became self-regulated, political representation would be redundant, leading to a state of enlightened anarchy where everyone governs themselves without hindering others. In Gandhi's ideal state, political power is unnecessary, echoing Thoreau's principle that the best government is one which governs the least. Gandhi also stressed that politics without principles, derived from fundamental human values, could lead to the downfall of humanity, emphasizing that such principles are immutable and must not be violated.

Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy on democracy is rooted in the principles of non-violence, self-rule (Swaraj), local self-sufficiency (Swadeshi), and universal upliftment (Sarvodaya). He contends that true democracy mobilizes all resources for the collective good, which can only be achieved through non-violent means. Gandhi vehemently opposes violence, arguing that it is inherently inhuman and counterproductive, perpetuating a cycle of brutality. He outlines six key principles of non-violence and insists that young Indians should not resort to violence to attain freedom. For Gandhi, Swaraj is not merely political independence but a profound personal experience of self-governance. He asserts that foreign rule should end through non-violent resistance, as adopting the violent methods of colonizers contradicts the ethos of genuine freedom.

Gandhi's vision of peace is anchored in the principles of non-violence (ahimsa) and self-realization (swaraj), advocating for transforming violent societal structures to achieve equality. His 'Constructive Programmes' aimed to restore traditional values and create a non-violent social order, emphasizing the importance of truth and equality. Gandhi believed that villages, being the heart of the nation, should embody this transformation. He proposed the "Oceanic

Circle" model, where society is decentralized and individuals and villages form a cohesive, self-sufficient network. Integrating politics with ethics, Gandhi stressed the inseparability of moral ideals from worldly matters, reflecting his deeply religious nature.

**The interplay of Swaraj and Social Contract-** While Gandhi and Rousseau approached the issue of political order from different perspectives; their ideas converge on the importance of individual responsibility and civic engagement. Gandhi's Swaraj emphasizes the moral and ethical foundations of self-governance, while Rousseau's Social Contract highlights the collective responsibility of citizens in shaping their political destiny. Together, their ideas provide a comprehensive framework for political education, emphasizing the interconnectedness of individual transformation and social change. The ideas of Gandhi and Rousseau have had a lasting impact on political education, inspiring educators and activists to promote critical thinking, civic engagement, and social justice. Their emphasis on moral development, individual responsibility, and participatory democracy has led to the development of educational programs that aim to empower individuals to become active and informed citizens. These programs often incorporate elements of Gandhian philosophy, such as non-violence, social service, and community engagement, as well as Rousseau's ideas on popular sovereignty and civic virtue.

### **Conclusion**

Gandhi and Rousseau's contributions to political thought have left an indelible mark on our understanding of governance, individual liberty, and social responsibility. Their ideas, while distinct in their approach, converge on the importance of individual transformation and civic engagement in achieving a just and equitable society. By incorporating their ideas into political education, we can empower individuals to become responsible citizens, capable of self-governance and committed to the common good.

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