



Gandhi and His Teachers: Peace, Pacifism, and Welfare

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Peace, pacifism, and welfare have been some of the main concerns in societies and visionaries of different places and times have attempted to deal with them since the hoary past. Some such personages were Gandhi and his four acclaimed teachers: Rajchandra in India, Tolstoy in Russia, Ruskin in England, and Thoreau in America.

Gandhi

•Born in India in 1869 in a high middle-class family, religious parents, an average student, turned out to be a great soul (Mahatma) through following of truth and self-reflection, became a role-model for the world for bringing peaceful changes in societies.

•Best-known works: *An Autobiography, Satyagraha in South Africa, Character and Nation-Building, Sarvodaya: The Welfare of All, Ashram Observances in Action.*

•Societal Impacts:

- Redirected society's attention to character-building and truthful functioning at all levels.
- Encouraged moral and spiritual living.
- Emphasized adoption of nonviolence (*ahimsa*) at all levels.
- Emphasized equal rights, same welfare, and same justice for all including women, low castes, and tribal populations.
- Encouraged elimination of artificial inequalities, prejudices, and discriminations.
- Encouraged a just social order.
- Encouraged non-tolerance of injustices and use of Satyagraha if necessary.
- Encouraged elimination of social evils like, alcoholism, use of drugs, maltreatment of lower classes, poor status of women, etc..
- Encouraged adoption of tolerance and particularly religious tolerance.
- Encouraged human dignity of all and respect of others.
- Encouraged freedoms, self-reliance, democratic functioning, and power back to people.
- Encouraged community cooperation, shared living, compassion, and goodwill in all functioning.
- Encouraged rejuvenation of rural areas through encouragement of cottage industries, home-based trades, healthy environment, and full employment.
- Encouraged education of all including boys and girls and young and adults.
- Encouraged self-sufficiency at personal, social, commercial, political, educational, judicial, and governmental levels.
- Encouraged balance of power between rural and urban areas and shifting of political/commercial seats to villages.
- Promoted greater decentralization with local communities handling own affairs.
- Encouraged fairness of media and made it responsible to public.
- Encouraged hygiene, sanitation, and clean habits.
- Encouraged simplicity, subsistence living, honesty in thought and endeavors, altruistic orientations, and universal brotherhood.
- Encouraged trusteeship of property and possessions.

- Encouraged humility for constant advancement and growth.
- Encouraged holistic approach to living, planning, and problem-solving.
- Became a role-model for all above respects and taught the world a new way of living and strategizing.

Rajchandra

•Born in India in 1868, a businessman, a poet, a Jain philosopher, and a spiritualist - topmost teacher of Gandhi.

•Best-known works: *Atma-Siddhi or Self-Realization of Soul, Philosophy of Six Padas (Steps).*

•Societal Impacts:

- Encouraged soul liberation as main goal of life - all else was of secondary importance.
- Soul search was paramount need of the person.
- Emphasized equality of religions.
- Revived Jain philosophy, encouraged spiritual living, and taught seeking of soul liberation through austerities.

Tolstoy

•Born in Russia in 1828 in the nobility of Russia, a world-famous fiction writer, turned a rebel against the church and the government for causes of peasant folks, a religious reformer - 2nd-ranked teacher of Gandhi.

•Best-known works: *War and Peace, Confession, The Kingdom of God is Within You, The Gospel In Brief.*

•Societal Impacts:

- Impressed upon people and governments the destructive effects of war and violence.
- Encouraged peaceful living and functioning at all levels.
- Pointed out manipulative nature of existing order and single-handedly fought against that.
- Pointed out corrupt practices of the government, the church, and rich people and warned against those.
- Gave people courage to fight against injustices during times when challenging of political and religious authorities was unthinkable.
- Revived Biblical practice of "non-resistance of evil" to deal with injustices.
- Recommended taking of Christianity back to pristine beginnings.
- Recommended a God-centered social order and God-pleasing practices.
- Encouraged straightforwardness in all walks of life and dealings.
- Recommended moral living and love for others.
- Recommended "bread labor" by everyone and prosperity through hard work.
- Recommended closing of gaps and better living of peasant folks.

Ruskin

•Born in England in 1819, an aristocratic family of Puritan leanings, a world-renowned critic of art and architecture, turned against occurring industrialization, urbanization, and commercialism, advocated medieval culture and institutions, promoted welfare of workers, recommended "welfare of all" - 3rd-ranked teacher of Gandhi.

•Best-known works: *Praeterita, Unto This Last, Munera Pulveris, Time and Tide, Fors Clavigera.*

•Societal Impacts:

- Worked against industrialization, urbanization, commercialism, and developing new values.
- Advocated keeping of art, architecture, culture, traditions, relationships, and institutions of medieval past.
- Worked for humanism in workplace.
- Recommended caring attitude of employers.
- Creating laws of work.
- Suggested that not material advancement or accumulations, but people were wealth of the nations.

Thoreau

•Born in America in 1817, a freedom-loving family, a naturalist and reformer, advocated simple living and elimination of injustices in societies, promoted a peaceful order for all - 4th-ranked teacher of Gandhi.

•Best-known works: *Walden, "Slavery in Massachusetts," "Civil Disobedience," "The Higher Laws," "Life Without Principle."*

•Societal Impacts:

- Encouraged individualism and morality in all walks of life.
- Recommended non-tolerance of injustices, particularly those by the government and the church.
- Recommended peaceful solutions to problems, but allowed violence in extreme cases.
- Recommended simple, self-reliant, natural, and frugal living.
- Worked for removal of inequality of women, maltreatment of Native Americans, and disrespect for foreigners.
- Recommended preservation of natural environment.
- Recommended recognition of "higher laws" and "principled living."
- Revolted against ill-use of power by the government and the church.
- Recommended "civil disobedience" when necessary to correct unjust situations.
- Worked for elimination of slavery.
- Encouraged elimination of all slave tendencies.

SOCIETAL IMPACT