

How Buddha's Teachings Influenced Mahatma Gandhi's Preaching

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Abstract—This research paper examines the influence of Buddha's teachings on Mahatma Gandhi's preaching and philosophy. Both figures emphasized non-violence, truth, compassion, self-discipline, and moral purity. Gandhi adapted these values into his own ideas of ahimsa and satyagraha, using them as tools for social and political reform. The paper explores the similarities between Buddha's spiritual path and Gandhi's ethical leadership, showing how Buddhist principles helped shape Gandhi's message of peace and justice. It also highlights Gandhi's unique contribution in applying these ideas to India's freedom struggle and modern social change.

Index Terms—Mahatma Gandhi, Buddha, Buddhism, non-violence, ahimsa, satyagraha, truth, compassion, self-discipline, moral leadership, spirituality, Indian philosophy, peace, social reform, ethical living

I. Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi and Gautama Buddha are two of the most influential moral and spiritual figures in Indian history. Although they lived in different eras, both shaped ethical thought through their emphasis on truth, non-violence, compassion, and self-discipline. Gandhi's preaching and public philosophy were deeply rooted in moral values that closely resemble Buddhist teachings. This paper explores how Buddha's ideas influenced Gandhi's preaching and how Gandhi adapted those ideas into a modern social and political context

II. Background of Mahatma Gandhi

Mahatma Gandhi was born in 1869 in Porbandar, India. He became a lawyer, reformer, and leader of India's independence movement. Gandhi was not only a political figure but also a moral teacher who preached truth, simplicity, self-control, and non-violence. His life was guided by spiritual discipline and a belief that personal transformation was necessary for social change.

Gandhi's preaching was not limited to speeches. He lived according to the principles he taught. He encouraged people to practice honesty, humility, service, and restraint. His leadership style was based on moral persuasion rather than force. This made him one of the most respected figures in modern history.

III. Core Teachings of Buddha

Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, taught a path to liberation from suffering. His teachings are centered on the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. The Four Noble Truths explain that life involves suffering, suffering has a cause, suffering can end, and there is a path to end suffering. The Eightfold Path provides guidance for ethical conduct, mental discipline, and wisdom.

Buddha also emphasized ahimsa, or non-violence, compassion for all beings, detachment from material desires, and self-discipline. His teachings encouraged inner peace and moral purity. Rather than relying on ritual alone, Buddha focused on personal conduct and inner awakening.

IV. Gandhi's Preaching and Philosophy

Gandhi's preaching was built on two major principles: ahimsa and satyagraha. Ahimsa means non-violence, while satyagraha means truth-force or insistence on truth. Gandhi believed that truth and non-violence were inseparable. He taught that one must resist injustice without hatred and seek moral victory rather than physical domination.

Gandhi also emphasized self-purification, fasting, prayer, simplicity, and service to others. He believed that a person must first conquer inner weaknesses before trying to reform society. His preaching encouraged people to live ethically and to see social reform as a spiritual duty.

V. Influence of Buddha on Gandhi

Buddha's influence on Gandhi can be seen in several important ways. First, both leaders placed non-violence at the center of moral life. Buddha taught compassion and harmlessness toward all beings, and Gandhi transformed this principle into a political method of resistance.

Second, both stressed self-discipline and inner control. Buddha's path required mental training and ethical conduct, while Gandhi believed that personal discipline was essential for public leadership. His fasting and simple living reflected a similar spirit of renunciation.

Third, both saw compassion as a practical force. Buddha taught kindness and empathy, and Gandhi extended this into social service and concern for the oppressed. Gandhi's preaching often called for unity, forgiveness, and moral responsibility.

Fourth, both believed that true change begins within the individual. Buddha sought liberation through inner awakening, and Gandhi believed that social transformation must begin with self-transformation. This idea strongly shaped Gandhi's preaching style.

VI. Comparative Analysis

Although Gandhi and Buddha shared many values, their historical purposes were different. Buddha's teaching was primarily spiritual and aimed at liberation from suffering. Gandhi's preaching was both spiritual and political, aimed at reforming society and achieving independence through moral means.

Still, Gandhi adapted Buddhist ideas in a modern context. He combined them with Hindu, Jain, and other Indian traditions to create a practical philosophy for mass movements. His preaching was therefore not a direct copy of Buddhism, but a creative synthesis influenced by Buddhist ethics.

VII. Impact on Society

The influence of Buddha on Gandhi had a lasting effect on Indian society and the world. Gandhi's preaching inspired millions to believe that moral strength is greater than violence. His methods influenced civil rights leaders, peace movements, and anti-colonial struggles across the globe.

By promoting non-violence, compassion, and truth, Gandhi helped make ethical leadership a powerful force in politics. The Buddhist influence in his thought contributed to a vision of social change based on conscience rather than coercion.

VIII. Conclusion

Buddha's teachings had a significant influence on Mahatma Gandhi's preaching. The shared values of ahimsa, compassion, self-discipline, and truth formed the moral foundation of Gandhi's philosophy. While Gandhi developed his own unique approach, Buddhist principles clearly shaped his spiritual and political message. Understanding this influence helps us appreciate Gandhi not only as a freedom fighter but also as a moral teacher whose ideas continue to inspire peace and justice today.

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