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Mahatma Gandhi and V D Savarkar - Ideological Comparison

What is the issue?

The 1911 to 1947 paradigm of the Indian freedom struggle was primarily dominated by two individuals - Mahatma Gandhi and V D Savarkar (Veer - the braveheart). Here is an overview of their ideologies.

What is the ideological significance of the freedom struggle?

- Besides achieving independence, the freedom struggle also involved nurturing the ideas and values for nation-building.
- The Indian freedom struggle too consisted of different ideologies encompassing the right, left and centre.
- It was indeed a broad socio-economic, cultural movement with the participation of reformists, revolutionaries, constitutionalists, loyalists, progressives and even regressives.
- Besides the Gandhian stream of nation-making, the other parallel but equally forceful stream was the stream of revolutionaries.



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GANDHI

VERSUS

V D SAVARKAR



COMPARING IDEOLOGIES



HINDU IDENTITY



More assertive; he described himself as a Sanatani Hindu and cow worshipper

More progressive in his approach; he was averse to the ritualistic aspects of the Hindu religion



IDEAL STATE



Championed the cause of Ramrajya, which is an ideal state where equality and justice prevail

A Hindu Rashtra in which anyone who is born in the motherland and loves his country is a Hindu irrespective of their religion. Hinduness was not sectarian or religious but a cultural identity



GOAL



Developed the idea of complete independence gradually. 1920 Non-Cooperation Movement - Dominion status. Opposed Nehru's proposal in 1927 on resolution for complete independence

Clear and firm on the idea of 'complete independence'. In his work, The Indian War for Independence, he hailed 1857 as the first war of independence.



APPROACH



The end had to be justified through the means. Non-violence, satyagraha, "changing the mind of the oppressor" were essential.

The goal (complete and immediate independence) was more important than the means. The means could be non-violent, fighting openly with the British and even aligning with their enemies.



SIMILARITIES



- Both were born in traditional Hindu families. Studied law and were barristers.
- Advocated for Hindi as a common language for the unification of Bharat.
- Proactive social reformers - Opposed untouchability; Advocated Reforming Hinduism from within and eradicating caste-based differences.
- Wrote extensively on contemporary political and social issues. Both wrote books in the same year, 1909: Gandhi - Hind Swaraj, Savarkar - The Indian War for Independence on the 1857 uprising.
- Both men spent time in prison for their fight against the British Empire.
 - From the inception of his civil rights movement in South Africa to the end of the Indian freedom movement in 1947, Gandhi served approximately 7 years in jail. He was mostly a political prisoner.
 - Savarkar, apart from minor arrests, served 13 years in Kala Paani in Andaman. His release was conditional.

What were the key contributions of Gandhi?

- “Fathered” many of the ideas that are the guiding principles for present-day Bharat.
- Made the freedom struggle a true “national” struggle.
- Promoted the idea of equality.
- Gave non-violence as a method to achieve independence by changing the heart of the oppressor.

What were the other key ideas of Savarkar?

- He evolved an enlightened view of Hinduism - Creating a strong national character by nurturing the individual with the cultural and ideological roots of Hindu culture.
- For his strong ideas and valour, Savarkar was charged with sedition, extradited and sentenced to transportation for two life terms, amounting to a 50-year sentence.
- After he was released with conditional confinement from the jail, Savarkar was engaged in a massive social reform project in Ratnagiri.
- He worked to uproot the caste system, advocated inter-caste dining, inter-caste and inter-regional marriages, widow remarriage, female education and temple entry for all castes.
- Savarkar was totally against the idea of the bifurcation of India. He hailed the glorious past and culture of India to borrow strength from it.

Source: The Indian Express



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