

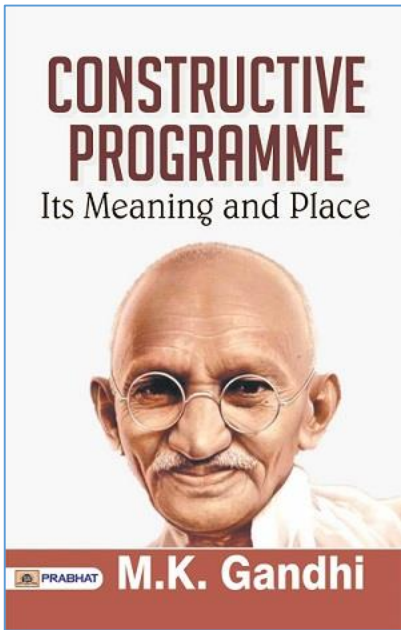


## Book Review of MK Gandhi’s “Constructive Program” by Alina Pandey

This article deals with the book review of the book ‘Constructive Program’ by MK Gandhi. MK Gandhi in his book Constructive Program deals with various aspects of prospering as a society and as an individual during colonization and post-colonization. This book review article deals with the major aspects described in the book constructive program and its relevancy in the modern-day world. Further, it reviews the ideologies in the book and its overall analysis.

## Introduction

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869 - 1948) was an Indian lawyer, politician, social activist, and writer who was one of the main leaders of the nationalist movement "Satyagraha" against the British colonization. He is named the father of the nation, and he lives in paper notes of Indian Currency to date. . He stood against injustice and inequality prevalent in the nation during British Rule and also initiated many successful campaigns at the ground level in order to thrive for independence, these



campaigns later also became national movements. Throughout his lifetime, he wrote many books such as his own autobiography, the Essential Gandhi, Peace: the Words and Inspiration, My Experiments with the Truth, Hind Swaraj and many others. Gandhi is globally recognized for his doctrine of nonviolent protest (satyagraha) to attain political and social advancement

Mahatma Gandhi was a freedom fighter and a socio-economic reformer. He was and continues to stay as an inspiration to many foundations of philosophy involving the way of living and sustainable society. He had a vision of an India that would cater to the essential needs of ordinary people. MK Gandhi believed that despite India being a holy country, poverty and hunger could be the country's greatest curse. In order to minimize these two problems, he came up with a constructive program that dealt with various factors to achieve the India of his dreams.

'Constructive Programme' was initially preached to the members of the Indian National Congress. He discusses some of the substantial measures by which that doctrine can be enforced. The constructive program may otherwise and more fittingly be called the construction of Purna Swaraj, 'Purna' means whole, and 'Swaraj' means independent India. It means the sovereignty of every branch without disparity of race, color, or creed. As Gandhi is known for Ahimsa and Satyagraha, he also tried to express the notion of the same in the book, he also portrays the notion of self-rule.

In his book constructive program, he provides us with a guide as to how the country can attain true independence, He sheds light on the underlying problems in the society and calls out the citizens and authorities of the country to perform the right set of actions for living. The book Constructive Program comprises 18 aspects that the Indian society needs to work on in order to prosper.

## Critical Analysis of the Book

The book has 18 chapters that deal with various ways to prosper as a society, this article will be dealing with the significance of each chapter.

### 1. Communal Unity

MK Gandhi tells us the importance of communal unity and steps to attain such unity. He believes that the person of authority has to identify as the same as the millions of people in India. He firmly states that everyone should be equal in the eyes of the law to have political unity. He believes that power resides in the people as they are the ones who choose their representatives. He says:

*"Civil disobedience is the storehouse of power."*

Hence such a situation shall not arise where there is civil disobedience as it is the ultimate power. This can happen when we choose the right representatives who will not see the religion, caste, creed of the people and work for everyone like their own family.

## 2. Removal of Untouchability

Gandhi recognizes the immediate need for the abolishment of untouchability in the country. He says that matters like untouchability should not be politicized as it is one of the most horrendous problems that exists in India. Instead, other countries can take it as an opportunity to look down upon them. As independence was a fresh start to all, he believed the marginalized community deserved their fresh start. *“And so far as the Harijans are concerned, every Hindu should make common cause with them and befriend them in their awful isolation - such isolation as perhaps the world has never seen in the monstrous immensity one witnesses in India.”*

## 3. Prohibition

Gandhi firmly stood against the use of intoxicants such as alcohol. He believed the use of intoxicants and narcotics to be a curse. He wanted health workers to contribute to the removal of this evil. He stated that women and students have an essential role in eradicating this problem. He believed that conducting creational camps could be a way to help mitigate this issue as the tired laborer would be able to rest their limbs, get healthy and cheap refreshments, and stay engaged and fresh. Presently, prohibition in India exists in Gujarat and Nagaland.

Some modern-day scholars argue that an outright prohibition affects not only people with a drinking problem but also those who see these intoxicants as recreational beverages or as a way to socialize.

## 4. Khadi

According to MK Gandhi, Khadi connoted the beginning of economic freedom and equality. Khadi was the most important approach proposed by Gandhi, which stood for the local production of goods. He says: "*Khadi to me, is the symbol of unity of Indian humanity, of its economic freedom and equality and, therefore, ultimately, in the poetic expression of Jawaharlal Nehru, "the livery of India's freedom"*". Khadi represents handspun and handwoven cloth. In 1918 Mahatma Gandhi started advocating for Khadi, a program for the marginalized community of India. Spinning and weaving were symbolical to an ideology for self-reliance and self-government. Khadi initiative by Gandhi has to be one of his best approaches to a truly independent India.

## 5. Other Village Industries

Gandhi believed other village industries could not exist without Khadi. He believed in local production in the village area. He realized most of the needs and necessities could be met by village area production. He didn't want to be reliant on west made machines to fulfill the needs of its people. Hence, it encouraged the production of goods at the local level.

## 6. Village Sanitation

Gandhi was aware that the situation of the village area was not as good. Dirty washrooms and public sanitation had a harmful pollutive effect that was not refreshing. Although the congressmen came from the village, they didn't work enough for the people in the village area. He was aware that if there was no national sanitation, a plague might exist. He very well said:

*"We may take a kind of a bath, but we do not mind dirtying the well or the tank or the river by whose side or in which we perform ablutions."*

## **7. New or Basic Education**

Gandhi wanted to design an education that would transform children from the village into model villagers. He urged the authorities not to neglect the children. He believed in education to all from the grassroots level in all parts of India despite their gender, caste, and creed. He wanted the Congressman to design a great education plan that would incorporate all as he believed in the power of a pen.

## **8. Adult Education**

Gandhi had a newer approach to education. He firmly believed that education should not be confined to a certain age and that it is never too late to learn. He wanted to open educational centers for adult people. He wanted to establish authoritative boards that would develop plans to make education shorter and available for all. In the modern-day, this has somewhat come into effect. We can see many people at very old age doing their doctorate or undergraduate degree. Few people who have realized the importance of education during their 20s are educating themselves through the internet.

## **9. Women**

Gandhi says that women were equally part of Swaraj. Without their presence, it would have never been possible. He sheds light on how men feel superior to women when they see women as an equal. He urged the Congressmen to start the revolution of gender equality because they are as important as men to attain Poorna Swaraj. He sees women as an equal and

urges everyone to see it that way, *'Wives should not be dolls and objects of indulgence, but should be treated as honored comrades in common service.'*

## 10. Education in Health & Hygiene

A healthy mind in a healthy body is a self-evident truth.

Gandhi has mentioned sanitation earlier, but he tells us that mere mention of sanitation is not enough in health and hygiene. He believes that well-ordered citizen of the country should know their role in health and hygiene. The main problem that humans face is related to health. Although poverty is the reason for these problems, if proper education about health and hygiene is given to people, it can be minimized. If our body is healthy, our mind will be healthy, so it is a crucial element. Gandhi's few health recommendations were to breathe the freshest air day and night, establish a balance between bodily and mental work, stand erect, sit erect, and be neat and clean, eat enough to keep your mind and body in good order. He further says *"Man becomes what he eats."* This describes how important he felt the need for health and hygiene was. With the ongoing Covid-19 crisis, we have all understood the importance of physical well-being and cleanliness.

## 11. Provincial Language

The English language managed to colonize a few parts of India. When somebody knows good English, they ultimately start feeling superior to the rest; due to this, Indian native languages were looked down upon. He said efforts must be made to use our mother tongue as there are many great languages in the country. In local parts of the country, the movement should be explained in their local language so that the right message about Satyagraha is sent loud and clear to

all. Gandhi said speaking language native to the place, the region should be encouraged.

## 12. National Language

He said it was important to have a language that is understood by the majority to be the country's national language. Hindi was considered the national language as it was spoken and understood by both Hindus and Muslims of the North. In 1920 a conscious attempt started to acknowledge the importance of Indian languages for the political education of the citizens. He said that the spell that English has cast on them should be broken. He tried to make people understand the importance of having a National Language as it binds all as one community.

## 13. Economic Equality

For me, this was the best approach in Gandhi's constructive program. He tells us how important it is to abolish the eternal conflict between capitalistic companies and labor workers. It is imperative to remove the gap by leveling down the riches who have hoarded the wealth. The nonviolent system of governance that Gandhi dreamt of would remain impossible if there is a vast gap between the rich and the poor, in his words, "*A nonviolent system of Government is an impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists.*" He tells us that it is the responsibility of each member of Congress to ask himself what role he has played for the attainment of economic equality. In the present context, the gap is ever-growing, and the rich people are becoming wealthier, and the poor are becoming poorer.



## 14. Kisans

Kisan comprises the most significant part of the Swaraj; they are the reason the country is prospering. In fact, as the majority (probably over 80%) the Kisans should be the Congress. Congressmen were urged to study how work can be done for and among Kisans. Like labor, Gandhi suggested that there should be a department working under Congress for the welfare of Kisaans in the country. The present-day farmers' protest shall be recognized by authorities as, like Gandhi said, Kisans are running the country, and they must be recognized with due respect.

## 15. Labour

As per Gandhi labour influenced the municipal policy of the city. They have the right to hold non-violent protests. He says there will come a time when the Trade Union Congress will accept the Ahmedabad method and will comprise the Ahmedabad organization as part of the All-India Union. Gandhi urged the workers to stay firm in mandating economic justice. Mahatma Gandhi directed the mill workers of Ahmedabad in a strike against the mill landlords who had denied paying them higher wages. When the workers lost their hope, Gandhi supported them by fasting so it was regarded as the first hunger strike of Gandhi which eventually gained success.

## 16. Adivasis

The term Adivasi was for Bhils, Gonds, or others variously described as Hill Tribes or aboriginals. He says that to fulfill the needs of Adivasis is also a part of a constructive program. India is very diverse. It was essential to be inclusive to all. There were over two crores of Adivasis in all of India. Gandhi believed they should be included as it is impossible to attain

true independence if such humanitarian needs of all communities are not met.

## 17. Lepers

Leper is a synonym for bad odor. India only stood second after Central Africa in terms of lepers. Gandhi addressed that Leprosy was a concerning health problem amongst the poor people of India. At that point, the only institution run by an Indian, as a pure labour of love, was by Shri Manohar Diwan near Wardha. If India were to attain independence through non-violence, Gandhi believed that the lepers' disease should be treated as soon as possible. This was only possible if people who lived below the poverty line were taken care of and not excluded from society. In 2005, after years of Independency, India declared it had eliminated Leprosy as a public health problem.

## 18. Students

Gandhi taught and learned a lot from his students. He encouraged college education as it provides a career. He planned research with students under terms like no affiliations to party politics, not resort to political strikes, must all do sacrificial spinning in a scientific manner, neatness o tool, and so on. One of his terms was that students should not impose Vande Mataram or the National Flag on others. However, a month back, two girls were killed during an India Vs. Pakistan match for not vouching for India. He believed that students should better than resort to violence and impose their feelings on others. He asked nationalists students to help him in this movement as they are an asset and that their one year of gap in education would be worth it as it was an education that was not confined to the books or classroom. *“But such as the students are, it is from these young men and women that the future leaders of the nation are to rise.”*

## Relevance of the Book and Ideologies

The father of Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, is known for promoting the concept of Satyagraha (the path of truth) and Ahimsa (non-violence). He had a solution to every problem at hand.

One of the questions laid down for us is: Is Gandhi and his ideologies relevant in the present world?

Definitely, yes. Not all but a lot of Gandhi's ideology is beneficial not just for the society to prosper but even for individual growth. Although the times were different, Gandhi predicted the community's needs and even the problems we might face in the future. For instance, in his book, he emphasizes how important it is to have proper hygiene and sanitization. In the present context of the world, it has been proven that health is what matters the most. During Covid-19, few people could somehow relate to how uncomfortable it feels to be treated as untouchable during times of isolation. Imagine having to go through that for most of your lives. Gandhi addressed the immediate need for the abolishment of untouchability in order for a society to prosper. His calls out to Congress in the book were very on point. His ideology that we need to start respecting women from home is convenient. We often dwell in trying to make significant changes in the world but fail to see the minimal pathway in front of us. We need to fulfill our role in a revolution to be an active part. Similarly, Gandhi wanted to promote all languages in India, and in present times, this idea is widely accommodated in schools to foster the students' mother tongue. Now we can see the perfect balance between competing with the world while not forgetting your roots.

Gandhi mentions the prohibition of intoxicants. While alcohol is not the best way to refresh yourself, it is commonly used as a means of socialization and recreation in the modern-day world. Not everyone has the daily time to go to the

recreational camp to reboot themselves. It is more convenient for some people to relax after alcohol consumption. In the modern-day world, a ban on alcohol doesn't seem feasible. Maybe the government could come up with better awareness camps related to the effects of drinking at a young age, overdrinking but putting a ban on it is only going to increase illegal ways of getting alcohol in the country. It is like trying to get a hold of the sand; the more tightly you hold the sand, the more quickly it will spill. In this capitalistic world that we live in, the economic index of a city is determined by its nightlife. Better the nightlife, better the economy. In order to sustain nightlife, the selling of alcohol is essential. But at the same time, all this is catering to the needs of the wealthy, and the gap between rich and poor is not being filled at all as Gandhi wanted.

We know that the book is addressed to the Congress party in the parliament. The party of the Indian National Congress has lost its significance as in present times; we come across many instances in which other parties have overthrown the party of Congress from its power because the other parties have a better manifesto. With time, the focus has eventually shifted to scientific and economic development; thus, it won't be wrong to contend some ideologies of Gandhi have lost their relevance in society. We as people should also learn to focus on what the global need is right now, at the given moment. While many ideologies of his, like Khadi, Economic equality, etc., will continue to live on for years, few of them are not as relevant as they were back then.

## **Conclusion**

The Constructive Program is a book that helped me analyze the pre-independence situation and India and the amount of work that was needed to be done in order to become truly independent.

The book and the book review article gave an insight into various ideologies that Gandhiji followed that can be applied to my day-to-day life too. The analysis between his ideologies gave a perspective into how much society has changed and how we are at the peak of capitalism at the moment.

Further, reflecting on a national hero lets you take inspiration from him and restores hope that if we could fight against British colonizers without violence we will certainly be able to combat any other threat with peace. MK Gandhi and his philosophies serve as an example to many and will always continue to be an inspiration to many in the years and centuries to come. As Gandhi is known for Ahimsa and Satyagraha, he also tried to express the notion of the same in the book, he also portrays the notion of self-rule. It is important here to understand that Gandhi did not ever intend to hurt the feelings of anyone with his book, instead, he merely expressed his personal views on how he thought India could again become ideal and independent.

## **Suryanshi Pandey**

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Suryanshi Pandey, is a multimedia broadcast journalist who writes independently for The USA Today, The Wire, The Print and Sportskeeda.

Graduate in Chemistry (H), she found her true calling towards media after completing PGD in English Journalism from India's pioneer institute of media, Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC).

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