
GANDHI AND MAO: A Comparative Study of Their Strategies

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Among the giants of the twentieth century, Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948) and Mao Zedong (1893–1978) stand out as exemplars of contrasting philosophies of nationalism, economic development, and especially the role of violence in modern political life. Gandhi, throughout his “Experiments with Truth,” adhered firmly to the principle of Ahimsa, or non-violence toward any living being, as a core value in achieving social and political change. In contrast, Mao’s famous dictum that “political power grows out of the barrel of a gun” places him firmly in the tradition of advocating military might and physical force as the primary methods for effecting social transformation. Ironically, Gandhi, the man of peace, fell to an assassin’s bullet at the age of 79, while Mao, the advocate of might, died a natural death at the age of 85.

Gandhi and Mao men mobilized mass movements of common people, each faced a form of western imperial and colonial rule, both espoused not only political independence but insisted on changing the hearts and minds of people, not only in their own nations but around the world. Each man left lasting legacies in India and China as well as large ideological followings around the globe. Therefore, it can be easily concluded that the practical application of ideas both from Gandhi and Mao were opposite to each other. Essentially, they chose different ideals for identical reasons.

Gandhi greatly influenced the Martin Luther King wing of the Civil Rights movement, the Nelson Mandela faction of the African National Congress, and peace movements around the world. Whereas, Mao helped shape the French student movement of 1968, the Vietnamese and Cuban nationalist movements, and continues to influence a strong group of American students and professors to this day.

The significance of Mao’s writing suggests that he was more focused on the analysis of the economic and political situation of China. According to him, politics is the remaining of economy and by Marx, it is the reductionist position. Therefore, Mao ordered for the pan-party movement

for the education of the principles of Marxist-Leninist theory and its ideological application in the social aspects. This call soon became the talking point among the comrades; however, this made proletarian ideology strong within and out of the party and encouraged broadly in the ranks of the party cadre to achieve the extraordinary unity.

There is a sonnet which exhibits this kind of person; it says “the reed growing on the wall - top heavy, thin-stemmed and shallow of root; the bamboo shoots in the hills - sharp-tongued, thick-skinned and hollow inside.” This is the complete description of those people who have little knowledge and does not display the learning attitude, these people only learn a couple of paragraphs and show themselves as they have an excellent knowledge.

The universal theories of Marxism-Leninism is a science which needs to be understood from the core and to be applied in the society when and where it is possible. With this approach he will only destroy and propagate unreal history, only knowing Greece history will not work, if you live in China you have to know about China ancient history too. One should know the revolutionary aspect of the ancient history to comprehend China’s revolution and its propaganda or objective. Chinese need some sort of weapon that could be utilized successfully during the Chinese revolution , a revolution from the East.

The main objective was to find the truth and truth is the internal relations which are the laws that govern them and understand that one must have to study scientifically. We have to go forward in the quest of finding the scope of improvement from the province, country, cities and that should have the relevance of our actions by laws and we have to find the closeness of the event occurring around us. Therefore, to achieve we mustn’t rely on subjective thinking and that we must stick to the general line of Marxism-Leninism theory in order to get a correct understanding from it. Such understandings are scientific understanding; it is the appearance of Party enthusiasm, the Marxism-Leninism way of uniting theory and practice. This is not the attitude of the all the comrades of the Communist party and this adoption attitude can be “top-heavy, thin-stemmed and shallow of root” and not “sharp lounged, thick-skinned and hollow inside”.

Therefore, with the concluding view of the above, I would throw these proposals: we should always put ourselves before the party and making a systematic and detailed study of the situation around us. We have to chalk out a complete examination of the progress in the economic, financial, political, military, cultural and party’s work towards our enemies, friend and us and then

check out the correct understanding. We have to make our comrades understand the importance of investigation with completely understanding the situation; the propaganda of this kind may work to make people understand us. It is necessary to understand the kind of work party is aspiring for and necessary investigation should be chalked out for the study by the party.¹Therefore, we have gathered academically qualified people to understand and investigate the situation on all the fronts through Marxist-Leninist way, moreover if people learn about this theory they ultimately also learn about the ins and outs of the October Revolution.

Mao had such a great class rule in which all the states, no matter colonial or semi colonial or a democratic state, could share the authority. In his opinion, the comprador and the landed class were the one who used to rule the entire China. This class was the accessories of the international relations of the bourgeoisie class as they actually showed their linkage out the country, though it's tough to say anything about their implication on a particular state. The study of the fragmentation of the state by Mao fills the gap voided by Marxist theory for state.

Mao Zedong and Mahatma Gandhi were the extraordinary leaders of the past history as both of them had very unique feature in their political philosophies. Mao and Gandhi both in their respective country, instigated the revolution and shaped their country's fate today.

Although having contrasting personalities, some of the views of both Gandhi and Mao were common politically and economically. Both of them believed in exploiting the natural resources of the country to be economically free which will be the biggest slap on the imperialist and colonist regime. Both of them broke the rules prescribed by the ruler. Gandhi did Dandi march to avert salt tax from the British because according to Gandhi the tax was not righteous therefore ensuing Gandhi as the largest economic leader and there was another way Gandhi strengthen India economically by the spinning-wheel, by doing this he almost barred Indians to buy foreign expensive clothes because the cheap and better clothes were made in India. He did not have to fight the colonial power, however China had to fight against its own government and make China economically independent. Therefore, in order to do this Mao did a long 6000 mile march thereby making poor peasants economically free, by giving land to them after snatching the land from the landlords.

Talking about revolution of India, Gandhi said "I know when the conscious efforts to embrace non-violence in India begin, and then the Swaraj will not be too far."² Gandhi always

knew that the successful implementations of revolution will only be possible through non-violent resistance. However, Mao was exactly opposite to how Gandhi thought about the revolution. According to Mao, arms and war are the essential fuel to drive any revolution forward. Mao wrote as “A revolution is an act of insurgency, an act of violence by which one class overthrows other”³ However, Gandhi certainly removed this thought and said non-violence is the necessity for revolution because it makes the oppressor’s efforts go in vain. He further added that no one would kick him just for the fun of it as there should stronger reason to do it so. Paradoxically, I believe this statement boomeranged Gandhi as usually the tyrant is there for a reason which is why he is there, therefore the tyrant will kick you off if someone refused to submit.

Mao also spoke about this fact, he wrote sans putting a great counter force. The peasants would not be to uproot the deep-rooted supremacy of landlords which is there for a number of years, in order to create that fear in every rural area or to remove this landed gentry. He further added that a true limit need to be set, make wrong to right or else wrong can not be righted.⁴ Fundamentally, Mao alleged that the feudal landlords would decline to give up their land, until and unless they are forced at the gun point. I do agree with him as it is quite natural that nobody would give up his or her property unless they are exposed to life threatening power!

Well, I believe Mao was right at his place because his idea and fight was different than Gandhi and that too what Gandhi did was something which only Gandhi could do, nobody could replicate it. And in fact Chinese feudal landlords did really care about their people who worked under them; they were always reluctant to implement any reforms. In the context of the idea of non-violence this only applies to the ruling class, the ruling class do not have any in enforcing their supremacy and I would bring it to your notice which I mentioned earlier as well that by the time Gandhi rose the non-violent revolutionary leader in India, Britain had grown weaker due to its involvement in World War II which drain out all of his resources and ultimately it couldn’t continue to exert the same level of pressure as it used to do earlier which did not have any relevance to Indian freedom struggle and therefore Gandhi succeed. However with this I am still firm in my belief that a strong violent force is really necessary to drive out revolutionary forces.

According to Gandhi people of India should be left to govern themselves on their own and he also wanted to inculcate the idea of non-violence or passive resistance to the people of India while on the other hand Mao wanted the people of China to embrace socialism whole heartedly

and he wanted to govern them and wanted to fulfil armistice uprising, killing and murders. Both of these leaders wanted to create their own style of liking of society however they both had some similarity too. Mao being such a great leader helped his peasant friends to evolve and have their say by the means of revolution while Gandhi defied all odds of violent method with his unique method of Satyagraha. Yet their common objective was to free their nation and make it more prosperous.

Both the leaders led their revolution in thriving conditions which were not conducive to them at all. Coming from a middle class family and engaging the huge mass to support their idea and philosophy was tremendous. Each of them, some way or the other would want to recreate the social system conducive to all the class of the society to either become Gandhian or Maoist sect. Ironically, both the countries coming from such an idealistic gateway have fallen prey to what both Gandhi and Mao throughout their life had abandoned, selfishness, materialism have largely shaped today's China and India culturally.

Mahatma Gandhi and Mao Zedong are the most influential personalities of world in the 20th century. They were two great leaders of their respective countries, who succeeded in many ways, by their actions and decisions. Their approaches to peace, violence, success and ultimately a revolution was very different. Gandhi favoured peace through non-violence and non-cooperation, on the other hand, Mao favoured peace through violence.

Gandhi and Mao were charismatic leaders who successfully made it through their revolution. Mao's revolution led to change in class structure while Gandhi's revolution involved India as a country and he wanted people to realize that working together is great way to gain independence.

While Gandhi and Mao both believed that each of their countries have the need of independence, their views differed on different issues. Gandhi and Mao indeed one thing in common i.e. anti-imperialism with anti - colonialism as one variety.

India was partitioned and violently divided, while China was united under Mao. Millions died during partition. India and Pakistan have not as yet reconciled their difference. On the other hand, China remained united and Mao accomplished his goal of uniting China as communist.

While Gandhi was unable to achieve independence with non-violence, Mao was able to achieve his goal with violence.

My hypothesis is

***“Gandhi accepted partition to avoid civil war and
Mao accepted civil war to avoid partition”.***

The most inspiring quotation of *Mahatma Gandhi* is

***“The weak can never forgive.
Forgiveness is an attribute of the Strong.”***

While on the other hand, *Mao Zedong*’s famous dictum is

‘Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.’

If we say that the 21st century is the century of the common man, then we see that Gandhism has even more relevance in this age and Gandhi will inspire generation of individuals fighting for goodness of the society.

I would like to conclude with a tribute to Gandhi that *Albert Einstein* gave : ***“Generations to come, will scarce believe that such a man as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.”***

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- 4 *Ibid.*

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