

Gram Swaraj : Gandhi's vision of A self sufficient village

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ABSTRACT

The thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi transcend the boundary of race, religion and nation states and have emerged as the panacea for the existing problems of 21st century .Gandhians thoughts underline the most humane way to resolve many of the problems that plague our times. In the age of markets laden with products based on generating and gratifying instinct of social approval and when public imagination is becoming increasingly vulnerable to demagogues, the idea of Swaraj which had economic, social, spiritual and political connotations continues to be significant. He taught us the dignity of labour as a leveling social factor that contributed to a national outlook in keeping with the vision of new India .Gram Swaraj or Village self rule, was a pivotal concept of Gandhiji's thought. His Gram Swaraj was not the reconstruction of the old village but the formation of fresh independent units of villages having self sufficient economy. Thus, the present paper is an attempt to measure the significance of Gram Swaraj. The study will be descriptive in nature .The study is based on secondary sources as the researcher has reviewed many books related to the topic.

Keywords: Swaraj, Self Sufficient, Village Economy, Decentralization, Village Swaraj

1.Introduction

Gandhiji was a man of extra ordinary courage, determination and perseverance. He is popularly known as Bapu (Father of nation). Who dominated the national movements of India from 1919 to 1947.He was an apostle of peace, non-violence and was ardent follower of Purna Swaraj or complete independence. He played a key role in accomplishing the national freedom .He edified to his compatriot countrymen a novel idea of “Gram Swaraj.” He credited all the evils of modern civilization to the dual practice of industrialization and urbanization.1The concept of Swaraj found an important place in Political, Social, Spiritual and Economic ideas of Gandhiji. In Hind Swaraj –he elaborated his ideas of Gram Swaraj-“My idea of village Swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its our vital wants and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity. Here there is perfect democracy based upon individual freedom .The individual is the architect of his own Government”. He firmly believed in the idea of decentralization. He emphasized on self sufficient villages in India where the needs of the masses are satisfied by using the local resources available. He was of firm believe that “India” soul lives in villages therefore he wanted the village should have the autonomy to decide about their own affairs

and well being .Gandhi's ideologies are not just for politics or economic or societies but for the way of living. Gandhiji was a man ahead of his times. He foresaw many of the problems which we are facing today. In 1927 he wrote "A time is coming when those who are in the mad rush today of multiplying their want will retrace their steps and say, what we have done"? His ideologies are very much needed to be practiced in the current world of growing unemployment and inequalities between the rich and the poor.

2. Review of literature

Literature review is necessary to know the issues that are highlighted by various scholars on particular issues. The available literature is reviewed in this chapter just under the broad heading of village Swaraj and then under the concepts which constitutes the Gandhian ideology of village Swaraj.

George (1994) wrote though the national leaders committed for the implementation of Gram Swaraj after independence but the constituent assembly was not categorical about it.

V T Patil and A S Ankini in their *An enquiry into the Gandhi on model of Democracy,1983* work represented that Gandhiji had great faith in human beings and he was of the opinion that human nature was not beyond redemption. Gandhi's idea of trusteeship sought to bring about economic democracy by identifying those who have entrepreneurial abilities with the common man from whom the industrial enterprise served a vital purpose. Such an attempt to bridge the widening gap between the rich and the poor may produce economic democracy.

Ganga Praad Agarwal in *Make the gram Swarajya Campaign a Success,1999* states that Grama Swaraj is not merely a programme for rural development .It is a programme for dislodging the present system root and branch and putting a new one in its place.

N G S Kivi in *Gandhian contribution to the theory of politics,1983* says that almost all the Gandhian concepts like Sat, Ahinsa, Satyagrah, Non-co-operation ,Sarvodya,Gram-raj,Ramraj etc are concepts by intuition. Even when Gandhi accepts certain concepts from western prophets or thinkers like christ,Tolstoy,Thoreau or Ruskin, he comments them to their equivalents in terms of concepts by intuition to fit them within his own system.

The book on *Village Swaraj* by M. K. Gandhi ,1962 contains selection from Mahatma Gandhi's writings on "Village Swaraj".It deals with the meaning of Swaraj ,picture of an ideal society .It also carries Gandhiji's views on different aspects of rural life.

A book by K Joseph, in *Conclusion of the study of the role neighbourhood groups in promoting Gram Swaraj,2002* concludes that concept of Gram Swaraj is a dynamic one. The neighbourhood group ,if formed with the intention of facilitating sustainable local development can serve as a significant step towards the attainment of Gram Swaraj.

3. Conceptualizing Gram Swaraj

According to Mahatma Gandhi, the word Swaraj was a Vedic word which meant self rule or the rule which self exercises over itself. To quote him, “The word Swaraj is a sacred word, a Vedic word meaning self rule and self restraint”.² It was the right order of the various powers of the self and embodied the quest for self improvement. Explaining the meaning of Swraj he said, ‘The root meaning of Swaraj is self-rule. Swaraj may, therefore be rendered as disciplined rule from within’.³ Gram Swaraj can be understood in a simple words; Gram means a village; and Swaraj means freedom ,independence, self rule. The Gram Swaraj would, therefore, mean the freedom, liberty, independence, self rule of the villages. The village is at the core of the Gram Swaraj-Samaj.”The picture of Gram Swaraj of Gandhiji is not the resurrection of the old village Panchayats but the formation of fresh independent village units of Swaraj in the context of the present day world. ⁴ Gram Swaraj is the practical embodiment of non-violence in the sphere of politics, economics and sociology.

In Gandhian politics, democracy developed into the rule of the common people and depends ultimately on the power of the people and not upon the power of the police or military therefore, the functioning of democracy and violence is not possible in the system of politics. So Gandhiji implores for the moralization of needs and voluntary action as the basis of democratic life and culture. The importance of diminishing co-ercion entails the closest possible estimate to decentralize polity. Voluntary co-operation demanded a federation of village communities.⁵

3.1 Basic Principles of Gram Swaraj-In order to grasp the essence of Gram Swaraj ,We need to understand the basic principles of Gram Swaraj which are as follows:-

- (1)Supremacy of man-Full employment (2) Body Labour (3)Equality (4)Trusteeship
 (5)Decentralization (6) Swadeshi (7)Self-sufficiency (8) Co-Operation(9)Satyagrah
 (10) Equality of religions(11)Panchayati Raj (12)Nai Talim

Everyone needs to have basic necessities of life. The economic constitution should be such that no one suffers from the want of food and clothing. To ensure this, means of production of the elementary necessities of life remain in the control of the masses. ⁶. Their monopolization by a country ,nation or an individual would be unjust .Every man has an equal right to the necessities of life. Real planning consisted in the best utilization of manpower of India.

The writings of the thinkers like Ruskin and Tolstoy greatly influenced Gandhiji and he inherited the idea of the bread and labour from them. He further argued that, God has given everyone the capacity to work and earn more than his daily bread. He said-“God created man to work for his food and those who ate without work were thieves.”⁷ As far as equality is concerned, economic equality means abolishing the conflict between the capital and labour, the rich and the poor. True economics

stands for social justice; it promotes the good of all equally. He said –“I want to bring about equalization of status”. 8

At the root of this doctrine of equal destitute lies the principle of trusteeship. Gram Swaraj aims to end the individual ownership of means of production. In Gram Swaraj the entire land in a given village would belong to the village means to all the people in that village. The Gram Swaraj abolished both the private and state ownership of the property and replaces them by the village ownership of property. Under this system all the people in village would jointly and co-operatively use the resources for the welfare of all in the village .Thus under Gram Swaraj village would be more a trustee than a owner putting an end to all types of exploitation and selfishness .So, trusteeship is a theory of need based production ,equitable distribution and social justice.

Swadeshi found an important place in Gram Swaraj. The spirit of Swadeshi guides the behavior of the men and encourages them the use of the local resources. It emphasizes on the local skill and indigenous work and makes people self sufficient. Various activities would be conducted on a co-operation basis and this co-operation should be based on non-violence. Non-violence could be the sanction of the village community in which every religion would have its full and equal place. Gram Swaraj aims to make every village self sufficient, self reliant and self governing entity. It should produce own food, cloth and other basic necessities.

The government of the village would be conducted by the Panchayat of fine persons, elected annually by the adults men and women possessing minimum prescribed qualification. 9The Panchayat would be the legislature, judiciary and the executive combined together. It would be expected to attend the education of the boys and girls in its village, sanitation, medical needs, and cleanliness of village, wells and ponds and the upliftment of daily wants of so called Untouchables. A Panchayat that fails without just cause to attend to the requirements of the villages or stands self condemned for any cause may be disbanded and another elected in its place. To achieve Gram Swaraj education was of prime importance. Education should draw the best out of the child and man-body ,mind and spirit.A new concept of education was offered to give rise to a creative human beings this was Nai Talim or new education. Nai Talim laid great stress on pupils contact with nature through manual work and on the concept of unity of life.

3.2 Foundation of Gram Swaraj

The foundation of Gram Swaraj is unique as it has primarily a spiritual foundation and then only secondarily a constitutional foundation. Its sanction is not so much derive from constitutional provisions as much as from the spiritual values. The basis of Gram Swaraj is Swaraj which means self control, self restraint, self rule or rule over self, control of mind, voluntary inner-self discipline and discipline rule found within by each and every individual. Non-violence, utmost duty, consciousness and the knowledge of the soul power are essential parts of Swaraj.The rationale of

Gram Swaraj is independence and freedom ,and man can not be free as long he is the slave of his own desire. Thus, the individual village community, society and nation must practice control, self reliance and self sufficiency, if they want to be free.

3.3 Gram Swaraj is an essential component of decentralized polity or decentralized governance. Gandhiji envisaged an ideal political order in which everybody is his own ruler and he rules himself in such a way that he is never a hindrance to other. He preferred self rule over and above all forms of government. That government alone can be considered best which governs the largest number of happy and virtuous individuals. Gandhian decentralization means the creation of parallel politics in which people's power is institutionalized to counter the centralizing and alienating forces of the modern state. According to Mahatma Gandhi, utilization of the local resources is quite fundamental to the development of the Panchayati Raj system. The Panchayat with the Gram Sabhas should be so organized as to identify the resources locally available for the development in the agricultural and industrial sectors. Gandhiji wrote, "Democracy becomes an impossible thing until power is shared by all but let not democracy degenerate into mobocracy.¹⁰

3.4 Gram Swaraj is the ideal given expression to on a realizable plane unlike the distant goal of the withering away of the state. Gandhiji being a practical idealist, realized the practical usefulness of the ideal of stateless Democracy, and presented village Swaraj which is not the withering of the state an utopian scheme but "Scattering of the state".¹¹

3.5 The concept of Gram Swaraj contains the idea of the ideal village, constructive programmes and village economy which transforms Gram Swaraj into a model of development.

a) An ideal village will be so constructed as to lend itself to perfect sanitation. It will have cottages with sufficient light and ventilation built of a material obtainable within a radius of five miles of it .The cottages will have a courtyard enabling house holders to plant vegetables for domestic use and to house their cattle. The village will have wells and waterworks according to its need. It will have house of worship for all, also a common meeting place(hall),a village common for grazing its cattle, a co-operative dairy, facilities for entertainment, a play ground ,a theatre ,a gymkhana and primary and secondary schools in which industrial education would be the central fact. It will produce its own grains, vegetables and fruit and its own khadi.The villagers can under intelligent guidance, double the village income as distinguished from individual income. There are in our villages in exhaustible resources not for commercial purpose in every case but certainly for local purposes in almost every case. The ideal village will contain intelligent human beings.¹²

b.) The Gram Swaraj economy would be (i) Intensive, small-scale, individual, diversified farming supported by Co-Operative efforts as opposed to mechanized ,large scale and collective farming (ii)Development of cottage crafts as ancillary to agriculture (iii) Cattle –based economy with strict enforcement of the "law of return" (iv) Proper balance of animal, human and plant life, their relationship being symbiotic (v) Voluntary protection of both human and animal power against the competition of machinery as the price of social insurance.¹³

c) Gandhi's "Constructive work programme" contains following items:-

(i) Communal unity (ii) Removal of untouchability (iii) Prohibition (iv) Khadi (v) Other village industries (vi) Village Sanitation (vii) Basic education (viii) Adult education (ix) Service of women (x) Education in health and hygiene (xi) development of provincial language (xii) Promotion of Hindi as a national language (xiii) Working for economic equality (xiv) Satyagrah (xv) Organizing peasants and industrial labour (xvi) Eschewing party politics, particularly by students and integrating theory of non-violence with academic studies.¹⁴

d.) Village Swaraj, according to Gandhi, is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity. Non-violence with its technique of Satyagrah and non-co-operation is the sanction of the village community. Here there is a perfect democracy based upon individual freedom. The individual is the architect of his own Government. The law of non-violence rules him and his Government.¹⁵

4. Relevance in present context

Gandhiji's ideology is the way of living a happy and peaceful life. His philosophy can be incorporated at every stage of life in every century and that's what his relevance is all about. Gandhianism has much significance today on ethical and behavioral part because today's society is witnessing the degradation of values. His virtues of self control are much needed in materialist world driven by the desire to achieve and acquire more. His idea of decentralization of power can be implemented in democracies through empowered local self government at the grass root level. Today people participation in the development of the villages is missing as the Gram Sabhas rarely meet to discuss the village development plan. No doubts due to reservation of seats a large number of women and members from deprived class have come to occupy positions in the Panchayat but their role in decision making is very limited. In the present time we find the problem of unemployment is increasing, environment degradation is a major problem, village community is fragmented, people do not participate in development process due to the breakdown of village and cottage industries and migration to the cities has elaborated the problem. The Gandhian concept of rural development is more of a people's movement than a system of regimented governance. The concept of service to the community or Shramdaan found no place in our system of village development as the dependence on government has increased to a large extent. The answer to these problems lies in adopting Gandhian model of Gram Swaraj where every village will be self sufficient unit. It is a panacea for all types of existing problems of Indian society.

5. Conclusion

We have discussed various aspects of Gram Swaraj of Gandhiji and indicated how these remain relevant in the modern times .Gandhiji is perhaps the only great thinker of this century who could foresee the social and ecological consequences of the exploitative model of development and offer an alternative model. When Gandhiji was preaching Swaraj he did not only meant self rule but also to become independent from the British way of living .He wanted to make people realize the value of truth, non-violence , Swaraj and implement them in their way of living. By implementing his philosophy of Gram Swaraj we can bring happiness to the humankind. It is only the Gram Swaraj which focuses on bringing social progress, social and economic equality, social peace, social security, social sustainability and happiness in the society.

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