



In Contemporary India, the relevance of Gram Swaraj

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Abstract

Gram Swaraj is the first step of Ram Rajya system. Ram Rajya means a society and village or country full of all happiness. Swaraj is a sacred and Vedic word which means self-rule and self-restraint. Mahatma Gandhi had also given maximum emphasis on gram swaraj for the development of villages. They always believed that the real identity of India is the villages itself. According to Gandhiji every village should be self-sufficient and capable. The village has been the centre of the holistic thought and philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi. According to Gandhiji, Gram Swaraj meant making every village in India independent and self-reliant. They believed that if the villages are destroyed, then India will also be destroyed, because the real identity of India is the village of India. Therefore, to make the villages self-reliant, Gandhiji had emphasized on the Panchayati Raj system. He constantly made people aware to adopt indigenous goods. He encouraged the adoption of khadi to make the villages self-reliant and also spread the message of boycott of foreign goods. Instead of consuming foreign goods, Gandhiji advised people to produce food, grains, fruit, greens, vegetables, cotton and khadi in the village itself for their needs. By doing this the people of the village will be self-sufficient for their livelihood.

INTRODUCTION

The picture of Gram Swaraj as conceived by Gandhiji is not the resurrection of the old village Panchayats but the fresh formation of independent village units of Swaraj in the context of present-day World. Gram Swaraj is the practical embodiment of non-violence in the spheres, economics and sociology. According to Gandhiji, ideal society is a stateless democracy, the state of enlightened anarchy where social life has become so perfect that it is self-regulated. In the ideal state, there is no political power because there is no state. Gandhiji wanted true democracy to function in India. He, therefore, observed: "True democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village. "In Gram swaraj, the village being the decentralized small political unit endowed with fullest powers, every individual will have a direct voice in the government. The individual is the architect of his own government. The government of the village will be conducted by a Panchayat of five persons annually elected by adult villagers possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. It will have all the authority and jurisdiction. The Panchayat will be the legislature, judiciary and executive rolled into one as there will be no system of punishment in it. Real Democracy, i.e. Swaraj works for the full freedom and growth of the individual who is the ultimate motive power of real political system. The main objective of Gram Swaraj is to promote social harmony, reach out to poor families, solve all the problem related to education, health, housing and benefit the people who have been deprived of the public welfare schemes of the central government. To realize Gram Swaraj, the Indian government has launched schemes like the Rastriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA) to strengthen Panchayati Raj institutions, and the Deendayal Anthodia Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) to empower rural communities through self-help groups. Other initiatives such as the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojna (Improving rural roads) and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana- Gramin(affordable rural roads) and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin(affordable rural housing) also contribute to rural development, a key aspect of Gram Swaraj. Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana is a rural development programme broadly focusing upon the development in the villages which includes social development, cultural development and spread motivation among the people on social mobilization of the village community.

GANDHIAN PHILOSOPHY OF GRAM SWARAJ

Gram Swaraj, a core concept of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy, envisions self-sufficient and self-governing villages, acting as the foundation of a truly independent India. It emphasizes decentralization of power, with villages managing their own affairs and becoming economically independent while individuals are at the centre of economic and social development, promoting self-reliance and moral governance.

KEY ASPECTS OF GRAM SWARAJ:

Decentralization and Self-Sufficiency:

Gram Swaraj advocates for villages to be autonomous units, capable of meeting their essential needs, including food, clothing, and other necessities through local production and resources.

Democratic Participation:

It envisions active participation of villagers in local governance, with village Panchayats playing a central role in decision-making and community development.

Economic independence:

Gandhi believed that economic independence at the village level was crucial for true freedom. Gram Swaraj encourages local production, fair trade practices. And a focus on sustainable livelihoods.

Moral Governance:

Beyond political and economic aspects, Gram Swaraj emphasizes moral values, social harmony, and ethical conduct in all aspects of village life.

Interdependence:

While striving for self-sufficiency, Gram Swaraj also recognizes the importance of healthy interdependence between villages and the wider community.

RELEVANCE OF GRAM SWARAJ

Gram Swaraj remains highly relevant in Indian democracy as the blueprint for decentralized self-governance and grassroots participation, promoting self-sufficient villages as the foundation for holistic development and an ideal non-violent social order. Though not fully realized, its principles are embodied in the Panchayati Raj system, which aims to empower local communities through participatory decision-making, ensuring direct involvement, thus fostering a more democratic and equitable society.

Why Gram Swaraj is still Relevant

Decentralization of Power:

Gandhiji believed that true democracy starts at the village level, and his concept of Gram Swaraj envisions a network of self-governing villages as the basic unit of political and economic activity.

Grassroots Participation

It advocates for direct participation of individuals in decision-making, creating self-reliant communities where people are the architects of their own government and development.

Holistic Development:

Gram Swaraj goes beyond politics to include economic, social, cultural, and ecological dimensions, focusing on the all-round development of individuals and villages.

Empowerment of Rural India:

It was conceived to empower the seven lakh villages where, according to Gandhiji, the real India resides, giving them agency in their own progress.

Nonviolent Social Order:

The System is rooted in non-violence and cooperation, aiming to build a just and peaceful society free from exploitation and selfishness.

Sustainable Development

The emphasis on local resources and self-sufficiency aligns with modern sustainable development goals, making the Gandhian model increasingly relevant in contemporary challenges.

Supremacy of Man -Full Employment:

According to Gandhiji the economic constitution of India and for the matter of that of the World, should be such that no one under it should suffer from want of food and clothing other words everybody should be able to get sufficient work to enable him to make the two ends meet. And this ideal can be universally realized only if the means of production of the elementary necessities of life remain in the control of the masses. These should be freely available to all as God's air and water are or ought to be, they should not be made a vehicle of traffic for the exploitation of others. Their monopolization by any country, nation or group of persons would be unjust. The neglect of this simple principle is the cause of the destitution that we witness today not only in this unhappy land but in other parts of the world too.

Equality:

Economic equality is the master key to non-violent independence. Working for economic equality means abolishing the central conflict between capital and labour. It means the levelling down of the few rich in whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation's wealth on the one hand, and a levelling up the semi-starved naked millions on the other. A non-violent system of government is clearly an impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists.

CONCLUSION

According to the dream of Mahatma Gandhi, every village in India should be self-reliant. The ideal Indian village should be set up in such a way that village has proper means for farming, schools, hospitals and meeting hall. Such swaraj which is equal for all, irrespective of caste or religion, which can be availed by every citizen of the village. The Gandhian model of Gram Swaraj may be relevant because it focuses on self-sufficiency and self-reliant through economic development and encompassed moral and ethical values. Primarily his Gram Swaraj is an alternative model for serving humanity.



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