



Gandhiji's vision of Swaraj in the present era of India

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Abstract

Gandhi's vision of fully realizing Swaraj true self-rule in India remained unfulfilled during his lifetime. However, the charitable organizations he established profoundly influenced subsequent non-governmental organizations (NGOs), volunteer groups, and people's movements across India's diverse regions. These later initiatives drew directly from Gandhian models, adapting them to local contexts. While Gandhi popularized the term "Swaraj," he redefined it far beyond mere political independence. For him, Swaraj embodied a holistic revolution permeating every facet of life: personal, social, economic, and spiritual. At its core lay the capacity for objective self-evaluation, relentless self-purification, and progressive self-reliance. This inward journey toward ethical autonomy mirrored ancient Indian spiritual practices, akin to the rituals of introspection in traditions like those observed at the Maha Kumbh, where collective purification fosters communal transformation. Undeterred by the enormity of this idealistic pursuit in a vast, stratified society, Gandhi remained resolute. He firmly believed that societal metamorphosis begins with individual and communal change. If sufficient numbers of people and communities embraced Swaraj's principles cultivating self-discipline, non-violence (ahimsa), and trusteeship then the nation would inevitably follow suit. This bottom-up approach challenged colonial hierarchies and inspired postcolonial movements, from environmental activism to rural self-help groups. Today, Gandhi's Swaraj endures as a blueprint for sustainable development, reminding us that true freedom demands ongoing moral vigilance. In an era of globalization, its emphasis on self-reliance offers a counter-narrative to dependency, urging India toward authentic sovereignty.

Keyword: *Gandhiji's vision of Swaraj, the present era of India*

1. Introduction

"In his single-track and many-sided nature, The dominating impression that one gathered was his identification with the masses, a community of spirit with them, an amazing sense of unity with the dispossessed and poverty-stricken not only of India but of the world. Even religion as everything else, took second place to his passion to raise these submerged people."

- Jawaharlal Nehru



When India achieved independence, the people celebrated because the period of slavery had ended and our nation had arrived, as though the golden sun has risen. Many individuals died in the war for freedom, and people had high expectations of national leaders. The exploitation that existed in the slave state will be eliminated, poverty will be eliminated, everyone will find a job, and even the common man will receive prompt justice. Gandhiji's ambition was to see every human being in the land happy. And he had his plan for achieving happiness. He made several practical suggestions. Gandhiji's ideas served as an inspiration for us. Our policymakers did not find it practical to put it into practice. As a result, the people's aspirations of a free India after independence, as envisioned by Gandhiji in his vision of Swaraj, were not met. The status of the poor, peasants, and other poor a community could not be significantly improved.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a doctrinal and interpretive methodology, rooted in philosophical hermeneutics, to analyze Mahatma Gandhi's concept of Swaraj and its relevance to contemporary India's development under the "Panch Pran" framework. Drawing on Gadamer's (1975) fusion of horizons, it bridges Gandhi's historical texts with modern socio-economic challenges. Primary data comprise Gandhi's seminal works, including *Hind Swaraj* (1909), *Village Swaraj* (1962), and selected *Young India* articles (e.g., 1928), purposively sampled for their articulation of Swaraj as holistic self-rule—encompassing self-purification, Gram Swaraj, ahimsa, and trusteeship. Secondary sources include Nehru's writings, Vinoba Bhave's commentaries, and contemporary analyses from journals like *Economic and Political Weekly*.

3. Gandhi's concept of Swaraj

In the 72 years of the journey to independent India, our condition as a nation is like a traveller who has lost his way. When the British left six decades ago, we called that event Swaraj. The British called it a transfer of power, today it seems that the British were right, we were wrong. After getting independence, the independent democratic country that India has become today is not the India of Mahatma Gandhi. The cooperation which Gandhiji got during the freedom struggle by instilling immense trust in the people was like some unspoken promise after getting Swaraj. Due to this, the people of the country saw a rosy dream of an independent India. That dream has come true.

Any thinker or idea that has a definite effect on the circumstances of that time. When Gandhi started his non-violent struggle for freedom, the condition of the people of Slave India was very bad. The problems of exploitation, poverty, unemployment, inequality, centralization of economic power etc. were faced in the



country in a serious form. Gandhi wanted to free the country from the slavery of the British and at the same time to get the people of the country out of the problems they were suffering from.

Gandhiji wanted to create a people-powered consciousness. Gandhi ji did not treat the citizen of the country as living animals, he wanted to give them the freedom to live with dignity on his two legs. For that, he had to make the village self-sufficient. Gandhi knew the weakness of the people of the country. Truth and non-violence are among the basic values of Gandhian thought to solve the problems facing the country. Their economic, social, political and cultural values are rooted in truth and non-violence. They did not support a social and economic system built on material values alone. The focus of Gandhiji's studies and activities was the common man. He had to build manpower. Unfortunately, after independence, we have failed to build a prosperous human power-member society. Human capital investment is very important for the economic development of the country.

Prof. Schumpeter said, *"For the success of economic and political democracy there must be a sufficient number of individuals of sufficient ability and moral character."*

Mr According to Crosland, *"We don't want to enter an age of abundance only to find that we have lost the very values that teach us how to use abundance to create abundance."*

India's misfortune is that the Gandhian idea has been praised or condemned in equal measure. It has not been criticized to that extent. Who has so much time for Gandhiji who has to think, be self-possessed, objectively analyze and test for criticism.

Values also change over time. Einstein also says that values depend on need. Paul Sarg says that we create ourselves and our values through our choices. So ideology is also changeable by nature. Gandhi's own words are, "I do not care to look the same all the time. In my search for truth, I have discarded many ideas and learned many new things. I may have grown old in age. But I don't feel that I have stopped developing internally or that I will stop developing after the fall of the body." But we have made Gandhiji's thought system rigid. Any policy which can bring happiness to the people in the far reaches of the country, whatever the modern technology, is not against Gandhiji's principles.

Gandhiji has shown the way to bring happiness to all the people of the country, especially the poor class to come out of their misery and the economic, social and cultural development of the people. Gandhiji had full faith that following that path would end all the problems of the people. He believed that any ideal could be achieved through masculinity. He did not believe in false pretences.

Gandhi saw the solution to India's problems in Swaraj. Gandhiji has said, *"The swaraj of my dream is the swaraj of the poor." All the common amenities of life which the rich enjoy should be available to the*



poor. I have not the slightest doubt that unless these facilities are guaranteed in Swaraj, it is not complete Swaraj."

Gandhiji says, "Swaraj means an independent effort to break free from the control of the government, whether the government is foreign or native". "Swaraj can be maintained only where many people are true and patriotic i.e. who understand their interest in the interest of the people and few are greedy, selfish and dishonest, one meaning of Swaraj is that the state of many is that if many are dishonest or selfish then there is chaos in the state.

"If Swaraj is not meant to clean and settle our civilization, it is useless. Our civilization means that policy should take precedence over practice."

"Complete Swaraj...Complete because it is for the people as much as for the king, without any distinction of caste, creed or status. The complete swaraj of my imagination is not solitary freedom. But there is healthy and dignified freedom. My nationalism is fierce. However, it is not isolated, it does not intend to harm any people or person."

'Swaraj itself means the means to achieve it - truth and non-violence - to which we are pledged. All that Swaraj in my imagination will come only when we all firmly believe that Swaraj can be achieved, exercised, and maintained through the only truth - non-violence.'

"Swaraj of the people means an independent state arising out of the swaraj of every individual. Such a state arises only from the observance of religion by every individual as a citizen. In this swaraj, no one has the same idea of his rights. When the right is needed, it rushes in.

'Swaraj only depends on our own inner strength. It is on our strength to fight against the greatest dangers. A swaraj which does not require such masculinity in attaining and sustaining it cannot be called swaraj.'

Gram Swaraj is the herb taken by Mahatma Gandhi as the fruit of his life's effort to unite his heart with the millions of hunger-suffering people of India. Not only in India but in the whole world, in whose history the peasants and the poor have always been exploited everywhere and have always been victims of starvation. The perfect medicine for his disease has been found.

War and imperialism have their roots in the social order and economy of nations. Until a radical revolution is made in the social system and the economy, the hope of world peace remains in the sky. Therefore the World Organization must secure the implementation of true democracy and eradicate all forms of exploitation. Small units are conducive to the implementation of true democracy. And it provides the field for the full development of individuals.



Human experience testifies that collective life is more vital, diverse and productive when it is concentrated in smaller units and simpler organizations. It is in the small units that life beats.

Gandhiji has said, "Serving the village means establishing swaraj, everything else is a myth."

"I have been saying that if the village is destroyed, Hindustan will also be destroyed. Then it will not be Hindustan. If we are to build swaraj on the basis of non-violence, we must restore the villages to their rightful place."

Gandhiji's concept of Gram Swaraj was that every village should be fully republic and autonomous. The instrument or force behind every village society is non-violence with the method of satyagraha or non-cooperation. Mahatma Gandhi was a practical idealist so he realized the utility of the ideal of stateless democracy and gifted us with the concept of Gram Swaraj. Which is not a merger of the state, but a decentralization of the state.

Swaraj in Gandhiji's vision is the upliftment of all sections of the country, true and powerful democracy. Who has the solution to all problems.

To fulfil the promise of present India Lokswaraj, the country gave an ideal constitution. But his tenure was such that the rags of that ideal flew. The father of the nation said that in Swaraj every minister will become a trustee of the people, and the administration will become a servant of the people. Today the entire system is riddled with corruption. No one is willing to believe that any elected representative can be honest.

The father of the nation said that simplicity and frugality will be the foundations of democracy. Today ministers and officials travel by air. They enjoy in five-star hotels. And the formula of higher spending, better governance is in effect.

Gandhiji said that the central point of Swaraj will be the human being, today the common man is feeling helpless and orphaned.

Gandhiji said that swaraj means swaraj of the poor, he saw Lord Narayan among the poor of this country. Poverty was not meant for him. Once when the girls came with lamps to perform the prayer of Gandhiji, Bapu said to extinguish these lamps and squeeze out the oil in the pan and give it to the poor. Today, the poor are being manipulated into whatever form they can, and such deceitful games are being played with the poor. So the poor understand that the government is playing Holi with them. And so they see a cloud of joy flying all around them. When the reality is that every rupee used for the poor becomes 15 paise by the time it reaches them. And this is not accepted by an ordinary person, the Prime Minister, sitting on the highest post in the country, has admitted.

Gandhiji talked about village swaraj, the village will become an autonomous unit, today the condition of the villages is pathetic. There is no clean drinking water in the villages, no roads, no electricity facility, no



health facility, and more than half of the population of the village is illiterate. Gram panchayat elections have replaced unity and animosity in the village.

No basic facilities are available in the villages. There is no scope for employment. There is no paved house to live in. A study by the National Council of Applied Economic Research has revealed shocking things.

It cannot be said that good things have not been done in this country. But it is certain that a well-mannered, civil society could not arise, which is not truly Swaraj, even if we take the false satisfaction of calling it our own Raj.

Today the country is mired in violence and terrorism. Animosity between sects, religions has increased. Gandhiji's weapon of intrepid seems to have disappeared. Society is living under constant fear. No thanks to safety and security either. Rulers who spend heavily on their security can do nothing for the security of the people.

One of the fighters of Swaraj Achyutara Pawardhan said, "After independence, we have cheated the people in the name of democracy. They have made fools of the gullible people by making promises. Party democracy has remained the tyranny of a handful of rulers, and the ideal of socialism has devolved into state capitalism. My belief that socialism would eliminate poverty was an illusion, I had no idea then that such distortions would occur in the management of socialist enterprises. You, me, and all of us are the culprits of the people for making such a state of democracy."

Our relationship with nature is breaking day by day. The pull towards materiality is separating us from the beating heart. Peace and contentment are nowhere to be found. The true joy of the mind is buried under the pile of power and wealth. We are surrounded by suffering so much that there is no room for sensation. Have we learned all this from Gandhi, who said, "My life is my message", while we are jumping for small, short and shallow goals?

Gandhi has trapped thought in a maze of big ideals and tough words. It seems that Gandhiji has become far away from the public. Gandhiji's seemingly simple principles have created such an atmosphere as if a saint had adorned nature. On the other hand, religion and culture have always had a strong hold on us. As a result of which people give the title of godman to such a person who himself is living in the past and also drags people to the past. We lose our own identity. Instead of making new discoveries, the scholars here use intellect to prove that many great discoveries were made in ancient times or to criticize discoveries. Otherwise Indian ships would sail as far as Mombasa for hundreds of years, yet we could have given the world a Vasco-de-Gama or a Columbus. Religion, spirituality and culture are misused to keep people always living in the past. Due to the habit of living in the past, no scientist, revolutionary thinker, social reformer or religious reformer emerged from them. After the Renaissance, the people of Europe were freed from the false beliefs or grip of religion, the new outlook that developed in those people after that is the result of the development of Europe



today. Of course, the glorious inspirations of the past should be kept in mind. One should draw inspiration from it and be aware of the current shortcomings.

Gandhiji valued masculinity, he knew that development is not possible as long as the people remain imprisoned in the illusions of religion and culture. So he gave great importance to masculinity and hard work. Some divine power or incarnate man will come and all will be well. This is what destroys the masculinity of people. Someone else will come and solve the problem. We cannot do that. And even though the solution to the problems is at hand, people do not make any effort. As a result, people become cowardly, passive, and escapist. Although the Gita is not read by the people of the West, it has brought the principle of Karma to life, the people there are honest and law abiding.

Our Swaraj is ravaged by many evils. All this is our creation. It is not the fault of the predecessors. We have ourselves to blame. No one Gandhi, no one Indira, no one Rajiv, no one Morarji, no one Bajpai, no one Manmohan Singh can solve all the problems single handedly. A national resolution is needed to overcome these problems. Gandhian values need to be adopted and put into practice.

Why are we silent in this atmosphere of injustice and inequality in all directions? Why have we got the habit of signing everything with our mouths? A democratic country and that too in our own country? Gandhiji could not tolerate injustice thousands of miles away in Africa, do we have the courage?

Democracy matured in Western countries, resulting in open democratic processes in the administration of most institutions and benefiting the entire population. We did the exact opposite there. Our other institutions, even the so-called Gandhian institutions, have not been free from internal strife and hypocrisy, our democracy is the most corrupt in the world. A criminal gets away easily by committing a serious crime or breach of discipline.

This is not a failure of Bapu or his policies or his philosophy. This is the failure of those who do not pass Bapu's test, while the policies made by the rulers of independent India are judged on Gandhiji's test. Then only failure comes into view. We could give our management skills to the world but could not benefit the villages of the country.

As the saying goes, "Der Aye Durast Aye" still has to create rich manpower if anything is to be done for the poor and villages of India. In which the values mentioned by Gandhi are internalized. This is time-consuming. But from the moment we decide, time will start and the later we wake up, the time will start late.

4. Conclusion

If his followers do not take care that the utterances and teachings that the country should adopt Gandhimarg are hypocritical and heretical, the impression is not imprinted on the minds of the people, and if



Bapu fails to convey the true message, the anger of the people will turn towards breaking the statue of Gandhiji himself. Do we want to save Gandhi? In today's time, this question has become complicated. Do we have an answer? What is the solution to this situation? The question is whether Gandhiji's idea of Swaraj will ever come. The question remains, do we have the moral courage to find out where the mistakes have been made and correct them?

Our economy has run in the opposite direction from Gandhiji's ideas. The common man was completely forgotten. Employment for all remained a dream. Gandhiji was not opposed to any policy in which the people of the remotest parts of the country get happiness then why not any modern technology. Vinoba Bhave said that, if you can employ the entire population of the country with something other than rent, then I will not have the slightest pain in burning this rent and cooking on it.

Blindly opposing modern technology in the manufacturing sector in the name of Gandhi is not the solution to the problem. If the state in which Gandhiji wanted to see the people of the country can be achieved even by getting concessions from Gandhiji's principles, then there should be no objection. The real capital of a country is its human power. Gandhiji's ideal values can be implanted in the people and an ideal member society can be created. And that work can be done with an ideal education system. Only an educated society can develop true understanding. Only such a society can get out of false pretences and beliefs, if every person accepts his responsibility, most of the problems can be solved.

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