

Mahatma Gandhiji's Concept of Swaraj

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Abstract

According to Mahatma Gandhi, Swaraj does not merely mean political independence or the establishment of self-government. Rather, it means complete self-rule and ethical self-control. Gandhi believed that political freedom without moral development and control over one's own desires is meaningless. As long as human beings remain slaves to their own weaknesses and uncontrolled desires, they cannot truly be free.

Mahatma Gandhiji's concept of Swaraj is not limited only to political independence, but it is a comprehensive thought of moral, economic, social, and spiritual self-reliance of the individual and society. According to Gandhiji, Swaraj does not merely mean ending the foreign British rule, but freeing the Indian mind from the colonial mindset, as well as self-control and self-rule, starting from the individual level.

The word 'Swaraj' is made of two Sanskrit words 'Swa' (self) and 'Raj' (rule), which simply means 'self-rule' or control over oneself. According to Mahatma Gandhiji, true political independence will only be meaningful when every individual in the country becomes morally and mentally free. Self-discipline and moral purity are the first steps to Swaraj.

Keywords

The present article discusses the concepts of Swaraj, Hindu Swaraj, truth and non-violence, self-realization and self-control, decentralization, Gram Swaraj (village self-government) Panchayati Raj, Satyagraha, non-cooperation, Swadeshi, economic self-reliance, cottage industries, universal humanism, ethical Swaraj, Ram Rajya, and the moral strength of the individual.

Introduction

According to Mahatma Gandhiji, the foundation of true Swaraj is the village of the nation. Every village in the nation should be a self-sufficient, independent republic that fulfills its own needs. All villagers (citizens of the village) should create employment in the village through agriculture and cottage industries (home industries). Also, for economic independence, the use of Swadeshi goods is very important. By decentralizing power and taking it to the grassroots level, every Gram Panchayat should have the right to make decisions at the village level, so that governance becomes people-oriented. Gandhiji had a deep concern for the development of rural people and farmers. Complementary home industries for agriculture should be set up in villages to generate employment; Gandhiji never accepted a development that displaces rural people.

Gandhiji was of the clear opinion that the five elements on earth: land, air, water, sunlight, and sky are gifts of God and belong to the community. Because of this, he insisted that under no circumstances should they be controlled by an individual or a corporate group. Mahatma Gandhiji firmly believed that a farmer should have only as much agricultural land as he can properly plan and manage for crops. Along with crop production and their by-products, he should be able to properly rear farm animals useful for agriculture, similarly, through good planning and achieving adequate biodiversity, he will capably rehabilitate himself and his family and be the master of a quality life.

In Gandhiji's concept of Swaraj (complete independence), agriculture was the cornerstone of all development. He repeatedly expressed the need for policies that develop agriculture and promote employment generation by producing essential goods for people through a network of home industries. Gandhiji's model was

not centered on mass production but production by the masses. According to his thought, large-scale land acquisition for various projects was not needed for development, because he knew this could create major problems like displacing people, depriving them of livelihood resources, and degrading the environment.

Unlike the systems of Western scientists, most development models were industry-centric, involving huge machines, tools, equipment, urbanization, corporate networks, and high-tech parks requiring large-scale land acquisition. Gandhiji did not accept such agricultural development models because the land acquired for such development was fertile. In most cases, large-scale farming families, tribals, fishermen, and marginalized sections of society are ruined. These displaced people are the original inhabitants of that region; thus, setting up development projects by making a graveyard of agriculture and society on a large scale was completely against the philosophy of Gandhiji's concept of Swaraj. Therefore, Gandhiji did not advocate such projects. However, projects and industries that are acceptable (approved) by the local people should be set up immediately, without delay, where farmers take the initiative and give their own agricultural land. Such a project of mass production, which people and farmers run as their own industry, would be ideal. Such projects would be owned by the people and run for the benefit of the society and the nation. Mahatma Gandhiji also clearly opined that it would be the moral responsibility of the state to provide sufficient financial assistance, technical guidance, and other necessary support for the establishment and prosperity of such industries. Establishing development projects by turning agriculture and farming communities into graveyards did not fit into Gandhiji's concept of Swaraj at all. In fact, he strictly opposed it.

Key Aspects of Swaraj

- **Personal and Moral Swaraj:** Swaraj truly begins with gaining control over each individual's own mind and desires. Unless a person conquers their own passions, greed, and selfishness, external freedom is meaningless.
- **Gram Swaraj (Economic Swaraj):** Mahatma Gandhiji's India largely resides in its villages, so every village should be self-reliant and self-sufficient. To provide employment to the citizens of the village, Gandhiji placed special emphasis on Swadeshi, Khadi, and Charkha.
- **Decentralization of Power:** He believed that political power should not remain concentrated in the hands of a select few, but must reach the grassroots level and every Gram Panchayat.
- **Non-violence and Truth:** According to Gandhiji, the path to achieving and maintaining Swaraj must always be that of truth and non-violence.

Political Decentralization (Gram Swaraj)

- **Strengthening Gram Panchayats:** The center of power should not just be Delhi or Mumbai, but every village in the country and state should be one, where each village has the legal and financial rights to make its own decisions.
- **Direct Democracy:** Every citizen (Gram Sabha) of the village should have the right to take direct decisions in the development works of the village.

Economic Self-Reliance and Swadeshi

- **Promoting Cottage and Home Industries:** Instead of large factories, Khadi, handicrafts, and home industries should be developed in every village. This will generate employment at the local level.
- **Use of Swadeshi:** Reducing dependence on foreign and outside goods and increasing the use of local products.
- **Trusteeship of Wealth:** The rich should not act as owners of their wealth but should use it as 'Trustees' for the welfare of society.

Social Equality and Justice

- **Eradication of Untouchability and Caste Discrimination:** Ensuring equal rights and respect for people of all castes and religions in society.
- **Women Empowerment:** Giving women an equal place with men in the decision-making process and economic activities.
- **Antyodaya:** Placing the welfare of the poorest, most deprived, and the last person in society at the center of development.

Moral and Value-Based Education (Nai Talim)

- **Education through Action:** Education should not just be bookish. It should include physical labor, handicrafts, and moral values.
- **Education in Mother Tongue:** Primary education should be imparted in the children's mother tongue only, so that the thinking process of children gets a proper boost.
- **Character Building:** The main purpose of education should be to instill truth, non-violence, and a sense of service in students.

Moral Lifestyle and Non-violence

- **Non-violent Society:** Adopting the path of dialogue and Satyagraha by abandoning violence to resolve personal and social disputes.
- **Physical Labor:** Every person must do some physical labor for their food, which will increase the dignity of labor.

Conclusion

- **Not Just Political Freedom:** According to Gandhiji, Swaraj was not just about freeing India from British rule, he did not consider it a mere transfer of power, but in a true sense, Swaraj means creating self-rule and a self-reliant social system.
- **Grassroots Democracy:** The fundamental basis of Gandhiji's Swaraj was basically rural India. His goal was to decentralize power everywhere in rural areas and make every village a self-reliant and self-sufficient republic. So that the rights of power reach the last section of society.
- **Moral and Spiritual Values:** Swaraj was not just a means of material development; it was based on truth, non-violence, purity of means (using the right path), and morality. He believed that gaining control over oneself (self-restraint) is true Swaraj.
- **Economic Equality and Sarvodaya:** Gandhiji wanted to achieve 'Sarvodaya' (rise and welfare of all) through Swaraj. The main core of this concept was to end poverty, inequality, and exploitation in the country by boycotting foreign goods and accepting Swadeshi.

In short, Mahatma Gandhiji's concept of Swaraj was not merely about one country gaining independence from another, but it was a comprehensive way of life ensuring the mental, economic, social, and moral freedom of every individual. Even in today's times, this concept of Swaraj proves to be very important and a guiding light for sustainable development, empowerment of democracy, and social equality.

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