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Role of Mahatma Gandhi in the Gram Sawraj in India

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Abstract

In this paper, the Gandhian philosophy of Gram Swaraj and its relevance in the contemporary Indian democracy was discussed briefly. Gandhi Ji presented Gram Swaraj as the conception of his ideal of stateless democracy and wanted true democracy to function in India. It is the practical embodiment of truth and non-violence in the spheres of politics, economics and sociology and offers a potent cure for many of the political ills of the present political systems. The concept of Gram Swaraj is not only political; it touches all aspects of life: cultural, social, economic and ecological. It provides an ideal non-violent social order, in which self-sufficient, self-reliant and self-governing villages function independently in vital matters leading to the holistic development of the villages. Mahatma Gandhi firmly believed in democracy in grassroots. He advocated decentralized governance to participate in the formation of a nation of the poor and at the same time to exclude the state's intervention in the routine life of the people. Panchayats should have basic unit of democratic decentralization and higher units should cooperate with them. Today the Central and State Governments have to do multitasking for the development of the people; Therefore, it is necessary to encourage the government to take care of the rural and urban population. For this purpose the new Panchayati raj system has been implemented at the grassroots level and to empower rural men and women. These new systems realize more power than power and authority.

Keywords: Gram Sawraj, constitutional amendment, Panchayat Raj Institution

Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi strongly believed in democracy in grassroots. Gandhiji was a complex, multi-dimensional personality. He was a religious saint, a politician, a patriot and a nationalist, and an economist and a great freedom fighter. He was one of the most profound and original thinkers of the modern era. He has expressed his views in most cases of his life and what he said is still significant. The 73rd Amendment to the Constitution is a step in the right direction to meet the general level of public will. He supported the decentralized regime for the formation of a nation of the poor and at the same time to exclude state interference in regular public life. The goal of the panchayat to replace the court, he believed that real democracy can be realized by Panchayats and some people do not realize through the Panchayat and do not sit with some people in the center.

Gandhiji announced the hard work of the villagers for the development of rural areas. The people of the village should be aware of "miracles, nonviolence, truth, pride, intellectualness, lack of access, physical labour, wealth control, fearlessness and equal respect for all religions". He believed in a proper institutional framework that women self-reliant in self-reliance is a good example in India. Panchayats should have basic unit of democratic decentralization and higher units should cooperate with them. Mahatma Gandhi promoted Panchayat Raj as the foundation of India's political system. It would have been a decentralized form of Government where each village would be responsible for its own affairs.

The term for such a vision was Gram Swaraj ("village-self-Government"). He preferred the term 'Swaraj' to describe what he called true democracy. This democracy based upon freedom. Individual freedom in Gandhi's view could be maintained only in autonomous, self-reliant communities that offer opportunities to the people for fullest participation ^[1].

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¹ Bandhopadhyay, S.K. (etd.) (1985). Politics in West Bengal Institutions, Processes and Problems. By Rakhahari Chatterjee. Panchayati raj in West Bengal. India: The World Press Private Limited. p. 213.

Gandhi Ji wanted to share political power in the Indian state's villages. To describe how he has described true democracy, the word 'Swaraj' can be quoted. This democracy is based on freedom. He dreamed of the village republic during the tenure of Independent India. Gandhi said, He said, "Panchayat Raj represents true of democracy realized. He would regard the humblest and the lowest Indian as being equally the ruler of India with the tallest in the land [2]." He considered threatening and the lowest Indian to be the emperor as the supreme ruler of India. "Standard village or village Swaraj, Gandhi's view it is a complete republic, its own individual freedom, and for many interdependent, in which the dependent requirements.

Politics in West Bengal: Institutions, Processes, and Problems. (1985). India: World Press.

Gandhi firmly believed that the economic fate of the rural economy heavily dependent. The villages were Gandhi's economic thought center. In 'Harijan' he wrote, "The farmers, the cattle breeders and the artisans are the main pillars of social and economic life of India [3]." For this reason, despite his disliking in advertisements, Gandhiji's weekly gave adequate space to proliferate any new-fangled things which would help to boost the rural economy. Gandhiji saw Khadi as the base for rural affluence. He made full uses of his tabloids to popularize Khadi among the Indian people.

Gandhian Philosophy of Gram Swaraj

The term "Swaraj" is derived from Vedic language and is considered a holy word. It denotes self-control and self-discipline, which in turn leads to true freedom. One cannot attain real self-interest simply by acquiring material possessions. Instead, it can be achieved by being able to resist authority and not being mistreated by it. This means empowering people to control and regulate authority. According to Gandhi, Gram Swaraj is a self-sufficient republic that is independent of neighboring communities for its essential needs, but interdependent for other necessities [4].

Gandhi's rural Swaraj works for providing full employment of the citizen for people centric, decentralized, simple village economy and for obtaining necessary autonomy for food, clothing and so on. Other requirements of life was his dream that through the participation of the people, democracy can only be guaranteed through village Swaraj. He wanted village Swaraj in the village where there will be a mass house in the village and will be directed to the people's work place. According to Gandhi, in Gram Swaraj "Every village should be a democracy in place, which they will not depend even on neighbour for major needs [5]." They should be self-sufficient. There will be no one except food and clothing. Everyone must work enough to meet the necessary requirements.

This model can be achieved only when the means of production is in control of people to meet the basic needs of life. According to Moitree Bhattacharya, Gandhi's village, Swaraj, "People are involved with the group, there is no

relevance for the majority and minorities, not everyone thinks of themselves or their community for the community [6]." Sovereignty is known as a 'communal society'. It is important that everyone here is a community or give and participate as part of the decision-making process.

Gram Swaraj, as per Gandhi's beliefs, should be viewed through the lens of the dual principles of truth and non-violence. However, the concept of every village being its own republic only pertains to rural areas. Gandhi advocated for the freedom of one's neighbors and mutual interdependence as the basis for law. In 1942, Gandhi proposed that each village should strive to be self-sufficient, providing for all of its own needs such as supplies, food, clothing, clean water, sanitation, housing, education, government, and self-defense, as well as social amenities. The idea of every village being a self-governing republic with full autonomy was radical at the time, but it did not seem to inspire or interest Nehru and other Congress leaders.

Gandhiji's efforts towards nation-building during the nationalist movement were centered on the idea of forming a confederation of villages. After Independence, the Indian administration carried forward the trend that was initiated by the British. This was primarily due to Pandit Nehru's approach towards nation-building and national reconstruction, which was influenced by his experience of partition and focused on a top-down approach. Consequently, he assigned a central role to the states.

Although Gandhi supported the idea of a village-based political formation for the creation of Gram Swaraj, the concept of Panchayati Raj did not make it into the Draft Constitution of India due to the Congress Constitution Committee's rejection of the idea. The Committee believed that the India could not become as decentralized as envisaged in the Gandhian concept of Gram Swaraj. While Ambedkar was apprehensive that Panchayats would be dominated by upper castes and exploit the lower castes, Nehru remained silent on the issue, perhaps favoring a centralized polity for modernizing and developing India. However, an amendment was incorporated into the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution of India, directing the state to set up Village Panchayats and endowing them with the authority to function as units of self-government. This led to the enactment of Gram Panchayat Acts by various states, but these were no more than half-hearted attempts to create rural local government institutions. The real impetus to Panchayati Raj was given by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. Influenced by Gandhiji's ideas on gram swaraj, it has achieved some measure of success.

Relevance of Gram Swaraj in Indian Democracy

Gandhiji envisioned Gram Swaraj as a robust and authentic form of democracy that could effectively address numerous political issues that exist in current systems. For Gandhiji, political power was not the ultimate goal, but rather a means to improve people's lives in all aspects. In his renowned "Last Will and Testament," he stated that even though India had achieved political independence, it still needed to attain social, moral, and economic independence, particularly in

² Ibid.

³ Gupta, S. S. (1994). Economic Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi. India: Concept Publishing Company.

⁴ Singh, R. B. (2006). Gandhian Approach to Development Planning. India: Concept Publishing.

⁵ Gandhi, M.K. (1962). Village Swaraj, Navjivan Trust, Ahmedabad, p-71

⁶ Bhattacharaya, M. (2002) Panchayati Raj in West Bengal: Democratic Decentralization or Democratic Centralism. Delhi: Monal Publication. p. 11.

the villages as opposed to the cities and towns ^[7]. The picture and strategy demonstrated were a depiction of Gram Swaraj or Panchayat Raj. Its goal was to create a self-sufficient and financially stable society with total political independence, attained through peaceful methods.

Gandhiji thought that Gram Swaraj, unlike Western economies, should be centered around people rather than wealth. Gram Swaraj's economy would provide full employment to its citizens through voluntary cooperation and working towards self-sufficiency in basic needs. Modern economic systems are disfigured by unemployment, pauperism, and exploitation due to their focus on self-indulgence and multiple wants. They involve treating individuals as mere parts of machines and lead to social division and economic inequality. Gandhiji believed that Gram Swaraj, or self-rule of villages, was the solution for not only India's problems but also the world's. He argued that violence and untruth would arise if people lived in cities, and that truth and non-violence could only be achieved through the simplicity of village life. He believed that without truth and non-violence, humanity would only lead to destruction.

Gandhi believed that centralization of power is a threat to democracy and all its values. He opposed all forms of power concentration and emphasized the importance of decentralization. According to him, individual freedom and growth are only possible through decentralization. He also believed that democracy cannot be achieved without providing opportunities for individuals to participate in managing their own affairs ^[8]. Further, Gandhi emphasized the need for both economic and political decentralisation, as success in one depends on the other. He believed that a new democratic and equal society requires a firm foundation, where decentralisation in politics and economics go hand in hand. ^[9] Gandhi believed in democratic decentralization where power flows to the masses, and every village should have enough power to manage its own affairs. He saw the village as the basic unit of administration and advocated for a decentralised democracy based on nonviolence where small communities or villages work together voluntarily. This approach allows people to participate in decision-making without strict control from higher authority and reduces state interference in their day-to-day affairs. Gandhi's system of Panchayat Raj highlights the relevance of decentralization in modern governance ^[10].

Gandhi's faith on Universal Adult Franchise, gender equality, and participatory democracy can be known from his concept of Panchayat Raj. The Panchayat of Gandhi's model would be sovereign, legally and politically, and would be subordinate to none. It would hold legislative, executive and judicial power - a perfect village government where perfect grassroots democracy would function to ensure individual freedom, social security and common welfare. Gandhi thought that for perfect swaraj, all the villages and all the villagers must be enjoying freedom. So he opined, "Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus every village will be republic or panchayat having full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be

self-sustained, capable of managing its affairs, even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world.

Panchayati Raj System after Independence

The new panchayati raj system aims to decentralize governance at the grassroots level and to empower rural men and women. Referring to the activities of Panchayat Gandhi, emphasizing the administration of justice, education, rural environment and the development of the poor. It is important to educate the leaders and leaders of the panchayat raj laws and the expectations of the people, especially in the grass root level, the foundation for democracy is well equipped. Rajiv Gandhi is credited with reviving the Panchayati Raj system, which is a dense core democratic institution in India. The 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution was introduced under his leadership, making Panchayat elections mandatory and recognizing rural society as a fundamental part of the new Panchayati Raj system. When Panchayati Raj was first introduced in India in 1959, then-Prime Minister Nehru hailed it as the country's greatest revolution, and the system was functioning well until 1964. To realize the dream of rural self-rule, a three-stage Panchayati Raj system was introduced, ensuring people's participation in democratic decentralization at the grassroots level. The first Panchayat Raj was established on 25th October 2000 in Nagaur, Rajasthan, under the leadership of then-Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. The Panchayats included in the 73rd Amendment 2001 now have constitutional status as the third tier of the Indian political system, comprising the panchayat, block panchayat, and district panchayat. The Indian Constitution's Article 40 outlines the formation of panchayats, which function as separate government units. This three-level structural system includes zilla panchayat, middle panchayat, and gram panchayat. The new system has constitutional status and is considered the third government in the Indian political system. It has the power to make decisions on 29 subjects listed in the 11th schedule. This provision addresses past vulnerabilities of the panchayat raj system, particularly in terms of financial matters, and emphasizes the need for rehabilitation and social welfare. The 73rd Amendment also mandates the reservation of one-third of seats for women and ensures that Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe populations receive special attention. However, the Gandhian ideal of Gram Swaraj remains an unfinished agenda even after six decades of the implementation of the Panchayat Raj. The 73rd Amendment was implemented by various States in 1994. Therefore, concerted, systematic and sustained endeavours are needed on the part of those for whom Gram Swaraj remains a cherished dream for the empowerment of people and for making India a participatory democracy because people must have the feeling that they are participating in their own programmes. More important is that they should manage their development programme and it is possible only in decentralized set-up of Government where local bodies like village Panchayats can enjoy genuine and real-power of decision making and decision-implementation at the grass root level.

Conclusion

Thus, to solve India's socio-economic and political problems, it is necessary to preserve and strengthen village independence, which can only be achieved through the

⁷ Gandhi, M.K. (1962). Village Swaraj. Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, p. 239

⁸ Sharma M.L. (1987). Gandhi and Democratic Decentralisation in India. New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications. p. 44-45.

⁹ <https://Mkgandhi-Sarvodaya.Org/Articles/Politics1.Htm>

¹⁰ Ibid.

Gandhian concept of Gram Swaraj. Gram Swaraj is not just a physical transformation of the village, but also a complete transformation of the people's outlook towards cultural, social, economic, and ecological aspects of life. It promotes a non-violent social order where self-sufficient, self-reliant, and self-governing villages function independently, leading to holistic development. With the entry of multinational companies in India, it is crucial for the government to encourage the care of both rural and urban populations. The new Panchayat Raj system aims to empower rural men and women by decentralizing governance at the grassroots level. It is an important step towards linking political and economic activities of society. Decentralization of power or empowerment of people is a new method of decentralizing power, where the government's role is re-oriented and reduced. The new Panchayat Raj system perceives more power and authority, and it is important for it to be vibrant and active to have a full impact on society.

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