

Relevance of Gandhi's Ram Rajya in Today's World

Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi, 'Father of our Nation' is now widely recognized as millennium man. The UN has started observing 2nd October, the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi as 'Non-Violence Day'. The Mahatma has definite opinion about the future, the ideal society which he termed as Ram Rajya. Gandhi's concept of Ram Rajya meant Swaraj. The Swaraj of his dream recognised no communal or religious distinction. Ram Rajya is the name Gandhi chose to describe the ideal form of governance he envisaged for India. Though Ram Rajya concept was drawn from Hindu mythology, it goes well beyond Hinduism to include all faiths. This paper attempts to analyse the Gandhi's dream about Ram Rajya is related with his concept of Swaraj and also highlights the relevance of Gandhi's Ram Rajya in today's world.

Keywords: Mahatma Gandhi, Ram Rajya, Relevance, India, Hinduism, Swaraj.

Introduction

Gandhi experiential that an understanding of one's duty and the observance thereof are different things. If they went together we should have Ram rajya. Gandhi had good reason for using in his writings swarajya and Ram rajya as nearly synonymous concepts. Swarajya literally means self-rule. The central postulate of Ram Rajya is self-rule. Gandhi wrote: "Without rule over self-there can be no swaraj or Ram Rajya. Rule of all without rule of oneself would prove to be as deceptive and disappointing as a Painted toy mango, charming to look at outwardly but hallow and empty within".¹

Gandhi elucidated evidently what he meant by freedom and swaraj in his Hind Swaraj. If we become free, India is free. And in this thought, you have a definition of Swaraj. It is Swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves. Thus, we find Gandhi relating Ram Rajya to dharma and locating dharma in the individual and his conduct. This, I believe, is crucial for understanding the true significance of Ram Rajya. The road to Ram rajya is self-purification. Therefore, truth and non-violence are the necessary means for establishing Ram Rajya. What Gandhi is seeking is more than constitutional swaraj. It is organic swaraj as he called it. Organic swaraj is swaraj obtained by pursuing truth and satyagraha as in the case of Bardoli satyagraha. Ram Rajya is a democracy, a government founded by public opinion. It is not, however, the public opinion generated by coercive methods, pressure tactics and inducements of various kinds. It is informed public opinion consistent with truth. It is possible to create such public opinion. As Gandhi says, Satyagraha is an attempt to make the possible real. Truth implies justice. A just administration implies an era of truth or swaraj, dharmaraj, Ram rajya or the people's raj (democracy).²

On various occasions and in different contexts, Gandhi gives us a well-rounded description of Ram Rajya of his conception. The following is one of them. It can be religiously translated as Kingdom of God on earth. Politically translated, it is perfect democracy in which inequality based on possession and no possession, colour, race, creed or sex vanish. In it, land and State belong to the people. Justice is prompt, perfect and cheap, and therefore, there is freedom of worship and of speech and of the press—all this because of the reign of the self-imposed law of moral restraint. Such a state must be based on truth and nonviolence and must consist of prosperous, happy and self-contained villages and village communities.³

By Ram Rajya Gandhi meant swaraj. The swaraj of his dream recognised no communal or religious distinction. Ram rajya is the name Gandhi chose to describe the ideal form of governance he envisaged for India⁴. Gandhi's choice of this mythic-religious concept, as in the case of several other central concepts he used in his writings and speeches, has



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twin purposes. First, it was an attempt to connect with common people, communicate with them and arouse their conscience. Second, Gandhi wished to convey as succinctly as he could the quintessence of his thoughts concerning governance. Ram Rajya served both purposes well. Ram Rajya concept was drawn from Hindu mythology; it goes well beyond Hinduism to include all faiths. Gandhi asserted unequivocally: Let no one commit the mistake of thinking that Ram rajya means a rule of the Hindus. My Rama is another name to Khuda or God in 1929 itself, Gandhi warned his Mussalman friends against misunderstanding him in his use of the word Ram Rajya. By Ram Rajya I do not mean Hindu Raj, Gandhi asserted⁵. "I mean by 'Ramarajya' Divine Raj, the Kingdom of God. For me Rama and Rahim are one and the same deity. I acknowledge no other god but the one god of Truth and righteousness"⁶.

He declared emphatically: It has been said that Indian swaraj will be rule of the majority community, i.e., the Hindus. There could not be a greater mistake than that. If it were to be true, for one would refuse to call it swaraj. In Rama Rajya or swaraj there is no place for humility. In such a society, the prince and the peasant, the wealthy and the poor, the employer and the employee, are all on the same level.⁷

Gandhi's knowledge of India and her people was profound. He was intimately aware of the historical root of the Indian. He used the term Ram to reach the heart of the half-literate and illiterate masses to instill his idea of swaraj. Bernard Shaw once remarked though Gandhi committed a number of tactical errors, his essential strategy continued to be right. For Gandhi, Rama symbolized justice and equity, Rama symbolized truth and charity⁸. In his possibly earliest statement on Ram Rajya, Gandhi said: "If the king is mindful of the difficulties of the weakest section of his ^{subjects}, his rule would be Ram rajya, it would be people's rule"⁹. Rama Rajya involves the establishment of kingdom of righteousness on earth. It ensures the rights alike of prince and pauper.¹⁰

Gandhi felt that swaraj is a prerequisite of Ram rajya. People's rule is a precondition for the rule of dharma, which is the objective of Ram Rajya. Therefore, Gandhi often equated Ram Rajya, swarajya, people's rule and the rule of dharma and used them interchangeably. He contrasted them with Ravanarajya, autocratic and oppressive rule. If Ram Rajya is the rule of the divine, Ravanarajya is the devil's rule, Rakshasarajya. Gandhi says: "We only mean by Ram Rajya swaraj or the rule of dharma or people's rule. Such rule can be established only when the people themselves come to have regard to dharma and learn to be brave. In Gandhi's usage, Ram Rajya stood for the model democratic form of government of his choice for the country, close to the ideal of God's rule. He asserted that the ideal of Ram Rajya is undoubtedly one of true democracy..."¹¹ Democracy is not a religious dogma or a divine, infallible instrument, but an imperfect means to an end which needs to be supplemented by other means.

Gandhi is very clear that the Indian

democracy of his vision is not copying the Western model. In his address at the Faizpur session of Indian National Congress he stated explicitly that he was not looking for "an imitation of the British House of Commons or the Soviet rule of Russia or the fascist rule of Italy or the Nazi rule of Germany"¹². Ramarajya meant to Gandhi, the sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority. We can readily see from Gandhi's conception of human nature that sovereignty and morality of the person belong to man's divine nature as opposed to the beast in him. Therefore, to translate Ramarajya as divine rule would be very consistent with Gandhian thought. In fact, Gandhi himself described it as Divine Raj.¹³

Gandhi was critical of industrial civilization not only because it led to severe and wasteful competition for goods and markets leading to colonization of weaker nations and exploitation of the countryside, but also because it led to displacement of manual labour and growing unemployment. In contrast was Indian civilization in which there was no system of life corroding competition. Each followed his own occupation or trade and charged a regulation wage. On balance, Gandhi finds that the tendency of Indian civilization is to elevate the moral being, while that of western civilization is to propagate immorality.¹⁴

The Phoenix Trust Deed is a very significant document for it contains a model of the type of society he wished to create for humanity. Among the objectives of the settlers on Phoenix Farm were: to order one's life so as to earn a living through handicrafts and agriculture without the aid of machinery; to promote better understanding between peoples; to live a pure life and thereby set an example for others; to try and promote the ideals of Ruskin and Tolstoy; to introduce vernacular education; to propagate the philosophy of 'nature treatment' in the medical field; to train for social service; and finally to conduct a journal for the advancement of these ideas.¹⁵

The doctrine of bread labour in broad terms, bread labour means that one should eat only after doing adequate labour to earn it. The divine law that man must earn his bread by labouring with his own hand was first stressed by the Russian writer Bondaref and later on Tolstoy gave it wider publicity. It was upon reading one of Tolstoy's essays that the principle came home to Gandhi. In fact he was familiar with the idea after reading Ruskin's *Unto This Last*¹⁶. According to Gandhi same principle had been set forth in the third chapter of the Gita where we are told that 'he who eats without offering sacrifice eats stolen food.' Sacrifice here only means bread-labour, said Gandhi. He read the same meaning in the Biblical injunction: 'In the sweat of thy brow shall thou eat thy bread.'¹⁷

Therefore, Gandhi is positive that bread labour meant manual labour alone and not intellectual labour. His logic is: "The needs of the body must be supplied by the body"¹⁸. He also feels that in any society, there are many individuals who can work physically or mentally to an extent that is more than is required to sustain themselves. The products of their

surplus labour capacity should, according to Gandhi's principle, be devoted to the common good. If this principle were followed, he asserts, there would be "no rich and no poor, none high and none low, no touchable and no untouchable". He believes that it is the wide gulf between manual and intellectual labour that is the cause of poverty and inequality in society.¹⁹ If each of us, he writes, performed only enough physical labour for our bread, even that, though short of the ideal, would go a long way in producing a just society – our wants would be reduced and our lives would be simplified and each would derive the greatest relish from the production of his labour. In his ideal state, those doing intellectual labour, such as doctors, lawyers and teachers, should not expect payment because such work is done for its own satisfaction and not for the self, according to him. The concept of justice forms an important element in Gandhi's view of the ideal society. His definition makes it clear: "Pure justice is that which is inspired by fellow feeling and compassion. We in India call it the eastern or ancient way of justice ... where such an arrangement exists there is hardly any need for a third party or an arbitrator." He considers that action alone to be just which does not harm either party to a dispute. This view sprang from his supreme belief in the oneness of all life –that there is divinity in each individual and, hence, justice should not be such as to harm any individual.²⁰

This persuasion is reflected in Gandhi's concept of social equality. His idea was that while all are equal in society, while each has a right to equal opportunity, all do not have the same capacity. Some would inherently have the capacity to earn more and others less. Equality of all its citizens, as we noted, is the trademark of Gandhian democracy. It is also pivotal to Ram Rajya. There can be no democracy without equality. "There can be no Ram Rajya in the present state of iniquitous inequalities in which a few roll in riches and the masses do not get even enough to eat Gandhi complained in 1947. In Gandhi's conception of economic equality, everybody would have enough for his needs. This meant that democracy would have the primary responsibility of enabling everyone to meet his essential needs with no discrimination whatsoever. He would allow a man of intellect to earn more. Though this view of differential equality of men expresses a very plausible argument, Gandhi appears to miss one dimension of social life – that individual capacity is itself determined by the structural inequalities in society.²¹

Objectives of the Study

1. To find out the relevance of Gandhi's concept of Ram Rajya in today's World.
2. To examine Mahatma Gandhi defined his ideal society as Ram Rajya.
3. To find out Gandhi's dream about Ram Rajya is related with his concept of Swaraj.

Conclusion

Ram Rajya is Gandhian model of governance emphasis is on self-governance. The state and society are to provide conditions and the climate for fostering self-governance. Again, self-governance is for self-realization. Self-realization

consists in experiencing one's authentic self. Such an experience leads to perfection; which means that people function at their optimum levels in pursuit of truth and dharma. State's rule and social dharma are facilitators; their purpose is to promote and sustain rather than bestow perfection on people. Governance, therefore, should be seen as means and not an end in itself. At best, in Gandhi's terms, governance is an end in the making, the end being truth realization in knowing and perfection in being.

Mahatma had a vision for free India, which was to give the nation a people-friendly governance— 'Ram Rajya'. Unfortunately, more than six decades after Independence, this dream of Mahatma Gandhi, remains just a dream and will probably continue so in future too. 'Ram Rajya' cannot be a reality because our country's leaders have too many vices and too few virtues. Degeneration of values in our society, soaring prices, frequent droughts and floods, corruption, red-tapism have led to dissatisfaction and disillusionment in the minds of the people.

One of the most important causes of our failures in this regard is that our citizens are not active and do not participate in the process of governance. Citizens' involvement in the affairs of the government can bring about a sea change in the current scenario. Unfortunately, this does not take place because everyone's intention is to live and let others live, no matter what the quality of life.

Awareness about our rights and duties is of utmost importance, which is totally lacking in a majority of India's citizens. People have to respond to the acts of the government. The citizen who is aware of the happenings in the country and who has the capability of understanding and reasoning it out is in a position to attempt to do something for his society. Unfortunately, this does not happen because our citizens, like our leaders, are more interested in self-development rather than the development of their fellow citizens.

There are numerous challenges before the authorities in particular and the citizens in general, because each one of us is responsible, directly or indirectly, for the state of affairs prevailing in the country today. We cannot shirk our responsibilities towards the aim of achieving 'Ram Rajya'. Let us aim high so that we at least achieve 50% of what Mahatma visualized for the future of India.

The major challenge before the nation today is the increasing population. We have not succeeded in controlling the rise in the number of people for the past six decades despite a slew of measures. The reason for the failure of this mission is that almost 40% of our population is illiterate. A huge population without the power of scientific reasoning has rendered all our efforts ineffective in controlling population. Some 82% of the population strongly believes in the caste system. This has been a great setback in promoting equality among the people. This has also resulted in suppressing the lower castes, which comprise a huge majority and adversely affect the people's living conditions. Poverty has spread and today about 30% of the people in India live below the poverty line. As a consequence of very poor medical

facilities, the economically backward, the sick, the orphans and the widows cannot get adequate treatment for their health problems, resulting in much sickness and disease in the country. It is a shame that even after so many years of Independence such conditions persist in the country.

A huge population engulfed by poverty and illiteracy has given rise to unemployment. Millions of youth, many of them educated, are unemployed. This number increases every minute. There was a time when only illiterate people were unemployed but today a majority of the educated youth suffers due to lack of employment opportunities. An idle mind is the devil's workshop. There are bound to be anti-social activities. The unemployed youth indulge in theft, extortion, fight and even rape and murder. Law and order problems are rife throughout the country. Factors such as labour unrest, communal tension, party rivalries, soaring prices and growing discontent and indiscipline among the students and politicians, problems of law and order have become a rule rather than an exception.

Yet another cancerous disease, which has suppressed the growth of our society, is corruption in public and private lives. It is rampant in political and administrative fields. Corruption stems from the people's willingness to pay money to get their work done. As long as there are corrupt people with moneybags, the reign of corruption will never end and a corrupt society never progress.

Mahatma Gandhi's vision of 'Ram Rajya' in our country, it appears like a dream difficult to be realized. Yet there is a ray of hope. This ray of hope is the youth of this country. Under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership, this great country freed itself from the clutches of foreign rule. To fulfill Mahatma's Gandhi's vision of 'Ram Rajya' the youth of this country will have to unite and fight, and once again free our country from the clutches of corruption, illiteracy, poverty, injustice, and other evils—the anti-people

creations of our own fellow men.

Gandhi was a man of vision, voice from a non-western world fighting imperialism. He waged war against a capitalist West for the freedom and dignity of the individual. He was victorious and his Struggle and achievement represented what was wrong with the West: aggression, greed and exploitation. Now as then, the world needs fixing: Gandhi's ideas of nation-building, of empowering the peasant, implementing bottom-up development.

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