
GANDHIJI'S IDEOLOGY OF VILLAGE SWARAJ

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Received: Sep. 2019 Accepted: Oct. 2019 Published: Nov. 2019

Abstract: In this scenario, it is necessary to take steps to disabuse the minds of the people, particularly the rural masses, and disclose to them the thought and the care that Gandhiji gave to their well-being. As a preliminary, it is expedient to measure villagers' awareness of the concepts of Gandhiji's ideology of Village Swaraj, "The village communities are little republics having nearly everything they want within themselves and almost independent of foreign relations. They seem to last where nothing else lasts. This union of the village communities, each one forming a separate little State in itself . . . is in a high degree conducive to their happiness, and to the enjoyment of a great portion of freedom and independence." The great deal of local freedom and independence that the villages had was a good thing, and there were other good features also The work of rebuilding and rebirth (of Village Republics) still remains to be done by us.

Keywords: Picture of Village Swaraj, Body-Labour (Bread-Labour), Trusteeship, Panchayat Raj, Nai Talim (Basic-Education).

Introduction: India now stands at the crossroads. The silver lining at the end of the cloud has been sighted and the Indian economy is poised for the leap forward which will carry it from the dark regions of under development to the bright regions of the developed world. Political Pandits hail India as an emerging economic power. Some even predict that India will be a superpower by 2020.

Urban India is prospering indeed, but rural India is degenerating. Urban Indians enjoy the benefits of world standard state-of-the-art technology in habitation, clothing, food, health care, education and entertainment. But rural India has not even heard of these. The promoters of technological advancement can never be persuaded to move to the villages of India. So rural India is doomed to remain backward. There is a danger of the rural urban divide deepening so far that the one will be totally cut off from the other in the near future. Urban India can not afford to cut itself off from rural India for the simple reason that nearly two thirds of India's population lives in rural India. Moreover, in its mad pursuit of world technology and the global market, urban India is certain to swallow up its scarce cultivable lands and deplete its supply of essential resources like potable water. Then urban India will perforce become totally dependent on rural India for essential necessities like water and food. So urban India needs must enable rural India to grow and develop. But rural India cannot grow and develop according to urban norms and mores. It can prosper only in its own element. The *mantra* for rural development in India was enunciated by Gandhiji even before Independence under the caption of *Village Swaraj*. In various speeches and writings over several years, Gandhiji enunciated certain concepts for village development, which cumulatively constitute his ideology of Village Swaraj. This and this alone can really effect rural reconstruction and revival.

Picture of Village Swaraj: The picture of Village 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 the present day world. Village Swaraj is the practical embodiment of non-violence in the spheres of politics, economics and sociology. Gandhiji writes:

"My idea of Village Swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants, and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity. Thus every village's first concern will be to grow its own food crops and cotton for its cloth. It should have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and playground for adults and children. Then if there is more land available, it will grow *useful* money crops, thus excluding *ganja*, tobacco, opium and the like. The village will

maintain a village theatre, school and public hall. It will have its own waterworks ensuring clean water supply. This can be done through controlled wells or tanks. Education will be compulsory up to the final basic course. As far as possible every activity will be conducted on the cooperative basis. There will be no castes such as we have today with their graded untouchability. Non-violence with its technique of Satyagraha and non-co-operation will be the sanction of the village community. There will be a compulsory service of village guards who will be selected by rotation from the register maintained by the village. The government of the village will be conducted by the Panchayat of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. These will have all the authority and jurisdiction required. Since there will be no system of punishments in the accepted sense, this Panchayat will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate for its year of office. Any village can become such a republic today without much interference, even from the present Government whose sole effective connection with the villages is the exaction of the village revenue. I have not examined here the question of relations with the neighboring villages and the centre if any. My purpose is to present an outline of village government. Here there is perfect democracy based upon individual freedom. The individual is the architect of his own government. The law of non-violence rules him and his government. He and his village are able to defy the might of a world. For the law governing every villager is that he will suffer death in the defence of his and his village's honour."

Body-Labour (Bread-Labour): Gandhiji asks, "How can a man who does not do body labour, have the right to eat?" Gandhiji writes,

"Earn thy bread by the sweat of thy brow,' says the Bible. Sacrifices may be of many kinds. One of them may well be Bread labour. If all laboured for their bread and no more, then there would be enough food and enough leisure for all. Then there would be no cry of overpopulation, no disease and no such misery as we see around. Such labour will be the highest form of sacrifice. Men will no doubt do many other things either through their bodies or through their minds, but all this will be labour of love for the common good. There will then be no rich and no poor, none high and none low, no touchable and no untouchable."

Gandhiji says, "Intellectual work is important and has an undoubted place in the scheme of life. But what I insist on is the necessity of physical labour. No man, I claim, ought to be free from that obligation." Gandhiji writes, "God created man to work for his food and said that those who ate without work were thieves."

Trusteeship: Gandhiji writes; Indeed at the root of this doctrine of equal distribution must lie that of the trusteeship of the wealthy for superfluous wealth possessed by them. For according to the doctrine they may not possess a rupee more than their neighbors. How is this to be brought about? Non-violently? Or should the wealthy be dispossessed of their possessions? To do this we would naturally have to resort to violence. This violent action cannot benefit society. Society will be the poorer, for it will lose the gifts of a man who knows how to accumulate wealth. Therefore non-violent way is evidently superior. The rich man will be left in possession of his wealth, of which he will use what he reasonably requires for his personal needs and will act as a trustee for the remainder to be used for the society. In this argument, honesty on the part of the trustee is assumed.

Self-sufficiency: Gandhiji writes: "Every village's first concern will be to grow its own food crops, and cotton for its cloth". Gandhiji also writes, "Every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world".

Panchayat Raj: Gandhiji says, "The government of the village will be conducted by the Panchayat of five persons, annually elected by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications," adding, "Since there will be no system of punishments in the accepted sense, this Panchayat will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate for its year of office".

Nai Talim (Basic-Education): Gandhiji writes: By education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man body, mind and spirit. Literacy is not the end of education nor even the beginning. It is only one of the means whereby man and woman can be educated. Literacy in itself is no

education. I would therefore begin the child's education by teaching it a useful handicraft and enabling it to produce from the moment it begins its training. Thus every school can be made self-supporting, the condition being that the State takes over the manufactures of these schools”.

Conclusion: It is concluded that a massive effort is needed to propagating Gandhiji's ideology of Village Swaraj and its constituent concepts among the rural masses of India. The campaign should particularly target women, Scheduled Castes / Scheduled Tribes and illiterates. Academic institutions dedicated to rural development must play an active role in the campaign. Such as institutions have the resources and the expertise to reach the rural masses, interact with them, show them the link between their development and Village Swaraj and persuade them to accept and implement Gandhiji's ideology of Village Swaraj.

References:

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