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Mahatma Gandhi's Vision of a Harmonious Society through Equality, Freedom and Self-sufficiency

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Abstract: *Gandhi's vision for a harmonious society was deeply rooted in ethical and moral principles, emphasizing the relevance of individual and collective responsibility for creating a fair enough society. So, in this article, some key aspects of Gandhi's belief that led to the creation of an ideal society will be discussed as his concept of swaraj, concepts of democracy, the republic, simplicity and minimalism, Ram Rajya, equality, human values and the concept of education will discuss. Gandhi was convinced that a right balance between social responsibility and individual freedom would exist in a peaceful, democratic society. He holds principles in the highest regard for their role in the existence of humans. Grounded in nonviolence (Ahimsa) and the pursuit of truth (Satyagraha), Gandhi's ideal society seeks to promote harmonious coexistence among individuals, transcending divisions of caste, creed, and economic disparity.*

Keywords: Ethical,Equality,Freedom,Gandhiji,Leader, Swaraj, Swadeshi,etc.

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Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi was a social activist, politician and a leader of Indian Independence. His life was an open book. His entire life was based on ethics, morality, simplicity and spirituality. His approach was human centric. He accepted positive points from Western and Eastern tradition. His image of a social order for India was shot through with gleams of ideas, which emanated from his own meaning system. Gandhi envisioned a harmonious society as one where individuals lived in peace and cooperation, guided by the principles of truth, nonviolence, and mutual respect. For Gandhi, a harmonious society with the principle of Ahimsa is an ideal society. He also believed we can create a harmonious ideal society through equality, self-sufficiency, and freedom. Harmony, in Gandhi's thought, was not just the absence of conflict but the presence of positive virtues, equal opportunities, local production,

a modest way of life, and a sense of responsibility towards society. Gandhi saw harmony as necessary for creating a sustainable and just social order. In such a society, individuals would work toward common goals while recognizing and valuing the inherent dignity of every person. Together equality, self-sufficiency, and freedom were integral to Gandhi's vision. His idea of a decentralized society where self-sufficiency and community-driven initiatives precede centralized power structures. He advocated a society can be developed only when a person in this society is self-sufficient. A person who depends on others to sustain himself/herself can have no rightful claim of being free. Therefore, Swaraj and Swadeshi go hand in hand. Gandhi termed his ideal society as 'Ramrajya' i.e., the kingdom of God on earth.

Historical background of Gandhi's Concept of a Harmonious Society

Mahatma Gandhi's advocacy for simple living and sustainable practices aligns with a deep reverence for nature, emphasizing the importance of respecting the environment for the well-being of future generations. He acknowledges that human beings are social creatures, they can only live life and contribute to creating a society that will bring them the closest to the ultimate goal of life. Gandhi's devotion to the simple life also influenced his conception of the perfect society. He thought that every individual possesses a divine element inside him suffices to demonstrate the worth of every man. Thus, the issue of prejudice against people based on their caste, creed, colour, etc. God and all men are related in the same way. The Gandhian ideal society places a premium on individual morality and self-discipline. Through the practice of nonviolent resistance, individuals are encouraged to confront injustice with courage and compassion, fostering a culture of empathy and understanding. Gandhi's emphasis on "Sarvodaya" also underscores the need for equitable distribution of resources, ensuring that the basic needs of every individual are met. The ideal society according to Gandhi embraces the principles of trusteeship, wherein wealth is considered a means to serve the community rather than a tool for personal aggrandizement. This approach seeks to eliminate extremes of wealth and poverty, promoting economic justice and social harmony. Gandhi's vision of a harmonious society transcends the political and economic realms, delving into the moral and spiritual dimensions of human existence. It advocates for a society where individuals live in harmony with each other and with the environment, guided by principles of truth, nonviolence, and compassion. Understanding and applying these principles, Gandhi believed, it would pave the way for a just, sustainable, and humane society, echoing the timeless relevance of his vision in the contemporary world.

The notions of Equality, Self-sufficiency, and Freedom

The most important concept in Gandhi's social idea is equality. Gandhi envisioned the construction of an ideal or harmonious society based on the profound principles of equality. For him, equality was not merely a political concept but a moral and spiritual imperative. He advocated for a society where every individual, regardless of their background, caste, religion,

or socio-economic status, was treated with equal respect and dignity. Gandhi's idea of equality went beyond superficial distinctions, emphasizing the intrinsic worth of every human being. His vision was rooted in the belief that true equality could only be achieved through non-violence and compassion. He encouraged the eradication of social inequalities and the establishment of a harmonious community where individuals worked together for the common good. In Gandhi's ideal society, the pursuit of truth, justice, and empathy formed the bedrock, fostering an environment where all could flourish in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation. The attainment of true equality in contemporary society what Gandhi has preached, remains an ongoing and complex challenge for today. While significant progress has been made in various parts of the world, disparities persist in terms of gender, race, socio-economic status, and more. Efforts toward achieving equality involve addressing systemic issues, dismantling discriminatory structures, and promoting inclusivity. In recent times, there has been a heightened awareness of the importance of diversity and inclusion, with movements advocating for equal rights gaining momentum. However, challenges such as unconscious biases, institutionalized discrimination, and economic inequalities continue to impede the realization of genuine equality. Achieving equality requires a collective commitment from individuals, communities, and institutions to confront and rectify these issues. In the present era, ongoing dialogues, policy reforms, and grassroots movements play crucial roles in shaping a more equitable society. Education, awareness, and fostering empathy are essential components of this journey toward equality. While the path may be challenging, the evolving conversations around social justice suggest a growing recognition of the need for change and a more inclusive future. Ultimately, the pursuit of equality is a dynamic and ongoing process that demands continuous engagement and commitment from all members of society.

In his weekly 'Harijan', he wrote:

> "There will be neither paupers, nor beggars, neither high, nor low, neither millionaire employers nor half-starved employees, neither intoxicating drinks nor drugs. There will be the same respect for women as for men, and the innocence and purity of men will be jealously guarded…. where there will be no untouchability and where there will be equal respect for all faiths. They will be all proudly, joyously, and voluntarily bread laborers."
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> -M.K Gandhi Harijan, August 29, 1936 ,p-226

Another important concept of his ideal society is Freedom or Swaraj. In Gandhi's political thought the word swaraj means self-rule, Gandhi gave it the content of an integral revolution that encompasses all spheres of life. He believed social and political transformation is possible through personal transformation. Swaraj, Gandhi said, really means self-control. Only he is capable of self-control and observing the rules of morality. Thus, politics is intimately tied with morality. He advocated for individuals and communities to take control of their destinies, both politically and personally. This involved not just political independence from colonial rule but also from self-rule at the individual and community levels. True freedom could only be achieved when individuals took responsibility for their actions and decisions.

He said,

> "At the individual level, swaraj is vitally connected with the capacity for dispassionate self-assessment, ceaseless self-purification, and growing swadeshi or self-reliance".
>
> M. K. Gandhi, Young India, June 28, 1928, p. 772.

Politically swaraj is self-government and not good government (for Gandhi, good government is no substitute for self-government) and it means continuous effort to be independent of government control, whether it is foreign government or whether it is national. In other words, it is the sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority. Economically, Poorna Swaraj means full economic freedom for the toiling millions. For Gandhi, swaraj of the people meant the total of the swaraj (self-rule) of individuals and so he clarified that for him swaraj meant freedom for the meanest of his countrymen. And in its fullest sense, swaraj is much more than freedom from all restraints, it is self-rule, and self-restraint and could be equated with moksha or salvation. He reminded always that Swaraj would not drop from the cloud and it would be the fruit of patience, perseverance, ceaseless toil, courage, and intelligent appreciation of the environment. He also reminded them that swaraj means vast organizing ability, penetration into the villages solely for the services of the villagers; in other words, it means national education i.e., education of the masses. In the Gandhian discourse, education of the masses means conscientization, mobilization, and empowerment, making people capable and determined to stand up to the powers that be.

He said:

> "Real swaraj will come, not by the acquisition of authority but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused. In other words, Swaraj is to be attained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority."
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> -M.K Gandhi Young India, January 29, 1925, p-41

Gandhi also imparted to us the crucial idea of self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency promoted the idea of self-reliance and local production. A self-sufficient society is less vulnerable to external economic shocks. When a society produces a significant portion of its goods and services, it is better equipped to withstand fluctuations in global markets. This economic stability can contribute to sustained growth and development. Relying on external sources for essential goods and services can create dependencies that may not always be reliable. Achieving self-sufficiency reduces this dependency, ensuring that society can meet its basic needs even in the face of disruptions or geopolitical uncertainties. Economic self-sufficiency is closely tied to national security. A society that can meet its own needs is less susceptible to economic coercion or manipulation by external forces. This independence is particularly crucial in times of conflict or geopolitical tensions. Emphasizing self-sufficiency promotes the growth of local industries and businesses. This, in turn, generates employment opportunities and contributes to the overall economic development of communities. Supporting local economies also helps distribute wealth more evenly. Self-sufficiency

encourages a more sustainable approach to development. By relying on local resources and minimizing dependence on external inputs, a society can reduce its ecological footprint and promote environmental sustainability. Self-sufficiency can contribute to the preservation of cultural identity. When a society produces its goods and services, it often maintains and values traditional practices, craftsmanship, and cultural heritage. This cultural preservation is integral to the overall well-being of a society. The pursuit of self-sufficiency often drives innovation as communities seek more efficient ways to meet their needs. This innovation can lead to advancements in technology, agriculture, and various industries. Additionally, the knowledge and skills developed through self-sufficiency can be transferred across generations, fostering a culture of continuous improvement. Self-sufficient communities are better equipped to handle crises, whether they be economic, environmental, or health-related. The ability to produce essential goods locally provides a buffer against disruptions, contributing to the resilience and adaptive capacity of communities. Sustainable development is inherently linked to self-sufficiency. By managing resources responsibly and ensuring that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, self-sufficiency contributes to the long-term sustainability of a society.

Although Gandhi's self-sufficient society does have both cities as well as villages, he was against the exploitation of villages by the town dwellers. He hoped to see a reasonable wholesome balance, totally free of exploitation between industry and agriculture, city and the village. Gandhi repeatedly believed and repeated that 'India is to be found not in few cities but in its villages. The real India lies in the villages. If Indian civilization is to make its full contribution to the building up of a stable world order, it is this vast mass of humanity that has to be made to live again. I would say that if the villages perish, India will perish too. India will be no more India.' Gandhi had full faith in the wisdom of the rural people. He opined that 'The moment you talk to them (Indian Peasants) and they begin to speak, you will find wisdom drops from their lips. Behind the crude exterior, you will find a deep reservoir of spirituality. I call this culture — you will not find such a thing in the West. In the case of the Indian villager, an age-old culture is hidden under an entrustment of crudeness.'

Contemporary relevance of Gandhi's thought

The concept of "Swaraj and Swadeshi with equality" in the age of global connectedness inspires people to actively participate in politics, encouraging participatory democracy and responsible citizenship. To make a comprehensive reform in our society, it is our responsibility as responsible members of the community to put each of Gandhi's ideas into practice. In this contemporary era, we can see how important Gandhiji's concept of equality is. Democracy depends on individual equality, whereby all people, regardless of their advantages or disadvantages in society, are judged equally based on the quality of their thoughts and the values that the majority of society holds. This allows the democracy to decide on its course.

In the tapestry of contemporary society, the principle of equality stands as a foundational pillar, weaving threads of justice, dignity, and progress. In the context of social cohesion, equality catalyzes inclusivity and diversity, fostering a sense of belonging among disparate

groups. As societies become increasingly interconnected, embracing a diverse array of perspectives and backgrounds becomes paramount for sustainable development. A commitment to equality not only mitigates the pernicious effects of discrimination but also cultivates an environment where each voice is heard, acknowledged, and valued. Economically, the pursuit of equality proves to be a driving force behind innovation and productivity. A society that provides equal opportunities for all its members harnesses the collective potential of its diverse populace, resulting in a more dynamic and resilient economy. In contrast, disparities in access to education, employment, and resources hinder overall progress, perpetuating cycles of poverty and limiting the unleashing of human potential. Furthermore, the psychological and emotional well-being of individuals is intricately tied to the principle of equality. A society that upholds the dignity of each person, irrespective of their background, instills a sense of purpose and self-worth. Conversely, pervasive inequality can lead to societal unrest, eroding trust in institutions and diminishing the social fabric that binds communities together. The importance of equality in contemporary society cannot be overstated. As we navigate the complex challenges of the modern world, embracing equality becomes not just a moral imperative but a pragmatic necessity. By championing equality in all its dimensions, societies can forge a path toward a more just, resilient, and prosperous future.

Inequality often leads to disparities in access to education, employment, and other opportunities. Individuals from marginalized groups may find themselves with fewer chances to advance, hindering social mobility and perpetuating cycles of poverty. In an unequal society, certain groups may experience political marginalization, with their voices and concerns often overlooked or dismissed. This can erode trust in institutions and hinder the democratic process. If equality wasn't a part of democracy, and individuals who were given an outsized influence because of some other attribute (wealth, inherited title, caste/class, religion, left-handedness, etc) then the political will would be unfairly distributed towards those that had a predetermined influential attribute to determine the direction of the society. Unequal distribution of wealth and resources can result in economic hardships for a significant portion of the population. Limited access to financial resources, employment opportunities, and social services can create and exacerbate economic inequality. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive efforts to promote equality and justice in various sectors of society, including education, employment, healthcare, and governance. Societal well-being is often closely tied to the degree of fairness and inclusivity within a community, emphasizing the importance of addressing and rectifying systemic inequalities.

Self-sufficiency is also important like equality in today's situation. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of self-sufficiency in several aspects, emphasizing the need for nations and communities to be more self-reliant. The pandemic exposed vulnerabilities in global supply chains, especially in critical sectors such as healthcare and essential goods. Many countries faced challenges in obtaining medical supplies, personal protective equipment (PPE), and pharmaceuticals due to disruptions in the international supply chain. This highlighted the need for local production capabilities to ensure a reliable and timely supply of essential goods during crises. Some countries heavily relied on imports for essential items,

including medical equipment and pharmaceuticals. When borders closed and transportation became difficult, these dependencies led to shortages and delays. The pandemic emphasized the value of diversifying sources and having domestic production capabilities to ensure access to vital resources. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical importance of self-sufficiency in various aspects of society, ranging from healthcare to economic resilience. It serves as a wake-up call for nations to reassess their dependencies, strengthen domestic capabilities, and invest in self-reliance to better prepare for future challenges.

Conclusion

Thus, the Gandhian concepts of equality, freedom (Swadeshi), and self-sufficiency (Swadeshi) contribute to economic stability, national security, cultural preservation, and fostering a resilient and well-rounded development of society. But after nearly seventy-five years of political freedom, Gandhi's dream of self-rule remains as unfulfilled as it was during his lifetime. His legacy remains more in the form of relics and museums people may visit than as programs pursued to make a difference in the lives of people. The political freedom that Gandhi helped the country to achieve was not followed by the kind of swaraj he had visualized. Gandhi stands as a historical figure respected and revered but not a driving force guiding the destiny of the country. Gandhi has become a vote-catching slogan on some occasions in India.

The one positive thing is that our government repeatedly acknowledges Gandhi's contribution towards society and initiated several programs such as Swachha Bharat, Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana, the smart city project, National Education Policy 2020 derived from Gandhi's constructive work as a prelude to Ramrajya. The Swachha Bharat mission was created for rural upliftment and to achieve an open defecation-free village. The Smart City project aims to optimize city function and promote economic growth. The NEP is a mother tongue and national language-oriented education policy as well as an employment-oriented education system. All of these initiatives have a positive significance in our society.

But nowadays where violence has become so pervasive in the world. In the present global scenario, it is equally important of Gandhi's non-violence theory as well. Gandhi not only led the country to achieve Poorna Swaraj but also laid the foundation of a new India free from any violence. So, we should understand our responsibility to create love for the new world of peace. Our education system helps in developing the right attitude among our students for modelling the Gandhian philosophy of nonviolence. We believe that an individual can grow a peaceful practice only when his mind is at peace. So, we stimulate our inner peace for the sake of our country. Peace will be the goal of humankind, like Swadeshi and Swaraj. It is the spiritualization of the human condition. Strong non-violence is spontaneous, free-flowing, and spiritual. In Gandhi's life, we have an example of such spiritual force. Such spiritual force can help us live in complete harmony with fellow humans and nature. When we understand Gandhi's contribution towards our nation and his theory wholeheartedly then we become fit to live in a truly harmonious society.

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