

Gandhi's Concept of Ram Rajya

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Abstract

Ram Rajya is generally understood as the divine kingdom of lord Ram mentioned in the epic Ramayana written by sage Valmiki. It is associated with peace, harmony, absence of suffering, equity and equality. The society and the people are all encompassing and welcoming, tolerant. Along this line Gandhi also tried imagining a state like that but not associated with any religion or religious figure, a state in which humanist principle prevailed, there is existence of equal rights to both king and society, where there is a balance and intermingling of social harmony, economic justice and political freedom. A state of Divine Raj and not a Hindu kingdom. Through which an egalitarian society could be imagined as a blue print for every state of that time. This paper attempts to study and identify the key characteristics of Ram Rajya mentioned by Gandhi and its modern-day need, necessity and application.

Keywords: Ram Rajya, Egalitarian Society, Justice, Trusteeship, Self Rule, True Democracy

Introduction

From the epic Ramayan written by Valmiki we get the idea of Ram Rajya, which had certain common features like compassion, truth, swift justice. Along with this Ram Rajya also presented an ideal form of government where each and everyone's opinion was heard and acted upon through justice, even the animals got complete justice. Society of that time was also an ideal society where each person lived in harmony with each other and also with environment. Everybody radiated compassion and adhered to their Dharma. All these characteristics are not possible in today's world but we can work to make the world better than it was yesterday, along these lines and Idea Gandhi proposed his Ram Rajya. Gandhi wrote in 'Young India' that "whether Ram of my imagination ever lived or not on this earth, the ancient ideal of the Ramayana is undoubtedly one of true democracy in which the meanest citizen could be sure of swift justice without an elaborate and costly procedure". Gandhi envisioned this type of government and governance in independent India as a model state to follow. This elected government would then create conditions of peace, progress and prosperity.

Gandhi's Ram Rajya was not a religious state dominated by a single religion rather it was a model state where government would be as close as described in the epic Ramayan. It provided everyone a chance to be heard and the king would listen to the opinion of his citizens, even taking animals consideration into account. Gandhi saw modern state as a tool of violence, where power was used for suppression and as a result he favored individual freedom over a fully sovereign state. It was to be a secular state, where people would enjoy freedom in moral, economic and political sphere. Concept of Ram Rajya inculcated what Gandhi termed as 'Sarvodaya', which was inspired from John Ruskin's 'unto this last'. We find similarities in Plato's Philosopher King and Ideal State concept mentioned in his work 'The Republic'. Philosopher king of Plato possessed wisdom, justice, reason and empathy, a king who would

encompass philosophical knowledge along with the political power and maintains both intellectual and moral virtue. This was similar to what Gandhi had imagined his Ram Rajya to be.

Challenges in Modern Society

With the advancement in technology and new discoveries human beings have attained the supreme authority over resources, environment, biodiversity and along with this some unintended consequences have also come into light. Humans control over other biotic and abiotic sources have given birth to negative values like greed, intolerance, selfishness, in every aspect of life. We can clearly identify Gandhi's seven sins concept i.e. wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity, worship without sacrifice, politics without principle lurking in today's society.

1. Wealth without work: it meant manipulating others and not doing hard work to accumulate wealth, not paying taxes, exploiting the resources of government meant for the masses etc.
2. Pleasure without conscience: it is mainly concerned with the people who use others, nature as a tool for enjoyment and extract pleasure out of it. Example-slavery.
3. Knowledge without character: it is concerned with a person's holistic development i.e. Acquiring knowledge with internal character development, if this is not followed then a society will not reach its full potential.
4. Commerce without morality: it is related to the profit following enterprises which don't take others welfare into account. E.g. Extraction of marine resources without taking the wellbeing of ecosystem into account.
5. Science without humanity: science is a two-edged sword, if not followed ethically then it can become a tool to eliminate humanity.
6. Religion without sacrifice: without sacrifice religion will also be a mere theory whose purpose would fade. Religion is a necessity without which people may suffer.
7. Politics without principle: politics represent ambition of the people and society, if the leaders are without principles, then ultimately society will fail in achieving its goal.

Ram Rajya of Gandhi

In order to cater to the needs of each and everybody and as a hallmark of good governance Ram Rajya is the ideal choice. It didn't mean Hindu raj or a dominance of a particular religion over others rather it was the Divine Raj, Gandhi said that Ram and Rahim both are same and that he acknowledges no other God but Truth. This utopian state was a vision for independent India's ambition of social, economic and political justice. It was an aim to achieve social harmony, economic justice and political freedom for the citizens. A state where there will be "equal rights alike of prince and pauper". Ram Rajya of Gandhi not only focused on citizen but

the king (Government) as well, the king would be someone who would rule with wisdom, compassion and justice. Fundamental elements of the Ram Rajya are:

1. Independence: it was not the independence of western society, ideology, parliament. It was based on the sovereignty of the people whose basis was moral authority. It didn't limit itself to the idea of political independence.
2. No Coercion: it presented a holistic picture that it was not only the absence of British army but any kind of army at all. Complete freedom from coercion can only be achieved when even the lowest being has the authority and capability to rise to the highest moral power. It didn't limit itself to force, it also covered the inequality between the rich and the poor.
3. Respect for Others: a society where each and every difference is acknowledged and paid heed to, where every religion is respected and different viewpoints are welcomed. Along with this Gandhi also called for self-introspection. By magnifying our own faults and try to be better.

While these ideals were mainly for the individuals a state must have the following ambitions in mind to achieve Ram Rajya

1. Education: education which is empowering, which connects us to the nature and civic sense. It is about respecting the ideals and trying to replicate in one's own life. An education which is vocational and practical, which also includes physical activities.
2. Equality: is availability of resources and justice to everyone equally irrespective of caste, class, gender. It is the foundation for an egalitarian society.
3. Justice: Justice was envisioned to be swift and accessible to all even a dog would get the justice. In line with this principle our preamble envisaged the different types of justice i.e. social, economic, political.
4. Non-Violence: Gandhi said that Non-Violence is not a tool for the weak but for the person with strong character. It is not only absence of physical coercion but mental as well.
5. Self-rule: Gandhi's Swaraj or self-rule envisioned social transformation along with an individual. While at individual level it meant self-discipline and self-control. At the level of Society, it was about equality and upliftment of the poor.
6. Prosperity: Gandhi's prosperity was not only about material well-being it also takes into account the spiritual upliftment of a person, prosperity therefore was synonymous with holistic development.
7. Decentralization of power: it was mainly the decentralization of economic power which in turn would mean prosperity for the village community.
8. Trusteeship: Gandhi's concept of trusteeship was based on the modern-day definition of sustainable development as well as of social welfare. It posits that wealthy individuals should act like trustees of their wealth for the benefit of the society so that

equal distribution of resource can be maintained and social harmony could be preserved.

9. Economic equality: Gandhi believed economic inequality was the evil for any society, if this could be addressed then many problems would vanish.
10. Self-sufficiency: Gandhi's idea of self-sufficiency was not about self-containment or exclusion rather it was that villages should be developed such that many of the necessities can be procured from village itself and the gap between urban and rural could be covered.

Relevance for modern world

In the 21st century almost all the countries are democratic with varying degrees of freedom mentioned in their constitution, social conventions and culture. Still people are suffering for the basic necessities, natural rights due to wars, toppling of governments and vested interests. In these tumultuous times Gandhis views on democracy are the need of the hour, to serve as a beacon of light. In 'Harijan' Gandhi wrote that democracy is the mobilization of resources be it physical, economic or spiritual for the service of all. And to achieve this one should adhere to non-violence and satyagraha. The ultimate aim was to attain Swaraj i.e. self-rule, not only at the level of state but at the level of individual as well. For Gandhi swaraj was: poor man's swaraj, which would bridge the gap between rich and poor, which would ensure equitable distribution of resources. Gandhi like John Mill differentiated between real and deceptive democracy where real democracy was not imposed but stems internally, where a person identifies with the poorest absent of these would mean a deceptive democracy. Gandhi's democracy was of autonomous villages with decentralization of power and resources. The rule of village panchayats as the primary political unit was envisaged by Gandhi, which would serve as the basic unit of public administration, focusing on self-sufficiency. In line with this Indian constitution imbibed many Gandhian principles in the form of preamble, fundamental rights and directive principles of state policy. At the world level leaders like Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Junior, Dalai Lama got inspired by Gandhian philosophy. Today the world once again needs to follow these basic tenets of Gandhi if we want a peaceful co-existence.

Conclusion

The Ram Rajya of Ramayan is a utopian concept which envisaged a perfectly ideal society where there was no poverty, no misery, no sadness or discrimination. It was a society where everybody performed their responsibilities according to their dharma while respecting and loving each other. Dharma involved charity, compassion, purity and truth. Gandhi envisioned Ram Rajya for independent India's growth and development. It would be where people would be ethical, loving and would promote humanist values. Government of Ram Rajya would be the kind of leadership who listened to each and everybody, who followed the dharma and cared for the environment as well a society where no body suffered physically, mentally and spiritually. This was a non-violent state whose primary aim was upliftment of the citizens, a state free of conflicts and any kind of exploitation between two groups. It would be a state where peace and happiness would prevail, Swaraj would be attained. But we do not find any example anywhere in the world where there is no exploitation or violence. Gandhi's ideas are

the trail which every state and individual should try to follow. Our constitution has included some of the ideas in preamble, Fundamental rights and directive principles of state policy. if our country adheres to these ideals then, only we can truly achieve Ram Rajya. This Ram Rajya provides a framework for a functional and development state which focused on welfare of all (Sarvodaya) and we must try to achieve it for True Democracy and Swaraj.

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