# Concept of Swaraj and Mahatma Gandhi : A Critical Analysis

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**INTRODUCTION:**

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was the greatest leader of the Indian independence movement in British-ruled India. Employing non-violent civil disobedience, Gandhi led India to independence and inspired movements for civil rights and freedom across the world.[1] He is popularly known as *Bapu* (father of nation) who dominated the national movement of India from 1919 to 1947. He was an apostle of peace, non-violence and was ardent follower of *Purna Swaraj* or complete independence.[2] His message has a universal appeal which has profound influence on humanity till now. On Gandhi's influence in Indian politics Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru wrote "Gandhi's influence is not limited to those who agree with him or accept him as national leader, it extends to those who disagree with him and criticise him, at a time of action and struggle when India's freedom is at stake they flock to him and look up to him as their inevitable leader". *Gandhian* ideology was an outcome of the synthesis of both moderate and extremist thoughts. The different social and political works of the moderates and extremists did not worry Mahatma Gandhi as he considered politics

as a method for social change. He had a vision of *Swaraj* and his concept of *Swaraj* was just like *Rama Rajya* or kingdom of God on the earth. [3]

During the period when Gandhi's freedom movement acquired its mass base, he again and again defined and explained the concept of *Swaraj* as the goal of freedom struggle, in terms of political, economic, social and moral rights of the downtrodden and exploited Indian masses. By *Swaraj*, he meant freedom and self-rule which should be practiced at three levels,

• In case of individual *Swaraj,* it is self-control or *Swaraj* of the self.

• In case of the country, it is the freedom of India from the British clutch, and

• In case of community level, it is Gram *Swaraj* or freedom of village.

The twentieth century marked with widespread national movement. It has been featured as a century of widespread democratic upsurge. The first half of the century started movement to overthrow the colonialism in Afro-Asian countries due to liberation struggles. By that time, India witnessed a freedom movement. In that Mahatma Gandhi
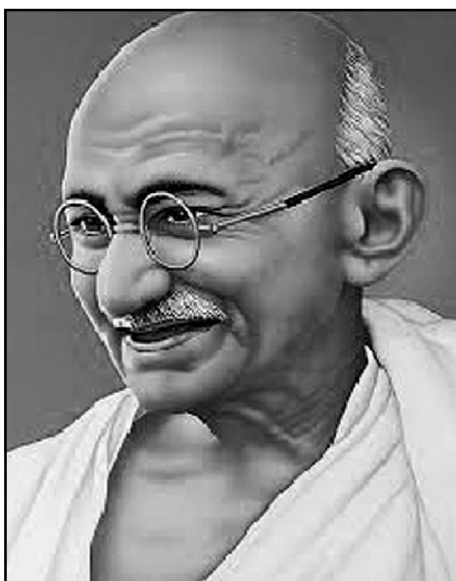
had a pivotal role. He used non-violent direct action *Satyagraha* as a technique of protest. The Indian freedom movement led by Mahatma Gandhi which used non-violent direct action *Satyagraha* as a technique of struggle, won general acclaim for the pioneering role it played in sharpening and hastening the process of dismantling the classical forms of colonialism and imperialism.[4] The middle part of the century witnessed post-colonial transformation in the newly independent Afro-Asian states. There was a massive attempt for presumption of the states as an effective mediator in improving the conditions of the weaker and poorer sections of people. For the purpose of ensuring social justice and equality, the liberator of the oppressed wanted to work "an engine of growth and development that would usher in a new civil order based on progress and prosperity and confer rights to life and liberty, equality and dignity, on the people at large".[5] However the independent states faced some disillusionment and demystification. The state initiated her expectations of the positive and interventionist role. And the people presumed alliance between the state and the masses have been completely belied.

## CONCEPT OF SWARAJ:

Mahatma Gandhi was a unique freedom fighter. The anti-colonial freedom struggle launched by Gandhi for the liberation of India was unique from many points of views. That it was predominantly a non-violent and his struggle for the liberation of India was based on non-violence. *Gandhiji's* role in freedom movement was multidimensional. He was not limited with one aim only to end the British rule in India. Of course, ending of British domination was his important agenda. His goals were greater and more ambitious. One of his important goals was to achieve *Swaraj, Purna Swaraj* or complete independence. The word *Swaraj* means self-rule. However, for Gandhi, *Swaraj* is the content of an integral revolution that encompasses all spheres of life. "At the individual level *Swaraj* is vitally connected with the capacity for dispassionate self-assessment, ceaseless self-purification and growing *swadeshi* or self-reliance".[5] From political point of view *Swaraj* is self-government and not good government . For Gandhi, good government is no substitute for self-government. *Swaraj* means continuous effort to be independent of government control, whether it is foreign government or whether it is national. Furthermore, it is sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority. From economic point of view *Purna Swaraj* is full economic freedom for the toiling millions. According to Gandhi, "*Swaraj* of the people meant the sum 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, self-restraint and could be equated with *moksha* or salvation."[6]

*Gandhiji* had serious attention on how to realise *Swaraj*. He has pointed out that "*Swaraj* will 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 observed that "*Swaraj* means vast organising 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".[7] In the *Gandhian* discourse, mass education is conscientisation, mobilisation and empowerment, which makes people capable and determines their power to stand up. He pointed out that, "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".[8]

Political liberty was an essential precondition of the *Swaraj*. It is the first step to realise the goal of *Swaraj*. For political independence of the people Gandhi had valuable contributions and for that he worked with and through the Indian National Congress. Of course, there were serious philosophical and ideological differences between Gandhi and other prominent leaders of the Congress, particularly Jawaharlal Nehru. *Gandhiji* visualised a model of *Swaraj* and that model was developed and enunciated in his *Hind Swaraj*. It was his manifesto. But his strategy of *Swaraj* was unacceptable to Nehru and other Congress leaders. They dismissed it as completely unreal. But his vision presented in *Hind Swaraj* was ideal for the realisation of self-rule and political independence. Even he had devoted his life for that. He wanted to reconstruct India which was more essential to end the British Colonial Rule in India.[9]

India was a colonial nation. But British domination was not the only form of subjugation suffered by her. India was the victim of many drawbacks which were her own making. For that foreign colonialism may not be blamed. Hence Gandhi wanted an internal reform mainly through self-motivated voluntary action in the form of constructive work. He dovetailed them into his freedom movement. *Swaraj* of his dream was to be built from grassroots level. For Gandhi it meant the elimination of all forms of domination, oppression, segregation and discrimination. The *Swaraj* could eliminate the active use of non-violence. It could be achieved through the economic regeneration of rural India through programmers like the revival and propagation of *khadi* and other related villages industries. For translating these constructive programmers into reality, organisations were necessary. In this regard the Indian National Congress had vital role. The Congress was chiefly concerned with the question of political independence. It believed in mobilising

the people politically for it. But it was not prepared to take up constructive work. So, *Gandhiji* founded voluntary organisations to carry out his constructive program. The All India Spinners Association (AISA) and All India Village Industries Association (AIVIA), the *Harijan Sewak Sangh,* the Leprosy Foundation etc., are the best voluntary organisations. Through these organisations, Gandhi launched a massive programme of rural reconstruction to empower the downtrodden people. These organisations were primarily stressed on social transformation through their voluntary actions at the grassroots level. Their thrust was mainly social. However it does not mean that they were against political development. On the other hand, they developed what later came to be known as people's politics and basic politics, which in turn helped in the stabilization of *lokshakti* or peoples' power. Of course, constructive workers were abstaining from direct political struggles. But on crucial occasions Gandhi enlisted their services for political mobilization. For instance, the seventy nine volunteers of Gandhi in the *Dandi* salt march team were all constructive workers. When *Gandhiji* launched the Individual Satyagraha there was the most prominent constructive worker *Vinoba,* whom he selected as the first *Satyagrahi*. Gandhi had vision of constructive work as a training programmer for non-violent resisters or *satyagrahies*. He advocated the extensive use of constructive programme for preparing a favorable environment for launching *Satyagraha*.[10]

*Gandhiji* wanted to transfer the Congress from political organisation to a constructive work organisation. He proposed to rename the Congress as *Lok Sewak Sangh* to mobilise the people to work and struggle for *Swaraj*. However Congressmen of the party-political disposition had no heed to the advice of the Mahatma. After Gandhi's assassination the

constructive workers, under the leadership of *Vinoba Bhave,* set up the *Sarva Seva Sangh* at the national level and *Sarvodaya Mandals* at the regional state levels to carry on *Samagra Grama Seva*(integrated village service) to fulfill the goal of *Swaraj.* Subsequently two major non-violent movements for socio-economic and political revolution in India namely the *Bhoodan-Gramdan* Movement under *Vinoba* and the Total Revolution movement under *Jayprakash* Narayanan were established under the aegis of the *Sarvodaya* Movement. However it could be observed that the constructive work organisations founded by Gandhi and the *Sarvodaya Mandals* and *Sarva Seva Sangh* are precursors and role models of people's movement, Voluntary organisations and some of the Non-Government Organisations which are launched in various parts of India at present.[11]

Gandhi had very clear ideas about the role to be played by the constructive work organisations. He had importance on the *Lok Sevak Sangh* in the reconstruction of India. He did not hesitate to use non-violent direct action against the new government headed by Nehru. Gandhi made it unequivocally clear that mass *Satyagraha* was required to launch against the landlords for persuading them to end their oppression and exploitation for the historic struggle for justice. He criticised the state as the most organised and concentrated form of violence. He called it an impersonal entity, a soulless machine that satisfied individuality, which lay at the root of all progress. The state is that it is an instrument of serving the people. But Gandhi had feared that in the name of molding the state into a suitable instrument of serving people, the state would abrogate the rights of the citizens and arrogate to itself the role of grand protector and demand abject acquiescence from them. This would create a paradoxical situation where the citizens would be alienated from the state and at the same time enslaved to it. Hence he thought it necessary to evolve a mechanism to achieve the twin objectives of empowering the people and empowering the state. It was for this that he developed the two pronged strategy of resistance to the state and reconstruction of the state through voluntary and participatory social action.

Socio-political growths in the post-colonial world paralleled with the *Gandhian* forecast. The post-colonial Indian state started showing signs of becoming authoritarian under the pretext of becoming an adequate instrument of serving the people. Since erstwhile colonies had to overcome their under- development due to colonial exploitation and develop in order to catch up with the west. Post-colonial societies were urged to give their states enormous power in every domain. There are struggles which held around a variety of issues that are different but inter connected. The theatres of struggles are also equally varied. The actors are disparate and sometimes even conflicting. At a glance, they appear almost kaleidoscopic. But there are certain characteristics that stand out. The most predominant, he supposes is the convergence and alliance of actors in each struggle. Most of these struggles are localised and single-issue based and take place in remote and inaccessible places. Therefore during the early years of these struggles, as the issues were not properly reported in the media, the action groups found it difficult to hold on against their adversaries who were formidable. But as a result of organised and concerted effort the situation changed gradually. As the action groups could succeed in publicising the seriousness of the problem and the consequences thereof, most of the theatres of struggle now attract a chain of actors. At the base are, of course, the direct and immediate victims, but on these converge people from media, professionals like researchers, technologists, doctors, professors, and human rights activists including lawyers and

also writers and theatre artistes, and students from different levels.[12] Some of the fights have attracted support even from foreign.

This kind of meeting of worried and alerted people strained from dissimilar gaits of life and numerous areas of concentration has assisted those at the base line of the deed to obtain truthfully correct data and claim their case additional methodically and persuasively. It has also shaped a new sense of cohesion and group evocative of the days of the historic anti-colonial fight. Freshly when a designated team of *Satyagrahies* of the N.B.A. obvious to do jail *Samarpan,* i.e. offering themselves as detriment in the rising waters of the river Narmada and declined to leave their post,, many sympathizers, strained from several parts of the country, obtainable to drown with the *Satyagrahies*. And they continued with them in neck deep waters defying the risk of being washed away by the state-created flood. This is one of the oddest protests of harmony that can be read as a very comforting sign of hope by all those who stand and scrap for the superior common good.

One of the significant consequences attained by the fights is that they prospered in starting a thoughtful dissertation and chat within and among the Action Groups and People's Actions on another growth example. This has helped the Action Groups in insertion the whole range of fights in viewpoint and in developing an agreement on what is destined by maintainable development, the standards that motivate it, the mechanisms that establish it and the practice that would interpret it into repetition. The discourse on other development model has thus tapering depressed the philosophical coldness between actions. It has also highlighted the need to change other politics. Deliberations on various aspects of the developing people's politics which remains distinguished from party politics, are galore in

People's Movements, though nothing concrete, capable of making a dent countrywide, has arisen yet. But an important and crucial political question hitherto ignored or marginalized by mainstream political parties and political critics have been pushed into the vortex of modern political discourse by the Actions.

An important trend that has started developing with the fights that effort to resist and opposite globalisation is the rank given to positive activities, Act Groups that were concerned with chiefly to anxiety and were betrothed in mobilising people only for fight, have achieved an alteration in their location by joining positive work also into their praxis. There was a time when attention in and persistence on positive work was fleecy aside as a *Gandhian* fad, but now, the number of Actions and Groups that allocate a key role to the building up of models of other initiatives and structures, are on the increase as they have understood the substantive and planned meaning of these programmers. The role of pacifism in these fights is of course a moot question. As previously stated, while some actions and groups have openly spoken their condemnation of pacifism as a technique of fight, others have emphasised the need to give up ferocity and option to non-violent means. Though these groups do not follow to Gandhi's location on pacifism, i.e., accepting pacifism as an article of faith and creation in the central organizing code of life, they are persuaded more than ever before that pacifism has to be putative as perfect if a just social order is to be translated into reality. For them, fairness is vital worth and they know that ferocity in any form and in any grade quantities to a rejection of fairness. So, they emphasise peace, taking concord as one form and appearance of pacifism. It is really revealing of developing tendency among Act Groups of giving up fierce approaches and slowly moving towards pacifism. Certain organisations claim to be peaceful. However, a

dangerous spectator is forced to point out that theirs is not the pacifism of the courageous visualised and established by Gandhi, but pacifism of the feeble.[13]

People's movements and their fights have been mostly situated in civil civilisation by social experts.[14] Civil civilisation has been progressive to deliver the theoretical framework to understand and assess people fights. It has been pointed out that these fights are to be seen as part of an attempt to make true civil society in which the values of freedom and parity can be knowledgeable by all its memberships. An earlier and dangerous look at Gandhi's idea of *Swaraj* will show that it can provide a more passable theoretical device to find and assess the fights of the burdened populates. As pointed out previous Gandhi's idea of *Swaraj* is a complete one and summarises the separate human person and life in an all-inclusive outline. It visualises the liberal deliverance of all from all cruel structures and so can be equated with redemption.

**Conclusion:**

Thus, Gandhi's aim of totally implementing the concepts of *Swaraj* in India was not achieved. The voluntary work organisations which he founded for this purpose did serve as precursors and role models for people's movements, voluntary organisations, and some of the non-governmental organisations that were subsequently launched in various parts of India. Although the word *Swaraj* means self-rule, Gandhi gave it the content of an integral revolution that encompasses all spheres of life, at the individual level *Swaraj* is vitally connected with the capacity for dispassionate self-assessment, ceaseless self-purification and growing self-reliance. Gandhi was undaunted by the task of implementing such a utopian vision in India. He believed that by transforming enough individuals and communities, society at large would change.

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