

Revisiting Gandhi's Concept of Individual Swaraj: A Pathway to Ethical and Moral Revival in Contemporary Society

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Abstract

At present, the world is facing many problems like terrorism, religious discontent, climate change, economic inequality and increasing threats from artificial intelligence. But among all these, one problem which is most important at this time is the continuously declining moral/ethical values of the society. My attempts in this research exercise to explore how Gandhi's teachings can help modern society rediscover moral and ethical principles. Mahatma Gandhi's values, which are based on self-discipline, truth (Satya), and non-violence (Ahimsa), provide a timeless framework for dealing with contemporary moral decay. By promoting humility and self-reliance, Gandhian philosophy counters materialism and selfishness, encouraging a sense of responsibility toward others

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Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi is one of the few people on earth who deserves constant reflection on his thoughts, as well as reform and revival of the principles and ideologies he believed in. Trying to research and write about a person like Mahatma Gandhi is like trying to stand out in the middle of the ocean. However, the curiosity and awe inspired by Gandhi is a source of incredible wonder in itself. In the modern period, the decline of morality and values in society has become a major worry. Human integrity, empathy, and social responsibility are declining as a result of the erosion of old ethical standards brought about by fast globalization, technological breakthroughs, and shifting lifestyles. The overpowering effect of materialism is one of the main causes of this decrease. Wealth, prestige, and power are becoming more and more valued than integrity, kindness, and compassion. This change has resulted in an increase in dishonesty, corruption, and unethical behavior across a range of industries, including business and politics.

In the age of economic, cultural and political globalization, violence and hatred have also taken a global form. Terrorism, atrocities against women, genocide of minorities, ethnic cleansing, religious hatred, communal violence. The destruction and slaughter of rational voices casts a terrible specter over world existence. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the environment around the world has become full and poisonous of impatience, aggression and intolerance. Without question, we are moving closer to the end of the world, the destruction of humanity. Today's society is constantly ready to swallow all the morals and ethics necessary for human life and human existence. In today's amoral world, Mahatma Gandhi's teachings demand a commendable place in logical debate. Here, they come alive to protect and mold human civilization through their humanitarian agenda, saving the world from horrific atrocities and heinous acts of barbarism.

Gandhi had not systematically explained his moral principles. He was a reformer and a man of action rather than a philosopher or thinker who developed a code of ethics. However, his approach to morality was deeply personal and experiential. Gandhi believed that true morality was found in finding one's own path and boldly following it, rather than mindlessly subscribing to social standards.¹ According to him, morality could not be applied to any behavior that was not a choice as it was a question of inner truth and personal conviction.

True morality consists, for Gandhi, not in following the beaten track, but in finding out the true path for ourselves and fearlessly following it. As Gandhi said "So long as we act like machines, there can be no question of morality. If we want to call an action moral, it should have been done consciously and as a matter of duty.

Any action that is dictated by fear, or by coercion of any kind, ceases to be moral. It also follows that all good deeds that are prompted by the hope of happiness in the next world cease to be moral”²

His moral sense was severely harmed by the state of the world he had discovered, and he established numerous precepts throughout his writings in an effort to alter it. By promulgating them Gandhi intended to regulate human relationships.³ The concept of self-rule, or Swaraj, which he viewed as both an individual and a community moral responsibility, was central to his ethical and political thinking and served as the basis for his reformist initiatives.

Individual Swaraj

A fundamental idea in Gandhi's political theory is swaraj. It is even more fundamental than nonviolence, which is the idea that everyone associates with his name. Even with its significance in his political theory, nonviolence is merely a method to achieving swaraj, which he claims “is a state of being of individuals and nations.”⁴ Swaraj is a good in and of itself rather than a means to an end. Those who don't have it are missing the one thing that should define them. Political selfhood is a prerequisite for Swaraj. The worst political deprivation that people and nations can experience is not having swaraj. It is the responsibility of both individuals and nations to obtain it and restore it if it has been lost. Gandhi used the term “swaraj” to refer to both nations and individuals. Political swaraj, or the state with sovereign independence, is the term used to describe the swaraj of nations. Self-rule, self-discipline, or spiritual swaraj are terms used to describe an individual's swaraj. The civic country is the “Swa” (self) in political swaraj, whereas the citizen is the “Swa” in individual swaraj.

Individual self-rule is something else. It is a typically Indian idea originating in Hindu philosophy. “The root meaning of swaraj,” writes Gandhi, “is self-rule. ‘Swaraj’ may, therefore, be rendered as a disciplined rule from within.... ‘Independence’ has no such limitation. Independence may mean license to do as you like. Swaraj is positive. Independence is negative.... The word swaraj is a sacred word, a Vedic word, meaning self-rule and self-restraint, and not freedom from all restraint which ‘inde-pendence’ often means”.⁵

The result of the mind's internal organization of the senses' passions under the direction of the soul is self-rule. Gandhi argues that the notion of the goals of life makes self-rule and political swaraj compatible. Gandhi's political ideology is unique because it combines political swaraj with self-rule. Additionally, it is the combination that sets his idea of the state apart from contemporary conceptions. Gandhi bases his case for self-government on the philosophical anthropology

presented in the Gita and Patanjali's *Yogasutra*. Thus, based on that anthropology, we know what a human being is. The senses, intellect, soul, and embodied self (atman) all serve as a person's compass. A "part" of the ultimate Atman is the latter: "The senses are exalted, or so the saying goes, and the mind is higher than the senses, but the soul is higher than the mind: what is beyond the soul is he [the atman]"⁶ Therefore, become aware of the one who is superior to the soul and firmly establish this [self] for yourself. Each of the senses, the mind, and the soul has a specific function in self-government. Humans are equipped to meet the demands of their physical and psychological existence by their senses, which are the source of emotions, desires, and passions. The soul equips them to meet the standards of their ethical and spiritual life. The mind, standing between the senses and the soul, plays a key role in addressing these demands. The harmonious operation of these interior capacities is necessary for a life well lived. How to maintain them operating in that manner is the question. They can only remain in harmony if the mind is self-disciplined, according to the Gita (and Gandhi).

Gandhi's idea of individual Swaraj has a number of fundamental components that are everlasting. First, the basis for freedom and independence in any given community would be "self-ruling" individuals. To put it another way, outward or outside swaraj would lose its genuine essence if inner swaraj were absent. Gandhi was correct when he said that a man with inner Swaraj could even take on the world's most powerful force. Additionally, it implies that such a person would never attempt to enslave even the most lowly and weakest of the weak. The Gandhian concept of individual swaraj is still highly pertinent today, especially when considering the global ruling class. Gandhi not only discussed "individual swaraj" in theory but also attempted to give it a tangible form by instituting a self-discipline program. Consequently, each prisoner was required to take eleven vows (*Ekadasvrata*) when he established Satyagraha Ashram in Ahmedabad in 1915. Five were taken from the Patanjali Yoga Sutra. These were Brahmacharya, truth, non-violence, non-stealing, and non-possession. The other six, however, were his own creations: equal regard for all religions, fearlessness, swadeshi, breadwork, control of the palate, and the abolition of untouchability. In his *Ethical Religion (Niti Dharma)*, published in 1912 on the basis of lectures given by him, Gandhi had stated simply that "he alone can be called truly religious or moral whose mind is not tainted with hatred or selfishness, and who leads a life of absolute purity and of disinterested service."⁷ He also stated that "without mental purity or purification of motives, external actions can not be performed in a selfless spirit."⁸ Gandhi's view of moral growth not merely allows for the inevitability of inconsistencies between

moral decisions made at different times and in different situations, but also for the impossibility of achieving at any time or in any situation the entirety of what one sets out to do.⁹ This was why he never held to the maximum.¹⁰ Gandhi said that every individual must uphold in a spirit of sanctity what he believes to be the highest human ideals because he wanted to combine urgency with flexibility and faith with humility. Unless we are willing to acknowledge some principles as absolute and superior, there cannot be moral authority or discipline, which are necessary for a true revolution in politics and society. An essential assumption for Gandhi was that at the critical moment the individual could, by reason of his moral discipline, be relied upon to come forward in accord with his deepest and most cherished ideals.¹¹

Gandhi also underlined that self-control is a necessary quality for moral behavior. His self-control, or Brahmacharya, discipline included restraining of ideas, impulses, and deeds in addition to celibacy. In a time when unbridled indulgence and consumerism frequently result in moral decay, this notion is still applicable. In addition, he promoted elevated thinking and simple living, exhorting people to live in balance with the natural world and to place a higher priority on moral and spiritual principles than financial gain. Additionally, his concept of Sarvodaya, or the well-being of all, placed a greater emphasis on the good of the group than on personal greed, highlighting the significance of moral leadership and ethical administration. Gandhi promoted the concept of Swaraj, or self-rule, in politics, which included both moral self-governance and political freedom. He held that people could only truly be free when they exercised self-control and made moral decisions.

Conclusion

In the modern day, when societal upheaval has been sparked by leadership corruption and moral decay, this theory is particularly important. A long-term answer to humanity's moral dilemma may be found in the resurgence of Gandhian ethics in politics, business, and daily life. Gandhi's philosophy offers a comprehensive approach to moral rejuvenation, showing that ethical transformation at the individual level can collectively heal the moral and ethical fabric of society. This principle can be applied to interpersonal, societal, and international conflicts today, fostering a culture of understanding and ethical engagement. To restore moral values, the greatest need of the hour is that we should take inspiration from Gandhiji's individual Swaraj to develop moral and ethical values in our lives so that we can rebuild a morally upright and responsible society.

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