

Deciphering the Principles of Sustainable Village through Gandhi's Gram Swaraj

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Abstract: *Gram Swaraj may be described as the Self-Reliant Village, a unique idea of rural reconstruction presented by Mahatma Gandhi long before India's independence that he developed through time. His Gram Swaraj idea is regarded as one of the alternative models of rural reconstruction, with a major focus on the holistic development of a society in which individuals are put at the center of the economic system. Gram Swaraj, on the other hand, is seen as an ideal development strategy. The purpose of this study work is to provide insight into Gandhi's thoughts on rural development. As a result, an attempt is made to reconsider Gandhi's notion of Gram Swaraj and its applicability to the current context of architectural development.*

Keywords: Rural Development, Sustainability, Gram Swaraj, Self-Reliance, Architecture, Education, Administration, Health, Infrastructure

1. Introduction

The Father of our Nation, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, was an ardent leader of the Indian Independence struggle in British-colonized India. He not only emancipated India, but also introduced the world to a new way of thinking about nonviolence and ecological living. His legacy cannot be defined by a single act or notion. Gandhi's entire life, he claims, is his message; and his accomplishments have always been the most universal, based on well understood ideas. He was always putting his beliefs into action and being experimental. As a result, his views and thinking would be shaped.

Migration to cities from various sections of the country became one of the most major concerns. People are migrating from villages mostly for employment, business, and education. People from rural regions relocate to cities because traditional rural revenue sources, such as agriculture, are insufficient to solve unemployment and raise living conditions. Gandhi expounded on a sustainable way of life and development when he spoke about an ideal village and the characteristics of a community that are required for self-sufficiency.

Gandhi is well-known for a variety of things, but architecture is not one of them. Nonetheless, he had a far bigger vision of the Ideal Village, in which he seeks to address problems in very basic and sustainable ways.

In today's setting, an interpretation of his rural development is required for the upliftment of rural society. As we see many programs and schemes introduced for rural development, a study on Gram Swaraj will be an igniting factor for the beginning of planning. As a result, an attempt is being made to understand the relevance of Gandhi's Concept of Gram Swaraj in mitigating different problems of rural areas such as migration, unemployment, access to livelihoods, education, and health services. This study is evaluative and heavily relies on Mahatma Gandhi's writings as well as a

comprehensive literature review.

The research attempts to demonstrate Gandhi's relevance in today's society as well as provide insight into the sustainable community he envisioned.

2. Literature Study

2.1 Gandhi's Dream Village

The Gandhian development approach's major objective was the village, as he believed that reconstructing a country is dependent on rebuilding rural regions. Based on his experiences, he proposed economic solutions to help rebuild many rural communities in India.

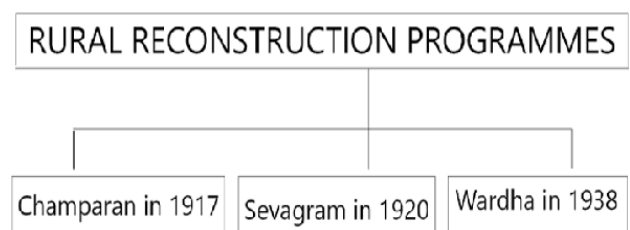


Figure 1: The table is derived from an article Gram Swaraj: Its relevance in present context by - Dr Bhaskar Kumar Kakati

Gandhi presented his rural reconstruction ideas openly and pushed his followers and colleagues to focus on rural rebuilding. On November 13, 1945, in one of his letters to the first Prime Minister of Independent India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, he advised mental, economic, political, and moral growth of each individual in order for everyone to have equal rights and opportunities.

He also instructed him to concentrate on bridging the rural-urban divide.

Gandhi considered the villages to be a wonderful location to live. His many works published in Harijan and Young India, as well as some of the personal letters he addressed to various people, provide a peek into his ideal village. On April 4, 1941, he expressed his perfect village vision in a letter to Munnalal Shah.

He envisaged a village where everyone wears their own cloth, uses oil from indigenous oil presses, and eats their own cuisine. Everyone would be literate in his ideal village, there would be unity among varied communities, there would be no untouchability, and there would be no quarrels or robberies.

As a result, his ideal village would be a self-contained entity or a whole nation.

As a result, Gandhi thought that each town should be independent of its neighbors for its own critical requirements, while being interdependent for many others. As a result, each village's top objective will be to grow its own food and cotton for textiles.

His ideal village would be free of caste and class divisions, with only horizontal rather than vertical divides; there would be no high and no low.

All services have equal status and pay equal compensation, which indicates that untouchability must be tolerated and common people must be free of bias. Others who have more utilize their advantage not for themselves, but as a trust to serve those who have less; the driving element in the choice of occupations is not personal gain, but self-expression and self-realization via societal service. (Gandhi, 1962).

Gram Swaraj's ideals may be summarized as follows:

- India lives in villages, not cities;
- Rural Reconstruction is founded on the non-exploitation of rural regions.
- Industrialization of villages through small-scale and cottage enterprises.
- Each individual must carry out their responsibilities to the state.

Gandhi's Gram Swaraj concepts may be divided into four primary categories:

- Rural Administration
- Rural Education (Nai-talim)
- Rural Infrastructure
- Rural Health

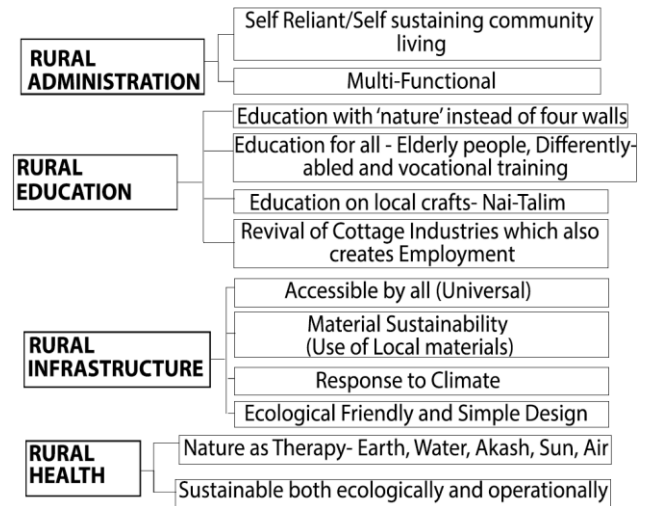


Figure 2: The table is derived from the book Gram Swaraj By The Author

2.2 Rural Administration

Self-Reliant/ Self-Sustaining Community Living

Gram Swaraj, in Gandhi's opinion, may be divided into two fundamental components: truth and nonviolence.

Gram Swaraj is a philosophy that claims that each village should be autonomous and its own republic.

The community should be self-sufficient and not reliant on its adjacent communities for any of its essential requirements and desires.

However, the communities might be dependent on each other for some needs and desires when dependency is required. Gandhi essentially desired that each community be self-sufficient and self-sustaining in terms of fundamental essentials of life, such as clean water, sanitation, shelter, education, food, clothes, and so on. It also covered self-defense, government, and any other social necessities that a man desires. This involves, for example, having a movie theater in the village for self-sufficiency.

Gandhi wished for every village in India to be self-sufficient and to be a re-public with complete powers of its own. These were revolutionary ideas back then, as they are now. as well as its self-sufficiency.

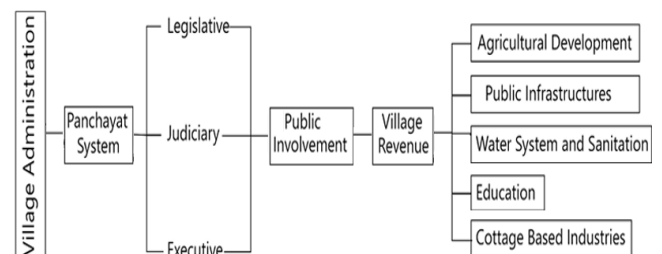


Figure 3: The table is derived by the author with reference to the book Gram Swaraj By MK Gandhi

2.3 Rural Education

"By education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in a 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."

M.K. Gandhi [Harijan: July 31, 1937]

Gandhi's education system included multi-disciplinary activities for youngsters, one of which was the learning of craft-based knowledge-

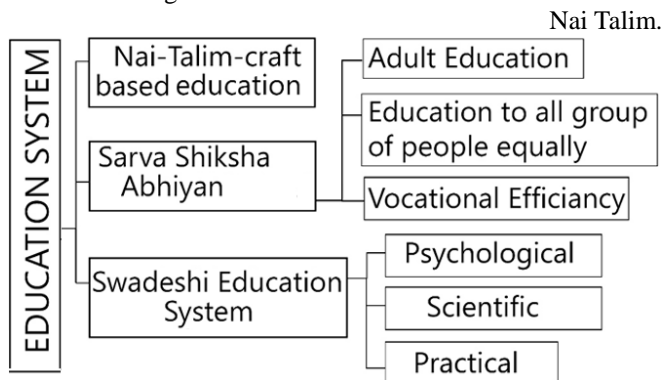


Figure 4: The table is derived by the author from the book Experiential Learning Gandhiji's Nai Talim by Dr W G Prasanna Kumar, Chairman, MGNCRE.

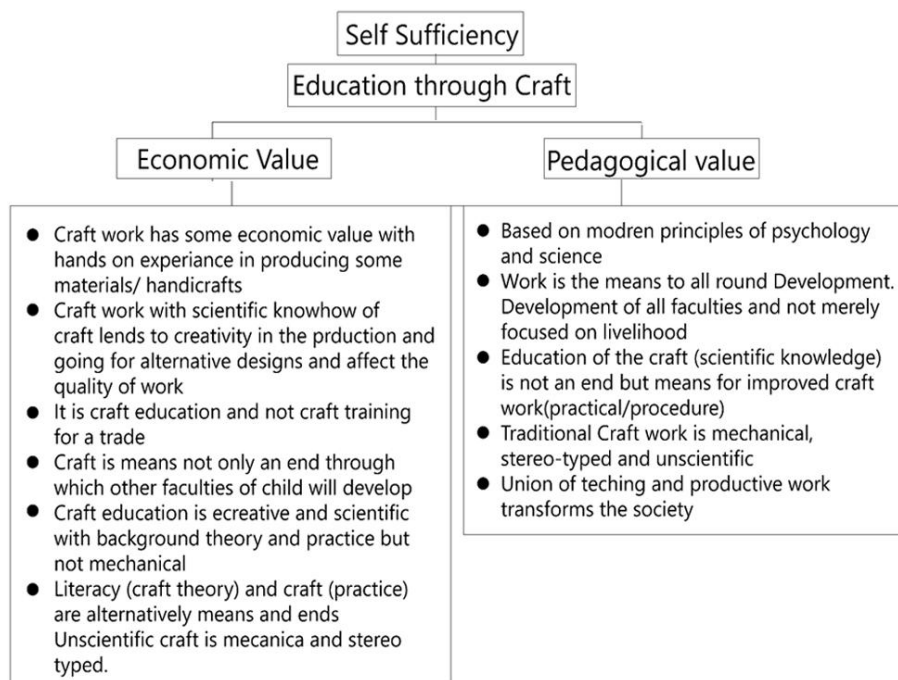


Figure 5: The table is derived by the author from the book Experiential Learning Gandhiji's Nai Talim by Dr W G Prasanna Kumar, Chairman, MGNCRE

2.3.2 Sarva-Shiksha Abhiyan

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is a community-owned school system that aims to universalize primary education. It is a reaction to the increased demand for high-quality basic education.

• **Gender**

Gender equality entails treating both sexes equally. The reservations or concessions made by the affluent and poor are intended to achieve the stated goal. The beginning points of diverse people's lives are not the same or com-

2.3.1 Nai-Talim: Education

Education devoid of culture will only lead to oblivion. Culture and education are inextricably linked and yet complimentary, with several places of contact. Culture prepares the path for education, while education is in charge of infusing cultural values into everyday life. As a result, both must be intertwined in diverse ways.

Nai Talim is Gandhi's style of education geared toward his alternative vision of the social order: Gandhi's primary education was therefore an incarnation of his vision of an ideal society comprised of tiny, self-sufficient communities, with his ideal citizen being an industrious, self-respecting, and charitable individual living in a small cooperative group.

Gandhi perceived a dialectic between man and 'machine' or 'technology,' in which man represented all of humanity, not just India, and the machine represented the industrialized West." For this reason, among others, Gandhi put such a strong emphasis in his pedagogy on the significance of handicrafts such as weaving, metal work, pottery, and spinning; they represented the virtues of self-sufficiency or Swaraj and independence or Swadeshi.

parable. The concept of equality considers equal opportunities. We cannot attain equality until all people have equal access to opportunities.

• **The differently-abled**

Children should not be discriminated against based on their physical appearance or abilities. Each youngster possesses an enumerable skill that should be evaluated and valued.

2.3.3 Swadeshi Education System:

Literacy, according to Gandhi, is not an education in and of itself. 'Literacy is not the end of education, nor is it even the beginning,' he adds. Literary education should come after

manual education—the one talent that clearly differentiates man from beast.

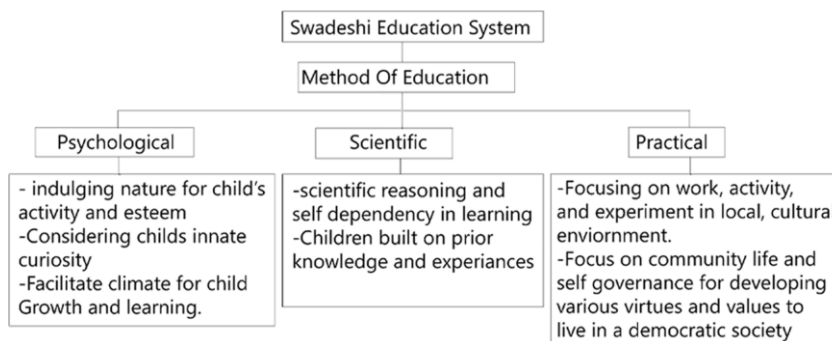


Figure 6: The table is derived by the author from the book *Experiential Learning Gandhiji's Nai Talim* by Dr W G Prasanna Kumar, Chairman, MGNCRE

2.4 Rural Health

Gandhiji's conviction in natural medicines was founded on the effective use of the nature-based antidotes proposed in Adolf Just's book *Return to Nature*. Natural therapies is based on the utilization of the same five components that comprise the human body in the treatment of disease. These are the elements of earth, water, ether, sun, and air.

2.4.1 Earth- Since the birth of civilization, Earth, or the 'Mother Divine,' has been thought to have healing properties. Gandhiji recommended a cold 'mud poultice' - a combination of pure soil and water - to relieve stress.

2.4.2 Water- This natural phenomena is endowed with relaxing properties that have recently been discovered by contemporary western medicine. It is used for symbolic washing away of sins.

2.4.3 Akash (Ether) - Gandhiji had a romantic relationship with nature, which he expressed clearly in his words when he stated, "If our bodies could be in contact with the sky without the intervention of houses, roofs and even clothes, we are likely to enjoy the maximum amount of health."

2.4.4 Sun- Life cannot be born or sustained in the absence of sunshine. Gandhiji recommended exposing the naked body to the early light to speed up metabolism.

2.4.5 Air- Gandhiji advocated "living in the open, in the middle of abundance of fresh air" as a time-honored technique for remaining healthy. 'Going Green,' or appreciating the freshness and beauty of nature, is in popularity, as man grows tired of his artificial life.

2.5 Rural Infrastructure

Gandhi felt that India was made up of villages, and that developing the villages would lead to the growth of India as a whole. When we broaden the perspective and see the globe as a united country and countries as villages, the importance becomes evident. Gandhi recognized the issues that came with industry and modernisation. He felt that unless villages were developed and made self-sufficient, it would lead to

mass migration, overcrowding in cities, and a never-ending cycle of poverty and under development.

2.5.1 Inclusiveness in design:

"What I want, what I am living for, and what I should delight in dying for, is the eradication of untouchability root and branch. ... My life I count of no consequence. One hundred lives given for this noble cause would, in my opinion, be poor penance done by Hindus for the atrocious wrongs they have heaped upon helpless men and women of their own faith....

I, therefore, would urge them not to swerve an inch from the path of strictest justice."

- M K Gandhi in *Harijan*, 1924.

Thus, his major goal with the Untouchability is to produce a service or environment that can be used by as many individuals as possible without the need for particular adaptations. This can be accomplished by involvement with extreme users who have unique requirements; nevertheless, this varies from design for disability in its mainstream emphasis.

The village reconstruction must make all human variation, such as ability, language, culture, gender, and age, accessible.

He envisions public areas, such as the area where water is fetched from the well and open places for gathering and gatherings, as being accessible since they are focused on making services available to a broader variety of individuals.

2.5.2 Materiality:

Working with one's hands was not only a symbolic gesture for Gandhi; it was integral to his way of life. In creating village homes, he stressed local materials and traditional notions, exhibiting a great dedication to mass.

"the ideal village will be built using materials which are all found within a five-mile radius of the house."

-M K Gandhi

This shows us that the built must be sustainable made with naturally occurring and local materials.

2.5.3 Inter-village connectivity:

Rural road connection is an important component of rural development because it promotes access to economic and social services, resulting in higher agricultural revenues and more productive job possibilities. It is a critical component in guaranteeing long-term poverty alleviation. The goal of Gandhi's ideal village was to improve socioeconomic circumstances in rural regions by establishing long-term conditioned connection, particularly to areas of disconnected habitation and other essential locations.

2.5.4 Ecological Planning:

Gandhi was a profound environmentalist in the sense that he valued nature not because it was helpful to man, but because it was God's creation and so was to be preserved as pristinely as possible. Gandhi stated that everything in the cosmos is a part of Parmatma and hence has its own right. As a result, Gandhi advocated for the limiting of demands in order to reduce man's burden on nature as much as possible.

3. Introduction of Rural Architecture through Gandhi's Gram Swaraj

The study of Gram Swaraj is used to interpret infrastructure development in rural areas, which includes;

3.1 Inclusiveness in design

- The infrastructure must be beneficial to the area and the community. It must be connected into the neighborhood's pedestrian network, with strategically positioned entrances, ramps, and broad tunnels and corridors, allowing for easy movement and access for all types of users.
- Free of any impediments, the arrangement of the area must be planned in such a way that there are absolutely no hinderances for easy movement for children and teens belonging to any section of the handicap spectrum- both physical and mental.

3.2 Materiality

- Indigenous peoples' architecture must be firmly entrenched in their environment, in the sense that materials are found locally and empirically tested to determine the construction processes and houses that best respond to the community's values and concept of habitation.
- An architect should broaden his perspective on architecture by learning from locals who have refined their abilities through life experience and are capable of creating one-of-a-kind structures that are ideally suited to their surroundings.
- Instead of importing foreign architectural languages into Indian land, one must make indigenous building methods accessible, which are eco-friendly alternatives. Using local materials and skills is the greatest approach to develop a meaningful relationship with the environment.

3.3 Inter-Village Connectivity

- Increased rural poverty is a result of greater rural connection.
- Through a variety of processes, improved roads may foster economic growth and poverty reduction.

- Rural connectivity is a critical component of rural development, contributing greatly to the socioeconomic development of rural people by giving access to facilities such as education, health, marketing, and so on.
- Construction of rural roads invariably leads to an increase in agricultural production and productivity by bringing in additional land for cultivation or intensifying current land usage to capitalize on improved market opportunities.
- Rural connection provides critical links that promote effective access to and exploitation of a variety of critical social and physical assets.
- Rural infrastructure, notably roads, not only facilitates agricultural commercialization and diversification, but also strengthens linkages between agricultural and non-agricultural activity within rural regions and between rural and urban areas.

3.4 Ecological planning

In India, sustainable rural development must be viewed as increasing the quality of life in villages by including ecological, cultural, political, institutional, social, and economic components without leaving a burden, hence producing the sustainable village.

- The planning must be based on a sustainable strategy that takes advantage of the climate, materials, and building techniques found locally.
- To attract biodiversity and maintain ecosystems, landscaping must be created with a range of native species, sizes, and colors that compliment the protected trees.
- Infrastructure must promote the learning, bonding, and healing of persons with diverse abilities within a biophilic setting in order to promote sustainability and sociability.
- When suggesting sustainable improvements, it is vital to examine the site's geographical position as well as its climate zone. The thermal comfort requirements of each climatic zone varies, therefore it is critical to address local issues.
- Take, for example, Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram, designed by Charles Correa, which was built using burned bricks, handmade tiles, and sawn lumber supplied locally. The walls of Sevagram Ashram were composed of "garhi mitti," a mixture of water, cow dung, wheat husk, and hay, while the roof was made of bamboo matting and supported by sagwan wood columns. The use of materials and energy was restricted, and a focus was placed on open and semi-open areas.

Gandhi's architecture, which was originally deemed rustic and conservative, is now rooted in the ideals of sustainability and frugality. This demonstrates his emphasis on local, affordable, and self-sufficient building materials, as well as his ideals and relevancy.

4. Analysis

An examination of the applicability of Gandhi's concepts and ideals in the modern setting is conducted, which may be summarized using the following criteria:

- Gandhi's goal is a stateless democracy governed by a federation of satyagrahi village communities that operate on the basis of voluntary cooperation and dignified and

peaceful coexistence. This results in a nonviolent growth in local output and participation.

- Gandhiji was opposed to overly centralized production and advocated for decentralized production. The goal was not to eliminate machines totally, but rather to avoid the accumulation of power in the hands of a few wealthy individuals. He intended to eradicate poverty by revitalizing the local economy. The emphasis was on intense, small-scale, individual, and diverse farming, as well as a cattle-based economy.
- The Gandhian ideal village has numerous components. These include money generating, village cleanliness, village industry, and women's high status, among other things. He believed that in order to be a complete republic, a village needed to generate revenue.

As a result, he stated that "any community today may become such a republic without any intervention, even from the current Government." would have cottages with enough light and ventilation made of a material available within a five-mile radius.

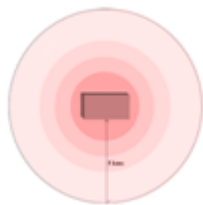


Figure 7: Sketch explaining the material availability
Source: author

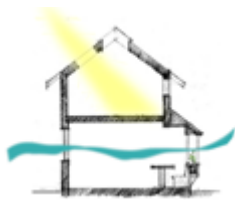


Figure 8: Sketch explaining the Light and ventilation in cottages
Source: author

- The courtyards in the cottages would allow homeowners to grow vegetables for domestic use as well as keep their animals, and the village alleys and streets would be free of any unnecessary dust.
- It would have wells that were appropriate for its purposes and accessible to everybody.
- It would grow its own grain vegetables, and fruit, as well as its own khadi.
- It would have houses of worship for everybody, as well as a common gathering place, a village common for grazing its cattle, a co-operative dairy, elementary and secondary schools, and a co-operative dairy.
- Given a decent zamindar, where there is one, or cooperation among the people, nearly the entire program, other than model houses, may be worked out at a cost within the means of the villagers, including the zamindar, or without Government aid. Here is no limit to the possibilities of village regeneration with this support.
- He was confident that with wise leadership, villagers

might treble village revenue in comparison to individual income. He thought that Indian communities contain limitless resources, not always for commercial purposes, but virtually always for local needs.

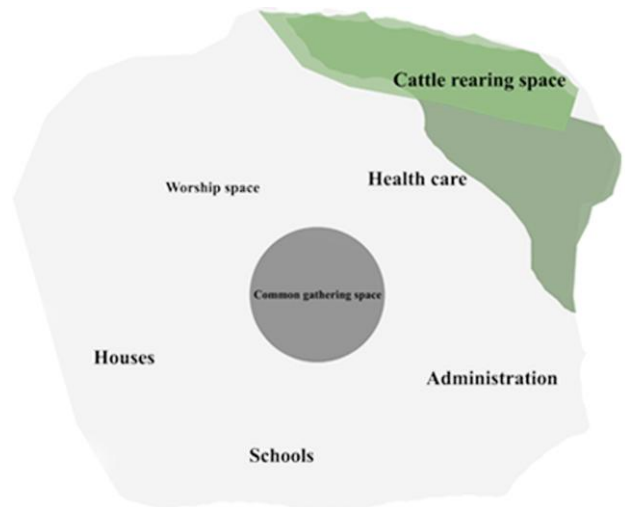


Figure 9: The picture shows the requirements of an ideal village according to Gandhi
Source: Author

He stated that the greatest sorrow is the peasants' hopeless refusal to improve their position.

Thus, in Gram Swaraj, Gandhi emphasized the holistic development of individual goals in order to achieve pleasure and peace in society. Gram Swaraj's vision therefore stressed economic growth as well as human social, cultural, and political development. Gram Swaraj's ideals may be summarized as follows.

- India's people live in villages, not cities.
- Rural Reconstruction is built on the principle of not exploiting rural regions.
- Moral and ethical ideals are more important than monetary gain.
- Sarvodaya - the welfare of all
- Swadeshi product promotion and use
- Village industrialisation through small scale and cottage industry.
- Each individual must carry out their responsibilities to the state, and decision-making should be left in the hands of the people.

5. Conclusion

Gandhi broadened the scope of the search for socially appropriate solutions by situating it in the ecosystem of talents, services, and products, as well as the reflexive link between process and design solution. His worldview contributes to the bonding of values to architecture such as:

- Righteous
- Empathetic
- Simple
- Contextual
- Innovative

The preceding points are not unique concepts, but are intertwined with multiple others. They overlap, share domains,

and lack clear limits. The authors anticipate that this framework will find a context in describing activities across a spectrum that includes conventional professions such as architecture and industrial design as well as emergent sectors such as service design.

Gandhi's vision and particular thoughts on architecture are inextricably linked to bigger concepts of labor and economy, and arose from his long and arduous effort to eradicate economic and social inequity. Gandhi created new institutional forms and meanings in the liberal and democratic domains. Throughout his life, Gandhi recast and re-configured existing social realities in his own hermeneutic, advancing a new 'moral' paradigm of problem solutions by engaging elements of social justice, morality, equality, and empathy. Gandhi's approach was neither rigid or formal, but rather socially driven.

In our situation, this leads to Gandhi's primary contribution to social design, with an overlap and interplay across social, environmental, and humanitarian domains, bringing the web of intertwined benefits to the last individual.

Trivedi outlined a few aspects that may be gleaned from Gandhi's comprehensive vision for India. Some of these are:

Karmabhumi (Land of Work and Production), Self-Governance and Self-Rule, Village Self-Rule, Critical Industrialization,

Decentralization, Sarvodaya (Welfare for All), Religious Equality, Women's Empowerment, Dismantling Untouchability, Providing Basic Education to All, and so on. Critical Industrialization, Decentralization, and Sarvodaya (Welfare for All) may all be realized at the first order of design manufacturing. The remaining virtues, such as Woman Empowerment, Self-Governance, and Self-Rule, can become an intrinsic part of the process and effort required to achieve these qualities.

The main issue with the current economic system is that it is built on exploitation, which leads to the breakdown of natural economic order and harmony. The Gandhian idea of Gram Swaraj may be applicable in this scenario since it emphasizes on self-sufficiency and self-reliance through economic growth while also including moral and ethical principles. His Gram Swaraj is primarily an alternate model for helping mankind.

However, when diverse development difficulties in rural India became more prevalent, it became crucial for policymakers. His Gram Swaraj concept impacted the adoption of many programs such as the Community Development Programme (CDP), the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), and the establishment of Panchayati Raj institutions (Sharma, 2019). As a result, Gandhi's rural reconstruction method through Gram Swaraj might be regarded as one of the alternative development models.

It will then be a gift of India to the world' (Vyas, 1962, p. 14).

Thus, retrofitting existing villages in accordance with Gandhi's grama swaraj will assist us in achieving self-sufficient and holistic village development, which will serve as a prototype model that can be replicated in other villages and is both sustainable and cost efficient.

As a result, Gandhi's prescription for empowering the rural masses through the establishment of additional work outside of agriculture remains particularly relevant today. We must broaden and extend his thought to address various other issues in order to address the same fundamental issue, namely the abolition of rural poverty in a different environment.

His ideals, such as bridging the rural-urban divide, creating jobs, caring for the environment, and so on, are extremely important in the current situation and may be used to formulate various development plans. As a result, Gram Swaraj's full-fledged activity will serve as a paradigm for the rest of the world to follow.

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