

‘Swaraj’ (Foundation for Good Governance)*

M.K. Gandhi

In this structure (of swaraj) composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be composed of individuals, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral unit...therefore the outermost circle (the nation) will not wield power to crush the inner circles but give strength to all within and derive its own power from the centre (the individual citizen)...

Swaraj can be maintained only where there is a majority of loyal and patriotic citizens for whom the good of the nation is paramount above all other consideration whatever, including their personal profit. Swaraj means government by the many.

My notion of ‘Poorna Swaraj’ is not isolated independence but healthy and dignified independence. My nationalism fierce though it is, is not exclusive, is not designed to harm any nation or individual.

The Kisan or the peasant of India, whether a landless labourer or a laboring proprietor, comes first in my picture of swaraj. He is the salt of the earth which rightly belongs or should belong to him. I have no doubt that if we have democratic swaraj as it must be if the

freedom is won through non-violence, the Kisan must hold power in all its phases including political power.

Economic equality is the master key to non-violent Independence. A non-violent system of government is clearly an impossibility as long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists.

In a country like ours there must be room for all schools of honest thought. It is one of the indispensable tests of a healthy public-life and therefore fitness for swaraj.

We have to learn to strike the mean between individual freedom and social restraint. Willing submission to social restraint for the sake of the well-being of the whole society enriches both the individual and the society of which one is a member.

If the individual ceases to count, what is left of society? Individual freedom alone can make a man voluntarily surrender himself completely to the service of society. If it is forcibly wrested from him, he becomes an automation and society is ruined.

We are inheritors of rural civilization. The vastness of our country, the vastness of the

* An abridged version of Gandhiji's 'SWARAJ OF MY DREAMS' - compiled and edited by A.V.Balakrishnan

population, the situation and the climate of the country, have, in my opinion, destined it for a rural civilization. Its defects are well known, but not one of them is irremediable. I can therefore suggest remedies on the assumption that we must perpetuate the present rural civilization and endeavour to rid it of its acknowledged defects. This can only be done if the youth of the country will settle down to village lives. And if they will do this, they must reconstruct their life and pass every day of their vacation in the villages surrounding their colleges and schools, they should think of settling down in villages.

Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote. In the domain of politics I should make use of the indigenous institutions and serve them by curing them of their proved defects. In that of economics I should use only things that are produced by my immediate neighbours and serve those industries by making them efficient and complete where they might found wanting.

This nation had courts, lawyers and doctors, but they were all within moral bounds. Everyone knew that these professions were not particularly superior; moreover these vakils and v aids did not rob people. They were considered people's dependants, not their masters. Justice was tolerably fair. The ordinary rule was to avoid courts. The common people lived independently and followed their agricultural occupation. They enjoyed true Home rule.

Villages have suffered long from neglect by those who have had the benefit of higher education. They have chosen the city life. The

village movement is an attempt to establish healthy contact with the villages and find self expression in the dedicated service of the villagers.

You must not imagine that I am envisaging our village life as it is today. My ideal village will contain intelligent human beings. They will not live in dirt and darkness as animals. Men will not wallow in luxury.

I would say that if the village perishes India will perish too. India will be no more India. Her own mission in the world will get lost. The revival of the village is possible only when it is no more exploited. Industrialization on the mass scale will necessarily lead to passive or active exploitation of the villagers as the problems of competition and marketing come. Therefore, we have to concentrate on the village being self-contained, manufacturing mainly for use. Provided this character of the village industry is maintained, there would be no objection to villagers using even the most modern machines and tools that they can make and afford to use. Only they should not be used as a means of exploitation of other.

We must train these masses who have a heart of gold, who want to be taught and led. But a few intelligent, sincere workers are needed, and the whole nation can be organised to act intelligently and democracy can be evolved out of mobocracy.

We have to make a choice between India of the villages that are as ancient as herself and the India of cities which are a creation of foreign domination. Today cities dominate and drain the villages so that they are crumbling to ruin. Exploitation of villages is itself

organized violence; we will have to give villages their proper place.

The whole programme of village reconstruction will be a structure on sand if it is not built on the solid foundation of economic equality. Economic equality can never be supposed to mean possession of an equal amount of all worldly goods by everyone. It does mean, however, that everyone will have a proper house to live in, sufficient and balanced diet to eat, and sufficient khadi with which to cover oneself. It also means that the cruel inequality that obtains today will be removed by purely nonviolent means.

Civilization in the real sense of the term consists not in the multiplication but in deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants which promotes real happiness and contentment and increases the capacity for service. One can reduce one's wants by perseverance and the reduction of wants makes for happiness - a healthy body and peaceful mind.

All activities should be centered in Truth. Truth should be the very breath of our life. When once this state in the pilgrim's progress is reached all other rules of correct living will come without effort, and obedience to them will be instinctive. But without truth it is impossible to observe any principles or rules of life.

I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? In other

words will it lead to swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and yourself melting away.

All society is held together by non-violence, even as the earth is held in her position by gravitation. When the law of gravitation was discovered it yielded results of which our ancestors had no knowledge. Even so when society is deliberately constructed in accordance with the law of non-violence, its structure will be different in material particulars from what it is today.

Society based on non-violence can only consist of groups settled in villages in which voluntary co-operation is the condition of dignified and peaceful existence.

A government cannot succeed in becoming entirely non-violent because it represents all the people. I do not today conceive of such a golden age. But I do believe to the possibility of a predominantly nonviolent society.

We have not had patience enough to wait and apply ourselves wholeheartedly to the spread of nonviolence among the people as a means for political ends.

In the ideal non-violent state, there is no centralized political power because there is no state as understood today. But the idea is never fully realized in life. Hence the classical statement "That government is best which governs least."

Swaraj of people means the sum total of the swaraj (self rule) of individuals. And such swaraj comes only from performance by individuals of the duty as citizens. In it no one thinks only of his rights. They come when they are needed, for better performance of one's duties. _____●