

## GANDHI'S RAMARAJYA: THE IDEA OF AN IDEAL\*

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I mean by *Ramarajya*-Divine Raj, the kingdom of God. *Ramarajya* of my dream ensures equal rights alike of Prince and Pauper.... *Ramarajya* is undoubtedly one of true democracy.... (*Young India*, 19-9-1929, p.305)

*Ramarajya* is an ideal for transformation in Gandhi's political philosophy. It is considered the goal for humanity. *Ramarajya* literally means *rajya* or reign of *Rama*, the seventh avatar of Lord Vishnu and the hero of *Ramayana*. But metaphorically *Ramarajya* means 'reign of ideal justice,' 'perfect democracy' or 'reign of righteousness'. In unfolding *Ramarajya*, first the concept of state (i.e. *rajya* from *Ramarajya*) demands focus.

According to Gandhi, state is an institution for the realization of the relation between government and its citizens. A state gives a community political unity. Without it, there would be chaos. From colonial experience, India and its people realized the necessity of a political unity in the name of nation. The concept of nationalism inspired people to bind into a single tag in the name of nation. Gandhi was against the modern concept of state. He mentions that modern state 'represents violence in a concentrated and organized form. The individual has a soul, but state is a soulless machine; it can never be weaned from violence to which it owes its very existence.'<sup>61</sup> From these comments one may be inclined to conclude that Gandhi was against the idea of state. But that will be wrong because Gandhi mentions in *Hind Swaraj* that he is only against the idea of an absolute and aggressive state. He said 'I look upon an increase in the power of the state with greatest fear....'<sup>62</sup> Gandhi admitted that state would consider the national interest. However, Gandhi was against the theory of 'reason of state', which holds that the interest of a state is morally superior to human interest. Gandhi gave more importance to the individuals. That's why he believed that for human development or well-being, state is not sufficient. It needs ethics and spirituality. Anthony Parel rightly mentions that 'An adequate theory of the state therefore should be mindful of the contributions that ethics and spirituality

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<sup>61</sup> Bose, N. K., *Selection from Gandhi*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmadabad, 1957, p.41.

<sup>62</sup> *The Modern Review*, 1935, p.412.

make'.<sup>63</sup>Gandhi was in favour of a state where law will be guided by morality, power will be decentralized, everyone will be his own ruler and everything will be done with justice. It would then be *Ramarajya*.

From childhood *Ramanama* made its impression on Gandhi. Gandhi's family was very religious and a traditional one. They were worshipers of Lord Vishnu (*Rama* is the seventh avatar of *Vishnu*). His mother was a religious lady and left a deep impression on Gandhi. Gandhi mentions in his autobiography that 'the outstanding impression my mother has left on my memory is that of saintliness'.<sup>64</sup> His mother was so religious that she would never take her meal without doing her prayer and also did many fasting. Gandhi was very close to his mother. This religious discipline made an impact on him. Gandhi's domestic culture and tradition influenced him to be a devotee of Rama. Gandhi practiced *Ramanama* to withstand his childhood fears. During his father's illness Gandhi regularly listened to *Ramayana*. Gandhi and his brother recited *Rama Raksha* under their cousin's guidance. This shows how Gandhi was brought up and how *Ramanama* was part of his daily life.

Now automatically question arises- what is *Ramarajya*? The best answer can be found in Valmiki's *Ramayana*. Valmiki describes the conditions obtaining in the society during the reign of King *Rama* a Widows lamented not, fear from wild beasts there was none; nor was there fear of disease when Rama ruled the kingdom. The world was bereft of robbers, none faced a calamity; the aged performed not obsequies of the young. All was happiness and all pursued their duties; looking up to Rama, they indulged not in mutual violence.<sup>65</sup>

This depiction shows *Ramarajya* as one in which everyone was happy and conscious about their duties. People practiced non-violence and worshiped truth. There was perfect harmony amongst citizens. In *Ramarajya* people aspired towards the ideal of King *Rama*- the man of truth. We can find that there were some basic elements in Valmiki's depiction of *Ramarajya*, they are- respect for women, basic needs for existence being met, health awareness, responsibility to perform one's own

<sup>63</sup>Parel, Anthony, 'Gandhi and the State', in J. M. Brown and A. Parel(ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2011, p.159.

<sup>64</sup>Gandhi, M. K., *An Autobiography*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmadabad, 2009, p.4.

<sup>65</sup>B. N. Srikrishna, 'Whither Ramrajya?', JSTOR downloaded from 14.139.58.194 on 7Sep. 2014,p.137.

duty or *dharma*, and inculcation of virtue. In *Ramarajya* of Valmiki's *Ramayana*, King *Rama* was the man of virtue and morality. He inspired everyone to cultivate virtues and be a man of truth.

*Rama* is part of Hinduism and Gandhi called himself a *sanatani* Hindu. Now question arises—does *Ramarajya* refer to a Hindu state? Gandhi says that ‘by *Ramarajya* I do not mean Hindu Raj. I mean by *Ramarajya* Divine Raj, the kingdom of God.’<sup>66</sup> Gandhi was in favour of secularism. He was against the idea of a state based on a particular religion. He said ‘the state should undoubtedly be secular. Everyone living in it should be entitled to profess his religion without let or hindrance....’<sup>67</sup> Gandhi was conscious and also afraid of the term *Ramarajya* being misunderstood. So he says that to the Muslim audience, he would refer to it as ‘Khudai Raj’ and to the Christians as ‘the kingdom of God’. To earn support from Muslims he not only translates *Ramarajya* into ‘Khudai Raj’, but also proclaims that ‘...the first Caliphs may be said to have established *Ramarajya*.’<sup>68</sup> He also mentioned that ‘for me Rama and Rahim are one and the same deity.’<sup>69</sup> *Ramarajya*, according to Gandhi, is a state of morality and righteousness rather than a religious state. Ashis Nandy mentions in his article ‘Final Encounter: The Politics of the Assassination of Gandhi’ how Gandhi was depressed during his last days thinking about the partition of India. He writes that Gandhi had said that ‘I can never be willing party to the vivisection. I would employ non-violent means to prevent it.... My whole soul rebels against the idea that Hinduism and Islam represent two antagonistic culture and doctrines. To assent to such doctrine is for me denial of God....if the congress wishes to accept partition; it will be over my dead body.’<sup>70</sup>

To understand Gandhi's image of *Rama* we have to understand Gandhi's concept of religion. Gandhi understands religion as that ‘which transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and

<sup>66</sup> Young India(henceforth YI), 19-9-1929, p.305

<sup>67</sup> Harijan, 24-8-47

<sup>68</sup> Gandhi, M. K., *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (henceforth CW), Vol.25, New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, p.558.

<sup>69</sup> YI, 19-9-1929, p.305.

<sup>70</sup> Nandy, Ashis, ‘Final Encounter: The Politics of the Assassination of Gandhi’, in A. Raghuramraju(ed.), *Debating Gandhi: A Reader*, Oxford India Paperbacks, 2010, p.62.

which, ever purifies.<sup>71</sup> A. J. Parel characterizes Gandhi's religion as that which transcends all historical religions. His idea of religion was against any sectarian bias. Gandhi says in *Hind Swaraj* that there is a religion that underlies all religions and he also says 'there is no religion higher than Truth and Righteousness'.<sup>72</sup> Gandhi's religion is inseparable from morality. Emphasizing on morality he says 'as soon as we lose the moral basis, we cease to be religious'.<sup>73</sup> In talking of *Rama*, Gandhi is referring to the ideal of truth and justice and not to a specific deity. Gandhi's *Rama* was not bounded only to Hinduism but to the universal principle of truth. According to Gandhi, 'Truth is God'. He valued truth more than God. Gandhi believes in God as truth. He mentions in his autobiography that he worships God as truth.

Gandhi's idolized *Rama* was a man of truth. According to Gandhi, *Rama* is the image of virtue and *Ramayana* is an epic of perfect fidelity to vows. Gandhi said 'the *Ramarajya* drives from the *Ramayana*'s classic depiction of the victory of *Rama*, symbolizing the force of good over *Ravana* symbolizing the force of evil'.<sup>74</sup> Gandhi realized from *Ramayana* that 'truth is the foundation of all merits and virtues'.<sup>75</sup>

Gandhi wanted to use the powerful image of *Rama* and *Ramarajya* as standing for truth and justice. Describing *Ramarajya*, A.J. Parel says in his book *Gandhi's philosophy and the Quest for Harmony* that 'Rama is not of history but to an imagined, spiritual Rama, the symbol of perfection'.<sup>76</sup> Gandhi said 'to think of God as "God" does not fire me as the name of Rama does...'<sup>77</sup> In order to understand the background of the image of *Ramarajya*, I want to move towards the role of Indian mythology. S. Balaram in his article 'Product Symbolism of Gandhi and its Connection with Indian Mythology' emphatically mentions that Gandhi used many symbols which have linkage with mythologies. Balaram says that 'mythology is probably the most important cultural treasure of a people. It occupies the people's

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p.406.

<sup>72</sup> Bose, N. K., *Selections from Gandhi*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmadabad, 1957, p.254.

<sup>73</sup>YI, 24-11-21, p.385.

<sup>74</sup>CW90, p.18.

<sup>75</sup> Chatterjee, Margaret, *Gandhi's Religious Thought*, The Macmillan Press LTD. London, 1983, p.16.

<sup>76</sup>Parel, A., *Gandhi's Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2013, p.64.

<sup>77</sup>CW48, p.127.

collective dreams, aspirations and visions.<sup>78</sup> We know that mythologies have great impact on people. It can help people to be disciplined, moral and virtuous. Mythologies are known to everyone whether educated or uneducated, from a town or village. Gandhi realized the importance of mythologies. Gandhi might have used the concept of *Ramarajya* because of its mythological power. India being a multi-cultural country, particularly before freedom, it was a challenge for Gandhi to unify the whole country. Hence Gandhi used mythologies as a tag to bind people. So irrespective of whether *Ramarajya*, the Kingdom of *Rama*, really existed or not, Gandhi accepted and projected it as ‘true democracy’. Gandhi says in *Young India* ‘whether *Rama* of my imagination ever lived or not on this earth, the ancient ideal of *Ramarajya* is undoubtedly one of true democracy.’<sup>79</sup> Gandhi mentions that *Ramarajya* is sovereignty of the people which is based on pure moral authority. *Ramarajya* requires that people be guided by virtues. Gandhi introduced *Ramarajya* as his ideal goal so that people are inspired to cultivate the virtues connected with the image of Rama within themselves.

Gandhi was aware of the value of the individual. He was against any social discrimination. He fought his whole life against social ills like untouchability, Brahmanism, etc. Gandhi wanted equal rights for everyone and that’s why he wanted to establish *Ramarajya*. He says ‘*Ramarajya* of my dream ensures equal rights alike of prince and pauper.’<sup>80</sup> Gandhi was a shrewd politician. He knew that *Rama* has devotee from every caste within Hinduism, even from ‘untouchables’ and Rama could be used as a symbol of inclusivity. Gandhi’s main aim was to use *Ramanama* as a force to build and upgrade social character and cohesion. Then the society will be one based on moral authority and it will be the kingdom of righteousness.

The concept of *Ramarajya* does not lead to a monarchy but rather it supports self-rule. Gandhi mentioned ‘my conception of *Ramarajya* excludes the replacement of the British army by a national army of occupation. A country that is governed by

<sup>78</sup>Balaram,S.,‘Product Symbolism of Gandhi and Its Connection with Indian Mythology’, in *Design Issues*;Vol. V, Number 2, Spring 1989, p.73.

<sup>79</sup>*YI*, p.76.

<sup>80</sup>*Ananda Bazar Patrika*., 2-8-34.

even its national army can never be morally free and, therefore, it is so called weakest member can never rise to his fullest moral height.<sup>81</sup>

Gandhi's *Ramarajya* was a secular one rather than a religious one. By integrating *Ramarajya* with several concepts Gandhi tries to make the concept of *Ramarajya* appeal to everyone. Gandhi was conscious that India is a heterogeneous country and has inter-caste and inter-religious problems. Gandhi believed that solution can be possible by practicing morality and virtues. To wipe out inter-caste problem in Hinduism, Gandhi coined *Ramarajya* so that people are inspired by the virtues of *Rama*. According to Gandhi, 'Truth is God' and every religion worships 'Truth'. The end was same for every religion. Problem was in the means. To appeal to other religions Gandhi used several terms to refer to *Ramarajya*. For Muslims he used 'Khudai Raj', for Christians 'Kingdom of God' and also beyond all religions he used the term 'Dharmarajya'. He mentions 'if the word *Ramarajya* offends any one, then I shall call it "Dharmarajya".'<sup>82</sup> Gandhi's concept of Hinduism is totally different from the traditional one. He wants to remould Hinduism through "de-Brahminization" and "de-intellectualization". According to Ashis Nandy 'to Gandhi Hinduism was a life style and an open ended system of universal ethics which could continuously integrate new inputs.'<sup>83</sup>

Gandhi's *Ramarajya* involves independence in political, economic and moral spheres. Parel mentions, 'the history of the alienation of the soul from the modern state goes back to Machiavelli'.<sup>84</sup> In Hobbesian state, people were alienated from soul. Bhikhu Parekh says in his *Gandhi's Political Philosophy* that state and human nature became non-co-extensive - one being soulless and another with soul. In Gandhi's philosophy means is as important as the ends; he says as the mean so will be the end. The ends of the state totally depend on its means i.e. citizens. Parekh suggests humans should find 'an alternative way of structuring their organized life'.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>81</sup>*Harijan*, p.116.

<sup>82</sup>*Hindi NavajivanPatrika*, 20-3-1930.

<sup>83</sup>Nandy, Ashis, 'Final Encounter: The Politics of the Assassination of Gandhi', in A. Raghuramraju(ed.), *Debating Gandhi: A Reader*, Oxford India Paperbacks, 2010, p.57.

<sup>84</sup>Parel, Anthony, 'Gandhi and the State', in J. M. Brown and A. Parel(ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to GANDHI*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2011, p.157.

<sup>85</sup>B. Parekh, *Gandhi's political philosophy*, Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University press, 1989, p.112.

Further Parekh says that 'the vital task today was to explore alternatives not just to the contemporary forms of government but to the very institution of the state.'<sup>86</sup> The alternative may be *Ramarajya*. According to Gandhi, '...the ancient ideal of *Ramarajya* is undoubtedly one of true democracy in which the meanest citizen could be sure of swift justice without an elaborate and costly procedure.'<sup>87</sup>

Gandhi believes that the state should run by moral law or *Dharma*. According to Parel, 'for ...a state of cooperation to flourish between the state and civil society, the average citizenry would have to reach an optimal level of material and moral development'.<sup>88</sup> He further says, 'the more vibrant the civil society the less violent the state would be'.<sup>89</sup> B. N. Srikrishna emphatically mentions the important role of the state and its citizens in realizing the concept of *Ramarajya*. He says'... as a state where there was perfect harmony amongst the citizen with happiness and contentment all around, citizen contributing to the economy with honest toil and the state giving succour to the needy, poor and destitute-a state of affairs during the reign of King Rama.'<sup>90</sup> Gandhi mentions that the civil society and the state need to be in right balance for there to be a good state or *su-rajya*. Gandhi has firm belief that *Ramarajya* can be established through inculcating civic virtues in the citizenry. He believed that both the state and the civil society have a joint role in the ideal society. It is imperative for the citizens to cultivate adequate virtues for there to be an ideal society. So his appeal to humanity is-

It should be remembered that in order to establish *Ramarajya*.... Cannot every one of us, if we want, today give proof of qualities such as truth, non-violence, propriety of conduct, bravery, forbearance, courage, etc.?<sup>91</sup> Speculation regarding the nature of an ideal state has always been there. Plato talked in *Republic* about his 'Ideal State', with a "philosopher king". He further said that 'this Ideal State is, therefore, not unreal, but the only real State, and its reality is the ground of existence

<sup>86</sup>B. Parekh, *Gandhi*, Oxford University Press, New York, p.81.

<sup>87</sup>YI, 19-9-1929, p.305.

<sup>88</sup>Parel, A., *Gandhi's Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2013, p.63.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., p.63.

<sup>90</sup> B. N. Srikrishna, 'Whither Ramrajya?', JSTOR downloaded from 14.139.58.194 on 7Sep. 2014, p.137

<sup>91</sup>Hindi *Navajivan*, 20-3-1930.

of all actually existent States.<sup>92</sup> Karl Marx also talked about ideal society. Political practice ultimately rests on moral principle which cannot be relinquished. Gandhi emphatically talked about *Ramarajya* as an ‘ideal society’ and shows how this ideal could be a pole star and a guiding vision to strive for. If we continue towards the building such a society, to some extent it is bound to be realized and to that extant people will benefit by it. Euclid has defined a straight line as having no breadth, but no one has yet succeeded in drawing such a line and no one ever will. Still we can progress in geometry only by postulating such a line. This is true of every ideal.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> W. T. Stace, *A Critical History of Greek Philosophy*, Macmillan, London, 1920, p.225.

<sup>93</sup> CW, Vol.85,p.266.