# THE PURITY, INCLUSIVITY AND EQUALITY OF GANDHI'S CONCEPT OF RAM RAJYA

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## ABSTRACT

*Mahatma Gandhi, revered as the Father of the Indian nation, invoked the ancient ideal of Ram Rajya as a moral and political framework for post-colonial India. Rooted in the epic Ramayana, this concept represented a vision of perfect governance, justice, and harmony. Gandhi reinterpreted Ram Rajya as a metaphor for a democratic and ethical social order rather than a religious construct. His vision emphasized non-violence (ahimsa), truth (satya), equality, and decentralization as the foundations of an ideal society. This paper examines the historical context, philosophical principles, and sociopolitical implications of Gandhi's concept of Ram Rajya, addressing criticisms and evaluating its ongoing relevance in contemporary governance and global ethics.*
**Keywords***: Gandhi, Ram Rajya, non-violence, equality, decentralization, Swaraj*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi frequently employed the term Ram Rajya to describe his ideal of a just and moral social order. Rather than an attempt to recreate the mythological kingdom of Lord Rama, Gandhi envisioned Ram Rajya as "the Kingdom of God on Earth," where sovereignty lies with the people under self-imposed moral restraint rather than coercive authority. He regarded this vision as integral to Swaraj (self-rule) and Satyagraha (truth-force), asserting that true freedom requires both internal discipline and collective ethical living. Politically, Gandhi's Ram Rajya denoted an egalitarian democracy—one that transcends divisions of wealth, caste, creed, and gender. In such a society, justice is swift, accessible, and fair, sustained by self-governing, self-reliant village communities.

## 2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF GANDHI'S RAM RAJYA

Gandhi's reinterpretation of Ram Rajya emerged from his deep engagement with Indian spiritual traditions and his confrontation with British imperialism. His early influences included the Bhagavad Gita and Western thinkers like Tolstoy and Thoreau. During his South African campaigns against racial discrimination, Gandhi developed the concept of Satyagraha, which would later underpin his vision of ethical self-governance. Colonial and liberal forms of rule were connected by a hidden thread: coercive rationality. This term describes how apparently impartial tools—such as science, bureaucracy, and statistics—are weaponized to uphold domination while cloaked in claims of efficiency and improvement. Drawing on Michel Foucault's insight that reason often functions as a technology of control rather than pure illumination, coercive rationality shows how both empires and modern democracies sustain unequal power through "objective" methods. During the colonial era (roughly 1700–1950), European states, such as Britain and France, justified their conquests with the language of progress. They drew maps, conducted censuses, and rewrote laws to frame plunder as sound administration. In India, British officials applied utilitarian principles—endorsed by John Stuart Mill—to enforce the Permanent Settlement, a tax scheme that displaced peasant farmers and forced them to cultivate export crops. Violence was hidden behind ledgers: people became numbers in a system designed for profit and order. In Burma, inherited local bureaucracies influenced how harshly the British imposed prisons and police, all of which were rationalized as necessary for stability. Foucault's concept of governmentality captures this shift: rule moved from brute force to bio-political management—regulating bodies through clinics, schools, and markets so subjects policed themselves.

The East India Company's 1772 Judicial Plan under Warren Hastings established a dual system: *diwani* courts handled civil disputes using adapted Hindu and Muslim personal laws, while *nizamat* courts applied Islamic criminal law under British supervision. This preserved local elites as intermediaries, channeling revenue while minimizing revolt. The 1793 Cornwallis Code introduced English-style procedure—written evidence, appeals, precedent—while retaining caste exemptions to secure loyalty. Central to British strategy was deterrent law.

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The 1860 Indian Penal Code (IPC), drafted by Thomas Macaulay and rooted in Benthamite utilitarianism, unified criminal law across faiths, targeting resistance with severe punishments, including death, lifelong transportation to the Andaman Islands, or public flogging. The "Thuggee" campaigns (1830s) criminalized entire lineages, resulting in thousands of executions on minimal evidence. Following the 1857 uprising, the Criminal Tribes Act (1871) identified and registered "habitual offenders," confining communities under surveillance. Public hangings and gibbeting amplified terror. Racial double standards persisted—Europeans often tried in separate courts with lighter sentences, sparking the Ilbert Bill crisis (1883). Judicial annexation via "lapse" absorbed princely states. This system fragmented society, outsourced coercion to locals, and embedded British authority as "rational" governance.

Gandhi dismissed codified law formed through British statutes as authoritarian and unjust, laden with sedition clauses and courtroom combat, as instruments that estranged justice from truth. In *Ramrajya*, *dharma* replaced legislation: an evolving moral compass rooted in conscience and context. In his opinion, conflicts are best dissolved through mediation rather than prosecution. Gandhi demonstrated this in Champaran in 1917, where farmers' grievances against indigo planters were addressed through moral persuasion rather than legal briefs. Penalties, when unavoidable, aimed at healing: labour for the common good, public admission of fault, or fasting to awaken remorse. Gandhi distrusted a state that was essentially lawless because it was amoral and authoritarian. He compared the colonial state's similar insensitiveness with the courtly intrigue of the Indian native states in British India. As Chandran D S Devanesen observes in his insightful study of Gandhi's formative years: "Gandhi's anarchism was rooted in his cultural revulsion against modern civilization. Reacting strongly against the type of anarchy he saw as a boy in Kathiawad, as a student in London and as a lawyer in South Africa, he idealized forms of benevolent, anarchistic government which he believed had existed in India in the past. His anarchist ideal was *Ramrajya*, a form of polity derived from the *Mahabharata*" (Devanesen, 308). Upon his return to India in 1915, Gandhi encountered widespread poverty and communal discord. Movements such as Non-Cooperation (1920-22) and the Salt March (1930) reflected his practical attempts to achieve Ram Rajya through non-violent resistance. He consistently emphasized that Ram Rajya was not "Hindu Raj" but a secular and inclusive moral order.

## 3. PRINCIPLES OF RAM RAJYA

In Mahatma Gandhi's conception of *Ramrajya*—the realm of Rama—political authority, justice, and civic responsibility were woven into a single ethical fabric. This was no mythical kingdom but a living ideal: self-mastery (*swaraj*) realized through non-violence (*ahimsa*), truth (*satya*), and selfless service to humanity (*lokaseva*). Gandhi recast Rama not as a conquering monarch but as the supreme public servant whose legitimacy sprang from unrelenting devotion to the people. Here, sovereignty lived in the awakened conscience of every person, law manifested as *dharma*—a flexible guide shaped by inner truth—and governance flourished in self-governing villages bound by mutual duty. Gandhi dismissed the modern state as a mechanical contraption that concentrated violence. In *Hind Swaraj* (1909), he declared that genuine independence meant learning to govern oneself, rather than seizing control. The ruler in *Ramrajya* mirrored Rama's voluntary exile, where power was expressed through sacrifice rather than domination. Authority rose from the ground up, beginning with village councils of five chosen members who settled matters by open dialogue. Gandhi pictured society as expanding "oceanic circles," each community sufficient in essentials yet linked to others in voluntary cooperation, radiating outward from the individual to the nation. At the heart of this order pulsed public duty—*lokaseva*. Gandhi taught that rights are born from responsibilities faithfully discharged. In the pages of *Harijan* (1939), he insisted that if every person fulfilled their obligations, no one would need to clamour for entitlements. The leader's role echoed Rama's: forging bonds with the humblest (the tribal woman Shabari, the boatman Nishadraj), honouring vows at personal cost, and placing the people's welfare above prestige. Gandhi expected rulers to live austerely, spin their own cloth, and undertake fasts to reconcile divided communities—acts of visible sacrifice. Ordinary citizens, too, carried sacred obligations toward the uplift of all (*sarvodaya*). The farmer tended the soil as a trust, the artisan crafted for use rather than profit, the teacher instilled non-violence. Gandhi's Constructive Programme of 1941 outlined a curriculum of civic duties: spinning khadi for self-reliance, maintaining village sanitation,

fostering Hindu-Muslim harmony, and eradicating untouchability. Wealth was held in trusteeship; the prosperous managed resources for the needy, and any breach—greed, corruption—met non-violent resistance, not fines or imprisonment.

## 4. NON-VIOLENCE (AHIMSA)

At the heart of Ram Rajya lay the principle of non-violence. Gandhi held that violence perpetuates moral decay, whereas peace nurtures justice. Governance should rely on moral authority rather than armed force. For Gandhi, a nation that depends on its army for peace cannot achieve genuine self-rule. Non-violence was the foundational principle of Ram Rajya. Gandhi believed that violence begets violence, and true justice could only arise from peaceful means. He advocated Satyagraha as a tool for conflict resolution, where individuals endure suffering to uphold truth without harming others. In Ram Rajya, governance would eschew armies and rely instead on moral authority. This principle extended to all spheres: personal, social, and international. Gandhi envisioned a world where disputes are settled through dialogue and self-control, fostering lasting peace. Non-violence also implied compassion toward all living beings, including animals, aligning with Rama's just rule in the Ramayana.

## 5. EQUALITY, SELF-RELIANCE, AND JUSTICE

Ram Rajya rejected all forms of inequality. Gandhi's crusade against untouchability, his advocacy of women's participation, and his economic principle of trusteeship reflected this belief. He envisioned an order where, as he said, "even the dog received justice" (CWMG, 41:374). Equality was paramount in Gandhi's vision, where all individuals—regardless of caste, creed, gender, or class—enjoyed equal rights. Ram Rajya advocated for the dismantling of hierarchical structures and the promotion of universal brotherhood. Social justice in this context meant equitable distribution of resources. Gandhi's concept of trusteeship posited that the wealthy hold assets in trust for society and voluntarily redistribute surplus to eliminate poverty. This addressed economic exploitation, ensuring that basic needs, such as food, shelter, and education, were met for all, thereby allowing the pursuit of higher aspirations. Self-reliance was a key economic pillar, encouraging local production and consumption to reduce dependency. Through Swadeshi, Gandhi promoted village industries, such as spinning, as a symbol of resistance to industrialized exploitation. In Ram Rajya, economies would be decentralized, with small-scale units empowering communities and preventing urban-rural divides. For Gandhi, *Rāmarājya* could not exist in the presence of economic injustice or social inequality. "There can be no Rāmarājya in the present state of iniquitous inequalities in which a few roll in riches and the masses do not get even enough to eat" (*CWMG*, 88:2). According to his vision, true *Swaraj* or *Dharmarājya* demanded economic equality, the dignity of labour, and protection of the poor.

Gandhi's economic philosophy promoted decentralized production and local self-sufficiency through the development of khadi and village industries. This was both an economic strategy and a moral act of resistance against exploitation. In *Hind Swaraj* (1909), he warned against replacing British rule with a similar oppressive system, advocating instead for a society free from armies and coercion. This historical positioning made Ram Rajya a rallying cry for decolonization, blending spiritual heritage with political activism. It inspired movements, such as the promotion of Khadi (hand-spun cloth), symbolizing economic self-reliance in opposition to imperial exploitation. In essence, the historical context reveals Ram Rajya as Gandhi's response to the moral bankruptcy of colonialism, offering a vision of governance where power derives from an ethical consensus rather than force. This set the stage for its principles to guide India's post-independence trajectory, though reality often diverged from the ideal.

## 6. MORAL GOVERNANCE AND DECENTRALIZATION

He envisioned governance through Gram Sabhas (village assemblies), ensuring community consensus and moral restraint among leaders. Ram Rajya thus embodied both spiritual democracy and political decentralization. Gandhi visualised that in his vision of Ram Rajya, or the rule of virtue, individuals would voluntarily seek liberation through purity in their personal lives, along with social cooperation and sacrifice for the greater good of society. In Western epistemology. it is to some extent comparable to Saint Augustine's foundational text, *City of God*, where Augustine addresses the question of human

happiness in these words: "For it is certain that if they [men] are happy, they envy no one, (for is there anything more wretched than envy?) and, therefore, they will give to unhappy mortals all the aid in their power, to help them to attain happiness so that they may be able to immortal after death and join the company of immortal and blessed angels" (Augustine, 358). Similarly, Immanuel Kant had accepted the validity of a moral impulse regulating individual reason and conduct: "A person may be compelled to duty by others, and even in that case, may act freely. This happens when the other, having the right to do so, confronts the subject with his duty, ie., the moral law by which he ought to act" (Kant, 283).

## 7. RAM RAJYA IN GANDHIAN PROGRAMMES

Gandhi attempted to translate the concept of Ram Rajya into practice through his ashrams and movements. Sabarmati and Sevagram were microcosms of this vision, where residents lived in equality and discipline. National campaigns, such as the Khadi Movement and the Salt Satyagraha, demonstrated how non-violent civil disobedience could strengthen collective moral power. He described the Constructive Programme as the pathway to Ram Rajya: "The execution of the constructive programme in its entirety means more than Swaraj. It means Ramarajya or the Divine Kingdom." (CWMG, 81:334). His ashrams, such as Sabarmati and Sevagram, served as microcosms of this ideal, where residents practiced nonviolence, equality, and self-reliance. In Sabarmati (founded 1917), untouchables lived alongside upper castes, challenging social norms and modeling inclusive harmony. During the independence struggle, Ram Rajya employed strategies such as the Quit India Movement (1942), where Gandhi called for a "Do or Die" approach in the non-violent pursuit of freedom. His emphasis on Khadi, which involved boycotting foreign goods, fostered economic self-sufficiency and empowered the rural masses. Following independence, Gandhi's vision significantly influenced India's Constitution, with elements such as village panchayats reflecting the country's commitment to decentralization. However, he lamented the persistence of violence during partition, fasting to promote peace and embodying moral restraint. Gandhi's interactions with leaders like Nehru showed tensions: while Nehru favored industrialization, Gandhi advocated village-centric development. Yet, his influence persisted in policies such as land reforms aimed at achieving equity. He had himself declared: 'The execution of the constructive programme in its entirety means more than swaraj. It means *Ramarajya, Khudai Sultanat* or the divine kingdom. I am thirsting after such *Ramarajya*. My God does not reside up above. He has to be realized on earth. He is here, within you, within me. He is omnipotent and omnipresent. You need not think of the world beyond. If we can do our duty here, the 'beyond' will take care of itself. This necessarily includes political independence.' (CWMG, 81:334)

During his lifetime, Gandhi provided a carefully detailed outline of his concept of Ram Rajya in his socio-political programs. Gandhi reiterated that there could be no non-violent swaraj, which was but another name for Ram Rajya, except through the spinning wheel, the charkha. His definition of *Ramarajya* was that under it, even the weakest must enjoy the same freedom and the same rights as the strongest. For that, even the physically weakest person needed to be able to take their due share in the struggle for independence. In other words, women and children should be able to play an equal part with men. It was clear that this was not possible in armed warfare. Regardless of the various definitions or interpretations Gandhi may have offered of swaraj, in terms of essentiality, he believed that its most authentic and most enduring meaning was Ramarajya. For those who found the term 'Ramarajya' objectionable, he suggested an alternative term: 'Dharmarajya'. For Gandhi, Ramarajya signified a governance system where the poor are fully safeguarded, justice prevails in all actions, and the will of the people is consistently honoured. Achieving such a state requires collective effort from all. He identified khadi as the primary, universal tool for this constructive work, fostering self-reliance and empowerment. However, to further amplify the people's strength, a broader appeal is necessary, and he points to the salt tax as a unifying cause. Since salt is a necessity used equally by the rich and the poor, resisting an unjust tax on it through civil disobedience allows everyone to participate in a nonviolent struggle, thereby enhancing their collective power. This peaceful resistance, rooted in civility, paves the way for the establishment of Ram Rajya. He noted that other burdensome taxes, similar to the salt tax, also oppress the people, and resisting these provides valuable training, further

strengthening their resolve. Through such means, Ram Rajya becomes more attainable. While no one can predict when Ram Rajya will be fully realised, he emphasised that it was everyone's duty to envision and tirelessly pursue it. True contemplation of Rama Rajya involves adopting effective methods to bring it about. Gandhi emphasized that achieving Ram Rajya does not require formal education; the necessary qualities—truth, nonviolence, ethical conduct, courage, patience, and bravery—are inherent in all, regardless of gender, age, or religion. The tragedy, he observed, was that many fail to recognize these qualities within themselves, remaining under a delusion that leads them to chase unattainable ideals instead of embracing their innate potential. Despite this, he urged readers of Hindi Navajivan to fully participate in the great national endeavour underway, contributing their utmost to this collective yajna for Ram Rajya.

## 8. CRITICISMS OF THE CONCEPT

Critics such as B.R. Ambedkar contended that Gandhi's Ram Rajya romanticized Hindu tradition, potentially masking caste inequities. Economists argued that excessive reliance on self-sufficiency impeded industrial growth. Feminist critiques noted that Gandhi's gender ideals, though progressive for his time, retained patriarchal tones. It is somewhat familiar for contemporary writers to criticize Gandhi for invoking Ram Rajya or Khilafat, which he did, introducing religious motifs into politics with disastrous consequences, including religious mobilizations, communalism, and the ultimate partition of the country. Arundhati Roy has concluded that Gandhi's metaphor of Ram-Rahim was in part responsible for the carnage of partition and the linkage of religious identity and nuclear weaponry in Independent India. More reservedly, David Hardiman writes that 'Gandhi was playing with fire' by invoking concepts from Hindu Dharma and participating in the Khilafat agitation.[1] Rajmohun Gandhi responds forcefully: 'Between a politics that pretended that religion was absent from India and a politics that squarely faced religion's hold, Gandhi chose the latter, and tried to remind all concerned that true Hinduism taught goodwill, and that true Islam, Sikhism, and Christianity did the same. Our survey suggests that he made the right choice, and also that without him, intolerance would have been stronger in both Hindu India and Muslim India.' (Gandhi, 2006: 666)

It is well known that Gandhi was emphatic in stating that his vision of Ram Rajya was completely non-sectarian. In his own words: 'I warn my Mussalman friends against misunderstanding me in my use of the word 'Ramarajya'. By 'Ramarajya' I do not mean Hindu Raj. I mean by 'Ramarajya' Divine Raj, the Kingdom of God. For me, Rama and Rahim are the same deity. I acknowledge no other God but the one God of Truth and righteousness. Whether the Rama of my imagination ever lived or not on this earth, 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. Even the dog is described by the poet to have received justice under Ramarajya.' (CWMG, 41:374)

## 9. CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

In the 21st century, Gandhi's Ram Rajya offers profound lessons for addressing inequality, conflict, and environmental degradation. Non-violence remains a viable framework for conflict resolution, trusteeship provides a moral alternative to unrestrained capitalism, and decentralization aligns with sustainable development goals.

## 10. CONCLUSION

Gandhi's Ram Rajya symbolizes an ethical democracy grounded in truth, equality, and compassion. It transcends religion, offering a universal model of governance based on conscience rather than coercion. Although Gandhi acknowledged that perfect Ram Rajya might remain unattainable, he believed its pursuit enables moral autonomy and thereby ennobles humanity. In the words of Anthony Parel: "Pax Gandhiana can flourish only with the support of a coercive state based on the consent of the governed. Similarly, it requires civic nonviolence or nonviolence as state policy" (Parel, 12).

In today's era of inequality, conflict, and environmental crises, Gandhi's Ram Rajya remains profoundly relevant. Its emphasis on non-violence offers alternatives to militarism, as seen in global

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[1] For a detailed treatment of the theme, see David Hardiman, *Gandhi: In his Times and Ours*, Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2003, pp. 161-169.

peace movements. Decentralization aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals, promoting local governance amid climate change. Inclusivity counters rising populism and religious extremism, reminding us of the importance of unity in diversity. In India, amid debates on secularism, the concept of Ram Rajya serves as a benchmark for ethical politics. Globally, it inspires ethical AI, corporate responsibility, and social justice campaigns. While adaptations are needed, its core moral authority over coercion endures as a guide for humane societies. It is noteworthy that many contemporary scholars of political theory argue that even the doctrine of the state as imagined by Machiavelli is not entirely amoral, as amorality invalidates the basic principles of polity. This validates Gandhi's imagination of an ethical state, embodied in Ram Rajya, since an unethical state would fail to realize the core principle of politics – the lawful organization of humanity and its progress and well-being. It might be relevant in this context to cite the view of one such scholar concerning an essential acknowledgment of ethics even in the political ideology of Machiavelli: "The whole point of Machiavelli's argument was to urge that precisely because of the unescapably autonomous nature of politics, it was all the more compelling that criteria for action be established and that appropriate means be fashioned for their implementation. In brief, the denial of heteronomy need not entail a denial of morality in politics, any more than the impossibility of ethical criteria follows from the denial of ethical absolutes" (Wolin, 204-05).

*Ramrajya* left its mark on India's 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments of 1992, which devolved power to elected village councils. Beyond India, it shaped the concepts of servant leadership and nonviolent struggle worldwide. In an era of algorithmic control and legal overreach, Gandhi's synthesis—sovereignty as conscience, law as lived morality, governance as daily service—remains a defiant call: justice is not decreed from above but enacted, moment by moment, by a people who govern themselves through devotion to one another.

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