



JOURNAL OF EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES AND INNOVATIVE RESEARCH (JETIR)

An International Scholarly Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Smart and Inclusive Village; Relevance of Gandhian Views of *Gram Swaraj* in Modern World

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Abstract: A concept's potential will be restricted by the technological and informational advancements of the respective period. However, as time and technology progress, an idea will become more apparent and vivid, like in Mahatma Gandhi's self-sustaining village concept. To meet the growing and ever-changing complicated challenges, this concept of a self-sustaining community, termed Smart Village with Inclusive Perspective, incorporates many new traits and programmes. This research will examine Gandhi's contributions to village development and provide a restructured Smart Village model that will be connected to modern advancement. It will also incorporate current village development ideas and techniques, such as crowdsourcing.

Keywords: *Smart Village, Inclusive Development, Self-Sustaining Village, Gram Swaraj*

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the major issues faced by policymakers all over the world is to address the needs and problems of communities, especially that of excluded and marginalized sections. Rural areas usually are more excluded from the development process than their urban counterparts. 1.3 billion people still live without electricity, while 2.7 billion continue to cook on inefficient stoves. There is a need to enhance and improve the living standard of people in isolated rural village communities. Policymakers need to address the ever-growing and ever changing complex issues faced by rural communities and provide a framework for possible solutions for these issues and guide them on a more sustainable and inclusive development path. The concept of a smart village gains importance in academic discourse in this background. The Smart village concept with its inclusive and sustainable development process has gained popularity in addressing the issues faced by rural communities. *Gram Swaraj* concept developed by Mahatma Gandhi, (a well-known philosopher of non-violence and father of the nation of India) at beginning of the twentieth century, calls for a more inclusive and self-sufficient village model and has many similarities to the modern concept of the smart village. This is a study that analyses the theoretical and conceptual understanding of *Gram Swaraj* in the light of the modern academic discourse on the smart village and how it is relevant to the development efforts of rural India.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data used in this analytical and explanatory research is secondary. The data was collected from a variety of publications, journals, reports and papers.

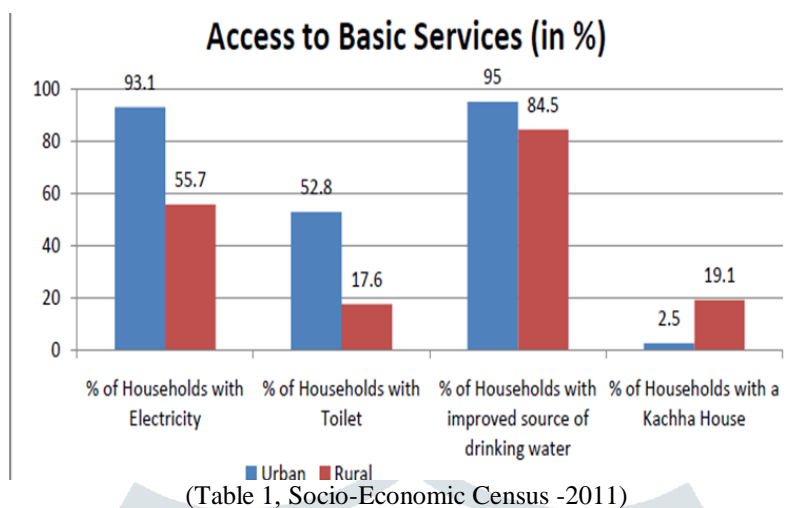
III. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This study mainly been based on two theories. The first theory is Gandhian economics, which is based on Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi's spiritual and socioeconomic ideas. It is defined by a rejection of the traditional economic thinking's view of the human person as a rational actor continually seeking to maximize material self-interest. J.C Kumarappa is one of the main scholars in this area of study. The second theory is Complex Adaptive System (CAS) by Holland John H in 2006, which is a type of highly interdisciplinary complexity research that seeks answers to fundamental concerns regarding living, adaptable, and changeable systems.

IV. RELEVANCE OF STUDY

In India, where according to the Census report 2011, 70% of the total population is living in rural and sparsely inhabited areas, inequality in terms of access to the development is staggering as per many studies. Almost three-fourths of the rural households live with a monthly income of less than Rs 5000 and more than half the rural households do not own land and more than half of them are casual laborers as per Socio-Economic Census (2011). According to Rangarajan Committee 2014, rural poverty is higher than urban poverty and stands at approximately 31% in 2011-12. Almost 55% of rural people were living below the poverty line

in 1972-1973 which now stands at 31 % which is still higher than the urban poverty of 23%. Again, urban poverty is induced by rural to urban migration which is happening because of the rampant rural poverty as per the urban poverty report released in 2009 by UNDP India. According to Socio-Economic Census 2011, there is a huge difference in access to basic amenities between rural and urban areas. 93.1% of urban people have access to electricity while it is a mere 55% in rural areas. (see table 1). 53% of the population from the urban area have access to a toilet while it is only 17.6% in rural areas.



Rural communities face a lot of issues in the health sector also. As a direct effect of the lack of clean water and hygiene environment, many types of diseases are more prevalent in rural India. Lack of proper nutrition is also affecting them. For example, more than 80% of children from rural areas suffered from Anemia in 2006. According to Dr. Milind Kulkarni, It will take a lot of effort to clean up the villages. Water supply, sanitation, indoor air quality, solid waste management, and renewable energy are some of the aspects of a clean village. Mahatma Gandhi in his book *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi 1945* calls for a joint effort on the triple malady which holds the villages fast in its grip : (I) want of corporate sanitation ; (ii) deficient diet; (iii) inertia. Since a comprehensive and organized effort for village upliftment is essential for rural India, Mahatma Gandhi proposed the idea of a self-sufficient village called *Gram Swaraj*. He believed in empowering and developing self-sustainable villages is the major aspect of the development of India. In his words “The real India lies in 700000 villages. If Indian civilization is to make a full contribution to the building up of a stable world order, it is this vast mass of humanity that hasto be made again”. By analyzing the aspect of a smart and inclusive village in *Gram Swaraj*, this study could contribute to the rural development discourse in India.

V. GRAM SWARAJ

Gram Swaraj (village republic) is a word coined by Mahatma Gandhi and eventually developed by Acharya Vinoba Bhave to advocate the transformation of every village into a self-sufficient autonomous entity with all the systems and facilities indispensable for a dignified livelihood. Dr. Moushumi Datta in the report ‘Self Sufficient Villages in Today's Global Village’ enumerates various features of the concept of *Gram Swaraj*. These are,

- Villages are the basic units of social organization
- Labor intensive and not capital intensive.
- Non-exploiting
- A decentralized system of planning production and decision-making
- Bread-labor
- Best utilization of the entire manpower
- Supreme consideration is man
- The ultimate aim is Sarvodaya (Welfare for all)

By incorporating these features, the idea of a village republic (*Gram Swaraj*) becomes relevant in modern times and provides solutions for many modern problems. Proper implementation of *Gram Swaraj* leads to reverse migration which relieves the immense strain on city infrastructure. Another important aspect is that *Gram Swaraj* encourages indigenization and localization of knowledge and traditions. Current global village countries and more so underdeveloped countries need to look inwards and see where their expertise and resource strength exist to further strengthen their development process. Underprivileged children's education and healthcare is a major formulated outcome of the *Gram Swaraj* model. Gandhi, contrary to popular perception never blindly opposed technology. But he supported the idea of technology with a purpose as it has been demonstrated that the correct type of technology creates more jobs than it eliminates. His major concept is non-violence and peace which addresses the security conundrum of each country striving to outspend the other in terms of defense spending.

VI. SMART VILLAGE

While the term "smart village" has become a trend in policy and rural development discourse, no clear definition exists. The substantial use of technology and the integration of multiple critical interventions in infrastructure and service delivery are two things that all Smart Villages have in common. It's an integrated approach to providing access to skills and fundamental services such as education, e-health, 24-hour power, and safe food, among other elements. Edwards and Haines define six smart growth goals that were most widely incorporated into smart growth plans. These are

- creating new housing choices and opportunities
- making communities more accessible by foot
- enforcing the sense of place in communities

- preserving different environmental zones
- connecting new and the existent developmental aims
- more varieties in terms of transportation

Thus, the primary notion of a smart village is to combine community efforts and strengths from multiple sources and integrate them with information technology to benefit rural communities. The smart village initiative, according to Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy and beliefs, delivers "global means to local needs." Yousef Khalili, Smart City Digital Consulting Unit NXN Group further elaborates on the smart village "The baseline for smart communities is always constant, whether it is a city or a village. It's how you use technology to better the lives of people."

As per the study of Bhattacharya, Dr. Sumanta & Sachdev, Bhavneet namely 'Smart Village: A new dynamic to end rural-urban gap and move towards sustainable development for all', smart village integrate with *Gram Swaraj* in the following features.

- Social, skilled, and simple.
- Moral, methodical and modern.
- Aware, adaptive, and adjusting.
- Responsive and ready
- Techno savvy and transparent

Gandhian view of a smart and inclusive village calls for a more modified and elaborated form of the village model which requires smart security, an efficient public transportation system, improving sanitation conditions, solid and liquid waste management, rain harvesting /rainwater drainage system, safe drinking water facilities, use of renewable energy, energy conservation, grievance redressing system, functional banking facility, facilities regarding the agriculture, latest& affordable medical facilities, e-governance, use of modern technologies for improvement of locality and improvement on women empowerment.

Drawing inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi's vision of *Adarsh Gram* (Ideal Village) and *Gram Swaraj* (Self-Reliance), Smart Village is a concept that has been adopted by India's national, state, and local governments as an initiative focusing on comprehensive rural development. Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the *Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana* (SAGY) or SAANJHI as a development program for India on October 2, 2014, Gandhi's birthday. The major purpose of the Parliamentarian's Model Village Scheme is for each Member of Parliament and Minister to adopt a rural village and transform it into a model by 2019 following SAGY guidelines. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Cabinet proposed a plan in early 2015 to transform a cluster of 300 villages into 'Smart Villages.' The initiative, dubbed the *Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission*, aims to complete the first phase by 2019.

VII. SUGGESTIONS

Governments are attempting to integrate existing infrastructure, whereas CSR projects prioritize innovation. Thus, future smart village approaches must be both integrative and inventive to benefit from both approaches. All smart village designs must be contextualized and localized for better implementation and active participation by the concerned parties. The emphasis shall be on entrepreneurship by identifying gaps and integrating with the Local Self Governments development process. The development of villages should be data-driven and cloud-based and the focus should be on ensuring last-mile access by offering alternatives such as white-fi (Microsoft model- Harisal is India's first smart village).

VIII. CONCLUSION

Mahatma Gandhi's vision of *Adarsh Gram* (Ideal Village) and *Gram Swaraj* (Self-Reliance), even though developed a century earlier, gains much importance and recognition in the modern discourse on the smart village. Many ideas from *Gram Swaraj* like dignified livelihood have to be incorporated into the concept of a smart village for a better development experience in rural India. The potential of the concept of *Gram Swaraj* thus becomes more obvious and vivid in modern times.

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