

GANDHIAN SWARAJ: A CONTINUOUS PROCESS

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Abstract

Gandhi was a political and social activist rather than a philosopher or thinker. However, the level of morality and purity in his politics was so high that it took politics to the spiritual and philosophical level. The same thing can be said for his social and economic thoughts. Therefore, Gandhi's Swaraj is cultural, political and spiritual because politics was a spiritual (religious) work for him. The question of Swaraj was not just a political question for him, nor did Swaraj mean for him only the expulsion of the British from India but freedom from slavery mentality as well . Thus, Gandhian Swaraj goes beyond the concept of political self rule and freedom.Swaraj is one's self rule over body and soul, a comprehensive self control. Swaraj is an equally important question in post independent India too. Swaraj is a vigilance for civil rights, public welfare, constitutionalism and good governance in a politically independent country. It empowers civil society. Hence Swaraj is continuous effort of independence and insistence on truth against arbitrary power of state and thus Swaraj creates and empowers civil society. From this point of view, Locke, Mill, and Rousseau are seen together in his Swarajist thoughts. Therefore, for Gandhi, Swaraj is a continuous process .

Keywords: Civilisation, cultural nationalism, dominion state, Hind swaraj, Indian civilization, nation-state, swaraj.

Introduction

Gandhi is the most outstanding personality of the twentieth century who has been read the most, on whom the most has been written, whose entire socio-political activities have been researched the most, and who is recognized by many universities in the world, including Harvard, Cornell, John Hopkins, MIT, Oxford Cambridge. There is a Gandhian Study Chair in all prominent universities and academic centres , or he is taught there. Socialists, philanthropists, communitarians, Pluralists, nationalists, rightists, and leftists all have

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accepted the importance of Gandhi and have used Gandhism in their ways. Even the brutal dictators of the twentieth century did not deny the importance of Gandhi, even formally. Gandhi was wholly accepted in the democratic governance system.

" Gandhi has been revered by many as a saintly figure who worked for peace and harmony in the world. This image is often found in depictions of him in the West. His statue in London, in Tavistock Square, thus shows him in a cross-legged meditative pose with eyes downcast. He is depicted similarly in a St Mary's Church in Oxford mural. Many, particularly in the West, regard Gandhi as a patron saint of pacifism. " (Brown, 2011 p.)

Scholars of different ideologies have expressed Gandhi in so many ways that sometimes it seems, many types of Gandhis are present simultaneously. Gandhi's political methodology and philosophy continued to attract social and political philosophers and scholars. The main reason is that Gandhi was most suitable for peacefully solving every country's situation and its problems. From Martin Luther King From America to Lech Walesa in Europe and from Nelson Mandela to Aung Sang Suu Kyi, many political activists took inspiration from Gandhi and achieved their political goals. In other words, the relevance Gandhi's philosophy has been proved everywhere in America, Europe, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Therefore, Gandhi's relevance is like the relevance of time, which remains forever. The Hind Swaraj, written by Gandhiji on the ship returning from England to South Africa in 1909, was confiscated by the Mumbai Presidency, so he published its English translation in 1910. This excellent Work is the primary source of his views on Swaraj and other thoughts. Anthony Parel praises this great work - *"Whenever we attempt to re-evaluate the thought of a great man, we naturally tend to go back to his seminal work, this law of taking the shortcut to a man's thought brings us to Gandhi's Hind Swaraj. What the Prince is to Machiavelli's writings and the Social Contract to the writings of Rousseau, the HS is to the vast corpus of Gandhian literature. It sets forth in a brief compass what its author developed in detail in later writings. John Middleton Murry, one of Gandhi's earlier critics, called it "one of the spiritual classics of the world" and Sir Penderel Moon, "the first comprehensive, coherent expression of certain basic ideas that Gandhi never lost sight of throughout all his subsequent political career." George Catlin compared it to Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola."* (Parel 1997 p.279)

Gandhian Swaraj

The most crucial thing in Gandhi's life was that his ideas gradually developed. That is why Gandhiji's thoughts changed from his early life to the latter part of his life, which Gandhiji also accepted. His life was that of an active political, social worker whose experiences developed his thoughts. Initially, he was in favour of colonial independence. However, by reaching the Quit India Movement, he seemed to agree with the demand for complete independence instead of colonial Swaraj, as Congress also accepted in the Karachi session 1930. Gandhiji's life was that of an active political and social worker; he never considered himself a philosophical thinker and accepted the fact that the thoughts of many people influenced him. In his own words

"The views expressed in Hind-Swaraj are my views, and I have tried to humbly follow the masters of Indian philosophy as well as Tolstoy, Ruskin, Shroom Arshan, and other writers. For years, Tolstoy has been one of my gurus."

(H S p.10)

Swaraj and Self rule

The 19th and 20th centuries were the century of colonialism when Britain, France, Spain, and Portugal. took over most of the countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and exploited their natural resources. Political movements had started in most of these countries from the beginning of the twentieth century; political independence and freedom from colonialism were the main goals of the political movements of these countries; hence, Swaraj Self-Rule was a significant goal of the political movements in these countries. However, the colonial powers cleverly tried to combine the demand for independence and liberation in these countries with colonial self-rule or Dominion State so that the revolutionary tendencies of these countries could be calmed down and the demand for complete independence could be suppressed as much as possible or it can be kept away. The colonial self rule meant that the country got the right to rule, but its sovereignty remained with the colonial power, which they called the Dominion State. Britain had done many such experiments with other colonies; hence, in India, the British also wanted to create confusion by mixing Swaraj with the colonial administration or Dominion State. The Home Rule Movement started by Annie Besant was a similar effort. Although this Home Rule Movement was not Gandhi's Swaraj, it was only a demand for the rule of Indians under British sovereignty, yet Gandhi initially Agreed with this. The question of what Swaraj ? It was explored by Gandhiji in Hind Swaraj, where instead of giving a direct answer, he takes it in the form of a question, which makes it clear that he had no initial objection to the Dominion State with British sovereignty, as he said - *"It is possible that we do not attach the same meaning to the term. You and I and all Indians are impatient to obtain Swaraj, but we are certainly not sure what it is. To drive the English out of India is a thought heard from many mouths, but it does not seem that many have properly considered Why it should be so. I must ask you a question. Do you think that it is okay to drive away the English if we get all we want?"* (HS p. 27) In the immediate circumstances of the first decade of the twentieth century, Gandhiji did not want any political anarchy, and being influenced by Gokhale, he believed that the question of the British leaving India immediately was a question of difficult discussion, as he says - *"Let us suppose that the English have retired. What will you do then?.If they do not take our money away, become gentle, and give us responsible posts, would you still consider their presence harmful ? Suppose we get a Self-Government similar to what the Canadians and the South Africans have, will it be good enough?"* (HS p.27-28)

For Gandhi's contemporaries, Swaraj meant political self-rule. Rule by Indians instead of British rule under British sovereignty. They believed that British rule suited British interests, not Indian interests, while India's socio-economic development was possible only through the self- governance of Indians. For Gandhi, British rule was more responsible for the moral poverty in India than the economic poverty. British rule has attacked the

fundamental tendencies of India and Indian society. It has tried to transform Indian society into a violent society, which was against the eternal values of India. Indian civilization has been a spiritual civilization in which moral progress was emphasised more than material progress. That is why its economy was based on cottage industries and agriculture, in which production was related to consumption and not profit. The profit creates capital, and capital in its colossal form causes many troubles. Indian civilization has been a civilization of self-contentment and self-reliance since time immemorial. Hence, Gandhi's Swaraj, compared to his contemporaries, is a Swaraj of spiritual and self-reliance rather than political Swaraj. (Brown, 2011, p.57) Thus, for Gandhi, Swaraj was a word with a broad meaning. For him, Swaraj did not just mean driving away the British from India. However, Swaraj was a question of Indianness, and Swaraj had to be achieved only by Indian aspirations and traditions. In other words, for Gandhi, Swaraj was not just a material thing; it was something bigger than just having their army and rule. Ideological Swaraj was as important as political Swaraj. As his views are famous, he wanted to end crime, not criminals. Thus, he was against Britishness and wanted freedom from Britishness rather than only from the British. As he said -

"In effect, it means this: We want English rule without the Englishman. You want the tiger's nature, but not the tiger; that is to say, you would make India English. Moreover, when it becomes English, it will be called not Hindustan but Englستان. This is not the Swaraj that I want." (HS p.28)

For a diverse country like India, whose political integration still needed to be completed and which was ruled by British provinces and princely states, reaching a single universally accepted concept of Swaraj was difficult. *"Gandhi's vision of an Indian nation and what might be meant by swaraj or self- rule differed greatly from the views held by many of his contemporaries."* (Brown 2011 p.56) In his essential work Hind Swaraj, written in a conversational style, he clearly says that the idea of Swaraj is yet to be developed as he writes that - *"There is a need for patience. My views will develop in the course of this discourse. It is as difficult for me to understand the true nature of Swaraj as it seems to you to be easy. I shall, therefore, for the time being, content myself with endeavouring to show that what you call Swaraj is not truly Swaraj."* (HS P.28) Thus, for Gandhiji, Swaraj was not just a political question but a holistic concept and had to be achieved similarly. Hence, Gandhian Swaraj has many political, social, economic, and cultural dimensions and can be understood in that context.

Nation-state vs. civilizational Swaraj

The British introduced the European concept of nation, where a nation-state meant a geographical state of people having one race, one language, one culture, and one religion, which was built on the remains of the Roman Empire. India is a collection of diverse religions and diverse castes speaking diverse languages; hence, a nation-state can never be formed; even after achieving the type of independence that Congress demands, India cannot become a nation-state. Many other political activists influenced by Western education also had the same belief that India is a mixed nation, which is a confluence of diversity and, as such, is a unique state. India has no distinct racial, linguistic, or religious identity. (Brown 2011) Gandhiji had severe objections to this notion. He considered

the British concept of nation-state to be completely wrong. In his view, India has been a nation from time immemorial and has always been organised and behaved as a nation. The culture of India made him a nation. Indian nationalism was cultural nationalism. Despite changing political units occasionally, India has been an eternal nation. In response to the question that European scholars do not consider India a nation, he gives an evident and detailed answer in Hind Swaraj.

"I hold this to be a mistake. The English have taught us that we were not one nation before and will require centuries before we become one nation. This is without foundation. We were one nation before they came to India. One thought inspired us. Our mode of life was the same. It was because we were one nation that they were able to establish one kingdom. Subsequently, they divided us, I do not wish to suggest that because we were one nation, we had no differences, but it is submitted that our leading men travelled throughout India either on foot or in bullock carts. They learned one another's languages, and there was no aloofness between them. What do you think could have been the intention of our farseeing ancestors who established Setubandha (Rameshwar) in the South, Jagannath in the East, and Hardware in the North as places of pilgrimage? You will admit they were no fools. They knew that worship of God could have been performed just as well at home. They taught us that those whose hearts were aglow with righteousness had the Ganges in their own homes. However, they saw that India was one undivided land made by nature. They, therefore, argued that it must be one nation. Arguing thus, they established holy places in various parts of India and fired the people with an idea of nationality in a manner unknown in other parts of the world. And we Indians are one as no two Englishmen are. Only you, I, and others who consider ourselves civilised and superiors think that we are many nations. It was after the advent of railways that we began to believe in distinctions, and you are at liberty now to say that it is through the railways that we are beginning to abolish those distinctions. An opium-eater may argue the advantage of opium eating from the fact that he began to understand the evil of the opium habit after having eaten it. I would ask you to consider well what I had said on the railway" (HS p.42-43)

Thus, Gandhi's Swaraj was not the Swaraj of a nation-state; with its identity of specific religion, race, language, and culture, such a unilateral nation-state was unacceptable. The Indian nation is cultural rather than geographical, the basis of which is its great civilization. India has been known not because of its geographical unit but because of its great civilization of integrity in its diversity; hence, Gandhi's Swaraj is civilizational-based rather than a nation-state. He emphasised the concept of a civilization-based nation but this cultural civilisation is not related to any specific one. *"In the Swaraj of my dreams, there can be no place for differences of caste or religion; it will not be dominated by teachers or rich people; everything will be for everyone, for today and every day, and for the welfare of all."* (Young India 26 March 1931)

For Gandhi religion was the main cementing factor of social and political life, but his religion was related to morals and duties rather than rituals. *"Religion is dear to me, and my first complaint is that India is becoming irreligious. Here, I am not thinking of the Hindu, the Mahomedan, or the Zoroastrian religion but of that religion that underlies all religions. We are turning away from God."* (Brown 2011 P. 41-42)

In his view, India is an ancient and cultured civilization that, despite its shortcomings, has persisted since immemorial. Like Rousseau, he considered material civilization uncivilised and believed it was the reason for India's plight because Britishness only meant material civilization. In his own words - *"It is necessary to exercise patience. You know the true inwardness of the evils of civilization, and you will understand with difficulty. Doctors assure us that a consumptive clings to life even when he is about to die. Consumption does not produce apparent hurt-it even produces a seductive colour about a patient's face to induce the belief that all is well. Civilization is a disease, and we must be very wary."* (Brown 2011 P. 41)

Many such qualities in the eternal civilization of India are worth teaching to others. All the civilizations, like Rome, Greece, and China, have fallen. However, the Indian civilization has remained intact even after slavery, and it is a stronger and more successful civilization than the nation-states as per the European concept. Therefore, he considers cultural civilization to be an essential quality of Swaraj. As he say in Hind Swaraj -

"I believe that the civilization India has evolved is not to be beaten in the world. Nothing can equal the seeds sown by our ancestors. Rome went, Greece shared the same fate; the might of the Pharaohs were broken; Japan has become Westernised; of China, nothing can be said; but India is still, somehow or other, sound at the foundation. The people of Europe learn their lessons from the writings of the men of Greece or Rome, which exist no longer in their former glory. In trying to learn from them, the Europeans imagined that they would avoid the mistakes of Greece and Rome. Such is their pitiable condition. In the midst of all this, India remains immovable, and that is her glory, and she remains steady. This is her beauty: it is the sheet anchor of our hope." (H S p.54)

According to Gandhi, the cultural unity that is visible in India despite so much ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity. Hence, cultural civilization is a higher thing than the concept of the nation-state, and even after slavery, this civilization kept India away from the West, as he writes in Hind Swaraj that- *"Civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty. Performance of duty and observance of morality are convertible terms. To observe morality is to attain mastery over our minds and our passions. By doing so, we know ourselves. If this definition is correct, then India, as so many writers have shown, has nothing to learn from anybody else, and this is as it should be."* (HS p.54)

Swaraj as atmanigrah and atma nirbhar (self control and self reliance)

For Gandhi, Swaraj did not only mean the expulsion of Britishers from India, but Swaraj was against the essential spirit of British rule and not the system of governance. He agrees that even after the departure of the British, India can operate with the same type of parliamentary system. For Gandhi, Swaraj was not just a method of governance nor a system of representation. Gandhi's Swaraj was the self-governance of the people. This made self-governance multidimensional, in which, naturally, the political dimension became very important. Therefore, in Gandhi's view, Swaraj was their own rule over oneself, self-control over body and soul, in the language of John Stuart Mill, having the sovereignty of their body and soul.

As he has written in Hind Swaraj that - *"If we become free, and in this thought, you have a definition of Swaraj. It is Swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves. It is, therefore, in the palm of our hands. Do not consider this Swaraj to be like a dream. There is no idea of sitting still. The Swaraj that I wish to picture is such that, after we have once realized it, we shall endeavor to the end of our lifetime to persuade others to do likewise. But such Swaraj has to be experienced by each one for himself."* (HS p. 56) To strengthen their rule, the British tried to impose a kind of slavery mentality among the Indians, and they used to propagate that India was an uncivilized country. They were bound with dual responsibility; they had to civilize Indians and rule India. Gandhi harshly criticized it. He pointed out that the Western civilization, carried by the British, is only a decadent civilization suffering from consumerism and profiteering tendencies. Indian civilization and its people have been living a self-reliant and contented life. Unlike Western civilization, the exploitation of nature has not been its objective. Western civilization tries to take maximum benefit from all the material and non-physical, living and nonliving things. In contrast, Indian civilization has stayed away from greed and has been driven by a sense of duty rather than profit. Gandhi writes in Hind Swaraj that -

"This nation had courts, lawyers, and doctors, but they were all within bounds. Everybody knew these professions were inferior; moreover, these vakils and v aids did not rob people; they were considered people's dependents, not their masters. Justice was tolerably fair. The ordinary rule was to avoid courts. There were no touts to lure people into them. This evil, too, was noticeable only in and around capitals. The common people lived independently and followed their agricultural occupation. They enjoyed true Home Rule. Moreover, where this cursed modern civilization has not reached, India remains as it was before." (HS p.54) Indian civilization was self-reliant and people were self controlled because they produced for consumption rather than profit, therefore everybody was derived by their duties rather than greed .

Political freedom is the first step towards swaraj

Gandhi is significant in the context of when universal suffrage was not available in the country, i.e., out of 34.5 crore people, only three crore people had the right to vote; hence, in Gandhi's view, Swaraj means the Swaraj of the entire people, which is the basis of freedom. Later, efforts were made to achieve a lot through political freedom through universal suffrage, but in Gandhi's view, Swaraj was not even dependent on the legislature. Thus, Gandhi's political Swaraj neither comes only from the legislature nor is formed only from the voters. However, it is genuine self-governance, such as self-governance or Swaraj, which means politics based on truth and non-violence, a corresponding radical political change capable of wiping the tears of the last person, and socio-economic reconstruction. Swaraj does not merely mean political independence, nor is it its only goal. In Gandhi's view, political freedom is only one dimension of Swaraj or a first step.

"you want Home Rule for India; it is not to be had for your asking. Everyone will have to take it for himself. What others get for me is not Home Rule but foreign rule" (H S p.84)

Therefore, political independence is only an initial stage of Swaraj's development. An essential feature of Gandhi's Swaraj is that after attaining political independence, the quality of opposition to power does not end with Swaraj; instead, it remains present with the same intensity. In other words, after independence, opposition to the government and power remains an essential quality of Swaraj. Thus, the right to political protest is a continuous right, and it is an essential quality of Swaraj because this right to protest or continuity of protest is also the fundamental basis of democracy and keeps the soul alive.

"MLAs can work to make government policies transparent. This will be their most basic service, but their main duty is to tell the common people why and how they become victims of government policies. Despite knowing the government's shortcomings, they should make the public aware of its unjust and wrong actions. Educate them to stand against the policies. The second job of legislators is to prevent anti-people laws from being made and to pave the way for making such laws that will help improve work. Gandhi does not see the question of representation as limited to merely making laws. For them, the job of MLAs is to represent public consciousness. Even if an elected government does anti-people work, they should prepare the people to fight against the government." (Ahmed 2017)

Swaraj is more than people's representation

Philosophically, Gandhi is very close to Rousseau in his explanation of political swaraj. Just as Rousseau's man is self-governing, his will is manifested in common good, social virtues and harmony. Similarly, Gandhi's Swaraj is neither a majority rule nor merely a representation system, but it is much more than this. - *"It is important to state here that the public sentiment of Swaraj does not mean the wish of the majority community. Gandhi says in 'Hind Swaraj' that Swaraj does not mean a numbers game."* (Ahmed 2017)

This is the actual governance of the people, which is done by the representatives but is not dependent on the system of representation, as he said in this speech, with particular reference to the Act of 1935. - *"Now consider this from another perspective. Only a certain, limited number of people can become members of the legislative assemblies; perhaps only fifteen hundred can become members. How many people present here can become their members? Only three and a half crore people have the right to vote for these fifteen hundred members. What will happen to the remaining 31.5 crore people ? According to our concept of Swaraj, these 31.5 crores are the true owners of the country, and these 3.5 crore voters, who will decide the fate of 1500 MLAs, are its servants. In this way, if fifteen hundred MLAs remain true to their beliefs, then in reality, they will be double servants of the entire public. But 31.5 crore people have to fulfil their responsibilities towards themselves and the nation of which they are a part as individuals. If they remain ignorant and do not try to understand what Swarajya is and how it can be achieved, they will remain slaves to fifteen hundred legislators...I know only one way to avoid such a calamity that all thirty-five crore people become hardworking and intelligent. This will be possible only if they adopt charkha and other village industries."* (Ahmed, 2017)

In Gandhian Swaraj, the real power is in the hands of the people. This public is even more superior to the political sovereignty of John Locke and legal sovereignty Dicey because in the political sovereignty of John Locke and legal sovereignty of Dicey, the absolute sovereign is the voter and legislature, who is above or is the creator of the sovereign, i.e., legislature. According to Gandhi's arguments, Swaraj is not only the creation of legislature and controlling the legislature through voters, but Swaraj means Swaraj of all the people; hence, the sovereign is the entire public. Gandhian Swaraj is near to the popular sovereignty of Rousseau. Thus, Gandhi's Swaraj is an element of legitimacy in the political system. Most of the political systems may be legitimate or claim to be legitimate. But in Gandhi's political system, the source of legitimacy is neither majority rule nor Parliament nor any supreme state post, but the source of legitimacy is the common people, their general will and common good |

"What I mean by Swaraj is the governance of India according to popular consent. True Swaraj is not achieved by a few people acquiring power but by all people gaining the ability to resist the abuse of power. In other words, Swaraj can be achieved by creating the knowledge among the people that they can seize power and regulate it." (Navjeevan, 1925) Therefore, Gandhi's Swaraj is a process to keep the socio-political system continuously aware. This is not the ultimate goal, but is a continuous process which continues through public consent and political resistance and keeps the socio-political system alive in the true democratic sense, hence it is a continuous process.

Conclusion

Like most philosophers and thinkers, there are contradictions in Gandhi's views. This contradiction sometimes comes out very clearly. On one hand Gandhi says that Swaraj will be achieved by oneself and every person is his own Swarajist, no one else will achieve Swaraj for him, he has to achieve Swaraj for himself. But on the other hand, Gandhi himself struggled throughout his life for others, remained dedicated, and ultimately even sacrificed his life. Despite this contradiction, the comprehensive explanation of Swaraj given by Gandhi, the way Swaraj was defined abstractly by taking it beyond self-rule and the way Swaraj was linked with political resistance, political activity, insistence on truth, its contemporary relevance evident. Today whatever pluralistic and mass movements take place against the coercive power of the state in liberal democratic systems are directly or indirectly influenced by Gandhi's Swaraj. The way today's civil society stands against the coercive power of the state, it is nothing but implementation of Gandhi's Swaraj. Therefore, Gandhi's Swaraj is neither contrary nor irrelevant to the contemporary political system and contemporary political philosophy and theory, rather it is completely relevant and keeps politics and the political system alive as a continuous process.

Thus, some essential outcomes Gandhian Swarajist analysis of his work Hind Swaraj are -

- Swaraj is a value in itself. Swaraj is not a material thing but a process and desired goal of human life and a tool to achieve that goal as well.

- Swaraj is moral and it is possible only through moral means like non-violence and Swaraj can be maintained only through moral means. Active resistance, civil disobedience, non-cooperation etc. are the means of this Swaraj. Swaraj is not possible beyond moral means
- Swaraj is civilization based, that is, compared to the materialistic and exploitative western civilization, self-reliant and based on consumption instead of profit, based on equality instead of special rights, cultural civilization is favorable to Swaraj. Being a value based civilization, there is an association between a civilization with moral values and Swaraj. Freedom can be achieved in material civilization but Swaraj is difficult to achieve.
- Swaraj is spiritual because it is spiritual freedom, it is not only physical freedom from foreigners but also freedom from foreign thinking and foreign culture.
- Self control is not rule over others but rule over oneself.
- Swaraj is a self achieved political social mechanism. It is not passivity and cannot be passively acquired or maintained. Non-cooperation, civil disobedience, active resistance, etc. are its means.
- Everyone's participation is necessary in Swaraj and in this form, Swaraj is real democracy.
- Gandhi's Swaraj is neither majority rule nor merely a system of representation.
- This is real self-rule, such self-rule or Swaraj which means politics based on truth and non-violence, and corresponding radical political change.
- Swaraj is a continuous process. It is a means of keeping the representation system healthy, and alert. Therefore, the right to protest is a continuing right and is an essential quality of continuing Swaraj. detail of life. "Self-government means, continuous effort to be independent of government control whether it is foreign government or whether it is national" (young India 6 Aug.1925 cited in Appadorai, 1969 p. 313)

Thus Gandhian swaraj is a process, continuous process.

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