GANDHIAN SWARAJ : A CONTINUOUS PROCESS

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Abstract:

Gandhi was a political social activist rather than a philosopher or thinker. But 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 political and social thoughts. 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 for him Swaraj also meant political self-rule along with liberalism and self-control. Therefore his Swaraj is not only political but also spiritual because politics was a spiritual (religious) work for him. Swaraj was not freedom from individuals but freedom from ideas. Swaraj was not the rule of one's own people but one's own rule over oneself, self control over body and soul. From this point of view, Locke, Mill and Rousseau are seen together in his Swarajist thoughts. From this point of view, Gandhian Swaraj goes beyond the concept of political self rule and freedom. His Swaraj is as important a question in an independent country as in a colony or slave country. Therefore, for Gandhi, Swaraj is a continuous process and a desired goal.

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

Introduction:

Gandhi is the greatest 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. In all big universities either there is a Gandhian Study Chair or he is taught there. Socialists, philanthropists, communitarians, pluralists, nationalists, rightists, leftists, all have accepted the importance of Gandhi, and have used Gandhism in their own ways. Even the brutal dictators of the twentieth century did not deny the importance of Gandhi, even formally. Gandhi was completely accepted in the democratic governance system.

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"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 in a similar way in a mural in St Mary’s Church in Oxford. Many, particularly in the West, regard Gandhi as a kind of patron saint of pacifism." (Brown 2011 p.)

Scholars belonging to different ideologies have expressed Gandhi in so many ways that sometimes it seems that many types of Gandhis are present simultaneously. Gandhi's political methodology and his philosophy continue to attract social political philosophers and scholars. The main reason for this is that Gandhi proves to be most suitable for the peaceful solution of every country's situation and its problems. From Martin Luther King in America to Lech Walesa in Europe and from Nelson Mandela to Aung Sang Suu Kyi, there have been many political activists who took inspiration from Gandhi and achieved their political goals. In other words, the relevance of 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 great book is the main 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 short-cut 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)

The most important thing in Gandhi's life was that his ideas gradually developed. That is why there is a lot of change in Gandhiji's thoughts from his early life to the latter part of his life, which Gandhiji also accepts. His life was that of an active political social worker whose experiences developed his thoughts. Initially he was in favour of colonial independence. But by the time they reached the Quit India Movement, they seemed to agree with the demand for complete independence instead of colonial Swaraj, as Congress also accepted in the Karachi session of 1930. Gandhiji's life being that of an active political social worker, he never considered himself a philosophical thinker and clearly accepted the fact that he was influenced by the thoughts of many people. 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)

Gandhian Swaraj:

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 were exploiting 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 major goal of the political movements in these countries. But the colonial powers very 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. Yes, it can be kept away. Colonial 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 also the British wanted to create confusion by mixing Swaraj with colonial administration or Dominion State. The Home Rule Movement started by Annie Besant was a similar effort. This Home Rule Movement, although it 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 is Swaraj 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 himself had said that -

"It is quite 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 decided as to 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 should it be so? I must ask you a question. Do not think that it is necessary to drive away the English, if we get all we want? " (H S 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 that –

"Well then, 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
to be harmful ?...Supposing we get Self-Government similar to what the Canadians and the South Africans have, will it be good enough?" (H S. p.27-28)

For Gandhi’s contemporaries, Swaraj meant political self-rule. Rule by Indians instead of British rule under British sovereignty. Because he believed that British rule suited British interests not Indian interests. Whereas India’s socio-economic development is possible only through 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 the 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 motive gives birth to capital and capital in its huge form causes a lot of 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’s Swaraj was a word with a broad meaning. For him, Swaraj did not just mean driving away the British from India but Swaraj was a question of Indianess and Swaraj had to be achieved only in accordance with Indian aspirations and traditions. In other words, for Gandhi, Swaraj was not just a material thing, it was something bigger than just having own army and having own rule. Ideological Swaraj was as important as political Swaraj. As his views are famous that he wanted to end the crime and not the criminal, thus he was against the Britishness and wanted freedom from the Britishness rather than only from the British. As he has says -

"In effect it means this: that 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. And when it becomes English, it will be called not Hindustan but Englistan. This is not the Swaraj that I want."
(H S p.28)

For a diverse country like India, whose political integration was not yet complete and which was ruled in the form of British provinces and princely states, it was a difficult task to reach a single universally accepted concept of Swaraj. "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 important book 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 endeavours to show that what you call Swaraj is not truly Swaraj." (H S P.28)
Thus, for Gandhiji, Swaraj was not just a political question but a holistic concept and it had to be achieved in the same manner. Hence, Gandhian Swaraj has many political, social, economic and cultural dimensions and can be understood in that context.

**Nation state vs civilization based swaraj:**

The British introduced the European concept of nation where 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. Whereas India is a collection of diverse religions and diverse castes speaking diverse languages, hence a nation state can never be formed, therefore, even after achieving the type of independence that Congress is demanding, 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 is not a nation state that has any distinct racial, linguistic and religious identity of its own. (Brown 2011) Gandhiji had serious objections to this notion. He considered the British concept of nation-state to be completely wrong. In his view, India was a nation from time immemorial and was always organised and behaved as a nation. The culture of India made him a nation. Indian nationalism was cultural nationalism. Despite changing political units from time to time, India has been an eternal nation. In response to the question that European scholars do not consider India as a nation, he gives a very clear 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 that it 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 those farseeing ancestors of ours who established Setubandha (Rameshwar) in the South, Jagannath in the East and Hardwar 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. But they saw that India was one undivided land so 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 and I and others who consider ourselves civilized and superior persons imagine 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 " (H S 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 not acceptable. The Indian nation is cultural rather than geographical, the basis of which is its great civilization. “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 for everyday and for the welfare of all.” (Young India 26 March 1931) 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 Swaraj rather than a nation-state. He emphasised on the concept of civilization based nation. He clearly says that – “It is my deliberate opinion that India is being ground down, not under the English heel, but under that of modern civilization. It is groaning under the monster's terrible weight. There is yet time to escape it, but every day makes it more and more difficult. Religion is dear to me and my first complaint is that India is becoming irreligious. Here I am not thinking of the Hindu or the Mahomedan or the Zoroastrian religion but of that religion which underlies all religions. We are turning away from God." (Brown 2011 P. 41) In his view, India is a civilization, an ancient and cultured civilization which, despite its shortcomings, has persisted since time immemorial. Like Rousseau, he considered material civilization as uncivilization and believed that it was the reason for India's plight is Britishness means material civilization only. In his own words - "It is necessary to exercise patience. The true inwardness of the evils of civilization 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 so as to induce the belief that all is well. Civilization is such a disease and we have to be very wary." (Brown 2011 P. 41)

There are many such qualities in the eternal civilization of India which are worth teaching to others. All the civilizations like Rome, Greece, China etc. have fallen but 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 as an essential quality of Swaraj. He has written in Hind Swaraj that - "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 imagine that they will 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….India, 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 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 mind and our passions. So doing, we know ourselves. If this definition be correct, then India, as so many writers have shown, has nothing to learn from anybody else, and this is as it should be." (H S p.54)

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 are bound with dual responsibility, they have to civilize Indians and also 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, 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 whereas the Indian civilization has stayed away from the problem of greed, and has been driven by a sense of duty rather than profit motive. Gandhi writes in Hind Swaraj that - "This nation had courts, lawyers and doctors, but they were all within bounds. Everybody knew that these professions were not particularly superior; moreover, these vakils and vaids 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. And where this cursed modern civilization has not reached, India remains as it was before. " (H S p.54)

Swaraj : Political dimension :

For Gandhi Swaraj did not only mean the expulsion of Britishers from India but Swaraj was against the basic 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 was it just 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 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, India is 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 realised it, we shall endeavour to the end of our life-time to persuade others to do likewise. But such Swaraj has to be experienced, by each one for himself." (H S p. 56)

Philosophically, Gandhi is very close to Rousseau in his explanation of political swaraj. Just as Rousseau's man is a self-governing man, his will is not only manifested in the majority but in social virtues and harmony, similarly Gandhi's Swaraj is also neither 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 clearly says in ‘Hind Swaraj’ that Swaraj does not mean a numbers game. (Ahmed 2017)

This is the real 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 given with special reference to the Act of 1935. -

"Now consider this from another perspective. Only a certain, limited number of people can become members in the legislative assemblies, perhaps only fifteen hundred can become members. How many people present here can become their members? And at present only three and a half crore people have the right to vote for these fifteen hundred members. What will happen to the remaining more than 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 fulfill their responsibilities towards themselves and also towards the nation of which they are a part as individuals. If they themselves 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) Thus, in Gandhian Swaraj, the real power is in the hands of the people. This public is even more superior than the political sovereignty of John Locke and Dicey because in the political sovereignty of John Locke and Dicey, the real sovereign is the voter, 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 not only the voters but the entire public.

"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 have the ability to seize power and regulate it. " (Navjeevan 1925) Especially this statement of Gandhi is more important in the context when universal suffrage was not available in the country i.e. out of 34.5 crore people, only 3 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 is not even dependent on the legislature. Thus, Gandhi’s political Swaraj neither comes only from the legislature nor is formed only from the voters, but it is real self-governance, such self-governance or Swaraj which means politics based on truth and non-violence, corresponding radical political change which is 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 only 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. An important feature of Gandhi’s Swaraj is that after attaining political independence, the quality of opposition to power does not end with Swaraj, rather 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 real basis of democracy, 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 shortcomings of the government, they should make the public aware and make them aware of the unjust and wrong actions of the government. Educate to stand against the policies. The second job of the legislators is to prevent anti-people laws from being made and to pave the way for making such laws which will help in the improvement 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)

Thus, from the analysis of Gandhi’s swaraj its two dimensions appear the cognitive dimension and the functional dimension.

Cognitive Dimension:

- 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.

**Functional dimension:**

- 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.

Thus Gandhian swaraj is a process, continuous process.
Reference:


Hind swaraj hindi edition p. 10


Navjeevan 29 January 1925 Ahmedabad.