

# Mahatma Gandhi and His Concept of Swaraj

Paper Submission: 10/12/2021, Date of Acceptance: 21/12/2021, Date of Publication: 23/12/2021

## Abstract

Hind Swaraj is the most seminal work of Mahatma Gandhi. It inspired people in India to work for independence from British colonial control. He used non-violence as a technique of protest. For Gandhi's swaraj is self-government. He had a different view of swaraj and struggled for independence from British rule and from industrialization. He asked Indians to refuse to obey the unjust laws of the British, as no government can function if the people and masses refuse to obey its laws. Swaraj of the people means the sum total of the swaraj of individuals.

**Keywords:** Swaraj, Self Restraint, Freedom, Social Reform.

### Introduction

Swaraj for Gandhi ji was not just political freedom but freedom from hunger, disease and ignorance. Although the word Swaraj means "Self-rule" Gandhi ji gave it the content of an integral revolution that encompasses all spheres of life. At the individual level "He was an apostle of peace, non-violence and was an ardent flower of Purna Swaraj." <sup>1</sup>

Gandhi ji wanted to end the British rule in India but his aim was greater. His aim was to get swaraj. Gandhi ji had serious attention on how to realize swaraj. He had a clear view that swaraj will not come from the thinking or by any miracle but it will come from patience, hard work and courage. He also observed that swaraj means vast organising ability, penetration into the village solely for the services of villagers, in other words it means national education i.e., education of masses." <sup>2</sup>

"He pointed out that "Real swaraj will come not by acquisition of authority but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused. In other words, swaraj is to be attained by education of masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority." <sup>3</sup>

Gandhi ji visualized a model of swaraj and that model was enunciated in his "Hind Swaraj." Gandhi ji was particularly vocal about his criticism of the contemporary political system. He especially targeted western democracy and the corrosive manifestation systems wrought. In Hind Swaraj for instance, Gandhi ji calls the British parliament a "sterile woman" for not having done a single good thing" and a "prostitute" because "it is under the control of a minister who changes from time to time. It is easy to read Gandhi ji in general and Hind Swaraj in particular as a political text. This is in fact the way Gandhiji has usually been read, as Gandhi' ji life and work is shot through with political concerns. At one level, Gandhi ji himself tells us that politics indeed, was not primary preoccupation. On a number of occasions, he claimed that his "work of social reform was in no way subordinate of political work and that when he saw that "to an extent my social work would be impossible without the help of political work." He also tells us that the "work of social reform or self- purification of this nature is a hundred times dearer to me than what is called purely political work." <sup>4</sup>

So, this is one level at which Gandhi ji himself tells us that politics was for him, a secondary concern. Hind Swaraj seeks to formulate the meaning of human life and its possibility in modern civilization. Gandhi ji says after India got awakened against the British, everybody needed to free themselves but- how, was the real question. To Gandhi Swaraj did not mean simply replacing British rule with Indian rule. Swaraj was above all about individual autonomy, involving self- respect; self-restraint and maturity. Gandhi ji appealed for individual Indians to free themselves mentally and through character development from internal and external colonization. In other words, Gandhi ji aimed to revitalize the ideal civilization as dharma through a redefinition of self-government as self-actualization. Adopting Swaraj means implementing a system whereby the state machinery is virtually nil and the real power directly resides in the hands of people. Gandhi ji said, "power resides in the people, they can use it at any time." This philosophy rests inside an individual who has to learn to be master of his own and spreads upwards to the level of his community which must be dependent only on itself. Gandhi ji said, "in such a state (where swaraj is achieved) everyone is his own ruler. He rules himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbour" and also it is swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves. Gandhi ji was first in human history to extend the principle of non-violence from the individual to the social



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and political plane. Swaraj meant freedom from British rule but Gandhi ji had a different view of swaraj. To him, self-rule meant not only the rule by Indians but also and more importantly, a rule by Indians rooted in Indian values, and ethos. Gandhi ji changed the picture and made the struggle for independence from British rule but also from modern civilization. Elaborating on the means of attaining swaraj he tells the readers, "I believe that you want millions of Indians to be happy not that you want the reins of government in your hands. If that be so, we have to consider only one thing: how can the million obtain self-true?"<sup>5</sup>

"Self-administration by force by arms, for violence breeds violence and eyes for eyes leaves everyone blind".<sup>6</sup> Gandhi ji's concepts of freedom means swaraj and in his swaraj there was no place for violence but he used nonviolence as a technique for freedom. He wanted to get an end to British rule from India but his aim was greater than this (only acquiring freedom). Explaining the way to get swaraj Gandhi ji told the readers, "I believe that you want millions of Indians to be happy not that you want the reins of government in your hands. If that be so, we have to consider only one thing, how can the million obtain self-true?" There is another peaceful way that is to refuse to obey the unjust laws and be ready to go jail, to be beaten and even killed. No government can function if the people in mass refuse to obey its laws. "What we need to do is to sacrifice ourselves. It is a cowardly thought of killing them."<sup>7</sup>

Those who want to throw the British out by violence would not bring swaraj. Swaraj for Gandhi ji was not simply a question of extricating the British from India. He did not want the British to be replaced by Indians. He wanted the value system and lifestyle of British raj to be done away with and totally replaced by a simpler, more spiritual, communal life. Explaining the way to get Swaraj Gandhi ji told the reader, "I believe that you want millions of Indians to be happy, not that you want the reins of government in your hands. If that be so, we have to consider only one thing: How can the million obtain self-true?"<sup>8</sup>

In his swaraj he said that the real problem of India is not its political problem but it lies in the social realms as well as in cultural realms. The truth of Indian tradition is that for every human society is needed and that is more important than state. The British rule in India had brought a change in society. Indians became dependent on the rulers for everything but Gandhiji opposed it. He had a strong belief in self-help and self-initiative. He believed in a society where the people come together and tackle their own problems.

Swaraj was above all this. Gandhi ji appealed for individual Indians to free themselves mentally and through character development from internal and external colonization. In other words, Gandhi ji aimed to revitalize the idea of civilization as dharma through a redefinition of self-government as self-actualization. According to Gandhi, to value human freedom only as the freedom to pursue one's self interest lacks moral and spiritual depth and creates a life devoid of meaning and truth. Swaraj means essentially 'being open to others; but at the same it means building a character for oneself by living one's life as a moral project. We can now understand why freedom for Gandhi ji was not merely arrived but was a duty in Gandhi's philosophy: civilization is not just a state of self-proclamation of freedom. True freedom is not merely the freedom to do what one desires, but also the ability to ensure that what one chooses is the result of a sense of duty and self-knowledge. For Gandhi ji this choice is not exercised as freedom from restraints but as freedom through restraints.

Gandhi ji focused on nonviolence and stressed that nonviolence is a must for Indians, they would be able to create a strong country by nonviolence. Gandhi ji had a strong faith that none can achieve self-realization with modern civilization. If a society is looking for success by means of materialism it would never be healthy, strong and vibrant. In his book, Hind Swaraj, Gandhi ji had clearly expressed his view that Indians had a great value for the British living system but with this mentality they would never be able to get independence, they would only change the rulers. Gandhi ji said that our problem was not British people but our confused goals are our main problems. Gandhi ji regards Indian civilization as a true civilization. He observes civilization as a mode which leads the man on the path of duty. In Hind Swaraj he criticised modern civilization. He says that Indian civilization teaches us tolerance, calm and love for all living things. Gandhi ji played an important role for congress in making it a modern and vital organization and set for them a new goal of freedom and gave them a new weapon that was Satyagraha.

Gandhi ji is deeply critical of western civilization. He announced freedom in his special sense. He told in a meeting of the village workers that freedom is bound to come and it will come. But mere freedom from the British will not satisfy me. He saw a dream for India's freedom and tried his best to turn the dream into reality. He could

keep the people's morals and hearten their faith along the humble and quiet pathways of constructive activity and self-reliance. The self-rule of masses, was what Gandhiji understood by swaraj, or not mere political Independence. His vision for India's future was highly unorthodox. In Gandhi's idealised state, there would be no representative government, no constitution, no army or police force; there would be no machines and certainly no modern cities. There would be no exploitation and no religious violence. A future Indian nation would be modelled off the India of the past. In many ways Gandhi ji's writings reflect his idealistic view on freedom.

Gandhi spent his life showing others the value of sacrifice and service. It was through these experiences that he found his truth. His views were based on his travels throughout his country, where he saw extreme poverty and the British government's indifference to the injustices of their system. Gandhi ji envisioned a country where the benefits of democracy existed within a culture that embraced a more holistic system that incorporated not only the material needs of its citizens but also its spiritual well-being. Gandhi ji argued for a society that valued both the body and the soul of each human being. In his book, *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi ji clearly outlined his concerns that his fellow Indians highly valued the British lifestyle and the system of government. Indian Independence would not be achieved if they only changed the rulers. He repeatedly expressed that India's problems did not lie in the lap of the British people, but in the misguided goals of modern civilization. He stated the necessity for Indians to remove the shackles of modern British culture. While he did not despise all aspects of British civilization, he was deeply concerned that many leaders of the Independence movement in India considered the British government as the appropriate model for an Independent India.

Gandhi ji believed in Thoreau's saying, "that government is the best which governs at least".<sup>9</sup>

Gandhi ji is famous for his dedication to nonviolence and its use in the creation of an independent India. He stressed that it was essential for Indians to obtain self-reliance through nonviolence. For Gandhi ji, true civilisation is not a linear progression towards greater prosperity but a manifestation of good conduct. The model of Swaraj he presented before Indians was Ram Rajya where the people were free from all sufferings. His vision for India was very clear. He described his outlook for the Indian future where there will be no constitution, no force and no communism and no religious violence. India will be a model of its past where all have self-restraint, self-control and self-discipline. He portrayed a society that should be need based not greed based.

#### Aim of the Study

Through this paper Author wants to express Gandhi ji's views on freedom. According to Gandhiji, independence cannot be attained by violence. He says that it can be found not by violence, but by opposing them by disobedience and self-sacrifice. Gandhi ji said that the British were able to rule over India because Indians cooperated with them. If Indians fought, they could never rule, but this fight should not be violent. It should be non-violent and non-cooperative.

#### Conclusion

To conclude we can say that for Gandhi ji's swaraj stood for our control on ourselves, making free ourselves from the slavery to the mind and desires. Thus, his concept of swaraj is very different from the "Independence" that we celebrate only every 15 August.

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