

Gandhian Principles in *Hind Swaraj* and its Relevance in Contemporary India

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Abstract: Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, an apostle of non-violence who was born in Porbandar on 2 October 1869 and died in Delhi on 30 January 1948 is commonly regarded as one of the greatest men of the 20th century. He has been called the father of the nation and given the appellation, 'Mahatma' or great soul who led India's struggle against the greatest and most powerful empire in human history. Gandhi is not superhuman per se, but superbly human. He rises higher and higher through endless striving and discipline. His life is exemplary. All the extraordinary events in his life are meant to uplift and inspire the next generation. During the South African years, Gandhi experimented with all major ingredients of his praxis: community living in the Tolstoy and Phoenix settlement, experiment with diet and natural cure, the invention of satyagraha, the adoption of truth and non-violence, the vow of brahmacharya or chastity, and finally, the giving up of personal property. During this period Gandhi discovered his personal and political philosophy and *Hind Swaraj* came to be written. In this epoch-making work Gandhi talks about swaraj, civilization, passive resistance, English education, and partition of Bengal. My present paper will throw light whether Gandhi's philosophy as expressed in *Hind Swaraj* is relevant in today's materialistic, modernist and mechanical contemporary India.

Key Words: Non-violence, swaraj, education, relevance.

1. INTRODUCTION:

one of the greatest leaders that the world has ever seen is Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi who was not only a political figure but also a social and political reformer. He was a humanist and a visionary and spiritual leader who took who took the country on the road to freedom. He is internationally respected for his doctrine of non-violence. Using the weapon named non-violence he not only led the freedom struggle of India but also performed a pivotal role in the struggle of the Indians for civil rights in South Africa. Victimized by the incidents of racial discrimination, Gandhi embarked on a crusade against injustice in South Africa that he continued the rest of his life. His experience and activities in South Africa provided necessary background for his subsequent emergence onto the Indian political scenario. The ideological concepts with which Gandhi revolutionized the Indian political scenario were molded to a large extent in South Africa. The celebrated notion of Satyagraha emerged as a consequence of various influences that worked on him. He extensively read religious books on Hinduism, like the Bhagwat Gita, and Christianity in South Africa. The works of Henry David Thoreau, Leo Tolstoy, John Ruskin and Ralph Waldo also had significance influences on his thought. The notion of non co-operation, as a civilian weapon to fight governmental tyranny was discussed by all these major writers, but it was Gandhi who gave practical shape to the thought. Being influenced by Jainism and Vaishnavism Gandhi showed the world how non-violence could be used as an effective political tool to fight the injustice hurled by an oppressive government. For Gandhi, ahimsa, non-violence entailed self control, swaraj or self rule and chastity. To ventilate and spread his ideas and philosophies of life Gandhi took pen and write immortal works like *The Story of my Experiments with Truth* and *Hind Swaraj*.

1.1. LITERARY REVIEW: Gandhi was against the 'Gandhism' or any sort of 'ism'. He did not want to open any school of thought. Despite it, Gandhism is based on his ideas, thought, and writings on various topics. Gandhism has been one of the most prominent school of thoughts or ideologies of the present century. Countless books, research papers, articles, and essays based on Gandhian principles are available. Some of the works discuss just the basic principles of Gandhi. Some writings highlight Gandhi's view on violence/non-violence, satyagraha, non-cooperation, education and social stigma like untouchability. I have gone through the essay 'Health Care: The Gandhian Way' that discusses Gandhiji's engagement with health and related issues. In the essay 'Concept of Satyagraha' Nirmala Singh elaborates Gandhi's view about Satyagraha and its basic tenets. My paper will try to trace the relevancy of Gandhian principles in contemporary society as expressed in his *Hind Swaraj*.

2. DISCUSSION:

Gandhi's opinion on *Hind Swaraj*: Among all the works of Mahatma Gandhi *Hind Swaraj* or *Indian Home Rule* occupied a place of pride for the author as it contained ideas which were closest to his heart. This booklet of about 30,000 words was written in Gujarati –between 13 and 22 November, 1909, on board the ship Kildonan Castle, on the ship's stationery, during his return from England to South Africa after an abortive mission undertaken on behalf of the Indians in South Africa. 40 out of the 275 pages were written with left hand as the right hand got tired, and only 16 lines were scratched out and only a few words were changed in the manuscripts. It is written in the form of a dialogue between the Reader and the Editor, who is the author himself. The Reader represents any intelligent person of Indian society. The young Gandhi must have been impressed by Plato's style whose works he had read with great interest and appreciation. He makes it clear at the outset that, "Whilst the views expressed in *Hind Swaraj* are held by me, I have but endeavoured humbly to follow Tolstoy, Ruskin, Thoreau, Emerson and other writers besides the masters of Indian philosophy." Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* is a text often cited for its seminal influence on the Indian Freedom Movement. 2009 was the centenary year of this epoch-making text. In 1921 Gandhi expressed his happiness at the growing popularity of this text. In the foreword of the new edition of the *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi writes: "It is certainly my good fortune that this booklet of mine is receiving wide attention. The original is in Gujarati. It has a chequered career. It was first published in the columns of the *Indian Opinion* of South Africa. It was written in 1908 during my return voyage from London to South Africa in answer to the Indian school of violence and its prototype in South Africa. I came in contact with every known Indian anarchist in London. Their bravery impressed me, but I felt that their zeal was misguided. I felt that violence was no remedy for India's ills, and that her civilization required the use of a different and higher weapon for self-protection. The Satyagraha of South Africa was still an infant, hardly two years old. But it has developed sufficiently to permit me to write of it with some degree of confidence. What I wrote was so much appreciated that it was later published as a booklet (in 1909). It attracted some attention in India. The Bombay Government prohibited its circulation. I replied by publishing its translation. I thought it was due to my English friends that they should know its contents". From his long time associate and Private Secretary Mahadev Desai it reveals that Gandhi translated this book especially for his friend Hermann Kallenbach, his close associate in South Africa. *Hind Swaraj* contains the seeds of Gandhian revolution, a "whole theory of life" as he himself characterized it. It has been aptly termed as "seminal" by Mahadev Desai.

Reasons for writing *Hind Swaraj*: In the "Preface" to the original Gujarati edition Gandhi had clarified his reasons for writing *Hind Swaraj*. "I have written because I could not restrain myself. I have read much, I have pondered much, during the stay, for four months in London, of the Transvaal Indian Deputation. I discussed things with as many of my countrymen as I could. I met, too, as many Englishmen as it was possible –s. I consider it my duty now to place before the readers of *Indian Opinion* the conclusions, which appear to me to be final." He also expressed: "*Indian Home Rule*--was written in answer to the revolutionary's arguments and methods—to offer the revolutionary something infinitely superior to what he had, retaining the whole of the spirit of self-sacrifice and bravery that was to be found in the revolutionary" [At It Again, YI(7.5.1925), CWMG 27:49]

Idea of "Swaraj" before Gandhi: In modern times, the term 'Swaraj' was first used by Dadabhai Naoroji in his Presidential address to the Congress in 1906 to ask for self-rule 'like that of UK or the colonies'. In 1907, Lokmanya Tilak advocated 'Swadeshi' and national education to attain 'Swaraja' or self-rule within the British Empire. In *Rig Veda* itself, in Part I, *Sukta* 80, all sixteen verses end with the word 'swarajyam'. These parts exhort knowledge, happiness, integrity, justice, righteousness, and faith in God. So the concept of 'swaraj' is certainly pre-Gandhian. It was Gandhi who defined the term in its fullness for us. It is particularly the agenda for the non-violent social order in free India. In this book Gandhi clearly expresses that driving the British out is not the same as attaining Swaraj. Gandhi believed that Swaraj or Self-Rule should begin with at the bottom of the society, with the poorest of the poor.

Main issues in Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*: The book is addressed to a mixed audience: the expatriate Indians greatly attracted to terrorism and political violence; the Extremists and the Moderates of the Indian National Congress; the Indian nation; and 'the English'. By the Indian nation Gandhi means ordinary Indians irrespective of their religious, linguistic, regional or caste difference, as well as the new emerging middle class. And by 'the English' he means both the British ruling class living in India and Britishers living in Great Britain. Gandhi believed that through *Hind Swaraj* he would be able to give Indians a practical philosophy, an updated conception of dharma, that would fit them for life in the modern world. In this book Gandhi has expressed his ideas on many concepts like (a) partition of Bengal, (b) condition of England (c) Swaraj, (d) modern civilization, (e) passive resistance, (f) education, (g) machinery, (h) conditions of India including railways, doctors and lawyers etc.

Gandhi's view about Civilization, Passive resistance, and Education: One of the most interesting things about Hind Swaraj is its cross-cultural comparison between modern Western civilization and the traditional Indian civilization. Gandhi realized that most educated Indians were totally awed and overwhelmed by the glamour and power of the former. Here Gandhi mounts a frontal attack on modern civilization by calling it Satanic and ungodly. Gandhi argues that the modern civilization caters only to the body and totally ignores moral development. He focuses on self-destructiveness of modernity. He looks at modern civilization as a disease but a curable disease. He believed that a simple way of life based on manual labour was the most conducive to moral and spiritual advancement.

Gandhi believed that soul force or truth force is a scientific principle without which the world would not have survived. Gandhi defines passive resistance as “a method of securing rights by personal suffering; it is the reverse of resistance by force.” He says, “A man who has realized his manhood, who fears only God, will fear no one else. Man made laws are not necessarily binding on him.” Gandhi refutes the idea that soul-force is the weapon of the weak; on the other hand, it requires greater courage to practice it than to practice violence.

We have inherited a colonial system of education and the result is so many ignorant and jobless graduates. He understood that true education was not merely literacy or the knowledge of mathematics but the development of high moral character. The worst feature in the racket that is education is what was known as “English education.” It created a class of person, Indian in blood and culture, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect. Gandhi wanted every Indian to learn one classical language. He also did not forget to emphasize religious education.

The importance of *Hind Swaraj* in contemporary India: The literary value of *Hind Swaraj* is highly significant because of its grave subject matters, direct and simple style, short sentences, absence of excessive coordination or subordination and ornamentation. But the importance extends far beyond its literary value. It is a seminal text for all those who wish to understand Gandhian philosophy properly. The book has the power to wake up every Indian from their stupor. We, who are intoxicated by modernity and westernization, who are continuing to be brainwashed daily via the mass-media to get entangled further into self-destructive life –style of consumerism, require the kind of jolt that *Hind Swaraj* offers. Gandhi's thoughts spring from a deep trans-civilizational perspective not just from intra-civilization. He identifies India as a spiritual and religious civilization. His criticism on materialistic and immoral Western civilization proves just in contemporary world. Gandhi wants modern Indians to get rid of the colonial mentality. He considers the craze for machinery to be inappropriate to India. Machine has dehumanized Indian workers and made them jobless. We are still far from attaining swaraj. Political independence is merely the beginning. Swaraj will be impossible before the world learns to co-exist in peace and prosperity forgetting their caste, creed and religion.

3. CONCLUSION:

Even today's Digital India is not ignoring Gandhi's philosophy as expressed in *Hind Swaraj*. As the nation geared up to celebrate Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary in 2018, various Government programmes and schemes named after him. Here's a look at Government initiatives named after Bapu: MAHATMA GANDHI NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE ACT (MNREGA), SWACHH BHARAT ABHIYAN, GANDHI SMRITI AND DARSHAN SAMITI, GANDHI SHILP BAZAAR, MAHATMA GANDHI BUNKAR BIMA YOJANA, MAHATMA GANDHI PRAVASI SURAKSHA YOJANA. The very names of the programmes indirectly assert the relevance of Mahatma Gandhi in contemporary India. Today India realizes the impotence of Gandhian philosophies regarding the excessive use of machine, role of parasites like doctors and lawyers, education, and violence and non-violence as expressed in *Hind Swaraj*.

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