

Gandhi Hind Swaraj: An Evaluation of Nationalist Thought of Gandhi

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Abstract:

This paper seeks to understand the nationalist thought of M.K. Gandhi through his classic work 'Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule'. The critical understanding of Swaraj, education and civilisation by Gandhi reflects the nationalist thought embedded in Gandhian thought. This paper presents how the nationalist thought of Gandhi is distinct in nature which was significant in the anti-colonial struggle and also have relevance in contemporary time. At the end, this paper makes a critical evaluation of Gandhian nationalist thought.

Keywords: Gandhi, Nationalist thought, Swaraj.

Introduction:

The study of nationalist thought of M.K. Gandhi is significant to understand its implication for India. Mohandas Karandas Gandhi was an Indian anti colonial nationalist leader, political ethics, eminent personality who used nonviolent weapon to lead the successful campaign for India's independence from British rule. 'Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule' is a classic work by M.K. Gandhi to present his revolutionary ideas in an understandable manner. Hind Swaraj is a foundational text to get idea about Gandhian thought. His ideas of economy, polity and society and satyagraha are significant in history along with ethics. This work was written by M.K Gandhi, a dialogue between the dialogist and the reviser of a journal (www.manifestias.com). The work not only influenced the social thought during the colonial period, but it still holds its relevance. He has written the book in Gujarati language as it was his native language during his travel from London to South Africa 13-22 November, 1909. Considering the possible implications of the thoughts present in the book, the Britishers banned the Gujarati edition of the book. They declared the publication as a seditious text in British India and it reflects the importance of the work for Indian nationalist thought. Gandhi translated the Gujarati version of his book into the English language, which slowly spread into the English-speaking community. Gandhi's Hind Swaraj is associated with two main issues: the nature and fabric of Indian Swaraj and the means and methods to achieve it. S.A. Bodde, Chief Judge of India, stated at an International Judicial Conference 2020 about Gandhi's Hind Swaraj that the real rights come from 'the performance of the duty' (as cited in www.manifestias.com).

Gandhi's ideas of Swaraj

Swaraj for Gandhi is identical to 'Ramraj' in which he equalizes the Ramraj with righteousness kingdom, divine Raj, the God Kingdom and his ancient ideal of Ramraj seen as true democracy, basic

foundation of a modern state system. Although Gandhi popularised the theme of Swaraj, he was not the first person to use it in Indian context. Bal Gangadhar Tilak first introduced the idea of Swaraj from a political perspective, which was popularised with the idea of Gandhi. Tilak well known slogan Swaraj as my Birthright having influence of Gandhian thought. While the Tilak used the idea of Swaraj in political perspective but Gandhi used the term in a much wider sense and hence Gandhian understanding of Swaraj is non-identical with Tilak concept of Swaraj. Gandhi states that main meaning of the 'Swaraj' is self-rule which signifies the discipline from within and does not mean having freedom from all types of restraints (Gandhi, 1931).

Another significant dimension of Gandhian understanding of Swaraj is in moral sense. The concept of Swaraj as used in the Vedas influenced the Gandhi's understanding of Swaraj from the perspective of moral constraint. In the *Indian Opinion*, Gandhi's wrote as follows,

“Real Swaraj consists in self-restraint. He alone is capable of this, who leads a moral life, does not cheat anyone, does not forsake truth, and does his duty to his parents, his wife, his children, his servants and his neighbours. Such a man will enjoy Swaraj wherever he may happen to live. A nation has many such men always enjoy Swaraj”. (Gandhi, 1908).

It reflects that Gandhi observe morality as primary over the political or economic consideration associated with human situation. Gandhi argued that any kind of human action can be understood under the aegis of morality. For Gandhi, it is morality which differentiated a man from a beast. Gandhi defines man with regard to presence of value. He said that one has to make reference to value to understand any social institution (Madhual, 1986, p. 27). Thus, the Gandhian idea of Swaraj can be understood with the reference to values.

The literal meaning of the Swaraj is 'Self Rule' (Sarraj). Here the term 'Saw' means 'of the self' and 'raj' means 'rule or government'. But Gandhi did not use the concept of Swaraj as dominion of India as he presented in his work Hind Swaraj as follows:

“By patriotism I mean the welfare of whole people...if any Englishman educated his life to secure the freedom of India, resisting tyranny and serving the land, I should welcome that Englishman as an Indian”. (Gandhi, 1909, p. 68).

Gandhi again states

“If English become Indianized, we can accommodate them. If they wish to remain in India along with their civilisation, there is no room for them. It lies with us who bring about such a state of things”. (Gandhi, 1909, p. 69)

Thus, the Gandhian usage of Swaraj is different from the common-sense usage of the idea where we mean Swaraj as self-rule by Indian. The three significant gimmicks of Gandhi's writings are: Swaraj, Swadeshi and Satya. For Gandhi, it is significant for the self-rule of the self or by the self. As such, he gave priority to spiritual thought over a political idea to achieve fundamental change in each individual perception. Gandhi insists the individual perceptions can be changed at the hand of the political leaders (Chakrabarty, 2011, p. 9).

It is observed that the Gandhi worked as an activist, theoretician who was simultaneously a practitioner. Gandhi states that it is necessary to bring Swaraj into practice. Here, Gandhi says the self-rule without self-transformation have no meaning. Gandhi's concept of Swaraj was not utopia as Gandhi himself argued:

“Do not consider this Swaraj to be a dream. There is no idea of sitting still. Swaraj is a method to organise human activities in accordance with Ahimsa or Satya. It is a complex unfolding blueprint of future socio-political orders of the society”. (Chakraborty, 2011, p. 11)

The concept of Swaraj popularised by Gandhi is more complex and multi-faceted. For him, Swaraj can not be taken merely the transfer of power from British hands to Indian hands but goes beyond that. For Gandhi, India will get freedom when the individual becomes free and Gandhi used Swaraj in that sense. Gandhi asserted that Swaraj can be achieved as we rule ourselves. Gandhi presented the interdependent relationship between self-rule of individuals and self-government of the Indian. He states that the Indians can have self when they are successful to bring ‘self-rule’ of the individual. Gandhi opined that the self-rule cannot be achieved through arms and violence. Therefore, he emphasised the significance of passive resistance based on love force or soul force. Passive resistance is a way of achieving rights by undergoing the personal suffering. Passive resistance is a weapon of the strong in opposition to the weapon of the weak (www.manifeatias.com). In this context, we observe ideas about the distinct character of Gandhian understanding of Swaraj.

Gandhi’s ideas of Education

Gandhi’s thought on education is an important window to grasp his nationalist thought. As Gandhi was a practical idealist, Gandhi wanted to comprehend the world with an aim to change it. Gandhi argues that the social change can be induced through education. For Gandhi, correct thoughts can promote correct action, or right understanding will lead to right action. In this context, Gandhi tried to design the strategy that will help to change the human society (Madhual, 1986, p. 48).

When we understand education based on theories, empiricism, idealism, and instrumentalism are the three main theories of education that help us to grasp the aim of learning. John Locke mainly proposed the philosophy of empiricism. This philosophy gives emphasis on execution of teacher is to provide information into the minds of people. Locke argues that education is meant to provide more information to people in order to create a gentleman. In contrast, idealist sees the primary aim of education is to rejuvenate the innate potential of the individual and hence different from empiricism. For the idealists, the teacher should only bring about what is already contained in the mind of the individual rather than providing more information. In this context, Plato suggested his theory of Knowledge, and Plato expressed the view that the teacher is like a midwife because a midwife is a woman who helps a mother with baby delivery. Similarly, a teacher should help the student to brighten the innate capacities of the students. The teacher should perform its duties as a philosopher for the students. Again, instrumentalism argues man is the determining factor of education, which depends upon society. (Madhul, 1986, 49-50).

Gandhi states that education is a value concept. He argues that the real education is a way to live in accordance with certain values. For Gandhi, nonviolence is the basic value, and all societal workouts should be associated with this value. Gandhi's philosophy of education was based upon the premise of ‘a body-mind and soul’ (Madhual. 1986, 51) and hence gave a holistic view of education. Gandhi dreamt of our education system as one which should be designed to fulfil the necessity of our body, mind and souls and thus provide all-round development.

Another perspective of Gandhi’s view on education is seen in his observation of education as vital way of social reconstruction. His views of education are noteworthy to contemporary Indian society. For Gandhi, education is important means of self-expression. Gandhi is against the unlimited opening of college and universities in India as he thought are as wastage. Gandhi can not be seen supporter of an

educational programme which produces unemployable graduate and highly trained individuals who have knowledge in science and technology. It was a message of Gandhi to all the developing countries of the world (Madhual, 1986, 68-69). Various views of Gandhi on education reflect his nationalist views and his concern for the country.

Gandhi's criticism of modern civilisation

Another major theme that helps us to understand Gandhian nationalist thought is his view on civilisation. Gandhi was critical of modern civilisation and hence provided his view on civilisation. The root of the word civilisation has come from the Latin word 'Civics' which means citizen and, in this context, we can define civilised as one who lives in cities and towns (Madhul, 1986, p. 5). For Gandhi, civilisation as a moral enterprise and therefore Gandhi was against the western materialism. Gandhi argues that the western materialism is associated with the exploitation of nature. Gandhi was critical of western civilisation which was based on greed and violence and hence will not exist for long. Here, Gandhi argues that the soul of civilisation must be seen as a value which distinguishes civilisations from one another. He further states that civilisation can survive only on the grounds of value displayed in the development of humans. (Madhual, 1986, p. 5)

Gandhi views that the modern civilisation, which emphasised on rational materialism, has departed from values of dharma, which is its major limitation. Gandhi was against allowing reason to destroy our faith. 'To observe morality is; states Gandhi; "is to attain mastery over our mind and our passion"' (Chakraborty, 2011, p. 8). Therefore, Gandhi gives priority to faith over reason in his understanding of human development.

Gandhi was against the superstition present in different religions but Gandhi accepted the importance of religion in our social life. Gandhi was critical of the modern version of civilisation as he it is not based on moral values and religion. Gandhi states 'This civilisation seeks to increase body comfort by pursuing truth and it fails miserably even in doing so' (Chakraborty, 2011, p. 9). Gandhian perception of enlightens not only reflects his criticism of western civilisation but also the significance of Indian civilisation.

Critical understanding of Gandhi's view

Gandhian nationalist thought based on his interpretation of Swaraj, education and civilisation also have limitations. They reflect the distinct character of the Gandhian mind. In May 1910, W.J. Wynberg provided many critical issues related to the Gandhian work *Hind Swaraj*. One basic criticism he raised is Gandhi's idea of 'passive resistance', and he argues it is a dangerous extreme. W. J. Wynberg was against Gandhi's idea of using 'soul force' in order to fulfil the physical and political objectives of individuals. (Pradhan, 2009)

Again, the new development model should be kept in consideration, and now people realise that it has to be done by 'putting the last first' (Heredia, 1999). In Gandhian Talisman, regarding Social planning, Gandhi talks about coming back to the last Indian. Here, it is observed that the reformist ideas propagated by Gandhi could not fulfil the rising expectations of citizens. Therefore, we can say that Gandhian ideas may not have complete relevance in contemporary times.

Conclusion

The socio-political thoughts of M.K. Gandhi are primarily drawn from his understanding of India's civil-

isation resources along with the diverse experiences that he gained in South Africa and India. Nonetheless, the Gandhian ideas were dismissed by the different practitioners in India, but they work as a sourcebook for alternative ideas on civilisation (www.manifestias.com). The classic work of Gandhi *Hind Swaraj* or India's Home Rule by Gandhi inspires the people of India to work for independence from colonial rule. Gandhi was successful in highlighting the problematic dimensions of the British domination of India. He was critical of the western culture and in this context suggested Indians to reject English customs, laws and industry. He suggested that we should adopt the traditional ways. Another distinct Gandhian way is to resolve conflict through the nonviolent and passive method (www.supersummary.com).

One primary objective of Gandhi's work *Hind Swaraj* is to see the new possibility for bringing order to society. Gandhi was critical of the existing order and therefore he wanted to establish a new order for the society. From that perspective he gave emphasis on the *Swaraj* as the primary requirement for the civilisation and culture. It needs to keep in mind that Gandhi's concept of *Swaraj* was meant for Hindustan i.e. India (Madhual, 1986, pp. 104-105). So, it necessary to keep in mind the ambiance of India while evaluating Gandhi's concept of *Swaraj*.

We can conclude that Gandhi's work *Hind Swaraj* is the most significant source of knowledge about Gandhi's socio-political thought. He states

“*Hind Swaraj* (was) written in order to show that (his countryman) are following a suicidal policy (of violence), and that, if they but revert to their own glorious civilisation, either the English would adopt the latter and become or find their occupation in India one”. (Chakrabarty, 2011 p, 4).

It can be safely concluded that Gandhi's concept of *Swaraj* still holds relevance in the contemporary period.

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