

## **Mahatma Gandhi's Hind Swaraj: A Socialistic Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

Postcolonial literature is the literature which presents the exploration of necessity, alterations, developments and differences of themes and literary ideas across literatures. Hind Swaraj can be understood in its true sense as a complex explanation of literary work, encompassing in all its relationships. History, Culture, Language, identity, and Nationalism are supposed to be the major factors responsible for creating a perspective. Hind Swaraj is a seminal text which not only throws light on the social perspective but also showcases the real behind the reality. The present paper unfolds the oriental v/s occidental perspective. The paper studies society and its unique perspective in the light of 'swaraj'.

**Keywords:** Orient, Occident, Swaraj, Postcolonialism

The word Postcolonial has become a very prominent and popular term now a days. This term refers to the period of colonization to the present day. There are a lot many outcomes colonialism that are reflected in the postcolonial era. It is a product of the experience of colonialism and its present effects on society's global development. The term post-colonial first came in existence in a British newspaper article of 1959.

The field of postcolonial studies has been gaining prominence since 1970's. Edward Said's influential critique of western civilization on the western construction of the Orient is presented in his 1978 book Orientalism. The term postcolonial is consolidated by the appearance in 1989 of Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literature by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. Since then the cognate terms 'Commonwealth' and 'Third World' were used to describe the literature of Europe's former

colonies. The term 'Third World' has been illustrated in Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction by Robert J.C Young as:-

The third world is the postcolonial world. The term third world originally invented on the model of the Third Estate of the French Revolution. The world was divided according to the two major political systems, capitalism and socialism, and these were the first and the second worlds. The third world was made up of what was left over: the non aligned nations, the new independent nations that had formally made up colonies of the imperial powers. (16)

The term 'Commonwealth' refers to the literature written in English in the countries ruled by British. They have given a new base to the literature and called it New Literature in English. Although Edward Said's Orientalism (1978) is said to have formally inaugurated the postcolonial debate..

Hind Swaraj is the most seminal work of Mahatma Gandhi and the most original contribution to political theory after Kautilya's Arthashastra. It is an alternative to feudalism, Marxism and western style democracy based on majority-ism. It is key to understanding Gandhi's life and philosophy; and to get over the present dilemma-growth without development. Published in 1909, it continues to evoke critical responses the world over. It is not a book on how to win political freedom for India; it is a book on how humanity can progress from conscious to super-conscious and moral beings.' In fact, Hind Swaraj is a manifesto for a new world order based on supremacy of ethics and morality over matter. It represents voice of the voiceless, voice of the common man of India, and the whole world. The book primarily focusses colonization, and many others are the writings in which writers have explored the comparatively new and burning aspect of literature which is the result of Postcolonialism. There are a lot many outcomes colonialism that are reflected in the postcolonial era. It is a product of the experience of colonialism and its present effects on society's global development. The term post -colonial first came in existence in a British newspaper article of 1959.

*Hind Swaraj or Indian Home-Rule* comprises of 20 short chapters. It is written in a dialogic form between the Reader and the Editor of a journal/newspaper. The advantage of the dialogic form is that it provides the Editor (here Gandhi) with an opportunity to discuss the entire gamut of issues with all their implications and intricacies. Primarily *Hind Swaraj* deals with two issues: (a) a critique of modern civilization, (b) the nature and structure of Indian Swaraj and the means and methods to achieve it. In *Hind Swaraj* he also

dwells on the condition of India as it has developed under the British rule and tutelage. He makes a basic formulation that under the impact of the British rule India is turning into an 'irreligious' country. He hastens to add that he is not thinking of any particular religion, but rather of that Religion which underlies all religions. We are turning away from God, he adds. He likens modern civilization to a 'mouse' 'gnawing' our people while apparently soothing them. Then he turns his moral gaze to some of major developments like railways and the emergence of new elite like lawyers and doctors. All these developments, he asserts, have only led to the impoverishment of the India. According to him railways have helped the British to tighten their grip over India. Besides, they have been also responsible for 'famines', epidemics and other problems for the country. He counters the argument that railways have contributed to the growth of Indian nationalism by saying that India had been a nation much before the British arrived. In chapter XI of *Hind Swaraj* he argues that lawyers have contributed more to the degradation of India. Besides, they have accentuated the Hindu-Muslim dissensions, helped the British to consolidate their position and have sucked the blood of the poor of India. In the next chapter he describes how doctors have failed the Indian society. In his opinion, doctors have been primarily responsible for making the people 'self-indulgent' and taking less care of their bodies. He concludes his critique of modern civilization by comparing it to an *Upas* tree, a poisonous plant which destroys all life around it. In another chapter of the *Hind Swaraj* he examines the English educational system introduced in India and describes it as 'false education'. For him the basic aim of education should be to bring our senses under our control and to help imbibe ethical behaviour in our life. He attacks the newly emerged elite, a by-product of the Macaulay system of education, as they have enslaved India.

Swaraj and the method to attain it was the main concern of the *Hind Swaraj*. In chapter IV of *Hind Swaraj* he puts forward a basic formulation that mere transfer of power from British hands to Indian hands would not lead to true swaraj. He adds that would be nothing more than having 'English rule without Englishmen'. In that case, he argues, India may be called 'Hindustan' but actually it would remain 'Englistan'. Hence it would not be swaraj of his conception. And in chapter XIV (How Can India Become Free?) he tries to define true swaraj by saying that if we (individuals) became free, India would be free. It is in the same vain that he opines that 'it is swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves! Such a swaraj, he further adds, would have to be experienced by each one of us. Gandhi also uses the term swaraj for home-

rule or self-government for the Indian people. But he makes it clear that there is a symbiotic relationship between swaraj as 'self- rule' of individual Indians and swaraj as the home-rule or self- government for the Indian people. In other words, home-rule that Indian people would achieve would be true only to the extent they are successful in being 'self ruling' individuals. In the chapter XV. Gandhi puts forward the thesis that the real challenge is to free millions of our people and not simply to change the government. How could it be achieved? Not by the use of arms and violence. This is for two reasons, he adds. One, any resort to violent rebellion would require thousands of Indians being armed which in itself is too much of a tall order. Two, more importantly, if India resorts to arms, the 'holy land' of India would become 'unholy'. In the process, India would become a land worse than Europe. He vehemently rejects the use of brute force for attaining swaraj for India. He introduces new arguments for such rejection. One, there is a close relationship between the means and the end. Thus he rejects the basic formulations of Indian revolutionaries that India could be freed only by violent means both on moral and ethical grounds. Besides, he also rejects the Moderates' view that Indians could be freed by mere supplication and petitioning. Unless backed by effective sanctions that would be an exercise in futility. Hence India would require passive resistance, based on 'love-force' or 'soul-force' to move forward on the road to Swaraj. In chapter XVII he elaborately dwells on the concept of passive resistance, albeit Satyagraha. He explains the concept of passive resistance as a method of securing rights by going through 'personal sufferings'. Here by implications he justifies the use of soul force on the basis of the concept of 'relative truth'. He further argues that passive resistance is not a 'weapon of the weak'. Rather it is a weapon of the strong. He concludes the entire discussion by saying that real home rule is possible only through passive resistance. But he also hastens to add that a true passive resistor will have to observe 'perfect chastity' adopt 'voluntary poverty' 'follow truth' and 'cultivate fearlessness.

The book, in the words of its author, has had a "chequered career".<sup>2</sup> Margaret Chatterjee called Hind Swaraj 'a very basic document for the study of Gandhi's thought'. B. R. Nanda called it Gandhi's 'confession of faith'. Erik Erikson called it 'a rather incendiary manifesto.' Dennis Dalton called it, 'a proclamation of ideological independence.' And Judith Brown called it 'the nearest he came to producing a sustained work of political theory'. Similarly, Gerald Heard compared Hind Swaraj with Rousseau's Social Contract. George Catlin (1950) compared it with The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyala. It would not

be wrong to say that Hind Swaraj is the seed from which the tree of Gandhian philosophy has grown to its full stature. For those interested in Gandhian thought, it is the right place to start; for it is here that Gandhi presents his basic ideas in their proper relationships. And for those who wish to study his thought more methodically, it remains the norm by which to assess the theoretical significance of his other writings, including the Autobiography. Gandhism is a body of ideas that describes the inspiration, vision and the life work of Mohandas Gandhi. It is particularly associated with his contributions to the idea of nonviolent resistance, sometimes also called civil resistance. The two pillars of Gandhism are truth and non-violence.

Another major concept which he introduces in *Hind Swaraj* is that of the composite nature of Indian nationalism. In *Hind Swaraj* he puts forward the argument that Indian people constituted a nation much before the British came. The coming of the Mohammedans earlier had hardly made any difference to the fact of India being a nation. In the process, he argues that India could not cease to be a nation simply because people belonging to different religions reside here. People with different religious backgrounds would continue to constitute one nation so long as they maintain the principle of non-interference in one another's religion. In the process, he makes a very profound statement:

'If the Hindus believe that India should be peopled only by Hindus, they are living in dreamland. Hindus, Mohammedans, Parsees and Christians who have made India their country *are* fellow countrymen and they will have to live in unity if only for their own interests. In no part of the world are one nationality and one religion synonymous terms nor has it ever been in India'.

Elsewhere in *Hind Swaraj* he rejects the British thesis that India was never a nation. Rather it has always been a conglomerate of different creeds and communities. He asserts that our seers and sages laid the foundation of our national unity and Indian nationhood by establishing centres of pilgrimage on the four corners of India. In the process, they fired the imagination of our people with the idea of nationhood. Thus in *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi lays a real foundation of secular nationalism for which he lived and died for.

By 1945 Gandhi had already declared Nehru as his political heir; and it was also becoming certain that India was going to be a free country in the near future. In his letter to

Nehru dated 5th October 1945, Gandhi pledged to stand by 'the system of government envisaged in his Hind Swaraj which had been confirmed by his life-long experiences.

Subsequently they met in November 1945 with a view to thrash out the issues involved. Gandhi again wrote a letter to Nehru on 13, November 1945 in which tried to sum up the major points of agreement which emerged out of their meeting. There points were:

- That there should be equal right and opportunities for all.
- That there should be parity between the villagers and the town dwellers in terms of food, drink, clothing etc.
- That the unit of the society would be village or a small and manageable group of people who would be self-sufficient in terms of their basic necessities and would live in mutual cooperation.

In fact, *Hind Swaraj* could very well be read as a classic work of 'recognized and established value'. It is to be read as a document for call for reflection and reasoned action, and not only for arm-chair reading. But it could not be read as a manifesto of a political actor promising 'heaven, on the earth'. It gives a call for 'sweat, blood, patience and perseverance but not as a piece of cacophonous preaching, rather as a guide. It should be read more for the questions it raises rather than the answers it provides. Changes are always an essential part of any thought or argument. *Hind Swaraj* is a seminal work by Gandhi displaying the action, politics, in a clever way of an argument in an epistolary form. Society and literature are interdependent. A unique but an interesting portrayal of society is displayed in a semi-circular way.

*Hind Swaraj* could be read as a perennial work which could always be subjected to new interpretations to suit the changing needs of time. It has the strength of containing diagnostic, prognostic and prescriptive ideas. It is not for nothing that one of its prescriptive ideas, viz. satyagraha not only led to the demolition of the British Empire leading to the independence of India but also started the process of decolonization which ultimately freed the 'weaker races' from the clutches of the Western dominance.

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