

Hind Swaraj of Gandhi

March 10, 2020

Source: *The Hindu*

Manifest pedagogy: Hind Swaraj is the foundational text of Gandhian world view. It's ideas on economy, polity and society and the nature of satyagraha are very important for both the History and Ethics section.

In news: Chief Justice of India, S.A. Bobde, at International Judicial Conference 2020 cited Gandhi's Hind Swaraj and observed that "real rights are a result of the performance of duty."

Placing it in syllabus: Hind Swaraj

Dimensions:

- Context in which it is written
- Outline of the central ideas
- Relevance for today's India

Content:

Context in which it is written:

- **Hind Swaraj or Indian Home-Rule** is written by Mohandas K. Gandhi in a dialogic form between the Reader and the Editor of a journal/newspaper.
- He wrote this book in his **native language, Gujarati**, while traveling from London to South Africa on board SS Kildonan Castle between November 13 and November 22, 1909.
- The Gujarati edition **was banned** by the British on its publication **as a seditious text** in British India.
- Gandhi then translated it into English.
- The **English edition was not banned** by the British, who concluded that the book would have little impact on the

English-speaking Indians' subservience to the British and British ideas.

- It has also been translated to French.

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.

Its central ideas:

Malaise of Modern Civilization:

- Gandhi's Hind Swaraj is primarily known for its **critique of modern civilization.**
- He makes a basic formulation that under the impact of the British rule **India is turning into an 'irreligious' country.**
- He talks about **Religion which underlies all religions.**
- He is of the opinion that **major developments** like railways, industries and the **emergence of new elites** like lawyers and doctors have **only led to the impoverishment of India.**
- He argues that these elites have **accentuated the Hindu-Muslim dissensions** and helped the British to consolidate their position.
- He concludes his critique of modern civilization by comparing it to an Upas tree, a poisonous plant which destroys all life around it.

English educational system:

- He has described 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 of the 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 tries to define true swaraj by saying that if we (individuals) became free, India would be free.
- He opines that **'it is swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves'**.
- He made 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.
- **Home-rule that Indian people would achieve would be true only to the extent they are successful in being 'self ruling' individuals.**
- The real challenge to **free millions of people could not be achieved by the use of arms and violence**, as the 'holy land' of India would become 'unholy'.
- He urged that **India would require passive resistance, based on 'love-force' or 'soul-force'** to move forward on the road to Swaraj.
- He explained the **concept of passive resistance** as a method of securing rights by going through 'personal sufferings'.
- He justified the use of soul force on the basis of the **concept of 'relative truth'**.
- He called the passive resistance not a 'weapon of the weak' but rather, a **"weapon of the strong"**.
- He also hastens to add that a true passive resistor will have to **observe 'perfect chastity'** adopt **'voluntary poverty'** **'follow truth'** and **'cultivate fearlessness'**.

Indian Nationhood:

- He propounded the **composite nature of Indian nationalism.**
- 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.**
- He rejected the British thesis that **India** was never a nation but reaffirmed that it has **always been a conglomerate of different creeds and communities.**
- He asserts that **seers and sages laid the foundation of national unity and Indian nationhood** by establishing centres of pilgrimage on the four corners of India and fired the imagination of our people with the idea of nationhood.

Vision of an Alternative Society:

- Hind Swaraj presents the broad contours of an alternative society as a **new civilizational framework in a rudimentary form.**
- He defines it as that **'mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty'.**
- He further adds that **moral behaviour is nothing but to attain 'mastery over one's mind'.**
- He believed that the **ancient Indian civilization fits the bill for being the true civilization.**
- Its **core values are** limits to self-indulgence in terms of luxuries and pleasures, emphasis on ancestral profession, rural life, its curb on unnecessary competitiveness and its preference for small scale technologies and decentralized polity.
- He admitted that at present modern India is moving away from these old values.

Relevance for today's India:

- Though most of these ideas have been discarded by the practitioners of 'realpolitik' all over the world

including India, the **intellectual interest and inquiries continue to persist** as it is seen as a **source book for ideas for an alternative civilisational framework.**

- Gandhi anticipated some of the **disastrous consequences of modern civilization** much more clearly than most of his contemporaries could do. E.g. Ecological imbalances including the **problem of climate change.**
- History is a witness to Gandhi's formulation that **unbridled use of technology breeds concentration of power in a few hands.**
- Hind Swaraj goes a long way to ensure the marginalization of millions, how they are the victims of domination and their exploitation at the hands of the powers-that-be.
- It **gives a call for 'sweat, blood, patience and perseverance'** as a piece of guide.
- It could be read as a **perennial work** which could always be **subjected to new interpretations** to suit the changing needs of time.
- On a more positive side, **satyagraha as a passive resistance** has attracted **worldwide recognition** as the only right way to right a wrong.
- It has the **strength of containing diagnostic, prognostic and prescriptive ideas.**
- Hence long as humankind seeks for a better, meaningful social life, Hind Swaraj will always have its relevance.