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Revisiting Gandhian Hind Swaraj: A Criticism of Western Civilization



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Gandhi was a political figure as well as a social and political reformer, making him one of the finest leaders the world has ever seen. He was a visionary and spiritual leader who was a humanist and who started the nation on the path to freedom. His nonviolent philosophy has earned him admiration on a global scale. Gandhi picked up his pen and wrote timeless masterpieces like *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* and *Hind Swaraj* to express and disseminate his views and life philosophies.

Between November 13 and 22, 1909, while he was returning from England to South Africa following an unsuccessful mission on behalf of the Indians in South Africa, he wrote 30,000 lines in Gujarati on the ship *Kildonan Castle's* stationery under the title *Hind Swaraj*, or *Indian Home Rule*. When the right hand would tire, 40 of the 275 pages were written using the left hand; just 16 lines were crossed out and a small number of words were altered in the manuscripts. The writing style of it is conversational, with the author acting as both the Editor and the Reader. The reader is a metaphor for any perceptive member of Indian society.

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 met 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"

The book is intended for a diverse group of readers, including the Indian country, "the English," the radicals and moderates of the Indian National Congress, and expatriate Indians who are drawn to terrorism and political violence. Gandhi refers to the common Indians, regardless of their caste, religion, language, or geographic location, as well as the recently formed middle class. And by "the English," he refers to both British nationals residing in the United Kingdom and the British ruling class residing in India. Gandhi thought that he would be able to provide Indians with a modernised understanding of dharma through *Hind Swaraj*, which would equip them for life in the contemporary world.

At the time he wrote this book, the nation was attempting to rebel against the British who were ruling us. Gandhi developed his own strategy for opposing the British. He made a deliberate attempt to present his views on "Swaraj," or home sovereignty, to the country in *Hind Swaraj*. This book can be viewed as an alternative way of life, even though its anti-British agenda and methods for achieving home rule, or "Swaraj," were its main goals. I want to investigate these "alternate" contemporary interpretations of Gandhi and assess their applicability in the current global context.

Main Issues in Gandhi's Hind Swaraj

It is crucial to remember that Gandhi's criticism of the West stems from his tactics to teach the Indian people about their glorious past, restore their self-esteem, and resist everything that was inherently Western. After escaping the British, he

critiques the current state of Western Civilisation. It should be mentioned that the West is responsible for introducing the idea of "modern" to us. Gandhi discusses an "alternative" modernity that he both invents and incorporates the Western definition of modern.

Gandhi rejects the contemporary Western Civilisation in Hind Swaraj. According to him, Western Civilisation was materialistic and placed greater value on material possessions than on moral principles, the truth, ethics, and so forth. For this reason, he disapproves of contemporary Western Civilisation since it is an alien culture that is inappropriate in the Indian setting. This is since he believes Indian civilization to be far superior to Western Civilisation in terms of spirituality and human values.

Gandhi argues in Hind Swaraj that we cannot entirely reject anything that originates in the West. However, we must reject the unnecessary and accept the finest of the West. In addition, I believe that Gandhi's beliefs were modern since they had a strong futuristic bent. Gandhi, for instance, advocated using traditional lifestyles and rejected excessive industrialization because he believed that if man relied too much on machinery, he might grow disillusioned. According to him, a machine can cause a person to even lose sight of human values.

As a result, he challenges the material foundation of contemporary Western Civilisation. He defines civilisation as something quite different. It is a sense that will guide him down the path of righteousness rather than just material development. He continues by saying that contemporary Western Civilisation is deeply damaged and detached from human values. Thus, he goes after the foundation or essence of Western Civilisation.

He targets several Western establishments, including the Parliament, the Railways, the Educational System, solicitors, physicians, and so on. The English parliamentary system is compared to a "prostitute" by him. He asserts that the parliament is not a smoothly operating institution, despite what the public believes. He claims that this is not actually the case and it operates based on dread. Prime Ministers continuously utilise the parliament as a forum to advance their personal interests at the expense of the wellbeing of others. The so-called educated electors, he claims, are self-serving hypocrites who only look out for themselves.

The author criticizes the railways for increasing life pace and causing corruption, allowing the British to control India and

increase crime. He also criticizes lawyers and doctors for teaching immorality and tightening the British's hold. He believes doctors should focus on health rather than disease cure, as the British use them to hinder India. Gandhi's critique of Western institutions highlights their hollowness and artificiality, raising awareness of their dominion over the east. This critical analysis is crucial for post-colonial writers, educating them on the politics of Western domination and promoting critical thinking.

Gandhi's resistance against modern Western Civilisation was centered on the use of "Swadeshi" or indigenous goods, which he aimed to revive in every aspect of life. He emphasised the importance of human labor and the concept of simple living and high thinking, which can be adopted by anyone to pursue other important things in life. This idea, which could be seen as an "alternative modernity" in pre-independent India, was a powerful critique of the modern Western Civilisation.

Gandhi believed that English education was both a necessity and a bane, as demonstrated by the efforts of English chancellor Lloyd George to revive the Welsh language. He argued that if we could revive our language, we could eventually get rid of the English language and become slaves under the West. Gandhi's understanding of the power of the colonizer's language can be applied to present-day post-colonial studies, where imperialist worldviews persist through language and the imposition of Western cultural hegemony over the colonized subjects. By rejecting Western materialistic culture and machines, Gandhi aimed to create an alternative way of living that was both sustainable and beneficial.

Conclusion

One important literary work that provides a deep grasp of Gandhian thought is Hind Swaraj. It is a foundational work for everyone interested in learning about Gandhian philosophy because of its clear and straightforward tone, concise phrases, and lack of overt synchronisation. The book seeks to awaken Indians from their sleep, since they are constantly being brainwashed into materialism and are intoxicated by modernity and Westernisation. Gandhi saw India as a spiritual and religious civilization and reasoned from a trans-civilizational standpoint. He urges contemporary Indians to abandon colonial mentality and the obsession with machinery in favour of criticising materialistic and immoral Western Civilisation. In his view, the world can only achieve swaraj if people learn to live in harmony with one another while keeping in mind differences in caste, creed, and religion.

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