

Remembering Hind Swaraj

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‘Hind Swaraj’ a Seminal ‘booklet’, written in the style of a ‘Dialogue’ by Mahatma Gandhi, was first serialized in the Indian Opinion, edited by Gandhiji in South Africa, around hundred years back. I call it ‘Gandhiji’s Manifesto’ since one could find germinated in it later ideas of the Mahatma – socio-political-economic-religious-moral – culminating in his ‘Sarvodaya’ Philosophy not excluding man’s environ, the nature and the universe. I call Gandhiji’s brand of humanism as ‘Ecological Humanism’. Through it Gandhiji ‘problematised’ or provided a Critique to a sensitized a Protest against the then civilisational trends and concepts dominated by a particular spirit of ‘modern’ science and technology, in Gandhiji’s vocabulary ‘VIOLENT’ or exploitative, domineering and centralized and tried to speak about a ‘COUNTER – CULTURE’ for meaningful and sustainable existence of Man and Nature all over the Globe.

The Communist Manifesto, through written much earlier, had its advocates and practitioners. Gandhiji’s manifesto remained virgin. Even independent India did not think it worthwhile to consult while restructuring its policy and economy, etc. Ofcourse academic interest in it remained.

What has provoked me to raise about it now? I mean is there any urgency?

A spectre is hanging before us – the spectre of loosing man’s identity in the wake of an emerging new globalization-culture reducing human beings to a ‘consuming animal’ and degrading women in particular to ‘commodity’ and motivating agency for sale of consumer articles.

The Human Development Report, come out every year. What these have held out after pursuing of so many models of ‘development’ for so many years --- Liberal, Neo-classical, Marxist, Keynesian, etc. is deplorable and hopeless, in Gandhiji’s vocabulary ‘violent’.

Only one (1) data is staggering. In the ‘developing’ countries around 100 crore people (out of 480 crore) live below poverty line and in the ‘developed’ countries 10 crore (out of 130 crore) people have remained on poverty line. This is so economics and H.D.I. are concerned.

Ideologically or philosophically – is the Scenario any better? How many we followed – Capitalism, Communism, Socialism, Democracy, etc., with adjustments here and there. What kind of situation has emerged – Disparities, Deprivation, Discrimination, Inequality, Self-Centrism, Apartheid, Ethnic and Communal strives, Terrorism, Regionalism, Security Syndrome, Religious Fundamentalism, Jingoism, Unholy nexus of vested Resources, Environmental Pollution, etc., making overall human existence miserable and survival questionable.

Thirty five (35) years earlier (1973) late Mohit Sen, an erudite Communist and Trade Union Leader, while speaking at a symposium organized by the Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, on the Hind Swaraj itself, described the Indian Socio-economic – political Scenario as

pathetic and ‘contradictory development’ deepened by a sickening moral crisis and commented that while the ‘Man of Morals’ gave us a PROGRAM we unwittingly ignored it. Sen’s one justification was that the ‘greatest moral regeneration of modern India’ was accomplished in the thirties of the last century due to this program. Situation today has worsened; particularly greed, corruption and criminalization have reached an uncontrolled proportion affecting just governance. Interestingly the Government of Bombay and later on the Government of India proscribed Hind Swaraj as soon as it came out in book form in Gujrati in March, 1910. They realized the importance of the book, its seditious contents for the British. It shook the very foundation of their Governance. But we failed to realise it.

The present inter-action starts from this point, Hind Swaraj contains the basic Principles on which Mahatma Gandhi’s Social Philosophy is based.

True, Gandhiji was not a philosopher in the academic sense of the term. He said action was his domain. In fact, his was action-research. But we have a definite blue-print through his huge writings and utterances including a pursuable Methodology by all to achieve. That was unique of him. He even spoke of principles to raise one’s standard to become worthy of his society – Truth or Swaraj – and himself lived on these to demonstrate the practicability.

Reverting to Hind Swaraj one would find it typically Gandhian as even the later Gandhiji would hold and express his views on matters mundane and metaphysical touching every aspect and subject under the Sun.

Written at a particular backdrop and perspective Hind Swaraj echoes the feelings of Pritrim Sorokin, as contained in his seminal book ‘Reconstruction of Humanity’, about the spirit, modes and trend of ‘Modern’ or ‘Western civilization, and questioned the validity of its imitation by the Indians forgetting their own rich Civilisation, which was one reason of their enslavement. It also raised questions about Truth – Non – Truth, Violence – Non – Violence, Ethics – Non – Ethics, material – Spritual or Moral, mode of Government and power-structure, proportion and type of Technology and Machinery or Mechanisation, faster Transport, certain professions, certain Institutions, and advocated an ECO-ETHICAL standard of living, in modern parlance, through Co-Sharing by a decentralized Polity and Society. Megalopolitan, Monolithic, centralised culture sanctioning man and man always pricked the Mahatma.

Hind Swarak evoked mixed reaction. Mahamati Gokhale thought that Gandhiji himself would destroy it. Till his Supreme Self-Sacrifice Gandhiji, however, stuck to it. The reason is not far to seek. To him it was a ‘theory of life’, teaching the “Gos[pe]l of Love in place of hate, replace violence with self-sacrifice, puts Soul Force against Brute Force.

Violence, magnified by nuclear arsenals, and depletion of natural resources and environmental pollution and above all separatist tendencies and Exploitation have brought Humanity and other Zoological and Biological Species to the brink of precipice today. Are we feeling the urgency to hark back to Gandhiji and his Class to save us from our predicament? The ‘Quaint’ (Mahamati Gokhale) little book may hold the key to our survival.

