



DECOLONIZATION OF THE INDIAN MIND: A CRITICAL STUDY OF GANDHI'S *HIND SWARAJ*

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Abstract

Philosophy of freedom has remained most debated concern of the 19th and 20th century Oriental countries. The encounter of western and eastern cultures reached warlike climax during early 20th century India. The proliferation in intellectualism and humanism opened up new discourse of political and spiritual freedom and equality. Various thinkers criticised colonial government across the globe and initiated freedom movements. The exploitation and subjugation which colonizer practiced over colonized explained in majority of theories. But there is interesting issue about western culture that is its hegemonic impression on colonized minds. The western culture established and imprinted its hegemonic impression on Eastern subjects in such a depth that people started condemning their own culture. Many critics have explained it in considerable depth. One of such thinkers was Gandhi who looked at western superiority from wrong end of the telescope. He developed his own views on colonial government. Gandhi's discourse of freedom consists of self consciousness and self control. His work Hind Swaraj nicely portrays how Indian people accepted superiority of white people. Majority of people examined the existence of whites in India as a result of their superiority in weapons but Gandhi rejects this hypothesis. Gandhi formulates a discourse where he says that we are enslaved by our mind that is the reason why we are colonized. Thus, it would be crucial to map down how the process of decolonization of Indian mind might be helpful in getting rid of British rules.

Keywords: *freedom, decolonization, hegemonic-impression, subjugation, exploitation.*



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In 20th century India, the wave of freedom was at prime point. People were struggling against coloniser to have free India. Though the struggle of decolonization was at its peak

nobody had a faint idea about how and what India would be after getting freedom. They were contradictory in their mind i.e. they (colonized) wanted English civilization but not English people. They appreciated the way in which English people were used to live even many of them tried to imitate them but could not accept English people. Majority of Indian minds thought that the problem was lying with colonizer not with their (colonizer's) system. Many of them wanted freedom through bloodshed and violence. Such sorts of people were of opinion that once they have free India they would think about how to live in better ways. They wanted to have free India at any cost even without knowing proper meaning of Swaraj.¹ Such sort of people had believed that only their bodies were colonised and upon which coloniser ruled and they were in need to get their bodies free from the oppressors.

Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* is a critical response to colonial mindset and their hegemonic impression over Indian people. Majority of people were of thought that they had been colonised in terms of their physical body. But Gandhi felt that it is not our body which is colonised but our mind as well. The book details the process of decolonization of the Indian mind. Gandhi opines that unless and until we would not decolonise our mind, we would not have true swaraj, it would be only transference of power position. According to Gandhi the word 'swaraj' is not just something which refers to intellectualism or to the work of 'brain' but it equally denotes heart and soul too. For Gandhi swaraj is not for some but for all. According to Gandhi, swaraj is not external thing which can be offered or gifted but it is something to be experienced. One can experience swaraj not offer or achieve it.

Gandhi states that if we have control over our body and mind, any extraneous element cannot rule over us. In *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi argues that we are colonised by our mind and we need to decolonise our mind. Gandhi says that our educated Indians are eager to behave like English man; they are interested in English education which is totally based on brain and whose prime focus is to make and earn profit. It is very clear that an education system which teaches us nothing but the way how to make more profit, would lead us to make much use of other and achieve our goal in cost of others lost. Thus, Gandhi rejects such education system because it produces only businessmen whose prime concern is to prove their selfish aims, which is the key characteristic of colonialism. Gandhi writes in the Chapter 7 Why was India Lost? "it is truer to say that we gave India to the English than that India was lost" (36). Thus, because of colonial

education system we lost our country or it would be rather fair to say that our English educated Indians offered India to English people to rule over us.

Gandhi criticises and rejects English education system because it only produces colonizers, artificial men, who are deviated from the natural nature and even from their soul. That is the reason why Gandhi calls English civilization as destroyer of soul, body, and mind (82). Gandhi says, “by receiving English education, we have enslaved the nation” (79).² This education system mere produces doctors and lawyers whose task is to play with human heart. Gandhi says English education taught us that without them (coloniser) we are unable to do our work. Thus, we accept slavery knowingly. Gandhi doesn’t say that we should not think rationally; instead we should think logically and rationally that why we are colonised, why India is colonised. When we succeed to know the reason why we are slave, we wouldn’t need to force English to leave India. They would leave their own. Thus, Gandhi focuses on the point that when we would decolonise our mind; we will have free India within no time.

Gandhi states that our ancient judiciary system was worthwhile because it was meant to be for people’s betterment. He states lawyer plays significant role in keeping India under the rule of English. Gandhi says that if we i.e. colonised native Indian stop to go to lawyer, we would have free India. Because if we do not go to lawyer and solve our problem with mutual understanding than there would be no lawyer and if there is no lawyer there would be no court and again if there is no court there would be no law or authority who rule over people. If we do not go to court, for whom they make laws, for themselves? Of course not. And if they make law for themselves, to whom they would govern? Over themselves? If yes than what would they do in India, certainly nothing. And if they want to remain in India, they will have to live their life as we Indians live. It is not Indians who are going to imitate and live their life according to English people but it is English people who will have to live according to Indian culture and the way Indians live. And if they would not like to live Indian life, it would be better for them to leave India. They will have to give reverence to Indian culture, Indian religion, and Indian people. They will have to learn Indian languages to communicate with Indians.

Gandhi further notes that when colonisers start livening an Indian live, there would be no superior place for them in India but an equal place. When we look at them as our fellow beings, they would not call themselves our masters but our friends. Gandhi criticises those Indians who give false reverence and do sychophency i.e. flattery to English people because it is these people

who make coloniser feel that they are superior than Indians, and after that they start to treat us as a slave or inferior. Gandhi opposes those people who believe that we are colonised. Gandhi states we are colonised because we think that we are colonised, once we stop to think that we are colonised we would be free in real term because the very idea of colonisation is in our mind. Gandhi says we are colonised through our mind and we need to decolonise it. According to Gandhi, the whole India is not slave but those alone who have been affected by Western civilization, they have become enslaved.

Gandhi rejects western civilisation which is based on mind and only seeks bodily pleasure. Western civilisation is interested in how we can make much use of machine and give much rest to body. It prepares machine who can cook food and serve, watch clothes, even nurse babies. Gandhi says such civilisation breaks human bondage, human affection. It gives much priority to machine rather than human. Gandhi does not opposite machine but our craze and madness behind machine. Thus, such civilisation leads us away from nature of our natural being. Gandhi rejects it also because it does not give equal right to every profession and we should keep it in mind that profession is directly related with people. Only Doctors and lawyers and other so called upper grade profession are considered worthwhile in western civilisation. What about farmer, worker and sweeper etc.? Such professions are not given so much important in western civilisation. Thus, the civilisation itself provides us the concept of superiority and inferiority. Gandhi does not disapprove new resources of nation but the condition he puts is that these resources should be accessible to all. What Gandhi wants to prove is that Indian civilisation is worthwhile than western and rejects the very idea of western superiority over Indian inferiority. Broadly speaking, Indian civilisation is superior to western civilisation. This is the process of valuing and giving importance to one's own culture. Gandhi's aim is that if everyone start to think like this and give value to one's own culture, India would not remain any more colonised.³ Thus according to Gandhi we need to decolonise our mind from such notion.

Gandhi rejects the very place of doctors and lawyers in India because they loot people. Ethically the task of doctor is to cure the society but it does not happen in real case. Gandhi says, doctor is interested in how many people are falling ill as he is interested in making money. And therefore there's lack of human affection in this business. The same case can be applied to the profession of lawyers whose chief task is to keep people always engage in quarrels. Morally lawyer's task is to give justice to people but he is interested in how long the juridical system last

for the case. The much time juridical system takes to seek justice, the more he would earn. Gandhi asks ironically what sort of education is this whose chief goal is to make much of people, which produces heartless men who are interested in fulfilling their own selfish wish. What Gandhi tries to say is that we need to understand all these things which are responsible for our slavery. Once we get rid of all these, we would be free on its own. Gandhi says we are fascinated toward doctors and lawyers and the result is that we are mentally slave. We think that without doctors and lawyers we could not live better life. Gandhi opposes such sort of mental condition because it leads us to accept that we are unable to live without them. That is the reason we are slave.

Gandhi says when we rule over ourselves we would have home rule. Swaraj is not for some but it is for all. Gandhi writes everyone will have to take swaraj for himself. What others get for me is not Home Rule but foreign rule. Here Gandhi's tone is very clear that he wants people to not hope that some other will give them swaraj. They will have to take swaraj their own. But it is possible only when they know the real meaning of swaraj. They will have to free from their colonised mind. In *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi writes that when people feel that coloniser can make them slave but not their soul, they would proceed toward the true swaraj.

Gandhi says that western civilisation teaches us how we can take much use of machine and do our work. It gives much importance to mind related work and less to physical work. It forgets that mind functions well if the body is healthy. Its prime focus is to fulfil bodily desires. When we give more than needed rest and fulfil desires in excess we fall ill and we need doctor. We do not do physical work, not feel hunger, thirst, and even sleep, as a result we need doctor, we take digestion and medicine for sleep, become slave of mind because it is mind which does not allow us to do physical labour. But the important fact is that why our mind does not allow us to do manual labour, answer would be lining in the imitation of western culture which is only interested in fulfilling bodily desires. What Gandhi tries to say is that we must keep control over mind, otherwise we will never be free. Thus, what European civilisation considers good, Gandhi rejects their idea and considers it worst.

Conclusion: Thus, in this book Gandhi's main concern is to understand the real nature of thing. According to Gandhi we have to remove and erase the idea of colonialism from our mind because we are colonised by mind. Thus, *Hind Swaraj* puts the point that if we control our mind from that rubbish thought and make it think in right direction, no external force can make us

colonised. And that is how Gandhi argues that if English wants to live in India; they will have to live an Indian life. Thus, *Hind Swaraj* details the process of decolonization of the Indian mind. Gandhi's vision to colonial oppression is quite wider than normal understanding of it. Writer and psychologist Ashis Nandy explains how colonial discourse impacted our minds and behaviour more than mere physical captivation. In his work *The Intimate Enemy* he deeply explains this psychological impression of colonial discourse keeping Gandhi in centre. Lot many other thinkers also promoted Gandhi's idea of swaraj and sought solution of decolonization from colonialism.

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¹ In Gujarati language the word *SWARAJ* means, in simple way, independence. Gandhi uses it in two ways: 1 independence and 2 rule over self- in Gujarati if we split the word *SWARAJ*, it would be *SWA* i.e. self and *RAJ* i.e. rule. Thus *SWARAJ* means rule of self and also independence from other ruler.

² In his works and speeches Gandhi explains how Indian became slave of western system by adopting their education. Gandhi could see the deliberate intention of Macaulian education system which is based on discrimination and inequalities.

³ Gandhi refers to the dispute among oriental and occidental philosophy. But his prime focus is to value one's own culture and not to consider it primitive and uncultured though other may say so.

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