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**POORNA SWARAJ: Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place****Introduced by Dhananjay Rai****Authors: M.K. Gandhi, Dhananjay Rai****New Delhi, Penguin Random House India, October 2023,****Pages: 280, Rs. 599, ISBN: 9780670098279, Imprint:****Vintage Books****Reviewed By****Mitalee Mahapatra**

Much like the growth of a plant into a tree, it is indispensable to acknowledge that the realisation of Poorna Swaraj or Complete Independence, cannot be attained within a limited or curtailed timeframe. Perhaps, Poorna Swaraj is unthinkable without addressing the people's social, economic and political concerns. These concerns have been outlined by Gandhi during the train journey from Sevagram to Bardoli in his seminal work *Constructive Programme: its meaning and place*, first published in 1941 and later on revised and enlarged in 1944, 1945 and 1948. Perhaps, this exemplary work was an outline for inner change in an individual, which would thereupon bring about a qualitative wholesome social change. Reviving the essence of Gandhian thoughts, the book under review, *Poorna Swaraj: Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place* explores Gandhi's vision of a free and ideal India, based on his *Constructive Programme*. Though the original text largely appears to primarily deal with socio-economic concerns,

however it is important to note that, in essence, Gandhi did not break away or deviate from mainstream politics when he launched his constructive programme, which he identifies it to be an ongoing process for achieving the finality; Poorna Swaraj. The 18-point constructive programme became the most accepted framework for the new India he aspired to see upon the attainment of Swaraj. Today as we talk about a Viksit Bharat by 2047, the idea and vision of the constructive programme continues to hold its relevance. Thus, Dr. Dhananjay Rai's book revives the legacy of Poorna Swaraj in this Twenty First century.

*Poorna Swaraj: Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place* is an academic piece that attempts to explore the context, objective and contemporary relevance of Gandhi's notions of constructive programme within the broader framework of the philosophy of Poorna Swaraj. Poorna Swaraj is unachievable in the absence real participation of the people, which nowadays is very common in liberal democracies where people are orchestrated largely by the political parties. While the *Hind Swaraj* found its due place in the shelves of political thought; *Constructive Programme* got insufficient attention and remained overlooked in independent India. Thus, Rai's book attempts to reconcile the philosophy proper (Hind Swaraj/Swaraj) and the philosophy practical (Constructive Programme); which has been a long overdue study. This critical edition is divided into four parts; the *Text* authored by Gandhi covering the eighteen items (49 pages) is preceded by a comprehensive contextual *Introduction* (88 pages) discussing the biography of the text from 1917-1948, followed by an *Afterword* (38 pages) and a long set of *Notes* (93 pages), all three written by Rai.

It's an irony that academia celebrates Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* but has undervalued the immanent text. Thus, Rai gives Gandhi's constructive programme a meaningful place in academia.

Through his academic piece, he attempts to fill the two lacunas of a liberal democracy/politics i.e. of definite political spaces and constrained representation by expanding it into a deliberative and participatory form through the conceptualisation of constructive programme as a mechanism providing a de-definite/ redefined space of politics and de-constrained representation. This volume brings to light Gandhi's road map for an egalitarian society by contemplating the mechanism of constructive programme which includes eighteen non-political domains: Communal Unity, Removal of Untouchability, Prohibition, Khadi, Other Village Industries, Village Sanitation, New or Basic Education, Adult Education, Women, Education in Health and Hygiene, Provincial Languages, National Languages, Economic Equality, Kisan (farmers), Labour, Adivasis (tribal), Lepers and Students<sup>1</sup> from the lens of a political scientist and thereby interprets it as a theory of extra parliamentary, which enlarges the scope of politics. While the conventional idea of 'extra parliamentary' is associated with social movements or activities of non-state actors, this study uses the concept in a definite sense where extra parliamentary does not work in isolation from parliamentary politics. Constructive programme as extra parliamentary addresses the context of serious limitations of the liberal-parliamentary-democracy model endorsed by liberal political theory as it holds the potential "to create the political space and

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<sup>1</sup> The sequence of these items are as per the contents mentioned by Gandhi in his original book; Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place. (1945). India: Navajivan Publishing House.

political subject immediately during the imminent crippling of the structure from within" (p. LXXVII).

In practice, the constructive programme was not a departure from politics, rather it ended up having profound political ramifications as it widened the meaning of extra parliamentary by incorporating "political action in those areas which are not even considered sites of political action" (p. LXXI). Hence, it proved to be an alternative approach to political engagement and interaction that was intended to revitalise and enhance mainstream politics. This alternative political mode, which the author convincingly terms 'extra parliamentary', generated remarkable political momentum and activism and continues to hold similar potential today. In essence, while constructive work seemed non-political on the surface, it was actually pursuing political objectives through different means outside of conventional parliamentary processes.

The book offers two broad understanding of this programme which can be implemented in present times also; first constructive programme promotes participatory politics in place of politics as mobilisation. Second, it revives the undermined issues of socio-economic disparities in politics, thereby expanding the space of politics as well as the ambit of representation along with reconciling political equality with economic equality.

The book is appreciable on two definite grounds, first the author in the *Introduction* itself has made it clear for the readers how each element of Gandhian ideas can be understood as a part of extra parliamentary which is to be grounded on the principles of ethics and morality, while in the *Afterword* has explained how each item of the constructive programme has an innate relevance. Second, it gives an equal space to both Western and

Indian scholarship in conceptualising the unresolved problems of liberal democracy/theory. However, the book falls short on a couple of grounds, first the author's choice of words for accurately conveying his complex or nuanced ideas have eventually become incomprehensible for a non-academic reader, thereby, running contrary to Gandhian philosophy, who himself believed and practiced writing in simple, precise and lucid language. Thus, book limits its audience to predominantly social scientists working within the academia. Secondly, Rai's clubbing of terminologies; Right wing populism, terrorism, revivalism and religious fanaticism (p.89-90) show unfortunate reductionism and ill-conceptualisation of illiberal values. The attempt to connect right wing popularity with the liberal conundrum, complemented by the argument that it does not engage with liberal values seems deficit.

Gandhian thought and philosophy have undergone substantial evolution since their inception in the twentieth century and the book under review has made an impressive advancement upon one of Gandhi's original works. The long set of *Notes* and *Afterword* reflect a testament of hard work and wide scholarship. Gandhi's philosophy continues to unravel itself; hence as a diligent researcher, the author has delved deep into a variety of primary as well as secondary sources for establishing the fact that present model of liberal democracies possess inherent contradictions and the redressal lies in the implementation of constructive programme. Constructive programme is simply a fraction of the massive expanse encapsulated within the Gandhian philosophy; thus, it becomes evident that one volume cannot capture the diverse trends and intricacies of such ideas. Additional endeavours like this must be made in order to make the rich and diverse resources on Gandhian philosophies

accessible in multiple Indian and foreign languages. Thereby, Rai's persuasively argued and conscientiously written book forms an excellent contribution towards comprehending a significant aspect of the Gandhian ideas and his philosophy will be immensely useful to not only the domain of Social Sciences and Liberal Political Theory but equally useful to political scientists, historians, policymakers, pressure groups, and anyone interested in reading about Gandhi.

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