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Gandhian Concept of Swaraj and Swadeshi

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Swaraj of a people means the sum total of the Swaraj (self-rule) of individuals. And such Swaraj comes only from performance by individuals of their duty as citizens. In it no one thinks of his rights. They come when they are needed, for better performance of duty. —

M.K. Gandhi (1909)

Abstract: Swaraj and Swadeshi were two major concepts that inspired Gandhi's thinking and action. In fact, they played a dual role in his entire scheme of thought. On the one hand, they functioned as lodestars, a continuous source of inspiration for Indian freedom fighters in their march towards the ultimate goal of independence. On the other hand, they also served as a "measuring rod" to assess the distance the Indian people had covered on the path to freedom. Moreover, swaraj and swadeshi constantly reminded Indian leadership of the need to work out a blueprint for an independent India. In other words, these ideals continuously prompted the leadership to visualise the contours of an independent India, its socio-economic and political structure as well as its cultural resurgence.

Keywords: Swaraj, Swadeshi, Self – government, Home rule, Self rule

At yet another level, the conceptualisation of swaraj and swadeshi, transcending national boundaries, became a search for human freedom at a cosmic level. In one sense, swaraj was such an emotive concept that it touched the soul of India by evoking the racial memory of the Indian people reaching back to the Vedic age. In this article, we seek answers to the following questions: How did Gandhi's predecessors visualise swaraj? What new content did Gandhi introduce into the idea of swaraj? How should we assess the twin concepts of swaraj and swadeshi in the wider context of Gandhi's philosophy of human liberty and liberation?

The Concept of Swaraj in the Pre-Gandhian Era

The concept of swaraj was not a new discovery of Gandhi, as he himself acknowledged. It was an ancient Vedic concept. Swaraj, as a religio-spiritual term, is found in Vedic and Upanishadic scriptures, including the *Chandogya Upanishad*¹. Subsequently, medieval Bhakti poets frequently employed it in their lexicon. In this traditional religious literature, swaraj was used in the sense of self-rule—*swa* meaning self and *raj* meaning rule. Thus, swaraj signified self-mastery at the individual level. It symbolized a person in complete control of his baser passions (the *tāmasic* and *rājasic* proclivities) and fully established in *sāttvic* disposition². In other words, swaraj was synonymous with self-realization, which was hardly distinguishable from God-realization.

For such an individual, control by any external agency, including the state, was peripheral, if not altogether irrelevant. However, once India came under British rule, the term swaraj entered the political lexicon and began to be used in a limited political sense of “self-government,” with *swa* denoting one's own and *raj* referring to government. During this period, the terms “self-rule,” “self-government,” and “home rule” were often used interchangeably.

It was in the first decade of the twentieth century that swaraj emerged as a popular political term and captured the imagination of the people. Both wings of the Indian National Congress—the Moderates and the Extremists—used it freely. In a sense, it became a symbol of all that the Indian nation demanded in the wake of the Partition of Bengal in

1905. There were several reasons why nationalist leadership preferred the term swaraj in the context of rising nationalism and democratization in the West.

First, the familiarity of the Indian people with the concept, owing to its indigenous origin, was perhaps the most important reason for its adoption. Swaraj not only became synonymous with self-rule but, because of its ancient, emotive, and expansive connotations, it stirred the racial memory of the people and connected them to the Vedic past. In this way, it provided nationalist leadership with an ideological framework that transcended Western concepts of nationalism and democracy.

Second, it helped counter the British claim that India was not a nation due to its diversity of religion, region, language, caste, and creed, and therefore did not deserve self-rule. Indian leaders responded by emphasizing the unifying elements of Indian civilization—its universalism, tolerance, inclusiveness, and many-sidedness, later articulated as “unity in diversity.”³ During this phase of national awakening, efforts were made to identify indigenous concepts that captured contemporary political aspirations while resonating deeply with the people. This explains the widespread use of terms such as swaraj and swadeshi in political discourse.

Moderates and Extremists on Swaraj

Although both Moderates and Extremists used the term swaraj, they did so with different meanings and emphases. The Moderates employed it in a narrow sense, referring to limited political autonomy within the British Empire. They did not attach much importance to swaraj as individual self-rule, as their political discourse was heavily influenced by British liberalism. Nor did they seek complete independence, which many of them regarded as providentially unnecessary.

For instance, when Dadabhai Naoroji spoke of swaraj at the Calcutta Congress of 1906, convened in the context of the Partition of Bengal, he demanded only self-government on the model of other British colonies. Moreover, the Moderates confined themselves to

constitutional methods—prayer, petition, and propaganda—to articulate their demands. Hence, they were often described as “political mendicants.” Nevertheless, they were the first to raise critical issues such as the Indianization of the colonial bureaucracy and greater Indian participation in legislative processes.

Their most significant contribution was Naoroji’s “drain theory,”⁴ which exposed how Indian wealth was systematically transferred to England through overt and covert means. By this analysis, he held British rule directly responsible for the mass impoverishment of India. The Moderates’ limited conception of swaraj must be understood in the context of the historical constraints under which they operated, including the memory of brutal repression following the Revolt of 1857 and their ideological reliance on British liberal traditions.

The Extremists, however, adopted a broader understanding of swaraj. While there were differences among them, they generally conceptualized swaraj in political, economic, and spiritual terms. Bipin Chandra Pal (1858-1932), for example, envisioned swaraj as a democratic and federal system comprising republican British Indian provinces and constitutional monarchies in princely states. He also emphasized its economic dimension, identifying British capital as the greatest obstacle to India’s economic progress⁵.

Among the Extremists, Aurobindo (1907)⁶ alone articulated swaraj as complete political independence. He also stressed its spiritual dimension, arguing that swaraj was essentially a spiritual movement aimed at the emancipation of Indian nationhood and personhood in every sense. Tilak (1922)⁷ further elaborated this concept by highlighting its spiritual core. For him, true swaraj meant a life centered in and dependent upon the self. Yet, he sought to bridge the phenomenal and transcendental worlds, asserting that “there is swaraj in this world as well as in the world hereafter.”⁸

Drawing upon the doctrine of *karma-yoga* in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Tilak emphasized the importance of engagement in the phenomenal world. He famously asserted that swaraj in the afterlife could not be a reward for those who had not experienced it in this life. Politically, he defined swaraj as a government constituted by Indians themselves, ruling in

accordance with the wishes of the people or their representatives. Such a government, he argued, would frame policies, levy and remove taxes, and decide on public expenditure. Though Tilak did not explicitly demand complete independence (*purna swaraj*), he strongly advocated comprehensive autonomy and democratic governance⁹.

A significant aspect of Tilak’s thought was his idea of *prajā-droha* (people’s wrath), which implied that a government loses legitimacy when it becomes tyrannical and neglects its obligations to the people. In such cases, it invites popular resistance. This notion underscored the democratic principle that the people are the ultimate source of political power.

It is evident that Tilak (1915) employed a new language of swaraj that blended Western ideas of nationalism and democracy with the Vedantic ideal of individual spiritual freedom. By foregrounding *karma-yoga* as the core message of the *Gita*¹⁰, he built a bridge between modern European intellectual values and India’s perennial philosophical tradition. In this sense, he emerged as a precursor to Gandhi, who further refined and contextualized swaraj in the evocative idiom of *Rāmarājya* and the Kingdom of God within the human heart. Gandhi’s conception encompassed a far wider vision of human liberation, transcending mere political freedom.

Boycott and Swadeshi

The Extremists added two new dimensions to the struggle for swaraj: boycott and swadeshi. The underlying assumption was that no government could survive without the cooperation of the people in political and economic spheres. Boycott aimed at weakening colonial authority, while swadeshi sought to fill the vacuum through indigenous creative effort.

During the anti-Partition of Bengal movement, boycott was employed effectively against the government. It extended beyond foreign goods to include schools, colleges, courts, titles, and government services. Mass mobilization through meetings, processions, and demonstrations became integral to this strategy, making boycott a powerful instrument in the struggle for swaraj.

Swadeshi was equally central and gave the movement its very name. The swadeshi spirit permeated cultural life as well. Rabindranath Tagore's songs and those of other poets stirred the hearts of the masses. In art, Nandalal Bose and Abanindranath Tagore revitalized Indian painting traditions. In science, Jagadish Chandra Bose and P. C. Ray made pioneering contributions. Indigenous enterprises such as the Punjab National Bank, Bengal Chemical Factory, and Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company were established, along with national schools and colleges to promote self-reliance.

Limitations of Pre-Gandhian Swaraj

Despite the advances made by the Extremists over the Moderates in conceptualizing swaraj, neither group could overcome its fundamental limitations, both conceptual and practical. The Moderates envisioned swaraj narrowly, as limited political concessions under British tutelage. The Extremists, despite their broader vision and innovative strategies like boycott and swadeshi, failed to expand their appeal beyond a relatively small section of society. Their movement did not fully encompass India's diverse population, particularly Muslims and Dalits.

These limitations created the historical space in which Gandhi would later redefine and democratize the idea of swaraj, grounding it in mass participation and ethical transformation.

Gandhi and the Theory and Practice of Swaraj

The idea of *swaraj* was so fundamental to Gandhi's thinking and action that the only book he ever wrote—originally in Gujarati and later translated by him into English—was titled *Hind Swaraj*. It was first serialized in the Gujarati columns of *Indian Opinion* in December 1909, and its English version was published in 1910 in response to the banning of the Gujarati original earlier that year. It needs to be emphasized that the primary inspiration behind *Hind Swaraj* was to conceptualize and clarify the idea of swaraj and to identify an appropriate path leading to it.

It is also important to remember that by the first decade of the twentieth century, the idea of swaraj had gripped the minds of the Indian people, particularly in the wake of the Partition of Bengal in 1905 and the emergence of the Swadeshi Movement in response to it. At that time, three political groups—the Moderates, the Extremists, and the Revolutionaries—were intensely engaged in debating not only the meaning of swaraj but also the appropriate means for achieving it¹¹.

The Moderates conceptualized swaraj narrowly, as limited political and civil liberties under British tutelage. The Extremists conceived swaraj in broader terms, ranging from full political and economic autonomy for India to the spiritual ideal of self-rule at the individual level. Their preferred means included boycott and swadeshi, though Aurobindo did not hesitate to countenance even violent means if they became absolutely necessary. The armed revolutionaries, on the other hand, were less concerned with conceptual clarification; their sole objective was to expel the British from Indian soil, using force as the primary means¹².

Gandhi was fully aware of these developments in India. As he himself acknowledged, *Hind Swaraj* was written in response to his discussions with expatriate Indian revolutionaries in London and their insistence that violence was the only viable path to liberation. Gandhi sought to articulate his own views on these issues, and *Hind Swaraj* became the vehicle for doing so. In it, he identified the limitations of prevailing political discourses, conceptualized swaraj in his own distinctive way, and argued that non-violence alone could serve as an effective means for achieving it.

While his sympathies at that time lay closer to the Moderates, he was fully aware of their two major limitations: their exclusive reliance on constitutional methods and their failure to recognize that without a "reform of the soul," the swaraj he envisioned would remain unattainable (Parel 1997, p. xxx). He was equally critical of the Extremists, whose views he found flawed, and *Hind Swaraj* is primarily an engagement with the arguments of the revolutionaries.

The “Reader” in the book represents a revolutionary viewpoint, while the “Editor” is Gandhi himself.

Gandhi conceptualized swaraj in *Hind Swaraj* and are specifically devoted to (a) defining swaraj and (b) outlining the means to achieve it. A close reading of Gandhi reveals that Gandhi was not offering a conventional definition of swaraj. In the chapter “What Is Swaraj?” he critiques prevailing notions advanced by revolutionaries and Extremists alike. He rejects the revolutionary belief that mere physical expulsion of the British would amount to swaraj. He also dismisses the Extremist view that the British should leave while the institutions they created remain intact. Nor does he spare the Moderates, questioning their liberal conception of swaraj as self-government modeled on British colonies such as Canada.

Summing up his critique, Gandhi rejects all these views when he writes:

“You want English rule without the Englishman. You want the tiger’s nature, but not the tiger. That is to say, you would make India English, and when it becomes English, it will be called not Hindustan but Englistan. This is not the swaraj that I want.” (Parel, 1997, p. 29)

For Gandhi primary unit is the individual, who must first experience swaraj within himself. As he writes:

“If we become free, India is free... It is swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves. It is, therefore, in the palm of your hands. Do not consider swaraj to be like a dream. The swaraj that I wish to picture before you and me is such that, after we have once realized it, we shall endeavor to the end of our lives to persuade others to do likewise. But such swaraj has to be experienced by each one for himself.” (Ibid., p. 73)

Having thus defined swaraj, Gandhi assumes that political independence is subsumed within it, resting upon the foundation of individual self-rule. He then turns to the question of how swaraj is to be attained. He rejects the violent methods employed in Italy’s liberation from Austrian rule, arguing that they failed to resolve the problems of the common people. In India, he contends, the situation

is even less favorable: arming thousands of Indians against the British would be nearly impossible, and even if achieved, it would result in the loss of India’s soul through Europeanization.

Gandhi establishes an intrinsic relationship between ends and means, asserting that one cannot obtain a rose by planting a poisonous weed. Just as the tree is inherent in the seed, so the end is inherent in the means. Consequently, he rejects brute force as the basis of any just action and pleads for the use of “soul force” (karuna Bal)¹³ or “love force,” also referred to as “passive resistance.”

He defines passive resistance as the method of securing rights through personal suffering. In a simple yet profound statement, he observes: “If a man will only realize that it is unmanly to obey laws that are unjust, no man’s tyranny will enslave him.” (Gandhi, 1909) This, he insists, is the key to self-rule or home rule. He further explains that passive resistance is the “weapon of the strong,” requiring greater courage than armed resistance. A person lacking courage and moral strength, he argues, can never be a true passive resister. He likens it to a many-sided sword that neither rusts nor can be stolen and that ultimately blesses both parties to a conflict.

Gandhi also lays down the moral disciplines essential for passive resistance: perfect chastity, voluntary poverty, and unwavering truthfulness. Toward the end of the book, he makes it clear that true home rule is self-rule, that passive resistance is the royal road to it, and that swadeshi is an integral part of this path. Toward the end of *Hind Swaraj*, he makes a solemn pledge to dedicate his life to this ideal. In later years, Gandhi articulated his conception of swaraj more succinctly when he wrote: “Swaraj is a sacred word, a Vedic word, meaning self-rule and self-restraint, and freedom from all restraints which independence often means.” (Gandhi, 1931, p. 38)¹⁴

At the same time, he was unequivocal in demanding national independence, asserting that “every nation is fit to manage its own affairs, no matter how badly.” His conception of swaraj thus involved a dialectical integration of political self-government, freedom from external domination- and individual self-rule- freedom from baser passions.

He firmly believed that “outward freedom is in direct proportion to internal freedom” and emphasized that self-government meant a continuous effort to remain independent of government, whether foreign or national. In essence, Gandhian swaraj is not merely a theory of government but a philosophy of self-rule rooted in his Advaitic vision and the organic relationship between God, man, and society (*Brahman, jīva, and jagat*).

New Dimensions of Swaraj

True to his pledge in *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi devoted his entire life to elucidating and realizing the many dimensions of swaraj in both personal and national life. Some of its major components may be outlined as follows:

National Independence

The demand for national independence became the most visible and concrete expression of Gandhian swaraj. Initially articulated as dominion status, it was transformed into the demand for *pūrṇa swaraj* at the Lahore Congress of 1929. The Day of Purna Swaraj was celebrated on 26 January 1930. For this historic occasion, Gandhi himself drafted *The Declaration of Independence*¹⁵, a powerful call affirming the right of the Indian people to freedom.

Every citizen was expected to take a pledge declaring that all governments derive their legitimacy not only from the will of the people but also from their ability to uphold human dignity and fundamental rights. The pledge stated: “We believe that it is the inalienable right of the Indian people, as of any other people, to have freedom and to enjoy the fruits of their toil and have the necessities of life, so that they may have full opportunities for growth. We also believe that any government which deprives a people of these rights and oppresses them, the people have a further right to alter or abolish it.” (1930)

In a word, *swaraj* became synonymous with full independence for the Indian people. However, ever since the days of *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi consistently insisted that the mere withdrawal of the British from India

did not constitute real swaraj. Unless every villager felt that he was the maker of his own destiny, true swaraj would remain an elusive ideal.

An All-Inclusive Nationhood

Equally strong was Gandhi's emphasis on the all-inclusive and egalitarian character of Indian nationhood. In his own words: “Swaraj for me means freedom for the meanest of the countrymen... I am not interested in freeing India merely from the English yoke. I am bent upon freeing India from any yoke whatsoever. I have no desire to exchange ‘king log’ with ‘king stork’.” (Gandhi, 1924, p. 195)¹⁶

He was deeply critical of the highly urbanized, English-educated Indian elite. Gandhi was fully aware that a significant section of this class had collaborated with the British in exploiting the hapless villagers. Consequently, he identified himself with *daridranārāyaṇa*—the poorest of the poor—and was always willing to take up cudgels on their behalf against all those who appeared mighty and powerful. This is why he explained *pūrṇa swaraj* in their terms:

“Purna Swaraj... is as much for the prince as for the peasant, as much for the rich landowner as for the landless tiller of the soil, as much for the Parsis, for Christians, for Jains, Jews and Sikhs.”

In essence, Gandhi did not merely aim at ending British rule; he sought to end every form of injustice and inequality and to “wipe every tear from every eye.”

People's Rights

The third dimension of swaraj lay in Gandhi's distinctive understanding of political freedom and the rights of the people. Unlike many nationalist leaders, he believed that “received rights”—those granted as concessions by rulers—were no rights at all. People could truly enjoy rights only when they learned how to earn and claim them legitimately. That is why he insisted on *satyagraha* as the rightful means through which people could acquire their rights. Emphasizing its centrality to swaraj, he asserted: “I have always held that political

justice even unto the least and the lowliest is impossible of attainment by force... it is possible by proper training of the lowliest by non-violent means... that means is non-violent non-cooperation.” (Gandhi, 1940, p. 97)¹⁷

Economic Freedom

Another vital dimension of swaraj, as conceived by Gandhi, was economic freedom. In his understanding, British rule constituted the greatest obstacle to the eradication of poverty in India and therefore had to be dismantled completely. He interpreted economic freedom primarily as freedom from poverty. This is why, after the Lahore Congress of 1929 adopted the resolution on *pūrṇa swaraj*, Gandhi defined it as “full economic freedom for the toiling masses.”

This understanding was further elaborated at the Karachi Congress, which gave concrete shape to economic freedom by adopting a resolution on the fundamental rights of the people, including economic rights. The Karachi Resolution later served as a key reference point for the framing of Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles by the Constituent Assembly.

It was in this context that Gandhi offered one of the most powerful critiques of modern industrial civilization. Unlike many of his contemporaries including some of his own disciples such as Jawaharlal Nehru he believed that industrial civilization had opened the floodgates of inequality, oppression, and domination of the weak by the strong on an unprecedented scale. Yet he did not stop at critique; he also proposed an alternative model of development. In 1940, he articulated a balanced vision of India's economic future:

“I do visualize electricity, ship-building, iron works, machine-making and the like existing side by side with village handicrafts. But the order of dependence will be reversed. Hitherto industrialization has been planned to destroy the villages and their crafts. I do not share the socialist belief that centralization of life will conduce to the common welfare, when the centralized industries are planned and owned by the State.” (*Harijan*, 27 January 1940)

It is another matter that this vision of village-based industrialization failed to find much acceptance among the modern Indian elite, including Nehru.

The Spiritual Aspect of Swaraj

The most distinctive dimension of Gandhian swaraj was its spiritual foundation. As noted earlier, ever since *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi maintained that self-rule at the individual level was the true foundation upon which national swaraj must rest. Yet the pursuit of self-rule did not entail withdrawal from the world; it had to be realized amidst active engagement with life. As he put it: “I have no desire for the perishable kingdom of earth. I am striving for the Kingdom of Heaven, which is *moksha*. To attain my end, it is not necessary for me to seek the shelter of a cave; I carry one about me, if I would but know it.” (Gandhi, 1924, p. 114)¹⁸

Duty before Rights

Another crucial dimension Gandhi added to swaraj was the primacy of duty over rights. In liberal political theory, the primary emphasis has traditionally been on rights rather than duties. Gandhi reversed this emphasis, insisting that rights flow naturally from the faithful performance of duties. As he explained: “Swaraj would come only from the performance by individuals of their duties as citizens. In it, no one thinks of his rights. They come when they are needed for the better performance of duties.” (Gandhi, 1939, p. 64)¹⁹

It is clear from the foregoing discussion that for Gandhi, swaraj meant far more than the end of colonial rule. Rooted in his Advaitic philosophy, national independence had to be built upon the firm foundation of self-ruling individuals. Here, the “self” was not the empirical ego of Western thought but the *ātman*, sharing the essence of the universal self. When an individual internalizes this deeper meaning of swaraj, he acquires fearlessness, self-purification, and a sense of unity with all beings. This constitutes the first step towards swaraj.

For Gandhi, the swaraj of the people was nothing but the sum total of the self-rule of individuals. He advanced several arguments to explain why individual self-rule was indispensable for collective self-government. First, the degree of external freedom achieved by a people would be directly proportional to the inner swaraj attained by individuals. Hence, every freedom fighter had to undergo self-transformation. As Gandhi himself stated:

“Swaraj has to be experienced by each one of us for himself. One drowning man will never save another. Slave ourselves, it would be mere pretension to think of freeing others.”²⁰

Second, he argued that swaraj implied government by the many, and if those many were immoral and selfish, such a system would degenerate into anarchy. Therefore, laying the foundation of swaraj in self-ruling individuals was of paramount importance. This explains why Gandhi identified swaraj with *Rāmarājya*—the reign of dharma and justice—and with the Biblical ideal that “the Kingdom of God is within you.”

Gandhi was deeply concerned not only with political domination but also with cultural domination and the mental slavery of the Indian elite, which he regarded as more damaging than physical bondage. Hence, his insistence on self-rule as the antidote to all forms of enslavement. Once achieved, self-rule would not only dismantle political subjugation but also lay the foundation of a new social order free from domination, oppression, and exploitation. Yet he was fully aware that mass practice of self-rule required a conducive socio-political environment, making the end of British rule a necessary precondition for the full realization of freedom.

Gandhi’s conception of swaraj was inseparably linked with *swadeshi*, which represented the practical expression of what swaraj articulated at the level of ideas. Explaining *swadeshi*, he wrote:

“Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote. Thus, as for religion, I must restrict myself to my ancestral religion... In politics, I should use indigenous institutions and serve them by curing them of their defects. In economics, I should use only those

things that are produced by my immediate neighbours and serve those industries by making them efficient and complete.” (Gandhi, 1925, p. 318)²¹

In conclusion, the concept of swaraj underwent many transformations during the freedom struggle. For the Moderates, it meant limited self-government under British rule. The Extremists articulated it in diverse ways—economic, political, and spiritual. Tilak emphasized political autonomy along with spiritual self-rule. It was Gandhi who finally gave swaraj its most comprehensive and many-splendoured meaning, integrating individual self-rule with national independence, and extending it to social, political, economic, and spiritual freedom.

Gandhi was acutely aware that earlier formulations of swaraj had largely reflected the aspirations of upper-caste Hindus and small sections of the Muslim elite, failing to encompass the marginalized. He therefore reimagined swaraj as an inclusive ideal capable of mobilizing all sections of society. His concept served a triple purpose: mobilizing the masses for independence, democratizing Indian society, and creating an army of fearless satyagrahis committed to non-violent struggle.

Equally significant was his insistence that leaders must exemplify the values they preached. Only those who had achieved self-rule could guide others toward freedom. Hence his emphasis on *satyagraha*, truth, non-violence, fearlessness, chastity, and self-denial. He believed so deeply in the moral power of such individuals that he declared that even one truly free Indian could compel the British to listen.

Finally, Gandhi’s enduring contribution lies in his attempt to reconcile the sacred and the secular, individual freedom and collective welfare. By grounding political life in self-ruling individuals and linking it to *swadeshi*, he forged a living connection between the individual, society, and the state—one that avoided both atomistic individualism and oppressive collectivism. In doing so, he offered a distinctive and enduring vision of freedom rooted in moral responsibility and human dignity.

“Individual freedom alone can make a man voluntarily surrender himself completely to the service of society. If it is wrested from him, he becomes an automaton and society is ruined.”²²

Another strength of the Gandhian concept of swaraj lies in the fact that it successfully avoids both extremes—extreme localism on the one hand and complete homogenization in the name of liberalization and globalization on the other. Such a balanced and nuanced view may provide a pathway towards a genuine universal culture without forcing individuals, groups, regions, or nations to lose their inner and local cultural moorings. This, in itself, constitutes a significant theoretical contribution.

However, this does not mean that the Gandhian concept of swaraj is free from problems. In the first place, Gandhi’s insistence on “self-ruling” individuals raises a serious practical difficulty: how does one determine whether an individual is truly self-ruling or not? Since this belongs to the realm of inner experience, no objective criterion or external measuring instrument can be devised to assess it. This leaves ample scope for hypocrisy and double-speak—a gap between precept and practice.

Secondly, the external dimension of swaraj—self-government combined with *swadeshi*—could potentially degenerate into extreme nationalism, jingoism, domination, and exploitation, as was witnessed for long periods behind the “iron curtain” and the “bamboo curtain.”

Thirdly, scholars have pointed out an apparent contradiction between Gandhi as a high priest of swaraj and Gandhi as a practitioner of “real politics.” For a considerable period, he remained a British loyalist and even extended support to the British war efforts during the Boer War, the Zulu Rebellion, and the First World War, willingly risking his reputation and even his life. He also supported working the Government of India Act of 1919 and, despite reservations, accepted the Act of 1935—both of which fell short of his own ideal of swaraj. Furthermore, he acquiesced in the Indian Independence Act of 1947, which granted only dominion status, despite the Congress’s long-standing commitment to *pūrṇa swaraj* since the Lahore Congress of 1929. Thus, critics detect a tension between Gandhi’s theoretical

articulation of swaraj and his practical acceptance of limited forms of it.

Added to this is the fact that many of Gandhi’s ideas on swaraj, like several of his other ideas, were not accepted by his own close followers. This has led some to argue that his concept of swaraj was too ethereal to be translated into concrete political reality.

Yet, much can be said in Gandhi’s defence. First, he was fully conscious of the dangers of extreme nationalism and therefore consistently refused to portray the British as enemies. This is why he repeatedly emphasized the distinction between hating the sin and not the sinner. As for the perennial human problem of hypocrisy and double-speak, this is part of a deeper moral predicament. If no high ideals are set, human striving towards higher values would altogether disappear from collective consciousness. On the other hand, if lofty ideals are articulated, the risk of hypocrisy cannot be entirely eliminated.

The Indian tradition, however, offers a remedy in the form of the ideal of the exemplar—one who demonstrates in daily life what he preaches. Gandhi consciously sought to embody this ideal and attempted to create an “army of exemplars” through ashram life and other institutional experiments. Nevertheless, in human affairs there can be no once-for-all or final solution. Each generation must strive anew to approximate and integrate high ideals into lived reality. Setting ideals, living by them as far as possible, and inspiring others to do likewise is perhaps all that even a great individual can accomplish—and this Gandhi did.

As for the rejection of his ideas by his close associates, such a fate is not unique to Gandhi; it has been shared by most prophets, including Jesus Christ. Often, the ideals they articulate are simply too demanding for ordinary human striving. Yet it is precisely these ideals that continue to inspire humanity across generations. Excessive realism, by contrast, risks reducing thought to what Gandhi himself once described as the role of a “gutter inspector.”

As already discussed, Gandhi's intertwined concepts of swaraj and swadeshi may still provide a viable foundation for a universal culture—one that avoids the pitfalls of extreme localism, jingoistic nationalism, and rootless cosmopolitanism.

SWADESHI IS that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote. Thus, as for religion, in order to satisfy the requirements of the definition, I must restrict myself to my ancestral religion. That is, the use of my immediate religious surroundings. If I find it defective, I should serve it by purging it of its defects. (Gandhi, 1925, p. 318)²³.

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Causes of the Marginalization of Social Sciences in India: A Comprehensive Research Analysis

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Abstract: *The social sciences—encompassing sociology, political science, economics, history, philosophy, and anthropology—have historically served as the intellectual backbone of democratic societies, offering the analytical tools necessary to understand diversity, governance, and structural inequality. In India, a nation defined by its complex socio-cultural landscape, these disciplines are indispensable for formulating inclusive public policies and fostering civic consciousness. However, an analysis of recent trends in higher education, fiscal allocation, and institutional frameworks reveals a systematic marginalization of these disciplines. This article investigates the root causes of this decline through a multi-dimensional lens: historical legacies of uneven development, the neoliberal restructuring of education and severe funding asymmetries compared to science, technology, engineering and medical (STEM) fields. Drawing on official reports from the University Grants Commission (UGC), the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), and academic literature, the analysis argues that the rise of "employment-centric" education models and the dominance of technocratic development narratives have collectively undermined the social sciences. The paper concludes that without immediate structural intervention, India risks producing a workforce devoid of*