

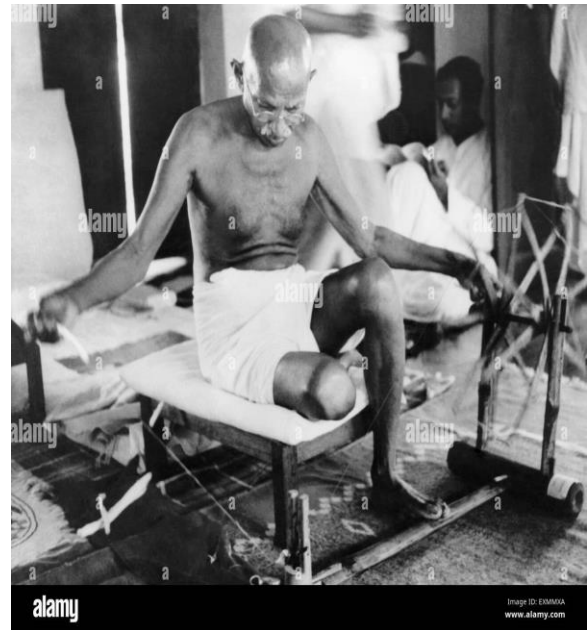
Gandhi's Hind Swaraj and Quit India Movement



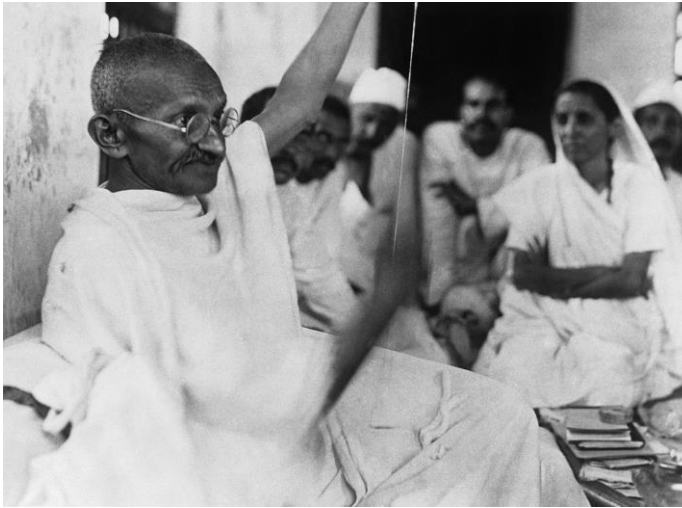
Hind Swaraj is the foundational text to understand Gandhi's mission and an incendiary manifesto to enkindle his revolution. Gandhi wrote it in ten days between 13 and 22 November 1909 on board *Kildonan Castle*, a ship that he took to return to South Africa from London. When he wrote this text, he had not immersed himself in Indian society and politics. He returned to India in January 1915 from South Africa and took a plunge

into political activities in 1917. *Hind Swaraj* served as the basis of experiments with respect to his all activities in India.

What is the concept of *Hind Swaraj*? In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi presents an idealised version of Indian culture. He defines and elaborates it in three important themes: *swaraj*, *satya* and *swadeshi*. Foundation of *swaraj*, according to Gandhi, is threefold: self-respect, self-realisation and self-reliance. *Satya*, the truth is not a matter of theory but of practice. Only ahimsa, non-violence can make the quest for such truth viable. *Swadeshi* is the means for Gandhi's quest for *swaraj*. His concept of *swadeshi* envisaged a more personalised and communitarian society on



a human scale. Gandhi's *purna swaraj* harmonises rights and duties, head and heart, individual and community, faith and reason, economic development and spiritual progress, religious commitment and religious pluralism, self-realisation and political action.



In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi expressed emphatically that colonial imperialism, industrial capitalism and rationalist materialism are the motivating factors for the British Government to expand its colonial base in India. If these are the main reasons, how to combat them? Gandhi said that colonialism was to be overcome in our own consciousness, otherwise we would be enslaved by one

power or another. He believed that the British were not in India because of their strength, but because we kept them.

After entering in the arena of politics in India, Gandhi realised two things. First, Indian elite class was deeply associated with western civilization inculcated and nurtured by British rulers and second, Indian National Congress (INC) did not create its mass base. Gandhi took the lead in spreading Indian nationalism amongst the general public with increasingly militant posture. He also travelled all over India and made experiment on his concept of civilisation enunciated in *Hind Swaraj*. Gandhi



launched an attack on every aspect of western civilisation in order to prove how evil and how harmful it was. He suggested an alternative to modern civilisation and a programme of action and behaviour that Indians must follow to ensure getting freedom from British colonial rule.

Unlike other leaders of INC, Gandhi realised that the challenge to modern civilisation in India would have to come from the people who lived in the villages. But then, how was this challenge to be articulated? Gandhi was emphatic that it would have to be non-violent. He believed that Indians at large were used to offer passive resistance in all facets of life and the peasants were

essentially non-violent. Thus modern civilisation in India, represented by British rule, has to be opposed passively through non-violent means. Gandhi gave a name to this form of struggle, *satyagraha* meaning the force which is born of truth and love and non-violence with the main aim of firm resistance for good cause.



Gandhi's 'Quit India' movement was the third experiment on his concept of *Hind Swaraj*. His earlier two experiments, namely, *Satyagraha* movement (1920-22) and Civil Disobedience movement (1930) were not successful. On 8 August 1942, the All India Congress Committee at its meeting at Bombay passed a resolution demanding that the British must finally quit India. Gandhi raised the slogan 'Do or Die'. In his words, 'I am not going to be satisfied with anything short of complete freedom.

We shall either free India or die in the attempt'. Such a declaration of Gandhi showed that 'Quit India' movement of August 1942 was a Gandhian movement with a difference. But why? Failure of the earlier movements made him more practical and indeed, from time to time, Gandhi suggested that non-violence might not be the only way to counter authoritarian intransigence and armed aggression.



The background to the 'Quit India' movement underscores another important point about Gandhi and nationalist movement at that time. Gandhi partly rose to power in 1919-20 on the back of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and the revulsion it created throughout India. Gandhi probably could not reconcile his concept of civilisation in *Hind Swaraj* and the slavery of colonial rule. And he expressed his growing exasperation and said that he could wait no longer for non-violence to be experimented.



Eventually, like earlier movements, most active signs of the movement died away. So ended the seemingly most un-Gandhian of Gandhi's campaigns. But then, did the 'Quit India' movement fail? Not really. Many scholars argued that this was India's revolution, the South Asian equivalent of the American War of Independence. In this movement, Indians were united to throw off the colonial yoke. Though independence did not actually come until five years later, it nonetheless set in train the inevitable process of India's decolonisation.

