

CHAPTER IV

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What is Swaraj?³³

READER: I have now learnt what the Congress has done to make India one nation, how the Partition has caused an awakening, and how discontent and unrest have spread through the land. I would now like to know your views on Swaraj. I fear that our interpretation is not the same.

EDITOR: It is quite possible that we do not attach the same meaning to the term. You and I and all Indians are impatient to obtain Swaraj, but we are certainly not decided as to what it is. To drive the English out of India is a thought heard from many mouths, but it does not seem that many have properly considered why it should be so. I must ask you a question. Do you think that it is necessary to drive away the English,³⁴ if we get all we want?

READER: I should ask of them only one thing, that is: 'Please leave our country.' If after they have complied with this request, their withdrawal from India means that they are still in India, I should have no objection. Then we would understand that, in our language, the word 'gone' is equivalent to 'remained'.

EDITOR: Well, then, let us suppose that the English have retired. What will you do then?

READER: That question cannot be answered at this stage. The state after withdrawal will depend largely upon the manner of it. If, as you

³³ This chapter is a critique of the prevailing notions of swaraj.

³⁴ Here Gandhi attacks the revolutionaries' view that physical expulsion of the British from India is the necessary and sufficient condition of swaraj.

assume, they retire, it seems to me we shall still keep their constitution,³⁵ and shall carry on the government. If they simply retire for the asking, we should have an army, etc., ready at hand. We should, therefore, have no difficulty in carrying on the government.

EDITOR: You may think so; I do not. But I will not discuss the matter just now. I have to answer the question, and that I can do well by asking you several questions. Why do we want to drive away the English?

READER: Because India has become impoverished by their Government. They take away our money from year to year. The most important posts are reserved for themselves. We are kept in a state of slavery. They behave insolently towards us, and disregard our feelings.

EDITOR: If they do not take our money away, become gentle, and give us responsible posts, would you still consider their presence to be harmful?

READER: That question is useless. It is similar to the question whether there is any harm in associating with a tiger,³⁶ if he changes his nature. Such a question is sheer waste of time. When a tiger changes his nature, Englishmen will change theirs. This is not possible, and to believe it to be possible is contrary to human experience.

EDITOR: Supposing we get self-government similar to what the Canadians and the South Africans have, will it be good enough?

READER: That question also is useless. We may get it when we have arms and ammunition even as they have. But, when we have the same powers, we shall hoist our own flag. As is Japan, so must India be.³⁷ We

35 Here Gandhi is attacking the meaning of swaraj held by the Extremists: expel the British but keep their political, military and economic institutions.

36 One of the striking metaphors of the book, comparable to the metaphor of the lion found in Machiavelli's *The Prince*.

37 Gandhi rejects the Japanese model of development, to which many Indians at the turn of the century were powerfully attracted. Gandhi's own attitude towards Japan underwent a gradual evolution in the period 1903–9. As a journalist he remained a keen observer of the rise of modern Japan. In 1905 he spoke of 'the epic heroism' exhibited by the Japanese in the 1905 naval victory over Russia, comparing the latter to the British victories over the Spanish Armada and over Napoleon. The secret of the Japanese victory was

must own our navy, our army, and we must have our own splendour, and then will India's voice ring through the world.

EDITOR: You have well drawn the picture. In effect it means this: that we 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 Englستان. This is not the Swaraj that I want.

READER: I have placed before you my idea of Swaraj as I think it should be. If the education we have received be of any use, if the works of Spencer, Mill³⁸ and others be of any importance, and if the English Parliament be the Mother of Parliaments, I certainly think that we

unity, patriotism and the resolve to do or die. All the Japanese are animated by the same spirit. No one is considered greater than the other, and there is no rift of any kind between them. They think nothing else but service to the nation ... This unity and patriotic spirit together with a heroic indifference to life (or death) have created an atmosphere in Japan the like of which is nowhere to be found in the world. (CW 4: 467)

The explanation of the Japanese victory, he wrote, 'deserves to be inscribed in one's mind' (CW 5: 32). Writing in 1907, he traced a link between the Japanese sense of self-respect and their political independence; and contrasted the Japanese situation with India's state of bondage and the resulting lack of self-respect. 'When everyone in Japan, the rich as well as the poor, came to believe in self-respect, the country became free. In the same way we too need to feel the spirit of self-respect' (CW 6: 457). But in *HS* he has become sceptical of the desirability of taking Japan as a model for India.

38 'the works of Spencer, Mill': i.e., Herbert Spencer and J. S. Mill. From available data it is not possible to indicate which works of Spencer and Mill Gandhi might have read by 1909. But we do know that he disapproved of the position of S. Krishnavarma and his colleagues in India House (London) who acted as though what India needed was the philosophy of Spencer. To counteract them he used with approval a witty article by G. K. Chesterton:

They talk about Herbert Spencer's philosophy and other similar matters. What is the good of Indian national spirit if they cannot protect themselves from Herbert Spencer? ... One of their papers is called *The Indian Sociologist*. Do the Indian youths want to pollute their ancient villages and poison their kindly homes by introducing Spencer's philosophy into them? ... But Herbert Spencer is not Indian; his philosophy is not Indian philosophy; all this clatter about the science of education and other things is not Indian. I often wish it were not English either. But this is our first difficulty, that the Indian nationalist is not national. (CW 9: 425-7)

should copy the English people, and this to such an extent, that, just as they do not allow others to obtain a footing in their country, so should we not allow them or others to obtain it in ours. What they have done in their own country has not been done in any other country. It is, therefore, proper for us to import their institutions. But now I want to know your views.

EDITOR: There is need for patience. My views will develop of themselves in the course of this discourse. It is as difficult for me to understand the true nature of Swaraj as it seems to you to be easy. I shall, therefore, for the time being, content myself with endeavouring to show that what you call Swaraj is not truly Swaraj.

As for J. S. Mill, Gandhi did mention *On Liberty* by name in the 1920s. He told a university audience:

I know that in the West there is a powerful trend towards licence. But I have no desire to see students in India take to such licence ... I want to tell you that the man who has not received education for freedom – and you may be sure this is not to be had by reading Mill on 'Liberty' – cannot be taken to be a free man. (*CW* 19: 26, 103)