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M. K. Gandhi

Excerpt

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Indian Home Rule

[or Hind Swaraj]

*

by

M. K. Gandhi

Being a Translation of '*Hind Swaraj*'
(Indian Home Rule), published in the
Gujarati columns of *Indian Opinion*,
11th and 18th Dec., 1909

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Preface to the English translation

It is not without hesitation that the translation of 'Hind Swaraj' is submitted to the public. A European friend¹ with whom I discussed the contents, wanted to see a translation of it and, during our spare moments, I hurriedly dictated and he took it down. It is not a literal translation but it is a faithful rendering of the original. Several English friends have read it, and whilst opinions were being invited as to the advisability of publishing the work, news was received that the original was seized in India.² This information hastened the decision to publish the translation without a moment's delay. My fellow-workers at the

¹ Hermann Kallenbach, Gandhi's close friend and donor of the Tolstoy Farm.

² On 10 March 1910 *Hind Swaraj* (HS) was intercepted at Bombay and placed in the hands of the Gujarati interpreter of Madras High Court. On 15 March he submitted a 21-page typed resume of the book to Sir H. A. Stuart, Secretary of the Home Department. 'I have given sufficient matter to form an opinion whether it is seditious or not', wrote the interpreter. 'Nowhere the author of the book advocates revolt or the use of physical force against the British Government in India. But he openly advocates passive resistance to subvert British supremacy. He advises all people not to cooperate with Government. If this idea takes hold of the mind of young inexperienced men, it might lead to systematic strikes among Government servants of various classes, as well as Public Works such as Railway, Post, Telegraph, etc. Surely a very dangerous thought to the safety of Government. The sooner it is suppressed the better.' On the basis of this recommendation, on 24 March 1910 the Governments of India, Bombay, Madras and Bengal banned the book. For the full text of the report, see Parel (1993, 240-54).

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International Printing Press shared my view and, by working overtime – a labour of love – they have enabled me to place the translation before the public in an unexpectedly short time. The work is being given to the public at what is practically cost-price. But, without the financial assistance of the many Indians who promised to buy copies for themselves and for distribution, it might never have seen the light of day.

I am quite aware of the many imperfections in the original. The English rendering, besides sharing these, must naturally exaggerate them, owing to my inability to convey the exact meaning of the original. Some of the friends who have read the translation have objected that the subject matter has been dealt with in the form of a dialogue. I have no answer to offer to this objection except that the Gujarati language readily lends itself to such treatment and that it is considered the best method of treating difficult subjects. Had I written for English readers in the first instance, the subject would have been handled in a different manner. Moreover, the dialogue, as it has been given, actually took place between several friends,³ mostly readers of *Indian Opinion*, and myself.

Whilst the views expressed in ‘Hind Swaraj’ are held by me, I have but endeavoured humbly to follow Tolstoy, Ruskin, Thoreau, Emerson and other writers, besides the masters of Indian philosophy.⁴ Tolstoy has been one of my teachers for a number of years. Those who want to see a

3 These include Dr Pranjivan Mehta (CW 71: 238), Shyamji Krishnavarma (CW 6: 28, 40, 73, 83–4) and V. D. Savarkar (CW 32: 102).

4 ‘the masters of Indian philosophy’: during his first jail term in South Africa (January 1908) Gandhi read Manilal Nabhubhai Dwivedi’s *Rajayoga, Commentary on the Gita* (Dwivedi attended the 1893 World Parliament of Religions, held at Chicago; the other to attend was Swami Vivekananda). During his second incarceration (October–December 1908) he read the *Bhagavad Gita* ‘almost every day’; and during the third term (February–May 1909), the *Gita*, *Veda-Shabda-Sangana*, the *Upanishads*, *Manusmriti*, *Ramayana*, *Patanjal-Yoga-Darshan*, *Ahnika-Prakasha* and Rajchand’s *Sandhya-ni Gutika* (‘I memorised a portion of his [Rajchand’s] writings and of the book on *Sandhya*. I would repeat them over and over again in my mind whenever I happened to wake up at night, and every morning I spent half an hour meditating on them’ (CW 9: 241–2)).

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corroboration of the views submitted in the following chapters, will find it in the works of the above named masters. For ready reference, some of the books are mentioned in the Appendices.

I do not know why 'Hind Swaraj' has been seized in India. To me, the seizure constitutes further condemnation of the civilisation represented by the British Government. There is in the book not a trace of approval of violence in any shape or form. The methods of the British Government are, undoubtedly, severely condemned. To do otherwise would be for me to be a traitor to Truth, to India, and to the Empire to which I own allegiance. My notion of loyalty does not involve acceptance of current rule or government irrespective of its righteousness or otherwise. Such notion is based upon the belief – not in its present justice or morality but – in a future acceptance by governments of that standard of morality in practice which it at present vaguely and hypocritically believes in, in theory. But I must frankly confess that I am not so much concerned about the stability of the Empire as I am about that of the ancient civilisation of India which, in my opinion, represents the best that the world has ever seen. The British Government in India constitutes a struggle between the Modern Civilisation, which is the Kingdom of Satan, and the Ancient Civilisation, which is the Kingdom of God. The one is the God of War, the other is the God of Love. My countrymen impute the evils of modern civilisation to the English people and, therefore, believe that the English people are bad, and not the civilisation they represent. My countrymen, therefore, believe that they should adopt modern civilisation and modern methods of violence to drive out the English. 'Hind Swaraj' has been written in order to show that they are following a suicidal policy, and that, if they would but revert to their own glorious civilisation, either the English would adopt the latter and become Indianised or find their occupation in India gone.

It was at first intended to publish the translation as a part of *Indian Opinion*, but the seizure of the original rendered such a course inadvisable. *Indian Opinion* represents the Transvaal Passive Resistance struggle and ventilates the grievances of British Indians in South Africa generally. It was, therefore, thought desirable not to publish through a

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representative organ, views which are held by me personally and which may even be considered dangerous or disloyal. I am naturally anxious not to compromise a great struggle by any action of mine which has no connection with it. Had I not known that there was a danger of methods of violence becoming popular, even in South Africa, had I not been called upon by hundreds of my countrymen, and not a few English friends, to express my opinion on the Nationalist movement in India, I would even have refrained, for the sake of the struggle, from reducing my views to writing. But, occupying the position I do, it would have been cowardice on my part to postpone publication under the circumstances just referred to.

M. K. Gandhi

Johannesburg

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Foreword

I have written some chapters on the subject of Indian Home Rule which I venture to place before the readers of *Indian Opinion*. I have written because I could not restrain myself.⁵ I have read much,⁶ I have pondered much, during the stay, for four months in London of the Transvaal Indian deputation.⁷ I discussed things with as many of my countrymen as I could. I met, too, as many Englishmen as it was possible for me to meet. I consider it my duty now to place before the readers of *Indian Opinion* the

- 5 'I could not restrain myself': an indication of the inner intensity that prompted Gandhi to write *HS*. Writing to Henry Polak a few weeks before the writing of *HS*, Gandhi confessed how certain ideas were 'brewing in my mind' and how they 'had taken a violent possession of me' (*CW* 9: 478, 481; see also *CW* 32: 489).
- 6 During his first prison term (January 1908), Gandhi read or re-read the Bible, the Koran, Thomas Huxley's lectures, Carlyle's biographies of Burns, Johnson and Scott, Bacon's essays on civil and moral counsel, and the writings of Tolstoy, Ruskin and Plato (*CW* 8: 159). During his second prison term (October–December 1908) he read or re-read 'two books by the great Ruskin, the essays of the great Thoreau, some portions of the *Bible*, the life of Garibaldi (in Gujarati), essays of Lord Bacon' (*CW* 9: 181–2). During his third prison term (February–May 1909) he read or reread Tolstoy, Emerson, Carlyle's *French Revolution*, Mazzini and portions of the Bible (*CW* 9: 208, 241); for a survey of Gandhi's readings after 1909, see Iyer (1986–7, 1, 66–198).
- 7 'The Transvaal Indian deputation': in the summer of 1909 the British Parliament was debating a draft bill for the creation of the Union of South Africa. To lobby for their interests, the Transvaal Asians sent a deputation consisting of Hajee Habib and Gandhi to London. The deputation spent four disappointing months (July–November 1909) in London, and returned empty-handed (*CW* 9: 288–301; Hunt 1978, 105–42).

conclusions, which appear to me to be final. The Gujarati subscribers of *Indian Opinion* number about 800. I am aware that, for every subscriber, there are at least ten persons who read the paper with zest. Those who cannot read Gujarati have the paper read to them. Such persons have often questioned me about the condition of India. Similar questions were addressed to me in London. I felt, therefore, that it might not be improper for me to ventilate publicly the views expressed by me in private.

These views are mine, and yet not mine. They are mine because I hope to act according to them. They are almost a part of my being. But, yet, they are not mine, because I lay no claim to originality. They have been formed after reading several books. That which I dimly felt received support⁸ from these books.

The views I venture to place before the reader are, needless to say, held by many Indians not touched by what is known as civilisation, but I ask the reader to believe me when I tell him that they are also held by thousands of Europeans.⁹ Those who wish to dive deep, and have time,

8 A key to the interpretation of the influence of other thinkers on Gandhi. According to George Woodcock, 'Even the influence of Tolstoy and Ruskin can be exaggerated, and Gandhi himself was inclined to do so, partly from a principle of humility that made him reluctant to accept all the credit for his achievements' (Woodcock 1972, 25–6). Of the influences of the Buddha and Buddhism, Mahavira and Jainism, and Christ and Christianity on Gandhi, K. G. Mashruwala, one of his close associates, declared that, of the three, Buddha and Buddhism exerted relatively little influence on Gandhi; as for Mahavira and Jainism, he was attracted more to their doctrine of the many-sidedness of truth (*syadvada*) than to their theory of non-violence; by contrast, Christ and Christianity exerted a relatively strong influence on him. He recognised that there was a 'great difference between Christ's active non-violence coupled with humanitarian service and the retiring, inactive non-violence of Jainism and Buddhism'. The latter two religions did not have a concept of God, which presented him with a theoretical problem in dealing with his Buddhist and Jain friends. According to Mashruwala,

Bapu [Gandhi] was often heckled about this. It led to Bapu's particular interpretation of the term God, by the proposition 'Truth is God' instead of such others as 'God is Truth' or 'God is Love', etc. He thereby sought to make God acceptable not only to Jains and Buddhists but also to Marxists. (Mashruwala 1983, 126–7)

9 An indication of the fact that Gandhi's criticism of modern Western civilisation is not inspired by any Indocentric animus.

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may read certain books themselves. If time permits me, I hope to translate portions of such books for the benefit of the readers of *Indian Opinion*.

If the readers of *Indian Opinion* and others who may see the following chapters will pass their criticism on to me, I shall feel obliged to them.

The only motive is to serve my country, to find out the Truth, and to follow it. If, therefore, my views are proved to be wrong, I shall have no hesitation in rejecting them. If they are proved to be right, I would naturally wish, for the sake of the Motherland, that others should adopt them.

To make it easy reading, the chapters are written in the form of a dialogue between the reader and the editor.

M. K. Gandhi

Kildonan Castle,

November 22nd, 1909