Trajectory of Swaraj and the Background Philosophy of Anti-colonial Solidarity: A Discourse on the Indian Agents of Change

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Abstract

No oppressive ideologies, such as racism, sexism, and imperialism, disappear easily; they require strong antitheses from external forces or through self-reflection. Embracing this premise, this paper explores anti-colonial solidarity in light of the reflective philosophy of Swaraj, emphasizing the importance of reflective ideas over brute force and discarding the assumption that violence is necessary for change. To accomplish this task, we examine into the profound historical and philosophical underpinnings of Swaraj (self-governance) as a potent reflective strength of anti-colonial cohesion within the framework and expressions of selected modern Indian philosophers. To be precise, this paper aims to enhance comprehension of the inclusive and normative significance of Swaraj in the anti-colonial and post-colonial struggle for liberation, pacifism, and solidarity.

Keywords Swaraj · Anti-colonial · Modern Indian thought · Non-violence

Introduction and the Idea of Anti-colonial Turn!

The idea of "anti-colonialism" has become commonplace, but we lack comprehensive intellectual histories and philosophies that explain the transnational and global processes leading to this emancipatory collective consciousness. While numerous factual works help us grasp the chronology of events, the required ethos to connect the dots is not sufficient. What this lacuna implies is that it is equally important to explore the historical narratives and philosophical underpinnings that shape such

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They (colonizers) were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force — nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others or *their courtesy*. (Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness, *Italics mine*).

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movements. This is the primary motivation that has intrigued this research from the outset. Following this line of thought, if we glimpse through the history of ideas and movements over the last two centuries, we find a plethora of paradigms that have arisen and evolved (Bevir, 2002; Kelley, 2017). For instance, major shifts in the West, such as the emergence of new waves of feminism, the dynamics of phenomenology and existentialism, the analytic and linguistic turn, the rise of postmodernism, and the hermeneutic turn, mark significant periods that we have had the opportunity to witness and experience (Grayling, 2019). Likewise, there are paradigms in other parts of the world that have often remained unacknowledged, one of which we shall discuss. Nonetheless, upon closer examination, while these movements may appear distinct from one another, they share a fundamental motivation towards one core value: freedom. There may be others as well. The same notion applies to the present study as well, but with a slightly different connotation, which we shall explore further in the context of the philosophy of Swaraj in light of some selected contemporary Indian philosophers.

Freedom, though, is a complex concept, and discerning what exactly it entails can be challenging. Yet, for those actively engaged in above cited movements, there was a profound sense of its importance. So, at the outset, it is crucial to recognize that the notion of freedom is multifaceted (Shaw, 2011). It encompasses various dimensions, including political, socio-cultural, spiritual, and intellectual contexts. Its name may change from culture to culture, with each having its own theoretical underpinnings; some may call it liberty, others may call it independence, among other viewpoints. For philosophical instance, Isaiah Berlin's "*Two Concepts of Liberty*" outlines two fundamental types of freedom: negative liberty, which is the absence of external obstacles allowing individuals to act unimpeded, and positive liberty, which is the ability to control and direct one's own life (Baum & Nichols, 2013). An intriguing aspect of Berlin's theory is his cautionary note regarding the pursuit of positive liberty, highlighting its potential to veer into authoritarianism. This is particularly relevant to the present research context, which we will also address implicitly. Similarly, John Stuart Mill's "*On Liberty*" champions individual freedom and autonomy, arguing that society should only interfere with an individual's liberty to prevent harm to others (the harm principle) (Mill, 2006). And this meditation on and about freedom is still ongoing, an aspect of which we shall explore by examining the multidirectional and dialogical dimensions of Swaraj within the context of contemporary Indian philosophy.

These perpetual humanistic deliberations serve a purpose by assisting us in maintaining the trajectory of the human condition. By what means? An example of a movement that peaked during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries amidst the aforementioned intellectual and socio-cultural developments was the anti-colonial turn, which could not have been possible without a sense of dignity and freedom of any form (Judge & Langdon, 2018). And this turn was, in fact, one of the most emancipatory turns humanities has ever embraced (Heath, 2021; Walter, 2017). It is possible to define it in a broad sense as a theoretical framework, an analytical instrument, and a grounded, place-based activity that is geared towards discarding, fighting against, and deconstructing the goals of colonial regimes, institutions, and ideologies (Lee, 2017). In attempting to make

sense of the breadth of forms of resistance encompassed through an anti-colonial ethic, "the concept has been framed as both (1) a historical event and (2) critical analytic" (Nunn & Whetung, 2020:155). Thus, the concept of anti-colonial thought and solidarity encompasses a wide range of paradigms, and it is in a state of constant evolution, dependent on the current manifestations and interpretations of colonial systems and institutions, as well as resistance against these.

Here, one might question whether the narrative we just outlined largely resembles a story of the western world. What about other parts of the world? Indeed, the story is not vastly different in other regions either. The quest for freedom is as intrinsic in humanity as any other natural element we crave for (Gandhi, 2000a, b; Shaw, 2011). Anti-colonial solidarity, a significant concern in our current discourse, can also emerge as a byproduct of this quest for liberty. This normative solidarity stands as a powerful testament to the indomitable spirit of humanity, woven from threads of resistance, spirit, and a shared yearning for freedom. Across continents and cultures, it echoes the collective roar of those who refuse to be shackled by the chains of imperialism, forging bonds of unity in the pursuit of self-determination and dignity. From the streets of India to the plains of Africa, from the jungles of Latin America to the islands of the Pacific, the practical philosophy of anti-colonial solidarity is embroidered with the stories of courage, sacrifice, and defiance (Lee, 2017; Manela & Streets-Salter, 2023). It is a living testament to the universal quest for freedom, manifesting in diverse ways as communities rally together, united in their unwavering resolve to reclaim their sovereignty and shape their own destinies. The means to achieve it might be culture-specific, but the motive and end goal of anti-colonial solidarity are transnational. To extract a few events from J. D. Elam's study:

> In the recent centuries, anti-colonialism emerged as resistance against imperial rule, significantly marked by the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung. In South Asia, movements spanned from the 1857 to the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947, with figures like Gandhi advocating non-violence and Bhagat Singh supporting revolutionary tactics. Anglophone Africa saw post-World War II movements influenced by Black diasporic thinkers, with notable events like Kenya's Mau Mau Revolution and South African anti-apartheid activism led by Nelson Mandela. Francophone Africa experienced unique challenges with French assimilation policies, highlighted by Algeria's FLN guerilla war and Moroccan independence. Latin America, focusing on economic and cultural independence, saw figures like Emiliano Zapata and leaders of the Cuban Revolution challenging global capitalism. Philosophers like Frantz Fanon and B.R. Ambedkar contributed to anti-colonial thought, emphasizing psychological liberation (Elam, 2017:1-6).

Following this line of thought, this deliberation shall demonstrate how the constructive ethos of Swaraj played a significant role in shaping anti-colonial solidarity in modern Indian thought. To be precise, we shall normatively focus on the ideas of selected thinkers, namely Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore,

Sri Aurobindo, K.C. Bhattacharya, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Mahatma Gandhi. The reason for selecting these thinkers is clear: they thoroughly contributed to the emancipatory act of anti-colonial solidarity through their philosophy of Swaraj and interestingly share a great length of philosophical ideas with each other, "providing a framework to view them in a single thread, namely Advaita (Non-dualism)" (Mahadevan & Saroja, 1983: 6; Naravane, 1964).Through their collective efforts, Swaraj was imbued with new meanings to reawaken the dormant Indian populace and instill in them a renewed sense of freedom, with the ultimate aim being free in holistic sense. The Indian people had been fighting for independence from the British for a long time. The political, economic, social, and spiritual limitations that had ensnared them made their journey toward freedom a difficult one (Chandra et al., 2016). And these were the thinkers who made this task imaginable through their comprehensive philosophy of Swaraj. Now the question arises: if a concept is of such importance, what are its philosophical and historical underpinnings? This is also a key question we are going to address in diverse ways in this study.

To briefly outline the narrative, one of the roots of anti-colonial sentiment in India can be traced back to the early nineteenth century, when the adverse effects of British economic policies and socio-cultural reforms began to be felt across various strata of Indian society (Sen, 2009). The deindustrialization of traditional crafts, exploitative land revenue systems, and the drain of wealth to Britain catalyzed widespread economic discontent one (Chandra et al., 2016). Additionally, the imposition of Western education and legal systems, along with efforts to reform Indian social customs, sparked cultural and philosophical resistance. And all these experiential instances led to the anti-colonial turn which was once considered to be a conformity. It was significantly influenced by an intellectual awakening among the Indian intellectual and populace. And reformers and thinkers cited above played key roles in reawakening a sense of pride in India's cultural and spiritual heritage. And Swaraj was the collective call for that which we shall explore in the further fragments. As Gandhi said with a collective sense of freedom:

> The Swaraj of my-our-dream recognizes no race or religious distinctions. Not is it to be the monopoly of the lettered persons or yet of moneyed men. Swaraj is to be for all, including the former, but emphatically including the maimed, the blind, the starving, toiling millions… Real Swaraj must be felt by all-man, woman and child (Gandhi, 2024:1).

Freed Trajectory of Swaraj and Some Historical Contexts

Images of wars, hunger strikes, weaponization, prisons, detention camps, and other similar settings are frequently associated with freedom movements. This is a common perception of movements for freedom and any other socio-cultural change. On the other hand, when we are confronted with circumstances such as these, we have a tendency to forget the value of ideas and ethics, which are the driving forces of liberation movements in general (Von Mises, 1949). This tendency results in an

enormous number of bright minds and ideas sometimes being overlooked. In this regard, there are many intellectuals who do not receive the recognition they deserve for their contributions and ideas, such as promoting socio-cultural freedom, eliminating poverty and injustice, preserving perpetual peace, and other important ideals. Bringing this discourse to the anti-colonial solidarity in the Indian context, the philosophy and history of Swaraj, as outlined in the introduction, are crucial. However, on the global platform, this holistic and pacifist philosophy, along with many other important axiologies such as ethics and aesthetics from South Asia, has not gained as much importance as it deserves due to several imperialistic reasons (Bhattacharya, 2011; Radhakrishnan, 1989; Ranganathan, 2007). And the philosophy of Swaraj is one of them which entails alternative forms of change and reality based on the normative vision one has in mind.

Of equal importance, upon examining the lifeworld of the chosen intellectuals in our composition, it becomes apparent that they assert the idea of Swaraj is not something they possess as a personal invention. Rather, they attribute it to tradition, culture, and part of one's own karma, where each individual has their own due to contribute for the greater good (Jahanbegloo, 2023; Devji & Kapila, 2013; Nagappa Gowda, 2011). While they were not the original inventors, they skillfully developed and adapted it to meet the demand of their time and vision of bright future. The term Swaraj was employed to denote the concept of autonomy and self-governance. From a broader perspective, Swaraj encompassed more than just the liberation of India from British colonial domination. "It entailed a profound and meaningful transformation of one's thoughts and attitudes" (Jahanbegloo, 2023:29). "Swaraj," in its early Vedic connotation, denoted self-governance, self-rule, or self-governance. The Sanskrit word "sva" translates to "own, one's own, my own, or self." Nevertheless, in Sanskrit, "sva" can also mean "self" in the most profound spiritual sense of the word "soul." In this context, "svaraj" implies soul rule, or an individual who is governed by the intentions of his own soul. However, an interpretation of a movement that contributed to anti-colonial solidarity as a whole and significantly influenced the future trajectory of India cannot be achieved solely through etymology. It demands careful deliberations and historical contexts.

So, beginning with some historical figures, Dayananda Saraswati could be considered as one of the first to contemplate the concept of Swaraj. He was among the pioneers to apply the term "swarajya" in a political context, establishing it as a watchword in India (Khimta, 2017). Dayananda, who recalled the famous slogan "Go back to the Vedas" to oppose the dogmas of Hindu society of his time, is notable for his prophetic stance on nationalism, substantiated by the potent slogan of independence, Swarajya (Chamupati, 1937:83). Dayananda was the first Indian to assert that Swaraj was an inherent privilege of their people, advocating for the liberation and independence of India. He believed, "It is a religious duty to get rid of Europeans and all the evils that prey on them. The better a man understands his religion, the clearer will be his perception that Europeans and European influence must be removed" (Das, 2005:116). In line with this, apart from the selected luminaries in our composition, there was a long list of Swarajists. Dada Bhai Naoroji, Swami Shraddhananda, Bipin Chandra Pal, Lala Lajpat rai, Gopal Krishna Gokhale,

C.R Das, and many others contributed greatly to the philosophy and ethos of Swaraj (Khimta, 2017; Jayapalan, 2000; Varma, 1961).[1]

It is interesting to note that among all of these thinkers that we have just mentioned, who appear to be activists, as the typical Indian history book suggests, because they were directly in confrontation with the Britishers, their concept of Swaraj was not conservative, which could be limited to merely political freedom and patriotism; rather, they also had their own profound metaphysical understanding of what it meant to be a Swaraj. In particular, Bipin Chandra Pal was the one who thoroughly worked upon this concept, as reflected in his movements, and works (Pal, 1922, 1945).

> Swaraj means the raj or supreme authority or domination of the swa or the self. This self or swa is that which we refer to by the first-person singular, "I". This "I" is called 'Aham' in our ancient thoughts and speculations. Our ancient seers divided the whole range of experiences into two classes, namely, that which refers to this 'Swa' or the 'Aham' and that which they call 'Idam'. This 'Idam' includes all else except the 'Aham'. To speak in modern terms, the 'Aham' is the knower, 'Idam' is the object of knowledge. And swaraj means the supremacy and dominion of the self over the non self. This is really the meaning of swaraj as known in our ancient thought and culture. It will thus be seen that the word swaraj belongs in our literature to the category of the spiritual (Pal, 1945:2).

Pal coined "Divine Democracy" and saw Swaraj as such. He believed "Divine Democracy" was the only way to free India. The concept of Swaraj that has shown itself to us is divine democracy. Democracy is better than battling, pushing, materialistic, harsh democracies of Europe and America (Varma, 1961:268). Clearly, one can observe the anti-colonial connotation in the words of Pal, which was also taking the form of collective solidarity among his contemporaries through the philosophy of Swaraj. Likewise, Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak also stands as a towering figure in the pantheon of Indian nationalist thinkers, alongside luminaries such as Swami Vivekananda, Dayananda Saraswati, and Rabindranath Tagore. Amidst the late 19th and early 20th-century ferment of colonial India, Tilak's vision of Swaraj, deeply rooted in philosophical interpretations drawn from ancient Indian texts like the Vedas and the Bhagavad Gita, echoed the sentiments of cultural pride and self-reliance espoused by Vivekananda and Dayananda.

Likewise, Tilak's conceptualization of Swaraj also went beyond mere political freedom, emphasizing the need for societal reform and the awakening of the masses. His advocacy for assertive resistance against British rule, for which he was regarded as a firebrand nationalist and often labeled as "The Father of Indian

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[1] In 1901, at the National Congress in Calcutta, Dadabhai Naoroji defined Swaraj: "It is an administration of affairs in a country by her own people on their own strength in accordance with the welfare of the people without even nominal suzerainty, which is the object which we wish to attain. We had forgotten it for a time and feared to speak about it." Aurobindo (1997). *The meaning of Swaraj*. In Complete works of Sri Aurobindo (Vol. 4). India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department.p.833, https://incarnateword.in/cwsa/7/the-meaning-of-swaraj.

Unrest," and his instrumental role in popularizing nationalist fervor through initiatives like the Ganesh Utsav and the *Kesari newspaper*, left an indelible mark on the Indian Swaraj movement. In 1916, in Belgaum, Karnataka, his slogan "Swaraj is my birthright and I shall have it" became a rallying cry for India's struggle for independence, encapsulating the spirit of defiance against colonial oppression. As we shall further, Tilak's work along with Tagore's cultural revival helped launch the Swadeshi movement, which promoted the idea of Indigenous work culture and self-sufficiency as essential to freedom. Enough of the preliminary historicity of Swaraj; we can now speak with our primary thinkers. This requires understanding how Swaraj evolved: Was it expanding beyond physical or political independence from colonialism to socio-cultural, intellectual, and spiritual domains, or was it encompassing all these goals and ideals?

Giving a clear response is difficult, but based on the previous discussion, which we will elaborate on more later, Swaraj was not organic like a tree, maturing over time and distance. Instead, it was holistic, culturally rooted without being conservative, and responsive to current demands. Of equal importance, the movement of Swaraj in its initial phase was embodied with aggressive activism, and the concern for the means to achieve it was not predominant. This is common at preliminary stages when a culture is undergoing a rejuvenation of its sense of integrity and freedom. This sentiment can be seen in the words of Dadabhai Naoroji, Swami Shraddhananda, Bipin Chandra Pal, Lala Lajpat Rai, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and C.R. Das (Khimta, 2017). However, the movement evolved to emphasize achieving freedom in a civilized manner. The seeds of this evolution can be found in the words of these early thinkers and are predominantly reflected in the ideas of other thinkers whom we shall discuss further. Simply put, violence was not the only option for their ideas and actions to function amid the colonial cage. Now we will discuss a group of philosophers that we have chosen for this particular composition. These philosophers, when read together, appear to be on the same page with regard to a wide range of philosophical topics, whether they are metaphysical or cultural, including the concept of Swaraj (Naravane, 1964; Radhakrishnan, 2018).

To begin with Vivekananda's Swaraj philosophy, he beheld a holistic view of India's spiritual, socio-cultural, and political awakening. He taught self-reliance, self-confidence, and knowledge to empower and gain national independence, believing true freedom begins with karma and spiritual self-realization. As he said, "Karma Yoga, therefore, is a system of ethics and religion intended to attain freedom through unselfishness, and by good works (Rathna Reddy, 1984:14)." His holistic approach to Swaraj—spiritual, social, economic, and political—inspired many Indian freedom warriors and leaders. Understandably, these Vivekananda claims may seem repetitive. But his philosophy becomes clearer as we study his large corpus of work and life moves. In particular, his affection for cosmopolitanism, vis-à-vis Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, is worth citing in relation to his approach to Swaraj. In his speech "The Work Before Us," which was delivered in Madras on February 9, 1897, he stated:

> To become broad, to go out, to amalgamate, to universalise, is the end of our aims. . . . With all my love for India, and with all my patriotism and venera-

tion for the ancients, I cannot but think that we have to learn many things from other nations. We must be always ready to sit at the feet of all, for, mark you, everyone can teach us great lessons. . . . We cannot do without the world outside India; it was our foolishness that we thought we could, and we have paid the penalty by about a thousand years of slavery. That we did not go out to compare things with other nations, did not mark the workings that have been all around us, has been the one great cause of this degradation of the Indian mind. We have paid the penalty; let us do it no more (Medhananda, 2022:6).

Yet, Vivekananda's close and creative connection with ancient Indian thought, particularly the Prasthānatrayī (the Upanishads, the Bhagavadgītā, and the Brahma Sūtras), was the guiding force behind his vision (Rambachan, 1994). In his "Reply to the Address at Ramnad" delivered on January 25, 1897, "Vivekananda called on Indians to cultivate a cosmopolitan receptivity to foreign ideas while remaining rooted in their own great Indian tradition (Medhananda, 2022:6)." Additionally, Sri Ramakrishna's Neo-Vedanta and the Sankhya philosophy informed his views on individual and societal evolution. He was one of the first thinkers to develop a new methodology for interpreting the Vedānta tradition, which later manifested in his practice of synthesis and assimilation. Writing about the synthesis of yoga and considering the practical aspects of Vedānta in relation to contemporary issues like colonialism, poverty, and religious violence, he reflected a cosmopolitan attitude. Thus, his idea of anti-colonial solidarity and universal religion was much broader, aimed at serving humanity and providing a philosophy for the holistic development of individuals, which he termed "man-making" (Mukhopādhyāẏa, 1971). He was a precisely a cosmopolitan Dharma Sastri which entail in the words of Dr. P.V. Kane:

> The writers on Dharma Shastra meant by Dharma not a creed or religion but a mode of life or a code of conduct, which regulated man's work and activities as a member of society and as an individual and was intended to bring about the gradual development of man and to enable him to reach what was deemed to be the goal of human existence (Rathna Reddy, 1984:X).

And this impact of Dharma Shastra was prevalent among his contemporaries and future generations of thinkers who were working toward humanistic goals, including anti-colonial solidarity and universal peace. And all these goals were properly guided by rigorous methodology namely "Subjectivistic (spiritual not relativistic), intuitional and aphoristic" (Rathna Reddy, 1984:X). This multifaceted idealism, both metaphysical and methodological, by implication, refutes any inconsistent way of life, particularly those that prima facie represents any form of injustices, such as colonialism. To understand it in this way, if a cultural consciousness is rooted in the idea of universal consciousness and methodological assimilation, where does the scope for the suffering of others in any form remain? This question permeates the life world of the thinkers we have selected and is consolidated in the philosophy of Swaraj (Radhakrishnan, 1913; Mahadevan & Saroja, 1983). Coming to Tagore's worldview, which was very contemporary to Vivekananda's, he also contributed to the practice of anti-colonial solidarity in his own unique way (Banerji, 2015). His affection for the philosophy and poetry of freedom is well-known and also well

reflects his idea of Swaraj. Likewise, he too, in consistency with the ethos of Swaraj, argued that freedom was the freedom of spirit. As reflected in the following words of Tagore:

> Real freedom is of the mind and spirit, it can never come to us from outside. He only has freedom who ideally loves freedom himself and is glad to extend it to others. He who cares to have slaves must chain himself to them; he who builds walls to create exclusion for others builds walls across his own freedom; he who distrusts freedom in others…. sooner or later, he is lured into the meshes of physical and moral servility (Tagore, 1996, p. 545).

> Or, as his famous freedom verses express:

> Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high, where knowledge is free.
> Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls.
> Where words come out from the depth of truth.
> Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection.
> Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit.
> Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action.
> Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake (Bhattacharya, 2013:8).

Tagore, embodying the anti-colonial spirit throughout his life and works, including "*The Spirit of Freedom*" and "*Creative Unity*," consistently sought to provide an alternative view of freedom (Banerji, 2015). His emphasis shifted from external conditions to internal states of being, advocating for a deeper understanding of liberation. He argues, like any other Swaraj practitioners, that true freedom is not merely the absence of external constraints but rather an inner state that empowers individuals and expands their creative potential. He asserts that without this internal freedom, political liberation is meaningless. He emphasizes the need for individuals to emancipate themselves from both external servitude and the psychological effects of colonization, which induce the colonized to internalize the values and power structures of their oppressors (Sen, 2022). For Tagore, freedom entails not only breaking free from external control but also overcoming the temptation to dominate others. He underscores the importance of creative unity in challenging the colonial mindset, which thrives on division and subjugation. Through this lens, Tagore calls for a profound transformation in the psyche of the colonized, one that rejects the oppressive structures imposed by colonialism and embraces a vision of unity and empowerment (Mukhopadhyay, 2023). In critique of this culture, Tagore frequently expressed in the following spirit of Swaraj:

> He only has freedom who ideally loves freedom himself and is glad to extend it to others. He who cares to have slaves must chain himself to them; he who builds walls to create exclusion for others builds walls across his own freedom; he who distrusts freedom in others loses his moral right to it.

Sooner or later, he is lured into the meshes of physical and moral servility (Puri, 2014:158).

Being a poetic philosopher, Tagore saw freedom as a creative attitude we must cultivate rather than a set of rights and benefits to be obtained via political agitation and then freely available after power transition. "This sensation frees the mind from egocentrism and integrates it with creation. Tagore defines freedom as unity with creation. This union requires pulling apart the veil of the small 'I,' which Tagore uses to define egocentricity, and entering the consciousness of bhuma, the grand or complete (Sen, 2022:147)." And it is what is the central call of Swaraj that without this realisation and its moral and spiritual elevation, political emancipation will not create a free people. Freedom means seeing others as equals rather than enslaved by our authoritarian, totalitarian urge to subjugate them. All the while, Tagore believed in the value of patriotic gestures and declarations. The 1905 Partition of Bengal inspired Rabindranath Tagore to compose "Swadeshi Samaj" (Tagore, 2003). This Tagorian essay presented a free India's new awareness and identity, where the people spoke together and powerfully.

Likewise, this effort sought to cross the divide between educated and illiterate, cities, and villages, so everyone could comprehend the ancient Indian concept of oneness and provide a local flavor of anti-colonial solidarity. Interestingly, despite having some differences with Gandhi on the issues of modernity and Swadeshi, Tagore found common ground with him on the point of Swaraj. This shared belief in Swaraj brought them together on the same page of anti-colonial solidarity, where they did not compromise for a moment.

Tagore, like Bhattacharyya, rejects the negative side of Gandhi's Swadeshi. Whereas Gandhi adopts an essentially parochial reading of values and institutions, rejecting all things foreign and an essentially conservative view of identity, Tagore is instinctively cosmopolitan and progressive. A great deal of his critique of Gandhi's views of development rests on his view that Gandhi—despite his assertions to the contrary—never took economic considerations seriously as ethical—as having a value in their own right (Bhushan & Garfield, 2017:61).

The game-changing moment was the Anti-Partition Movement (Banga Bhanga Birodhi Andolon, 1905), which initiated protests across India. Bengali political leaders organized the Raksha Bandhan Utsab (celebration) to foster unity between Hindu and Muslim communities. Tagore and other Bengali leaders took to the streets to protest against the divisive Bengal Partition. After this surprise blow, the nation exploded in indignation and united quickly. Here, Aurobindo can be brought into the picture, whose life and work are the perfect embodiment of Swaraj, and he was also shaken with this event. Furthermore, whether discussing cultural renaissance, building solidarity among communities, or transforming from an agitated activist to a spiritual reformer, Aurobindo's journey encapsulates many ideals associated with the ethos of Swaraj. His life and contributions reflect the multifaceted nature of Swaraj, which we have been exploring and shall explore further. Aurobindo's life can be divided into two distinct phases that reflect his evolving idea of Swaraj.

The first phase, from 1893 to 1910, was marked by his fervent political activism. After returning to India from England, Aurobindo criticized the moderate Congress leaders and called for a revolutionary movement against British rule. He became a prominent leader in the radical wing of the Indian National Congress and was heavily involved in the anti-partition movement in Bengal. His influential writings in "Bande Mataram" and "Karmayogin" culminated in his arrest during the Alipore Bomb Conspiracy Case in 1908, where he experienced a major spiritual awakening. The second phase of his life, from 1910 to 1950, focused on spiritual activism. After moving to Pondicherry in 1910, Aurobindo dedicated himself to spiritual practice and writing, producing significant works such as "*The Life Divine*," "*Essays on the Gita*," and "*Savitri*." He called:

> Our aim will therefore be to help in building up India for the sake of humanity – this is the spirit of the Nationalism (*therefore of Swaraj*)which we profess and follow. We say to humanity "The time has come when you must take the great step and rise out of a material existence into the higher, deeper, and wider life towards which humanity moves. The problems which have troubled mankind can only be solved by conquering the kingdom within….For that work the freedom and greatness of India is essential, therefore she claims her destined freedom and greatness, and it is to the interest of all humanity, not excluding England, that she should wholly establish her claim (Paranjape, 2023:32).

Moreover, during this period, his concept of Swaraj evolved from political independence to spiritual self-independence, emphasizing that true national freedom requires the inner liberation of individuals (Kumar, 2021). These two phases illustrate the progression of Aurobindo's idea of Swaraj, from a focus on national liberation to a broader vision of spiritual freedom and human evolution. He advocated methods of peaceful resistance and non-cooperation against British rule, which anticipated the rise of a leader like Gandhi which we shall discuss further. Further, to contextualize it in more in historical view, as noted, the call for Swaraj reached its peak following the significant and crude incident of the Bengal Partition. Among the prominent nationalist leaders advocating for this cause was Aurobindo, who was well-known for his fervent support of Swaraj. In his famous speech delivered in Nasik on January 24, 1908, which was also published in "*Bande Mataram*" under the title "The Meaning of Swaraj," he called for solidarity: "Swaraj is life, it is nectar and salvation. Swaraj in a nation is the breath of life. Without the breath of life, a man is dead. So also, without Swaraj, a nation is dead. Swaraj being the life of a nation, it is essential for it" (Aurobindo, 1997:834).

Aurobindo was greatly motivated by the philosophy of evolution, which is clearly shown in his most important work, "*The Life Divine*." Likewise, this effect is seen in the development of his concept of Swaraj, which transitioned from pushing for national sovereignty to placing greater emphasis on individual self-reliance. Nishant Kumar's analysis reveals that Sri Aurobindo's emphasis on national independence in his early phase did not exclude spiritual elements from his concept of Swaraj. While he emphasized the need for independence, he acknowledged that true independence could only be achieved through spiritual growth showing a very pacific picture of

Aurobindo's philosophy. The shift, argues Kumar, occurred gradually, and can be most effectively described as an evolutionary process. For instance, "by comparing his *Bhawani Mandir* with his editorials in *Bande Mataram* or *Karmayogin*, one can identify a strikingly similar expression of the spiritual" (Kumar, 2021:42–43). Furthermore, it can confidently be asserted that Aurobindo who made it clear that the ideal Swaraj was deontological, where every act and moral was directed towards achieving it. In his words:

> Let us work practically at the smallest details but let us never forget that the work is not for its own sake but for the sake of Swaraj. We shall be false to our inspiration if we forget the goal in the details; we shall condemn ourselves to the fate of the man who in the eagerness of picking up pebbles on the seashore threw away the alchemic stone which God had for a moment given into his hands. Swaraj is the alchemic stone, the parash-pathar, and we have it in our hands. It will turn to gold everything we touch. Village samitis are good, not for the sake of village samitis but for the sake of Swaraj. Boycott is good, not for the sake of Boycott but for the sake of Swaraj. Swadeshi is good, not for the sake of Swadeshi but for the sake of Swaraj. Arbitration is good, not for the sake of arbitration but for the sake of Swaraj. If we forget Swaraj and win anything else, we shall be like the seeker whose belt was turned indeed to gold, but the stone of alchemy was lost to him forever (Ghose, 1965:62).

In line with the narrative, at this stage, we can compare Aurobindo's doctrine of Swaraj with Gandhi's ethos. After Aurobindo withdrew from Indian politics, Mahatma Gandhi emerged as a prominent leader. Gandhi understood the importance of Swaraj and expanded its meaning from colonial self-government to complete self-government, or Purna Swaraj which ultimately culminates into Hind-Swaraj (Sonnleitner, 1989; Jahanbegloo, 2023). Thus, Gandhi can be seen as a true successor to earlier Indian socio-political leaders, as he actualized the notion of Swaraj envisioned by his predecessors. Additionally, his deep understanding of multicultural civilizations, including Indian tradition, enriched his philosophy with the ethics of assimilation, eliminating most possibilities of violence and injustice, as reflected in Aurobindo's worldview, where the idea of Swaraj cannot be initiated as long as these evils exist. Although the holistic concept of Swaraj existed in the words and movements of other nationalist thinkers before Aurobindo and Gandhi, it was these two leaders who popularized it and brought it into the collective consciousness (Giri, 2021). In the colonial context, Swaraj was consistently associated with political freedom, often translated as self-rule or self-government. However, it was Aurobindo, Gandhi, and others like K.C. Bhattacharya, whom we will discuss shortly, who had a broader vision. In the words of Nishant Kumar:

> Sudipta Kaviraj notes that new ideas often find awkward translations and slowly integrate into the semantic structure. For Indian nationalists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Swaraj primarily signified political independence from the British Raj. This narrow interpretation overlooked the broader possibilities of the concept. However, Aurobindo and Gandhi's engagement with Swaraj transcended traditional boundaries, using it to imply

deeper meanings beyond national independence or political freedom. Their philosophical approach developed Swaraj as an inclusive concept (Kumar, 2021:41).

Of significant importance, Gandhi practiced the idea of Swaraj at three levels, each connected with the others. These were "personal Swaraj, purna Swaraj and Hind Swaraj" (Sonnleitner, 1989:8).[2] To reflect upon them one by one, according to Gandhi, personal (parliamentary) Swaraj denotes a condition of things when the dumb and lame millions will speak and walk. At this basic level of understanding, "self-rule" means the "rule of Indians by Indians," reflected in their ability to select their own representatives through free and open elections. Gandhi believed that not achieving this fundamental level of self-rule tends to produce in a population a sub-conscious (if not conscious) feeling of low self-worth and cultural inferiority. "Thus, as early as 1908, Gandhi endorsed the idea of parliamentary independence for India because accruing to him it is wrong normally for one nation to rule over another" (Sonnleitner, 1989:10). As Gandhi express:

> Although this is the age of democracy, I do not know what the word connotes; however, I would say that democracy exists where the people's voice is heard, where love of the people holds a place of prime importance …Real swaraj will come, not by the acquisition of authority by a few, but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused. In other words, swaraj is to be attained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority (Jahanbegloo, 2023:32).

Being a thinker of the philosophy of Swaraj, Gandhi's moral argument was simple that even if the rule were benevolent, the danger of breeding a complacent or slave mentality would remain. Thus, his ideal was a "true democracy" in which citizen participation in decision-making would be fostered, with the village level becoming the primary political unit (Gandhi, 1996). Each village unit would select sub provincial representatives who would then select other representatives until the capacity to regulate national life through national representatives is achieved. Thus, the "true democracy" of purna Swaraj may approach an ideal state of "enlightened anarchy," where everyone is one's own ruler, ruling oneself in a manner that does not hinder one's neighbor (Chaturvedi & Rai, 2008). Nishant Kumar cites Gandhi from 1931, when he was asked to explain the significance of the phrase "purna Swaraj" or complete independence, which had been the declared goal of the Congress. Gandhi replied:

> I do not know any word or phrase to answer it in the English language —I can, therefore, only give an explanation. The root meaning of swaraj is self-rule. Swaraj may, therefore, be rendered as disciplined rule from within and 'purna' means 'complete'. 'Independence' has no such limitation. Independence may

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[2] For a detailed elaboration on these three levels of Swaraj in Gandhian worldview: see- Sonnleitner, M.W. (1989). *Gandhian Satyagraha and Swaraj*. Peace & Change, 14: 3-24. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0130.1989.tb00111.x.

mean licence to do as you like. Swaraj is positive. Independence is negative. Purna Swaraj does not exclude association with any nation, much less with England. But it can only mean association for mutual benefit and at will. … The word swaraj is a sacred word, a vedic word, meaning self-rule and self-restraint, and not freedom from all restraint which 'independence' often means (Kumar, 2021:113).

Likewise, on its second level of meaning, Swaraj is "synonymous with moksha or salvation" (Sonnleitner, 1989:10). On this level of Swaraj, the purna Swaraj ideal of people progressively growing in the capacity to rule themselves becomes inseparable from the ideal of encouraging all individuals to allow their inner selves or souls to rule over their bodies. A truly moral person thus becomes one who not only gains a sense of self-respect (via tactical nonviolence) but also learns to respect the self or soul in him- or herself and others, requiring that nonviolence be accepted as a religious discipline. Gandhi believed that the "Swaraj of a people means the sum total of the Swaraj of individuals" (Sonnleitner, 1989:11). In other words, to the extent to which individuals in a society approach spiritual moksha (liberation), or personal Swaraj, to that degree they could not be ruled over by others and the stateless ideal of purna Swaraj might be attained. This higher level of understanding Swaraj presupposes a significant degree of self-respect and empowerment in the understander. "Gandhi held that real swaraj will come, not by the acquisition of authority by a few, but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused, thus educating the masses to regulate and control authority (Jahanbegloo, 2023:29)." Indian political scholar Rajiv Bhargava also provides a unique perspective on Swaraj worth citing here, implicitly connecting the above two forms:

Nowhere is Gandhi's intellectual framework more central than in deciphering his meanings of swaraj. Swaraj in Hind Swaraj has two meanings, one political and the other spiritual. Political swaraj is freedom from alien rule that leads to the rule by an Indian sovereign state. Spiritual swaraj is the ability of the citizens to control their anti-social behaviour through high minded patriotism, self-discipline, and an authentic spiritual life. Gandhi's originality lies in linking these two forms of swaraj. To have full swaraj (purna swaraj), you need both. Hind Swaraj seeks to establish the need for swaraj in both its meanings (Bhargava, 2022:31).

So, it is for sure that Hind Swaraj was of supreme importance in Ghandhian worldview. And on third level of meaning, Gandhi conceived Swaraj as Hind Swaraj, "the rule of all people, the rule of justice," which consists of "the sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority" (Jahanbegloo, 2023:29). The goal of purna Swaraj, which involves encouraging a people to rule themselves rather than be ruled over by others, is joined by the progressive surrender of rule to one's inner self (soul) on a personal level. As this process affects more and more individuals, the Gandhian ideal of Hind Swaraj might approach realization. It is in this context that Gandhi would observe the independence of my conception means nothing less than the realization of the "Kingdom of God" within you and on this earth. For Gandhi, the ideal of the Kingdom of God (Hind Swaraj,

sometimes also described as Ram Rajya for Hindu audiences) is the ultimate goal towards which satyagraha movements are designed to progress (Mukherjee, 2009; Sonnleitner, 1989). Gandhi described it as a condition of "true democracy" in which the power is shared by all and the state ceases to exist in any coercive sense. As depicted in the following assertions:

> Gandhi brought the terms swaraj and swadeshi to center stage in colonial Indian discourse. These two words have both descriptive and evaluative content. On the one hand, they denote independence and native character; on the other, they suggest freedom and independence at individual and collective levels. They served to unify metaphysical and political thinking about India and Indianness (Bhushan & Garfield, 2017:155).

It is a condition in which the masses of humanity have become so willing to voluntarily suffer for their love that they have approached as perfect a realization of truth as is possible in embodied existence. Such perfection was thought to require the highest level of satyagraha, that of a soul force capable of making even the lions and the lambs lie down together. To be precise, in that sense, from Gandhi's point of view Swaraj did not mean solely independence of India from colonialism. Swaraj, for Gandhi, as outlined above, was something more significant and meaningful, involving a change of heart and mind for Indians (Jahanbegloo, 2023). Gandhi, therefore, argued:

> Swaraj and Ramrajya are one and the same thing. … We call a State Ramrajya when both the ruler and his subjects are straight forward, when both are pure in heart, when both are inclined towards self-sacrifice, when both exercise restraint and self-control while enjoying worldly pleasures, and, when the relationship between the two is as good as that between father and son. It is because we have forgotten this that we talk of democracy or the government of the people. In my Ramrajya, however, public opinion cannot be measured by counting heads or raising hands. I would not regard this as a measure of public opinion … The rishis and Munis after doing penance came to the conclusion that public opinion is the opinion of people who practice penance and who have the good of the people at heart (Jahanbegloo, 2023:29).

The discussion so far reveals that the idea of Swaraj is inherently inclusive and non-discriminatory, embodying an essence of assimilation and integration. Nishant Kumar, in comparing the worldviews of Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo, highlights how both thinkers, despite some initial differences, converge on key principles such as non-violence, valuing both means and ends, universal spiritualism, and the assimilation of diverse viewpoints as long as they do not cause harm or violence. This inclusive vision seeks to uplift every person, fostering justice, equality, and fraternity without exclusion. Both thinkers emphasize that true independence and self-rule (Swaraj) are achieved through unity, inclusivity, and mutual respect, underscoring a universal principle of transformative, inclusive progress applicable to various contexts of human development and societal

advancement. And as discussed, this inclusive moral sphere also encompasses the philosophies of Tagore and Vivekananda, who similarly emphasize unity, synthesis, inclusivity, and mutual respect. As Kumar put it about Gandhi and Aurobindo:

> Assimilative world view puts Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo again on the same page as cosmopolitan thinkers, for whom the idea of swaraj could not be defined by restricting it either at the level of individual or nation, but rather seen as expanding its horizon to harmoniously accommodate the concerns of humanity and look for solutions to inculcate the spirit of freedom in its truest sense. This idea of swaraj is based on the essence of 'spiritual universalism' that both these thinkers not only advocated but also embodied in their lives, sadhana and struggles (Kumar, 2021:59).

After examining some of the major Indian national leaders who fought against colonialism and fostered solidarity, two thinkers who remain significant but are often overlooked are K.C. Bhattacharya and Bhagwan Das (Bhushan & Garfield, 2011). Despite being academics rather than activists, their philosophy of Swaraj has had a profound influence on recent Indian thinkers and researchers (Mayaram, 2014). Bhattacharya and Das contributed to the movement through their intellectual prowess and philosophical insights, offering nuanced perspectives on self-rule and emancipation. Bhagwan Das, in his endeavor to elucidate the concept of Swaraj, emphasized the imperative of providing a clear and comprehensive definition. During the All-India Congress Committee's sessions in July 1921, Das presented a proposal advocating for the clarification of fundamental principles, asserting that such clarity was paramount for the success of any public movement (Das, 1921).

He noted the significant strides made under Mahatma Gandhi's guidance, particularly in terms of moral fortitude and peaceful resistance against injustice, stressing the need for a clearer vision of the Swaraj goal to consolidate and protect these advancements. Das also provides his view, asserting that careful assimilation is the only way to achieve true reconciliation among all nations and classes, including India and England. "Wise legislation can reconcile the "I" and "We" in humans, balancing competition and cooperation, individualism and socialism for communal health and prosperity. This can be achieved through wisely elected spiritual-minded legislators over centuries for true Swaraj (Das, 1921:99)." And it is what we have tried in this composition in narrative format. In particular, the three levels of Swaraj in the Gandhian worldview discussed above directly address Das's question. Gandhi's answer, embodied in the concept of Karma Yoga, was embraced by all the thinkers discussed in this composition:

> After all, the real definition (of swaraj) will be determined by our action, the means we adopt to achieve the goal. If we would but concentrate upon the means, swaraj will take care of itself. Our explorations should, therefore, take place in the direction of determining not the definition of an indefinable term like swaraj but in discovering the ways and means… Swaraj is in the palm of our hands. Do not consider this swaraj to be like a dream. Here there is no idea of sitting still. The swaraj that I wish to picture before you and me is such that,

after we have realized it, we will endeavor to the end of our lifetime to persuade others to do likewise. But such swaraj has to be experienced by each one for himself (Gandhi, 2008:152, 2024).

Furthermore, the philosophical question raised by Das was intellectually addressed by K.C. Bhattacharya, perhaps intentionally or inadvertently influenced by the prevailing movement of that time. K.C. Bhattacharya, in his classic "Swaraj in Ideas," investigates the notion of self-government, particularly in the realm of ideas and culture (Bhattacharya, 2011). He addresses the tangible socio-political subjection experienced by many, emphasizing that domination extends to the realm of ideas, where one culture may exert influence over another, often unnoticed but with profound consequences. And Swaraj, as we have been exploring, is intended to make us aware of this subjection and to free us from an enchained spirit. Bhattacharya argues that socio-cultural subjection, unlike political subjection, operates unconsciously and leads to a slavery of the spirit. Moreover, he distinguishes cultural assimilation from cultural subjection, noting that the latter occurs when one's traditional ideas are replaced by those of an alien culture without comparison or competition (Ganeri, 2015).

In analyzing Western culture and education's impact on Indian thought, Bhattacharya questions its unexamined assimilation into indigenous culture. He criticizes the passive acceptance of Western ideals and neglect of India's rich heritage, noting the lack of significant Indian contributions to global culture despite a century of Western influence. He highlights the resulting hybridization of ideas, which often leads to confusion and intellectual sterility, and advocates for a deeper understanding of India's past, present, and future to achieve continuity between old and new selves. He, therefore, argues that "subjection is slavery of the spirit; when a person can shake himself free from it, he feels as though the scales fell from his eyes. He experiences a rebirth, and that is what I call Svaraj in Ideas" (Bhattacharya, 2011:103). He thus discusses the need for a critical attitude towards foreign valuations of Indian culture, rejecting blind acceptance in favor of critical examination. And also provide scope for the translation of foreign ideas into indigenous concepts to facilitate productive thinking rooted in Indian thought clearing the fact that Swaraj is not a conservative ideology, rather keeps the spirt in alert and creative mode (Bhattacharya et al., 1984). Bhattacharya's worldview interestingly resonates with that of Gandhi, who claimed:

> My swaraj is to keep intact the genius of our civilization. I want to write many new things, but they must be all written on the Indian slate. I would gladly borrow from the west when I can return the amount with decent interest (Gandhi, 2011:15).

And as discussed above, the same sentiment was evident in the views of Vivekananda and Tagore, who believed that being conservatively isolated in a rapidly connected globalized world is not a good idea (Medhananda, 2022; Kumar, 2021; Ganeri, 2015). This is even more apparent now, with the world being wholly connected through technology and media. Thus, the practice of Swaraj did not merely reserve India for itself; instead, it aimed at a holistic version of Swaraj and Swadeshi

that suggests every country has an identifiable role to play in the creative human venture and world order. Every nation has its own duty in the long history of human progress, but this still requires the self-reliance that the aforementioned Indian thinkers collectively advocated. It is common sense that a nation that is not free to develop its own individuality and consciousness cannot contribute meaningfully to the sum of human progress. To consolidate in the words of Aurobindo:

> India can best develop herself and serve humanity by being herself only. . . This does not mean, as some blindly and narrowly suppose, the rejection of everything new that comes to us . . . [that] happens to have been first developed or powerfully expressed by the West. Such an attitude would be intellectually absurd, physically impossible, and above all unspiritual; true spirituality rejects no new light, no added means or materials of our human self-development. It means simply to keep our centre. . . and assimilate to it all we receive and evolve out of it all we do and create (Bhushan & Garfield, 2011:64).

Conclusion: Inclusivity and Pacifism of Swaraj as an Antidote to Violent Ideologies

The idea of Swaraj is abstract yet experiential, leading to India's freedom from colonialism without fostering cultural egoism or toxic nationalism. How can we make such a claim? A simple observation is that the figures discussed in this composition—Gandhi, Tagore, Vivekananda, Aurobindo, K.C. Bhattacharya, among others—can be named by any sincere scholar on any global platform without moral or intellectual guilt. Their character is an open book, much like the idea of Swaraj, as they embodied this holistic philosophy of freedom. Furthermore, they serve as exemplars of anti-colonial solidarity for humanistic reasons, whether to revive one's culture, foster indigenous creativity, or assimilate others. As glimpsed in the previous section, a lot of work has been done on this one notion, viewed creatively both teleologically and deontologically. Some see it as a means to cultural renaissance, others as a path to enlightenment, and some as a virtue to be practiced among other viewpoints (Bhattacharya et al., 1984). What, then, can be the central spirit or guiding principle of this notion? Does it have any specific trajectory that can be traced historically or philosophically? In this composition, we implicitly address these two questions and find that, rather than seeking a specific chronological trajectory of Swaraj, it is more fruitful to view it holistically or in a looped manner. This perspective provides a better understanding of it, consistent with the views of the thinkers we discussed. As Gandhi viewed it:

> Under Swaraj based on non-violence nobody is anybody's enemy, everybody contributes his or her due quota to the common goal, all can read and write, and their knowledge keeps growing from day to day. Sickness and disease are reduced to a minimum. No one is bankrupt and labour can always find employment. There is no place under such a government for gambling, drinking and immorality or for class hatred. The rich will use their riches wisely and use-

fully, and not squander them in increasing their pomp and worldly pleasures. It should not happen that a handful of rich people should live in jeweled palaces and the millions in miserable hovels devoid of sunlight or ventilation (Gandhi, 2000a, b:180).

Of equal importance, while this is one way of understanding it, the aim to be inclusive reflects the methodological worldview of many thinkers we discussed and should thus be considered holistically. Careful and pacific assimilation is an outcome of this approach, preventing it from becoming an ideology of cultural or national egoism. Aurobindo's integralism, Vivekananda's synthesis, Gandhi's inclusive slate, and the assimilation advocated by Das and Bhattacharya all converge towards a life that emphasizes holistic pacifism rather than exclusivism. Following this track, we aimed to convey that in a world connected through technology, no nation, including India, can approach cosmopolitan forums empty-handed. This composition implies that the philosophy and spirituality highlighted by K.C. Bhattacharya and many modern intellectuals, as the unique legacy of India, needs to be emphasized. It is not merely the economic aspect that represents a culture; ideas hold equal or greater importance. Arguing for this narrative, we had suggested that Swaraj, in light of contemporary Indian thinkers, paved the way for a better India, anti-colonial solidarity, and a more gentle world. It connected ideas with the past, implying a renaissance, made its followers attentive to the present by making culture more philosophical, and set the trajectory for the future, connoting a progressive attitude.

Now one implicational aspect of Swaraj which may also be considered as the outcome of this open-ended research. We all may have heard that "Change is the law of nature," at least in the apparent world. Buddhism even extends this law into the ontological domain, considering reality and change synonymous. However, for now, we shall not plunge into the metaphysical domain. Human beings prefer change for several reasons, including addressing injustice, alleviating discomfort, and striving for a better future. These are all things we study in the philosophy of change. In this practice, philosophers examine into the sophisticated mechanisms and driving forces behind the evolution of societies and cultures over time. Within this expansive field, various theories and perspectives have emerged, each offering distinct insights into the dynamics of societal transformation. For instance, in the West, we have observed that Herbert Spencer and Auguste Comte (evolutionary theory), Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons (functionalism), Karl Marx and Max Weber (conflict theory), George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer(symbolic interactionism), Claude Levi-Strauss and Ferdinand de Saussure (structuralism), Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida (post-structuralism), and Simone de Beauvoir and many other feminists (feminist theory) all engaged in socio-cultural change through their respective theoretical frameworks.

Yet, what is interesting to note is the awareness of the violence that the Western world has encountered in various forms behind all the change it wanted. Blaming the aforementioned theoretical frameworks would be overly generalized, but it is also a fact that founders and followers cannot entirely evade this accusation. Do they ensure that their theoretical frameworks do not advocate or imply violence in principle in the first place, even if not in the practical domain? In other words, why is it

that Hegel, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Martin Heidegger, coincidentally all Germans, are often blamed for conflict and violence (Armitage, 2021; de Warren, 2023; Merleau-Ponty, 2017; Muirhead, 2018; Parrish, 2006)? The attribution of blame to these thinkers is a complex and contentious issue, deeply intertwined with historical, cultural, and philosophical contexts. Likewise, their association with conflict and violence, as numerous qualitative studies suggest, can be attributed to the interpretation and application of their ideas by subsequent generations, influenced by historical contexts and socio-political dynamics. Yet, it should be noted that there is a significant silence on this existential question, with relatively few responses received from the followers of these thinkers. This raises the question: How do we interpret that intellectual silence? Is violence merely a coincidence in all these theories? Or do they accept that violence is an inevitable part of any theory of change?

These questions are so profound that they take us into an extraordinarily complex domain of dilemma of whether to embrace the idea of change or oppose it? Following any position is of great responsibility since on the one hand we have the responsibility to prevent violence and on the other hand to prevent the injustices for which people demand the change. This is a typical story that any sincere thinkers can feel inside them. The same agony had all the Indian agents of change, but most of them choose or evolved to the path of pacifisms. In this composition, we centrally explored that avenue and showed pacifism and nonviolence as one of the culminating points of Swaraj. As reflected in the comparative study of Aurobindo and Gandhi, they are the ideal embodiments of this philosophy of pacifism, i.e., of Swaraj (Dalton, 2012). They, along with many others, adhered to the idea that change, whether it involves looking backward for learning or moving forward for progress, is essential. However, they believed that change must be gradual and guided by spirituality, moral fortitude, peaceful resistance against injustice, dharma, and karma, rather than simply responding to demands for extreme change. These concepts in themselves are of a great philosophical nature, which can further be discussed within their worldview, individually or collectively. In fact, the idea of Swaraj itself can be left open-ended for exploration. Gandhi, the great advocate of Swaraj, himself kept it open-ended for exploration.

> … In my opinion, we have used the term 'Swaraj' without understanding its real significance. I have endeavored to explain it as I understand it, and my conscience testifies that my life henceforth is dedicated to its attainment. *The same can be done by us as well, albeit we are ready to do Sādhanā as Gandhi and other Swaraj thinkers did* (Gandhi, 2009:117, italics mine).

Furthermore, there is also a scope to deliberate upon the idea of Swaraj and whether it can be a theory like modernism to guide an entire civilization. The leaders we cited in this composition believed it could. However, despite flourishing on numerous fronts such as socio-cultural and cosmopolitan worldviews, its economic and educational models have not been extensively addressed. Gandhi actively tried to address these two fronts through his ideas of Nai Talim and the Trusteeship theory, but they largely remained in the realm of ideas. This aspect is yet to be fully explored. Likewise, the ever-evolving West, whether through industrialization, technology, or new emerging ideologies, shall remain a challenging point for

the very philosophy of Swaraj. This situation creates the scope for the fact that no static explanation of Swaraj can match the demands of the time. It has to evolve, perhaps in its own reflection, which we have deliberated both philosophically and historically.

So, let us look at Swaraj in light of Swaraj itself and see if it can revitalize itself as it was in nineteenth and twentieth century India. Lastly, despite numerous scholarly works, there remains a need for further research to provide a definitive characterization of contemporary Indian philosophy (Rajan, 2023). Among scholars, there is still confusion about the absence of particular subjects that could be singled out, a specific canon in which philosophers ought to be included (or should not be included), and a specific process or language used to write about this genre of thought (Coquereau-Saouma, 2022). Interestingly, the result of this skepticism is quite optimistic, as it provides tremendous flexibility and room for intellectual innovation. However, it also leaves room for prejudices and absences. Thus, acknowledging this scope and intellectual responsibility, in this study, we sought a unique window to enter contemporary Indian philosophy, at least among the thinkers we discussed, which can confidently be considered a central subject of inquiry: Swaraj and its alternative forms.

Declarations

Ethics Approval   Approved.

Informed Consent   Approved.

Competing Interests   The author declares no competing interests.

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