

From Hind Swaraj' To Swaraj': A Brief Encounter with Aam Aadmi Party Manifesto

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Abstract - This paper seeks to evaluate the manifesto of Aam Aadmi Party written by its supremo Aravind Kejriwal foregrounding Gandhi's Hind Swaraj.

Index Terms - Swaraj, Development, Ideology, Civilization.

INTRODUCTION

Hind Swaraj is Gandhi's main ideological work. It is a key to his thought. In it Gandhiji presents an alternative way of life based on human values, ethics and spirituality. He wrote this text while he was returning from England for South Africa in November 1909 that too within Ten days. Hind Swaraj, Gandhi's political manifesto, first published in 1909, proclaimed that real Swaraj could only be achieved by bringing about a regeneration of Indian society through its own indigenous resources and in tune with its people's cultural ethos.

Swaraj was first used politically by grand old man of Indian national movement Dadabhai Naoroji (Tendulker:1961:326). It was later popularized by Bal Gangadhar Tilak: "Swaraj is my birth right and I shall have it". The concept has its origin in Brihadaranyaka Upanishad'. It literary means self-rule. It also connotes the autonomy of the moral self.

Gandhi used the term Swaraj in its specific and generic senses. He conceived swaraj as a constitutional and democratic political order as well as economic and organic content. He organized the masses towards that end in view. That is why he stated, "Swaraj for me means freedom for the meanest of our men". (Young India: 1924:19) He argued that the real swaraj would 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. (Young India:29/1/1925: 40).

While examining the nature of British colonialism he went to root of the problem. He understood that the real problem lies in modern civilization which is

inherently violent. Indian is too ethical to adopt a violent, non-ethical, exploitative modern civilization which British colonialism bestowed upon it.

Hind Swaraj essentially was a product of Gandhi's intense patriotism reinforced by his admiration for the civilization of India. It goes without saying that he drew ideas from other civilizations for preparing Hind Swaraj. Especially, he received wisdom from nineteenth century western thinkers: simple, back to nature, life.

Hind Swaraj provides a vision of desirable society and the rules and self-discipline which bind it together. To understand Gandhi, what he did, and much more importantly, the manner and the process of his striving, seem to be the only guide and handbook. For Gandhi, Swaraj was the quest for self-improvement. Hind means rule of dharma in ideal state.

Gandhi compared Swaraj to Vatavriksha, whose branches struck root in the earth all around it, feeding any particular branch was like feeding the whole tree. For example, if a battle was to be fought regarding any issue, whether with the alien government or with his own countrymen, as on eradication of untouchability, or Hindu-Muslim unit, the battle was seldom over in one go. The key point of the concept of Swaraj was that power belongs to people.

Gandhi was quite sure that political freedom devoid of economic content is futile. He says, "Let there be no mistake about my concept of Swaraj. It is complete independence of alien control and complete economic independence. So, at one end you political independence, at the other the economic. It has two other ends. One of them is moral and social, the corresponding end is Dharma," (The Harijan, 2.1.1937, p.374)

He wrote in Navajivan, Swaraj has but one meaning, the eradication of the poverty of India and freedom for every man and women. By Swaraj Gandhiji meant freedom and self-rule which should be practiced at

three levels in case of individual Swaraj, it is self-control, or Swaraj of the self, in case of the country, it is the freedom of India from British clutch and in case of community level, it is the Grama Swaraj and freedom of village. He bestowed on it a wide spectrum of meaning such as liberty, autonomy, political freedom of individual, nations, nations economic freedom, individual's freedom from poverty, self-rule, freedom of foreign rule or so on.

Arvind Kejriwal has written a small book '*Swaraj*', which is being distributed in English and Hindi and has been translated into various Indian languages. The cover of the book has a quotation of Anna Hazare declaring this book 'a manifesto of our movement against corruption and for systemic change'.

It is a good critique of the evils of centralized governance. It also points out the shortcomings of present-day *Panchayat Raj* and calls for empowering *Gram Sabhas*, *Mohalla Sabhas* and people at grass root level. There can be no disagreement with it. But is that all?

There is no mention of economic policies in this '*Swaraj*'. It does not touch globalization or imperialism. It does not question the present-day development model, or the consumerist culture promoted by capitalism. It does not talk of corporate loot or the way people all over the world are being uprooted for corporate profit. It does not comment on global warming, or the environmental catastrophe created by modern civilization. It does not question the LPG policies being followed by Manmohan Singh & company. It is silent on caste and gender questions. It does not have any comments on communalism, sectarianism or intolerance growing around us. It does not discuss the agricultural crisis in India leading to a large number of suicides every year or the growing casualisation, exploitation and repression of labour. People in India and all over the world are fighting on various issues which are not limited to corruption only. But the 'Manifesto' is silent on all of them. At best, it says, empower the people, everything will be all right. It is a cure for all.

It is difficult to swallow this '*Ramnaan*' medicine. Can *Gram Swaraj* work in isolation? Will administrative decentralization be successful without economic decentralization? When corporate power is growing and global market is penetrating even in the remotest areas destroying further the village society (which was never a homogenous one), will the *Gram Swaraj*

work?) And can you ignore the question of social justice, so important in the Indian context? Aam Admi Party has formed twenty-two Committees to formulate its policies on various issues. Experts, not necessarily from within the party, were invited to provide inputs for that. But a Party document cannot be a compilation of diverse views.

Both Anna Movement and AAP swear by Mahatma Gandhi and their followers wear Gandhi caps. AAP manifest *Swaraj* is an attempt replicates Hind Swaraj'. But Gandhi was never limited to a single issue. In fact, it was he who broadened the freedom movement. He took up issues of exploitation of farmers, Charkha (technology), tax on salt, untouchability, education, language, liquor, hygiene and many other issues which had no direct link to the question of freedom from British occupation. And for that he tried to chalk out a comprehensive blueprint of Swaraj. Throughout his life, he engaged in ideological debates.

The thumping victory of 'Aam Admi Party' in Delhi was a strong indication of Indian democracy's strength. The concerted effort of two movements: firstly, Right to Information, secondly Jan Lokpal, contributed heavily for the breathtaking success of AAP. AAP victory needs to be critically reflected in the light of Arvind Kejriwal's manifesto; the book entitled '*Swaraj*'.

For creating a larger electoral base middle class is not enough. It has to take up the issues of farmers, workers, fishermen, artisans, Dalits, tribals, backward classes, minorities, women, and ethnic groups to attract them. Rising issues of corruption is insufficient. If it is serious about a political movement, it has to build a mutually consistent set of ideas analyzing their problems and offering solutions. It is generally called ideology'.

AAP has realized the need of an apolitical alternative which captivated the imagination of a large chunk of middle-class people. It is a middle-class trend to reject ideology and make fun of it. Surely it is the result of the degeneration of ideological movements of all hues. One can disagree with a particular ideology, but one cannot escape from some sort of ideology. One can decide not to be dogmatic and keep one's ideology flexible, open to new ideas and lessons. Those who claimed to have no and have a hidden ideology and it is mostly status-quoist one. A party which proclaims to change the system has to clearly state its ideology. To build a mass movement, it requires not only an

ideology but also good leadership, strategy, mass mobilization, and circumstances to mature. Ideological clarity provides a movement a vision, a spirit and preparedness for a long-term struggle. AAP manifesto and programs is lacking this point.

During the electioneering, AAP leader Kejriwal appears to have stated that he had no ideological obligations and was willing to take ideas from both left and right. Is it politically correct statement? It seemed he had seventy manifestos for seventy constituencies and a general manifesto. He might have different manifestos for different communities, faiths, political ideologies, and different regions; east, north, south, and west.

The moot question is whether AAP is bothered about the corrupt practices of corporate business houses. There are some pertinent questions to be answered :firstly, whether Jan Lokpal is sufficient to sweep out the corruption? Secondly, which of the two, private or public sector corruption is higher in value in India? Indian democracy has graduated over a period of seven decades attained capricious maturity' using traditional institutions and not necessarily by the western values of democracy. All the established parties have some ideological position or agenda. In a parliamentary democracy, where politics decides many things in governance, ideological position of a party irrespective right or left is predictable. But a party without ideological commitment might send wrong signals. The process generated by the AAP will make the people casual and might harm the democratic values and will ultimately turn out to be a disaster to common people in due course.

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