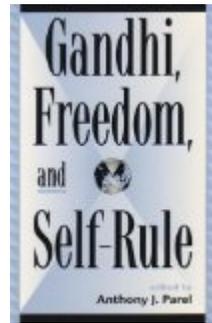


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Unlocking Gandhi's Worldview

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Edited by Anthony Parel, professor emeritus of political science at the University of Calgary, *Gandhi, Freedom and Self-Rule* is a compact eight essay volume circulating around the heart of Gandhian thought—swaraj (self-rule). Written by several prominent Gandhi scholars, this material originated from a 1997 Mahatma Gandhi conference. At issue is nothing less than Gandhi's place in world history. Parel has addressed this question before, most prominently through his editorship of *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, an essential annotated version of Gandhi's most important work.[1] While *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings* was intended to make Gandhi's underrated 1909 classic more widely known, *Gandhi, Freedom and Self-Rule* functions as critical commentary and analysis of Gandhi's masterpiece. I have divided the essays of this volume into two main categories: those primarily furthering the reader's exposure to Gandhi's conception of swaraj and those exploring the relationship between swaraj and the western intellectual tradition.

The essays that focus specifically on *Hind Swaraj* include contributions from Anthony J. Parel, Ronald J. Tercheck, Fred Dallmayr and Sudarshan Kapur. Parel's introduction, "Gandhian Freedoms and Self-Rule," offers a four pronged typology of Gandhi's understanding of freedom: national independence, political freedom of individuals, economic freedom of individuals, and self-rule. Parel's introduction is a vital assessment of Gandhi's conceptualization of freedom and crucial in setting up the

other essays in this collection. In the words of Parel "To pursue one aspect of freedom without simultaneously pursuing the other aspects was [for Gandhi] to distort the meaning of freedom and to interfere with the process of human development." (p. 18)

"What is Swaraj? Lessons from Gandhi," by Dallmayr begins with a basic review of swaraj (self-rule) which according to Gandhi was more than simply removing the British from Indian soil. Gandhi blamed Indians for allowing the British to dominate the subcontinent as Indians had become hypnotized by the comforts of modern (western) civilization. Only by learning how to exercise the power of self-control could Indians (or anyone else) learn the true meaning of freedom according to Gandhi. Dallmayr explores Gandhi's critique of modern civilization as well as the practical possibility of moral swaraj. His basic point is that Gandhi used swaraj to address British colonialism, untouchability, violence, and modernization. (p. 57) Dallmayr examines the compatibility/incompatibility of Gandhi's swaraj with western ethical and political thought (via Kant and Hanna Arendt) while emphasizing the Indian foundation of Gandhi's ideas by placing Gandhi's thought into the context of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

In "Gandhian Autonomy in the Late Modern World," Tercheck explores Gandhi's notion of individual autonomy expressed in *Hind Swaraj*. Gandhi understood modern civilization as focused on comforting the body at the expense of the soul. One's bodily well-being was often

derived from the domination of other people, not only in the form of world-wide colonialism, but also in the form of our everyday activities. Gandhi did not accept comfort and security as legitimate goals for any civilization if they were achieved through violent means. According to Tercheck, "Gandhi's expansive view of swaraj is meant to cover everyone; that is, no one is to be the object of domination." According to Gandhi each one of us must take personal responsibility for those less fortunate and not only refuse to participate in oppressive practices, but to fight domination whenever we see it; Gandhi's was a moral path of action.

One of the real jewels of this collection is Kapur's essay, "Gandhi and Hindutva: Two Conflicting Visions of Swaraj," which looks at two of the competing worldviews that emerged in response to the rule of the British Raj. Swaraj as advocated by Gandhi and Hindutva promoted by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966). Savarkar, an Indian anarchist living in London and a major theoretician of the revolutionary nationalist movement, sought to "Hinduize All Politics and Militarize Hindudom!" (p. 120) [3] Hindutva's aim was to create a Hindu state directly opposed to Gandhi's vision of a religiously tolerant society where state and religion would remain separate.

On July 1, 1909, Sir William Curzon-Wyllie (the ADC to the Secretary of State) was assassinated by Madan Lal Dhingra (c.1887-1909) who was under the influence of Savarkar and his vision of Hindutva. This assassination shook London immediately before Gandhi arrived to discuss the South African Indian problem. While in London, Gandhi met with Savarkar, preferring to stay in contact with this group of Indian revolutionaries. In fact, Gandhi had briefly stayed with a close associate of Savarkar's, Shyamji Krishnavarma (1857-1930) during his 1906 visit to London. Gandhi attempted to convert Savarkar to his vision of Swaraj. Savarkar rejected Swaraj, but they agreed to disagree and Savarkar continued to promote Hindutva while Gandhi promoted Swaraj.

On his return voyage to South Africa, Gandhi wrote the clearest expression of his worldview – the 100-page *Hind Swaraj*. Gandhi was determined to provide an answer to the expanding role of violence and assassination within Indian political circles. *Hind Swaraj* is both an elegant expression of Gandhi's worldview and a dialogue on issues of ends and means. Hindutva, however, became the foundation for the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) who trained cadres for Hindu revivalist organizations such as the Hindu Mahasabha and was banned for its compliance in the murder of Gandhi in

1948. The Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) was founded in 1951 and was directly inspired by the RSS understanding of Hindutva. The BJS developed into one of the major Hindu nationalist parties in India today, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). If India has rejected Gandhi's vision of Swaraj, does Gandhian thought on freedom and self-rule have any place in the modern world? To answer this question in might helpful first to explore the relationships between Gandhi's ideas and the western intellectual tradition.

The essays that explore the relationship between Gandhi's thought and the western intellectual tradition include selections from Antony Copley, Dennis Dalton, and Judith M. Brown. "Is There a Gandhian Conception of Liberty?," by Copley explores the connections between Gandhian thought and Western libertarianism. Copley briefly compares Gandhian thought to such western intellectuals as: Isaiah Berlin, John Stuart Mill, John Rawls, and Jean-Paul Sartre. An incomplete comparison is the natural result of the space limitations, but his point clearly emerges. Gandhi did not identify with the aspirations of the Indian middle class, "and this inevitably takes him away from a tradition of bourgeois liberalism." (p. 42)

In "Gandhi's Originality," Dalton argues for more recognition of Gandhi's contribution to thought on means/ends relationships – key to understanding Gandhi's swaraj. Dalton examines Machiavelli (via Isaiah Berlin), Leon Trotsky, Emma Goldman, John Dewey, and Saul Alinsky to highlight the originality in Gandhi's means/end thought. Dalton also places Gandhi's ideas into the context of Indian philosophy utilizing Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) whose writings contain, "the seeds of practically every major idea of twentieth-century Hindu thought." (p. 76) Vivekananda's thought influenced Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, B.G. Tilak, Aurobindo Ghose, Subhas Chandra Ghose, Vinoba Bhave, J.P. Narayan, and M.N. Roy. However, the concept of satyagraha was a Gandhian originality and has not received its deserved recognition as a major development in the history of ideas at the global level. According to Dalton, the Indian intellectual tradition could prove useful for solving modern day problems, if only we would familiarize ourselves with it.

Brown's "Gandhi and Human Rights: In Search of True Humanity" is an excellent piece directed toward those who appropriate Gandhi as a defender of Human Rights. Brown focuses on some of Gandhi's key thoughts revolving around dharma (duty). Gandhi received a west-

ern legal education and held great admiration for such western thinkers as Tolstoy, Ruskin, and Thoreau. Brown reminds us that Gandhi's thinking was not founded upon western liberal human rights discourses centralized on the freedoms of individuals; but, upon Indian philosophical traditions conceptually grounded to protect the community as a whole. Gandhi's worldview emphasized dharma – as performance of our duties to the people around us – as a way we can achieve true swaraj. According to Gandhi, people have no natural individual rights, only rights earned through their performance of duty, as he understood all individual humans to be interdependent.

The appropriation of Gandhi for human rights causes, according to Brown, is based on a simplified picture of Gandhi's thought (and his life) which if more closely studied show us that Gandhi's had different goals for humanity than human rights proponents. "For them rights are the device for protecting core values and attributes of individual and group life, vis-à-vis the forces of the state and society. For him recognition of individual duty and social and moral interdependence were the foundation of an authentic human existence." (p. 100) In Gandhi's worldview human rights must first be earned by performing duties. The distinction is not insignificant. Gandhi clearly thought that for the majority of the world's peoples 'Human Rights' in the western sense were unattainable until the method in which the wealthy minority lived changed. A more lucid assessment of the relationship between western thought and Gandhi can begin when Gandhi's ideas are understood in their own context and not just as an extension of the western intellectual tradition.

The major weakness of this collection is that none of the authors does a very good job making the argument for Gandhi's relevance to modern problems. The strength of this collection is that it helps to position the intellectual contributions of Gandhi onto the stage of world history by focusing on his understanding of swaraj. Often

when dealing with Gandhi we emphasize his thoughts on ahimsa (non-violence) and satyagraha (passive resistance) ignoring the fact that for Gandhi these were inseparable means to achieve and end, swaraj (self-rule). To understand Gandhi's worldview we must first understand swaraj. As a whole, this collection assumes the reader is familiar with *Hind Swaraj* and focuses on a critical examination of swaraj. Gandhi scholars will find these a welcome edition to the excellent collection of similar essays located in *Hind Swaraj: A Fresh Look*, which up until now has been the major collection of essays examining Gandhi's classic.[5] Those using Gandhi in the college classroom should find several essays that are easily manageable by students as long as the essential *Hind Swaraj* has also been utilized. I have used *Hind Swaraj* several times in the classroom and have found that a guided reading with students is a useful tool to encourage critical thinking on the nature of our own lives. Students find Gandhi's thought complex and usually dismiss his non-violence and anti-technological positions as impractical for the modern world. However, once students begin to understand Gandhi's meaning of swaraj, then his worldview and critique of modern civilization begins to make more sense. Not that his positions need be taken in whole, but swaraj does provide many points from which to reconsider our current society and our own lives. *Gandhi, Freedom and Self-Rule* is a welcome collection for understanding Gandhian thought as it highlights the key to unlocking his worldview, his notion of swaraj.

[1]. M.K. Gandhi. Anthony J. Parel, Editor. *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*. Cambridge Texts in Modern Politics. Cambridge University Press, 1997. lxxvii + 208 pp. bibliography, and index.

[2]. Original quote from S.S. Savarkar and G.M. Joshi, eds., *Historic Statements of V.D. Savarkar* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1967), 1.

[3]. Nageshwar Prasad, editor. *Hind Swaraj: A Fresh Look* New Delhi, 1985.

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