

A Sangithi on

Hind Swaraj: Relevance and Implications for Society in 21st Century

January 30 - February 1, 2009

Backdrop

Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj* in November 1909. It is going to be 100 years since this authentic critique of western civilisation was produced and a design for an alternative was suggested. It was written with great intensity. As John Middleton Murry had noted Gandhi was entirely serious about his critique of the western civilisation for it was an integral part of his whole religious philosophy. Western Civilisation for Gandhi was outcome of rejection of spiritual truth and a consequent concentration on material things. *Hind Swaraj* drew extreme reactions. Some welcomed it as a treatise on development of society based on ethics and spirituality. Some considered it as too emotional and therefore of almost no practical significance. Very recently in his foreword to a commentary on '*Hind Swaraj*' in Gujarati by Sarvodaya ideologue Kanti Shah, renowned Gandhian Narayan Desai has said that treatises that transcended geographical boundaries and time were of two types: one that delves deep into the human soul, and second that floats on the ocean of social life. *Hind Swaraj* is a sound combination of both.

During last one century the world has gone through sea change. The humanity has witnessed two World Wars, the great depression and revival, rise and fall of Communism, return of market forces for guiding the economies and the international trade, and consumerism resulting into serious environmental and ecological crisis. Violence is also on rise. Terrorism has almost taken roots in every society. Have the worst of the fears that were anticipated and depicted by Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj* come true? Is the future course of human development heading towards economic, social and environmental disaster? There has been an explosion in the introduction and use of technology. Gandhi had a different understanding on the use of machine and technology for economic development. Is there anyway to interpret Gandhi's ideas on machinery and technology in today's reality? Has the human society gone so divergent from the path charted out in the *Hind Swaraj* that returning is not possible? If so, is there any way out and is it indicated in the *Hind Swaraj*? To put it again in Narayan Desai's expression, humanity has always struggled to solve problems relating to self (soul searching and development), inter personal relations (harmonies between communities and borders) and relations and tensions with nature (environmental and ecological issues). What leads *Hind Swaraj* have to offer in this struggle?

With an objective to address some of the questions raised above a ***Sangithi on Hind Swaraj: Relevance and Implications for Society in 21st Century*** is planned during January 30 – February 1, 2009 in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India, at the Gujarat Vidyapeeth (www.gujaratvidyapeeth.org), a university founded by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920, in collaboration with Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and Gandhi Peace

Foundation, New Delhi, Kashi Vidyapeeth, Varanasi and Allahabad University, Allahabad.

The word *Sangithi* calls for an explanation. It is drawn from the Buddhist tradition. Debates on religious discourses and treatise were organised and scholars participated in them. It was known as *Sangithi*. Its equivalent in Sanskrit tradition is *Shastrartha*, which also implied debates on religious texts known as *Shastras*. *Hind Swaraj* has been commented upon many scholars and it would be useful to have a debate on it in the present times. In the proposed event it is not planned to have any structured papers. *Sangithi* format is suggested to facilitate a free flowing debate. The three days are planned in the form of a Camp with activities planned for the whole day. Following sub themes are suggested for the *Sangithi*.

Sub-themes

1. *Hind Swaraj* as a critique of modern civilisation
2. Political philosophy in *Hind Swaraj* (with Focus on *Ahimsa* and *Satyagraha*)
3. Understanding and interpreting history in *Hind Swaraj*
4. Economic system and technology issue in *Hind Swaraj* (With a focus on Gandhi's ideas on Machines)
5. Depiction of alternative society in *Hind Swaraj*

Proposed Structure for *Sangithi* and Follow Up Activities

A total of 40-50 persons are going to attend and participate in the *Sangithi*. We expect that each participant commits all the three days. In each sub-theme a team of four key persons will be formed. Each would initiate the debate by a commentary for fifteen minutes. Then all the participants will comment, critique and raise questions. The team members will then respond at length. By the end of the debate the issues raised under the theme would be settled and difference of opinions will be specified. It is expected that action plans on various fronts should evolve from the discussions. Two to three participants will be requested to contribute a paper on selected sub theme towards a book. Follow up activities will be planned based on the action plan recommendations. It is further planned that each collaborating organisation will organise a seminar/event during the year in their respective institutions.

Detailed structure will be sent by 20 December 2008.

Kindly send a word of confirmation to vc@gujaratvidyapith.org