

Self-reliant India: Towards Svarajya in Ideas (आत्मनिर्भर भारत: वैचारिक स्वराज्य की ओर) (18-20 June, 2021)

Concept Note

Atmanirbhar Bharat

Moving towards independent pursuit of knowledge through the acquisition, augmentation, sustenance of quality research, innovation, creativity and originality of ideas to help India achieve the goals of self-reliant nation need not be over emphasised. The concept of Atmanirbhar Bharat was first coined, though rooted in the concept of swadeshi movement of the days of the struggle for India's independence, in May 2020 by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The pandemic Covid 19 had completely shattered India's economy and the society, leading to the loss of jobs, sharp decline of rate of growth, infrastructure - physical, social, economic and psychological – under severe stress and crumbling. The PM's call was a way to rouse the nation to overcome the terrible calamity that we were going through.

India needed, and still needs, a huge recovery march to meet the challenges thrown by the huge natural and manmade disasters, including the adversities like Corona, mucormicosis, and its variants, cyclones, and so on. In this context a long jump is the most significant imperative to achieve Vaicharik Svarajya in various fields based on the generation, utilisation and transportation of indigenous intellectual and economic resources and reducing our dependence on others even if it does not mean cutting off from the global ideas and philosophy.

While this Vaicharik Svarajya does not propose to close its windows to the outside world, it is implied that the exploration, reinvention and revalidation of Indian treasure of knowledge in different areas has acquired a new salience in the fast changing world order. In this environment, India can be a torchbearer not only for the well-being of her own people, but also the world can be given a new hope. For this to happen, India's knowledge system needs to be revisited and revalidated so as to build a new confident, progressive, energetic Indian nation setting new heights and scales of human, cultural and economic freedom.

The proposed symposium discussed following themes:

Svarajya as an Ideal

One of India's great contributions to the discourse of modern political thought is the notion of Svarajya or svaraj. In political terms, we might ask what is this word *svaraj*? It is a very old word, going back to the Vedas, but comes into the vocabulary of modern India in the nineteenth century. When the struggle for freedom started acquiring a certain momentum, leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, Lokmanya Tilak, Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi, and several others, used the word *svaraj*. The year in Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj*, 1909, was also the year in which Veer Savarkar wrote *The First Indian War of Independence*. All of these visionary leaders used the word *svaraj* to signify political independence from the British. But etymologically, the word means much more than that. Actually *svaraj* is a short form of the Sanskrit word *svarajya*, which is an abstract noun. When applied to a single individual, the word was *svarat*, an adjective. It is a word that occurs in the Chandogya, the Taittiriya, and in the Maitri Upanishads

It is in India that political independence was expressed in terms of enlightenment, self-illumination, not merely in terms of political autonomy, nor necessarily in opposition to the

colonizers or imperialists. Svarajya, then, is the principle of perfection, of perfect governmentality, because illumination comes from internal order, not from oppression. Originally, svarajya referred to the internal government of a person, the government of the limbs, and of the senses, of the organs, all the different constituents of the individual. When that is well-governed, a person who can rule himself is a svarat. So svarajya is self-rule or self-governance.

Synonymous with liberty, freedom, and independence, svaraj also suggests a host of possibilities for inner illumination and self-realization. One's own svaraj can only help others and contribute to the svaraj of others. In svaraj the person and the political merge, one leading to the other, the other leading back to the one; I cannot be free unless all my brothers and sisters are free and they cannot be free unless I am free. Svaraj allows us to resist oppression without hatred and violent opposition. Gandhi developed the praxis of satyagraha or insistence on truth or truth-force to fight for the rights of the disarmed and impoverished people of India.

Svarajya in Ideas: as autonomy in thought, culture and freedom to choice

The idea of svaraj had large-scale ramifications in many areas of Indian thought and culture. In 1928, Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya, one of India's leading philosophers, delivered a lecture called "Swaraj in Ideas." He raised the pertinent question of whether we had achieved autonomy in thought and ideas along with the quest for political independence. Bhattacharya was of the view that Indian intellectuals would have to work a lot harder if such an emancipation of consciousness had to be accomplished. Several decades later, his essay was reprinted in a special number of the *Indian Philosophical Quarterly* (October–December 1984) also entitled "Swaraj in Ideas." Many outstanding philosophers and thinkers debated this topic and their responses were also published in the same journal on the content and means of decolonizing the Indian mind.

This may be achieved at **five** levels:

The first level is the level of what might be called the **code**. This refers to the ideology, the mindset, or the drivers of the system. How do we change the code? First one has to try to understand what this Indian mind with its multiplicity is. And to do this you have to try to understand what the traditions are. Because all discussions of colonization and decolonization hinge on constructions of India and of the Indian past, as also on constructions of the "West."

So at the level of the code, at the level of the ideology, at the level of the mind, we will have to work very hard. We also need to see what our tools are and what the possibilities of recovery might be. Because when you go deeply into what the traditions mean, then you get an entire world view, a cosmology, not just a fragment from a certain historical conjuncture.

We also have to look at the **institutions**, which would be level two. If you want to decolonize, you need appropriate institutions. Everyone knows that our institutions are in a very bad shape. We are in desperate need for institutional reform. Our university systems, for instance, have to be revamped. We have to change these structures because they are so stultified, and because decolonization won't take place just through an exchange of words like this. We have to take charge of the situation. We have to take responsibility and not indulge in the politics of blame. Revenge histories will not satisfy.

Then level three—**content**. Take the case of our syllabus. It's so obvious that we have to change it. That this has already happened in several universities is heartening. We need to ask what it is that we are actually teaching, and why. This process needs to be effected in all our areas and disciplines of study. The content has to be changed constantly in keeping with our goals and needs. We simply can't afford the sort of syllabi, which remain static for, literally, half a century at a time, as is still the case in India.

Svarajya in ideas cannot be achieved unless focus on the fourth level, that is, the **medium** is given due recognition. We cannot keep talking about decolonization only in English. There are people who will argue that we have benefited so much from the English language, from our contact with the West, so why give it all up now? The idea is not to get rid of English but to give equal opportunities to other Indian languages. The goal is also to restore Sanskrit and other classical languages as sources of classical culture, philosophy, and ethics.

Now, finally, let us come to the idea of **agency**. That is the fifth level. Who's going to do this job of decolonizing for us? Are we going to look to the state? Of course, the state is important. But are we going to wait for the state to take the initiative? Shouldn't the independent Indian state have accomplished this way back? Why didn't it? Why couldn't it? Or, alternatively, will the initiative have to come from civil society? And if it is from the civil society, what do we mean by that phrase? Who constitutes the civil society? Will the elites have to do it? Or will the masses have to do it? The elites are known to be compromised, if not corrupt, while the masses are deprived, if not incapable.

Ultimately the responsibility rests with us. We cannot wait for others to lead; we must do so ourselves. responsibility rests with us. We cannot wait for others to lead; we must do so ourselves.

The 3rd National Integration conference on 'Self-reliant India: Towards Svarajya in Ideas (आत्मनिर्भर भारत: वैचारिक स्वराज्य की ओर)' was organized by IAS during 18-20 June 2021 online on Cisco Webex. Professor Rajvir Sharma, Fellow, IAS was the Convener of the conference. The welcome address was given by Professor Makarand R. Paranjape, Director, IAS. An Introductory remarks was given by Professor Rajvir Sharma, Convener of the conference. Inaugural address was delivered by Professor Sachin Chaturvedi, the Global Justice Fellow at the MacMillan Center for International Affairs at Yale University on '*Revisiting Indian Development Models and Contemporary Connects*'. Keynote address was delivered by Dr Rakesh Sinha, Honourable Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha on '*Decolonisation: Where Did We Fail*'. *Special Lecture* was delivered by Dr. Anuradha Choudry, Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, & Member, The Rekhi Centre of Excellence for the Science of Happiness, IIT Kharagpur. Shri Tarun Vijay, Chairman, National Monuments Authority was delivered valedictory address on '*Digital Decolonisation*'. Vote of thanks was proposed by Professor Rajvir Sharma, Convener of the Conference.

PARTICIPANTS

- Professor Radhavallabh Tripathi, Former Vice Chancellor, Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan
- Professor Shashi Prabha Kumar, Dean, Sri Sankaracharya Sanskrit, Mahavidyalaya, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, K.G.Marg, New Delhi
- Professor Dipti Sharma Tripathi, Former Director, National Mission for Manuscripts, Government of India.
- Shri J. Nandakumar, National Coordinator, Prajna Pravah
- Dr. Ratan Sharda, well-known author, freelance columnist and TV panelist
- Shri Prafulla Ketkar, Editor, Organiser (Weekly), one of the oldest nationalist magazine of India

- Professor M D Srinivas, Chairman, Centre for Policy Studies.
- Professor C. K. Raju, Honorary Professor, *Indian Institute of Education, Mumbai University*
- Professor Shreepad Karmalkar, Professor of Electrical Engineering, and Head of the Teaching-Learning Center at IIT Madras
- Dr. J. K. Bajaj, Director, Centre for Policy Studies
- Professor Lavanya Vemsani, Department of Social Sciences, Shawnee State University, USA
- Professor S R Bhatt, Chairman, Indian Philosophy Congress
- Shri Tarun Vijay, Chairman, National Monuments Authority.