
A Review of Mahatma Gandhi's Statements in His Book Selected Political Writings

Gandhi Essay

Mahatma Gandhi, in the book "Selected Political Writings," claimed that "swaraj" is to be taken to mean the "independence" of a nation or people. In this essay I will discuss the questions of: Why does Gandhi think nations need to rule themselves? What does he mean when he suggests "external freedom will always be the means of measuring the freedom of the self within. Hence we often find the laws that are made to grant us freedom often turn out to be the shackles binding us"? And, why does he say that "warfare may give us another rule for the English rule, but not self-rule"?

I will first begin with answering the question of why Gandhi thinks nations need to rule themselves. Gandhi uses the word "swaraj" to mean independence or self-rule. He says politically that "swaraj" is self-government and not good government, meaning that a country, India in this case, is independent of another governments' control; at the time India was under the control of Great Britain. Gandhi is seeing the abuse, oppression, and crisis that his people were in so he led a non-violent civil disobedience movement. It was said that "liberation ultimately had to begin with the colonized and end with the colonizers". Gandhi realized that the real power was never really in the colonizers (Great Britain) or the government, but in the hands of the people. Gandhi said that growth would come to India if "swaraj" was attained. That was really what he wanted, a great change to come to India; the kind of change that would encompass all of society, individuals, and communities. He didn't say however that it would be easy for "swaraj" because it is not just "the change of government from British to Indian rule but a real change of heart on the part of the people".

Next, I will discuss what Gandhi meant when he said that "external freedom will always be the means of measuring the freedom of the self within. Hence, we often find the laws that are made to grant us freedom often turn out to be the shackles binding us". In that quote Gandhi is saying that his fellow Indians should have social reforms that don't rely on the British leaving, known as his "constructive program" (106), but that rely on reforming the self. He said that as a reply to his fellow Indians that challenged him that those social reforms could only be obtained after Britain had left. The social reforms were the major concentration that Gandhi was focusing on. He felt that it would not just work to attack the politics or the economy of India to gain its independence, but to attack the society as a whole. This attack was known as a reform in which everyone was to have a commitment to the uplift of others and to change society where power

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comes from. He is also saying that when he mentions “laws” he is referring to “the legislators” and how they take it upon themselves to rule the people instead of just representing them. It is easy for people with power to abuse it and such that is why the real power must remain with the people. Gandhi had to exemplify this point for his people to become free from Britain which ruled them. It was easy though for Britain to gain that kind of power over India because it used “fear of the government, legislators, law-courts, [and] armies” to rule them. However, Gandhi said that all of that power would be lost when Indians reformed themselves to know that freedom comes not from the government, but from within.

Lastly, I will cover why Gandhi says that “warfare may give us another rule for the English rule, but not self-rule. Gandhi is in essence saying that resulting to violence will not give them the independence (swaraj) that they want, but another ruler like Great Britain. He has been promoting “swaraj” but notes that “the pilgrimage to swaraj is a painful climb”. The reason it is such a hard climb is because it involves a national education and an awakening of national consciousness throughout all of India that violence is not the answer and “swaraj” would only be obtained through non-violence. He gives the example of a “multi-headed monster” and how when violence is used it cuts off a head but then another shows up. Gandhi uses that example to show how the English, if not Western ideals, would not stop coming into and ruling over India if violence were used. He acknowledges that a revolution of India is on the way but that can’t happen if India is still being ruled by the English and not themselves. All of this reasoning from Gandhi about non-violence is coming from his reply to questions that he was asked that argued the contradictory of his view. That contradiction was that “if it is proved that by killing a few hundred, ...can [we] put a stop to the degeneration of 33 million”? That is a strong point that was made which has been used time and time again throughout history but Gandhi objected it. He says that it is not encompassing the highest good of mankind like that of “swaraj” does. The good that it would do for India would be only temporary and not permanent like that of non-violence would do.

Gandhi also claimed that the responsibility of the present state, encompassing the English rule, the need for “swaraj,” and the need for non-violence, of India was more theirs “than that of the English”. He was saying that there is little to no more “evil” that the English can do to India if all that India gives is “good.” Morals are what Gandhi revolves his whole reasoning around, for he is not just trying to change a small part of a society but flip the whole thing. India had been oppressed by Great Britain for such a long time that its society had become unaware of where its power really lay. In that respect, India was to blame and not Great Britain.

To conclude, this essay covered the questions of: Why does Gandhi think nations need to rule themselves with that “swaraj” is necessary for a society to completely change and become independent of any other power. What does he mean when he suggests “external freedom will always be the means of measuring the freedom of the self within. Hence we often find the laws

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that are made to grant us freedom often turn out to be the shackles binding us” with that social reforms are necessary and change from within the person is essential for their freedom. And, why does he say that “warfare may give us another rule for the English rule, but not self-rule” with that violence would only put them back to where they started but that non-violence is the answer to everything.

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