

## THE SVARAJ OF INDIA

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(I)

What could be the significance, the esoteric and civilisational significance, of the remarkable coincidence that precisely during the half-century when Mahātmā Gandhi was steering India's struggle for at least political svarāj, Śrī Ramaṇa Maharṣi mightily witnessed to the truth of svānubhūti, self-realisation, radical freedom from all delusion and ignorance of not-self, alienation? The answer should be obvious to anyone who has not lost a sense of the truth of India, the advaitin (not 'advaitic' which has the bad suggestion of "smacking of advaita") truth of India, and it is this. 'Svaraj' in politics or economics or in ideas or whatever is etymologically the kingdom or order or dispensation of 'sva', *self*, myself; consequently, in all seeking of svaraj I seek, 'sva' seeks, to be the ruler, centre, source of all things; and this seeking is wisdom and not paranoia, health, i.e. svāsthya or self-situatedness, and not sickness, sarvodaya and not selfishness, only in and through the truth of advaita, *the truth that you and I are not other than one another*. Thus the Gandhian struggle for svaraj, and indeed the Indian struggle for svaraj under the leadership of thinkers and revolutionaries rooted in Indian metaphysics and spirituality such as Lokamānya Tilak and Śrī Aurobindo, is always implicitly an advaitin struggle, a struggle for the kingdom of self or autonomy and identity as opposed to the delusion and chaos and dishonour of not-self or heteronomy and divisiveness. British rule or modern industrial civilisation and its imperialism and materialism, missionary Christianity and Islam and their soul-lust, the self-contradictoriness and shame of advaitin Hinduism's practice of untouchability, etc., are symbols and powers of illusion of not-self, otherness, Māyā; and the historical struggles of metaphysical Indian civilisation have always been, not excluding the modern period, attempted overcomings of all such

Māyā so as to see God face to face in the truth of self-realisation. Such alone is the svaraj of India, at least such.

Śrī Ramaṇa Maharṣi's towering presence in the background of modern India's struggle for svaraj in outer life is no coincidence, it was meant to draw attention to the deeper advaitin implications and responsibilities of the outer struggle, and it was meant to be a promise of the possibility of victory. Really the outer struggle gathered momentum only after 1896 when Śrī Ramaṇa, shortly after his Naciketan self-realising victory over death, arrived in Tiruvannamalai. Indeed it is only in 1897 that Svāmī Vivekānanda establishes the Rāmakṛṣṇa Math and Mission and metaphysical Indian thought, advaitin thought, is world news, good news, great news. Renaissance is not rebirth but second-birth, dvijatva, birth into Brahmanhood. Nationally, in the modern period of history, Indian dvijatva is promised by Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa's catholic spirituality and marked by Śrī Ramaṇa's unambiguous, effortless, sahaja self-realisation at the end of the 19th century. Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj, powerful self-images of defensive Indian self-confidence, lose catholicity in their flight from the truth of image worship, and lose Indian distinctiveness and truth's ultimacy in their flight from advaita. It is only in the post-Vivekānanda and post-Ramaṇa phase of Indian awakening that social awareness begins to acquire the catholic advaitin śakti of svaraj. Aurobindo and Tilak and Gandhi are inconceivable before Ramaṇa and Rāmakṛṣṇa and without them.

It is important, following K. C. Bhattacharyya's lead, to examine the whole corpus of our indigenous thought and ideas with a view to ascertaining whether this storehouse of truth cannot serve our civilisation's needs better than imported knowledge and experience and enthusiasm, and whether our intellectual inheritance needs renewal and reorientation in the light of our encounter with the modern world's alluring intellectual and civilisational foreignness. It would be a great pity, however, if we were to allow ourselves in this exercise to get stuck with lists of what is native and yet serviceable, and what is alien and yet available in the world market today as civilisation, important though it is to be mindful of these things even in a list-

making way. It would be a great pity if such list-making, whatever its importance, were to obscure from our view the root obligation and meaning of svaraj, the obligation to repudiate the so-called law of identity, that old testament of unadventurousness which is at the foundation of alienating modern civilisation, i.e., *that everyone is what he is and not someone else, that everything is what it is and not another thing*. In so far as we choose not to repudiate this manifesto of monadism, we are hardly entitled to speak and dream of svaraj in ideas or life, of a jealous self-sufficiency which is at the same time exploding uncoercing uncovetous caring. Advaitin India must boldly embrace the new testament of identity, which is really anādi and new only in rediscovery and abiding freshness, *that everyone and everything is both what he is and it is and also everyone and everything else*. For svaraj is simultaneously autonomy and love, radical and universal, and these are impossible of realisation without transcending in advaita the old order of isolationism and hegemonism, tribalism and imperialism.

## (II)

"Nativism!" is how a friend only half-humorously derisively characterised the defence of svaraj in ideas generally, and not only K. C. Bhattacharyya's plea for it. What is "nativism" as a dirty word and thing? Perhaps the following things: (a) A mulish disregard of truth and worth which originate and flourish elsewhere than in one's own nation or civilisation or general cultural milieu, irrationally and unexaminedly reserving regard only for indigeneness in all spheres of life and thought. (b) An almost pathological womb-returning life-style which chooses the timid security of familiarity and kinship and abandons the adventure of growth and rebelliousness and novelty, impervious to rational and ethical and general social and existential considerations in the matter. (c) A failure of cosmopolitanism and internationalism and cultural freedom, a blindness to the universalism of science and a deafness to contemporary imperatives and invitations of justice and freedom and enjoyment.

I suppose there is some dark truth in the above characterisations of what might be called degenerate nativism, although I think one should here be very wary of implicit assumptions such as the following which are worse than fallen nativism and often pass as adequate criticisms of it: that to prefer one's own truth and dharma to another's is unmitigated selfishness, or that faithfulness to the familiar is less adventurous spiritually than being magnetised by novelty; that conformity to truth as one sees it is less demanding morally and intellectually than the rebelliousness of egoistic heterodoxy, or that the metaphor of "returning to the womb" cannot be a term of praise and celebration, that the world is less cocooning in its worldliness than the womb in its nourishment of a soul; that internationalism which is mostly superpower nationalism in disguise is less parochial than the patriotism of dateless national traditions; that Eurocentrism is universalism; that class war and race war and arrogant species-centredness are more redeemable than, e.g., the merely fallen but not false sociology and ecology of Indian civilisation.

Unfortunately, those who pejoratively shout "Nativism!" are not only not wary of the dangers listed above, constantly succumbing to them in high places; they have no notion at all of unfallen or regenerate or true nativism, for such a thing and truth there really is, and it is the highest truth and thing too. There is no need to abandon even the word "nativism" falsely defensively in favour of words of euphemism and growing respectability such as "tradition", "aboriginality", "ethnicity", etc., because there is always greater hope for the fallen and abused than the secure and unharmed in language as in spiritual life! Take the word "untouchable", vehicle in use of tragic sinful disrespect of a whole category of human beings in our country even today, alas! Yet savingly ironically, the word "untouchable" itself truly designates *Ātman*, which alone cannot be touched, seen, heard, etc., and is what each one of us really is. Thus when we would-be-derisively call somebody an untouchable, we acknowledge him in perfection of phrase as *Ātman* and he deserves our obeisance and not ostracisation. Untouchability will be defeated by the word "untouchability". Likewise, narrowing unadventurous isolationism is overcome by



nothing more effectively than by etymologically self-conscious "nativism", which is loyalty to what is most *native* to myself, i.e. selfhood and self-consciousness one in and as all.

Consider further the svarājist magic of nativism. Even if what I am exhorted to return to, or to race towards, is as exotic as the idea of a golden age of Indian civilisation, Rāmarājya, both as symbol and reality, or the idea of a human future beyond history and without inhumanity and alienation, without fear and delusion, e.g. communism, but if what I am exhorted to return to, or to race towards, is not myself, my own essential truth of self, the retreat and the adventure cannot be enduringly satisfying to me, because they will prove to be forms of otherness capable of unexpected power of oppression over self, myself and yourself. Only if a golden age of the past or of the future can be seen by me as the unfurling in manifestation of myself, the truth of me, the being of me, can they be unalienatingly acceptable to me. Dualistic nativism or dualistic universalism and futurism are by this token equally alienating and unacceptable to the core of my being. But "nativism" has this edge over universalism and futurism, it suggests powerfully, as earlier pointed out, the idea of that which is native to myself, that which is in no manner alienatingly other than myself, i.e., that which is myself, i.e., I, self-consciousness, Ātman. Existentially and metaphysically, nativism is advaita, Ātmānubhūti in all its forms and figurings. Nativism become self-conscious ceases to be fallen, resurrects as the truth of Ātman-Brahman. Nativism becomes Resurrection! Self-conscious Indian nativism cannot, therefore, be any of the narrow things possible to it in ignorance of itself, in fallenness.

Advaita is a Śruti-sanctified tradition of India revived down the ages, not excluding our own age where Jñānī Rāmaṇa reigns supreme in svarājya, unlike elsewhere in civilisational time and space where advaitins appear but advaita does not receive the status and sanctification of Śruti. Christ is at the head of a long line of advaitins martyred by the absence of appropriate advaitin Śruti. Indian nativism because of its inescapable advaitin dimension, unlike fallible dualistic localism of all varieties, *including its Indian equivalent*, is the very

opposite of irrationality and exclusivism and infantilism, it is on the contrary a Śruti-sustained far-flung sourcewardness, the heterodoxy of orthodoxy, the rebelliousness of conformity. Faith in Ātman one in all and as all is the most seditious and iconoclastic and cosmic, not merely universalist, revolutionary śakti conceivable, but it is not hubris-inviting world-remaking arrogance because it is indistinguishable from the timelessness of self-realisation which is no worshipper of times past or present or future while caring for all time, and because of its rootedness in one nation of the earth, Bhārata, spiritually omnipotent but geographically uncovetous. K. C. Bhattacharyya's or Ganhi's invitation to svaraj, in ideas or civilisation, is unalluring without advaita, run-of-the-mill traditionalism and not a summons to Indian self-realisation. Mercifully advaita is at the heart of the philosopher's thought and the Māhatmā's life.

### (III)

I can hear the following strident objection straightaway to what has been said above. "You are unjustifiably advaitising the Indian tradition of thought and aspiration. The viśiṣṭādvaitin and dvaitin traditions of metaphysics and meditation, thought and aspiration, are as fundamental a part of Indian consciousness as advaita, no less Śruti-supported than the latter. Nativism of the Indian variety is a return to the entire corpus of our legacy and inspiration, not only to those portions of revelation that sustain a Śaṅkarācārya or a Ramaṇa Mahārṣi, but also those sources which uphold a Rāmānujācārya, a Madhvācārya, a Caitanya Mahāprabhu, and a Śrī Aurobindo. Indian groundedness is larger than advaitin self-realisation. Even K. C. Bhattacharyya in 'Svaraj in Ideas' is not flying exclusively the advaitin flag, he is not unfurling a Śaṅkarite umbrella and pretending to be able to give shelter under it to the totality of tradition. We have roots to return to, not just one trunk of one tree but roots that nourish a whole orchard of trees and fruits and flowers. Tradition is an ocean, not one or two rivers, howsoever mighty. Neo-Vedānta is a caricature of the complexity of Indian civilisation. Off with your head!"

Without losing my head, and without denying the complexity — and oceanic unity — of Indian consciousness, I would like to suggest that the above diatribe is shot through with misunderstanding. Advaita is a distinctive identifying feature of Indian consciousness, not a mere fringe indulgence as it is elsewhere, and dualism of all types in India defines itself most intimately by reference to advaitin thought. If Indian nativism is a distinctive sourceward turn, and not merely an instance essentially indistinguishable from other instances in the modern world of a harking back to the truths of the past, if it is a rootedness not to be confused with mere chauvinism, it cannot hope to avoid acknowledging the centrality of advaita in Indian Śruti and civilisation and the advaita inherent in the very idea of nativism, i.e., of that which is truly native to oneself, i.e. self-realisation. Non-advaitin Indian thought and aspiration cannot claim to be nativist in this deep sense of the word. Dualism of all kinds requires reference beyond oneself to something other than oneself, God or heaven, which dualistically conceived are not the self-consciousness which is what is most fundamentally native to oneself. Only in a watered-down sense of nativism can a dualistically envisioned deity be regarded as my native being. Such a deity and his abode may be my native place, but even my native place will alienate me if it does not disclose itself as the unfurling of my native being, self-hood and self-consciousness. I am not here concerned to argue against the truth-claim of dualism. I am merely suggesting that dualism and nativism do not go well together at any level of depth, and that for better or for worse, metaphysical nativism is unavailable as a principle or a platform to dualism. As for qualified non-dualism, viśiṣṭādvaita, it can only lay claim to a qualified, not a full-blown, nativism and it is for my purpose sufficient to point this out and not attempt metaphysically to quarrel here with viśiṣṭādvaita.

I believe that it is possible to cast apparently dualistic Vaiṣṇava bhakti and thought in a strictly advaitin mould, taking metaphysically seriously Śrī Kṛṣṇa's declaration "Vāsudeva Sarvaṃ Iti", but it is not necessary for me to attempt such an exercise here or even to indicate its possible outlines. My limited purpose here is to argue that Indian nativism which

is not the *mumukṣutva* of *advaita sādhanā* is not the kind of Indian sourcewardness in thought and life which is likely in India and elsewhere to be a winning power of correcting the costly self-obscuring absentmindedness of modern civilisation. K. C. Bhattacharyya's plea for *svaraj* in ideas has many dimensions, but its worth would diminish in my judgement if it is not understood as taking for granted that *advaita* is the true philosophy of nativism, and that Indian nativism because of the centrality of *advaita* in Indian civilisation is more likely than any other kind of nativism to be the genuine thing. The imagined diatribe against *advaita* quoted earlier invoked Rāmānujācārya, Madhvācārya, Caitanya Mahāprabhu and Śrī Aurobindo. It is my belief that their implicit and esoteric *advaita* (*advaita* is not synonymous with Śaṅkarācārya) tends to be forgotten in *śāstrārtha* between doctrinaire dualism and non-dualism, and in any case my plea that *svaraj* in ideas or *svaraj* in general in India is unintelligible without *advaita* is not an undermining of their truth and vision.

The boy Mohandas who later became Mahātmā Gandhi confessed to his father the sin of stealing and selling some of the latter's gold ornaments and spending the ill-gotten money on meat-eating forbidden to Vaiṣṇavas such as his family, and his father forgave him the transgression with tears of joy at the nascent saint's contriteness and purity of heart. Gold symbolises the native wealth of the soul, i.e. self-realisation, and selling gold dramatises the obscuration of *advaitin* self-realisation in exchange for the glitter and litter of worldliness which includes meat-eating symbolising lack of faith in the soul's capacity for nourishing itself without avoidable violence. Gandhian nativism, esoteric Hind *Svaraj*, in ideas and in other things, is, therefore, *advaitin* faith together with a search for autonomy in all spheres of life, an unexploiting idiom of living with which to battle and cure, hopefully, the heteronomous megalomania of modern civilisation; it is the faith that within the soul of man and in the intimacy of community life are available all the resources of survival and growth in love and truth that mankind needs. *Advaitin* conviction is what prevents intimacy from becoming isolationism, and uncovetous intimacy is what



prevents advaita from becoming expansionist in morally risky ways.

#### (IV)

On the subject of Svaraj and India, I can think of nothing more instructive than stories, true stories, from the lives of saints and jñānis. Even more powerfully instructive than the Gandhi story I recalled in the last section is the following outwardly innocuous incident from the life of Śrī Ramaṇa Maharṣi. Ramaṇa was but a boy biologically, although a jñānī, when, magnetised by Aruṇācala Śiva, he made the sacred hill his home, inhabiting its caves and groves, instructing its animals and devotees, communing with its spirits and siddhas, one with Śiva in essence, and in manifestation the most ardent bhakta cleaving inextricably to his Lover Hill. One day the boy Ramaṇa, bare-headed and barefoot, kaupīna his sole garment, is wandering in the hot sun up and down all over the hill as any boy would, jñānī or no jñānī, as any child should. From nowhere a cāṇḍāla old woman appears and fires a volley of abuse at Ramaṇa, the gist of her vigorous speech being: "And why don't you sit in one place, are you off your head?" At first puzzled by the undeserved abuse, the boy jñānī realises that the strong words are good advice to a jñānī who must exemplify sufficiently outwardly too his inward truth of still-centredness, so that everything about him, the style of his rest and movement no less than the power of his words and silence, are a complete upadeśa, a complete upaniṣad. But the incident is a volume of esoteric instruction on our civilisation and its future, on the truth and fate of India, and not merely good advice to a sadhu in the sun.

The cāṇḍāla woman is surely Pārvatī, mother of Kārtikeya Ramaṇa or Gaṇapati Ramaṇa, protectively scolding her son for avoidably risking life and health. But why has she assumed the form of a cāṇḍāla woman and why is her speech so strong? To the believing heart of India the answer should be plain, and it is this. Essentially every woman is Pārvatī herself, God-head, and not only half of Śiva; this is the first lesson which the

incident teaches us, that all women, and especially urgently, all ill-treated and exploited women, are in truth to be seen as the Divine Mother, Ātman-Brahman, if we would wish to put right our society's injustice to them not in the style of meta-physically uprooted feminism, but in absolute harmony with the nature of things. Again, quite rightly roughly, for politeness and the urgency of truth don't go together, She orders the jñānī to sit in one place and conserve the truth of Ātman-Brahman and not let it die in the hot sun of aimless dogooding, the exploited of the world being quite capable of fighting their battles without such misdirected help. (Ramaṇa is not guilty of any of this. He only occasions in līlā Pārvatī's warning to mankind). What the exploited, the wretched of the earth cannot hope to do without, what no one can do without, is the truth of advaita which must continue to be exemplified in the lives of jñānis, who must not be allowed prematurely physically to disappear, something which in their utter forgetfulness of bodily need they may let happen. A jñānī like Śrī Ramaṇa Maharṣi arrives once in a millenium and the cāṇḍāla needs him no less than the brāhmaṇa. Svaraj in ideas, in everything, requires the uncompromised exemplification of the reality and possibility of advaita-siddhī, self-realisation ablaze with the gospel of identity, contemporary battles for freedom and justice in India and the world requiring the light and fire of such self-realisation no less than the battles of other ages. It would be a false activism which would make of all contemplatives political revolutionaries, and it would be a false jñāna mārḡa which would seek to make all activists yogis. Aruṇācala means "The Red Hill", "Aruṇa" symbolising the activist śakti of truth, as does the cāṇḍāla woman; and "acala" images truth's still-centred, yet omnipresent, immovability, Ramaṇa-Śiva. "Aruṇācala" is the motto of Indian civilisation's revolutionary conservatism and its saving, conserving, śakti. Śiva and Pārvatī. Svaraj.

A final story and reading of outwardly trivial things which are yet monumental in their significance for us, an incident from the life of Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahansa. When it was reported to Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa that one of his devotees had started quite avoidably to learn English, the Paramahansa made the com-

ment "Now he will start whistling and wear boots!" That comment of Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa's goes to the heart of the subject of Indian Svaraj. Whistling represents frivolousness, especially of thought and speaking, inquiry and learning, which is what our servile and supercilious English speaking symbolises with deadly accuracy. Boots represent grossness and insensitivity, the trampling upon native soil which borrowed authority so painfully truthfully represents, the authority of sundry isms of importation without examination and assimilation. They are a caricature of the substantiality, gāmbhīrya, which and not whistling, ought to characterise our speaking and life of mind and ideas. And whistling in the context caricatures the lightness, the uncoerciveness, which should be our gentle walking upon this sacred earth. The absence of svaraj results in comic costly inversion of the truth of things, trivialising levity where deep-going seriousness is in place, i.e. in thought and speech, and trampling burdensomeness, weight of insensitivity, where the lightness of the Paramahansa's feet, which shuddered even at the thought of stepping on grass, is called for. The setting right side up of things is no Marxist discovery, it is the ancient Indian t̃āntric discipline of svātantrya.

May K. C. Bhattacharyya's plea for svaraj in ideas occasion a deep-going Indian inquiry into the idea of svaraj as our birth-right to second-birth, dvijatva, true renaissance. May we rediscover and celebrate the distinctive advaitin politics and metaphysics of Indian civilisation.

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