



Hind Swaraj Conclave, Lonawala 6-10 June 2013



**H**ind Swaraj Conclave of selected Swarajists with Ven Samdhong Rinpoche in Lonawala, June 6-10 this year was an extraordinary experience of a dialogue on modernity, tradition, civilization, and violence (organized by Swaraj Peeth and hosted by Shri Arvindbhai Motasha and Smt Hansabahen Motasha) each one is engaged

in experiment with Hind Swaraj.

**I**t was a conclave for senior, experienced Hind Swarajistas with a good understanding of and firm belief in Hind Swaraj; commitment to non-violence, engaged in spreading (Hind) Swaraj awareness, and serious about developing Hind Swaraj campaign. Participation was on the basis of invitation. It was in continuation of Swaraj peeth's effort in 2009 of bringing more than 110 leading experimenters from 17 countries for 4 day, at the end of which an informal net work Global Gandhina Movement for Swaraj was borne. Conclave was organized to share experiences, understanding and future vision and plans. Swarajpeeth and Global Gandhian Movement for Swaraj are striving to create and consolidate a core that holds Hind Swaraj in absolute reasoned faith.

A four-day conclave with 14 participants was started on the seventh June. 4 out of 18 invited and confirmed participants could not reach due to unconfirmed train reservation and other reasons.



The highlight of the conclave was the guidance of Ven Samdhong Rinpoche all through the programme which was quite extraordinary for a person of his stature. The swarajists considered it their fortune to have a free flowing discussion with Ven Rinpoche, a sage-

scholar and statesman, who is known among the visionary teachers of today to hold absolute principled faith in Hind Swaraj

The Conclave was hosted by Shri Arvind bhai and Hansa Bahen Motasha of Mumbai, family friends of Rajiv and Niru, who spared their holiday home and threw open all their resources most lovingly. Their commitment to make the conclave a success was evident through their exemplary hospitality. Right from the day break when Arvindbhai would get up to make the morning tea himself disregarding his health condition. Haresh bhai, their family friend could be seen ever present, assisting them Hansabahen would look into every small need of each like a mother.



Participants bore travel cost. Friends of Tibett gifted white khadi shoulder bags. Yeldho and a friend of him surprised everyone with very fine handmade fountain pen by the Company of one who had gifted one such pen to Mahatma Gandhi



#### **Deliberations:**

Each day began with prayer. Niru was asked to be in moderator's seat.

At the beginning of the Conclave the great historical significance of the date was reminded by Sh Kalianpur. On this day, 7<sup>th</sup> June, a hundred and sixty years back Mohandas Gandhi was thrown out of the train in South Africa, the event that triggered eventual changes that the world had never seen before

On the first day, after Prayer Rajiv gave a brief introduction. The Conclave began with discussion on each one's experience and understanding of Hind Swaraj. It was observed that we must talk on practical plane, evolve a frame work of action so that others, the youth and younger generation can find a direction. Understanding and practice must not remain separated.

Presentation by each *Hind Swarajist* brought out the various ways in which *Hind Swaraj* inspired their actions.

Yeldtho, even as an executive in a Public Sector company, adopted Satyagraha for conflict resolutions which in turn inspired others in the organization. His success was, according to him, due to his adherence to the Gandhian Spirit rather than the populist appeal.



Satish, a dentist by profession started looking at the doctor patient relationship in a different angle to discover compassion and friendliness as being the elements, as important as, if not more, than the medicine itself when it comes to healing.

Prof Raja Vashishtha thinks that the erosion of values could be checked by the message of *Hind Swaraj*. He along with Shyamdhar Tiwari and Rama Nand Tiwari – all from Varanasi - distributed 10,000 copies of *Hind Swaraj* among school children in their bid to take Hind Swaraj to the future citizens.



Shyamdhara Tiwari has taken two years leave from his career in Sales Tax Department, to dedicate fully to work among the youth and he is already seeing very promising results in his area of activity.

Mukta, an activist, thought that HS provides a strong basis for recovering the lost social capital. She expected that the conclave would help her sharpen her focus in her activities by giving a clearer sense of direction.

For Satyen, it provides both a vision and method for harmonizing personal freedom with the freedom of the rest, without which a nation cannot achieve justice.



Working with farmers, youth and the intelligentsia, Ram and his team are able to bring back farmers' confidence in traditional best practices in agriculture. He holds *Hind Swaraj* readings, has developed a method. Thus, he could successfully

campaign against BT-Brinjal and influence decision makers in Tamilnadu. Ram gifted His booklet 'Baingan-Swaraj' was a wonderful reading experience for participants.

Pawan observed that most Indians think that they know Gandhi – without ever reading him! Pawan discovered Gandhi in the course of



his work that posed some serious issues he needed to resolve. He found answer in Gandhi; fascinatingly he found in Gandhiji profound consistency about and among all the issues he handled, besides in his thoughts, words and deeds.

An experiment in education he developed defined the actual educational needs

of people among whom he works in Uttarakhand as different from the modern one which robs people of their language, idioms, and values of life, self-esteem and self-confidence. After two decades of intelligent, dedicated hard work he cultivated a band of well-trained worker-colleagues. His model worked so well that, to his dismay and agony, one day he found, that the fruits of his hard work were

harvested by Azim Premji Foundation in one swift sweep, all his best trained colleagues over the years left him for much higher salaries. Yet his experiment continues. According to him, what is significant is the insight as to how modernity works both at micro and the macro levels. *Hind Swaraj* provides a comprehensive frame work for understanding both the morally degrading transformations and the ways of liberation – Swaraj.

Sethu thinks that though there are certain basics that *Hind Swaraj* stipulates, their interpretation, for example, that of the core concept of Swaraj, may differ in certain content according to the context of a particular group, its profession.

For Tenzin Tsundue Tibetan Freedom Struggle is a struggle not for political freedom, but it is for Swaraj as defined in *Hind Swaraj*. He presented his dilemma about the nature of direct action, the place and forms of Satyagraha in political action appropriate and needed for their struggle.



#### **Five coordinates of *Hind Swaraj*:**

Moderator Niru Vora requested Ven Rinpoche to respond to these presentations and enlighten them by explaining how he looks at Hind Swaraj.

**Ven. Rinpoche** in his touching humility said he himself is exploring the path, and can't say whether he has found it. The process has to be a collective one; through collective reason, understanding and experience. The smallness of *Hind Swaraj* is deceptive. It is vast in its sweep and unfathomable in its depth. He has been studying it for past twenty five years and finds newer insight every time he reads it or refers to it for answers.

Ven. Rinpoche explained what he thinks as five main points, the five coordinates of *Hind Swaraj*:

1. What is *Swaraj*? Gandhiji has defined *Swaraj* with respect to social, political, economic, mental and spiritual domains, from personal to national scale.
2. Rejection of modern civilization and modernity, including its science and technology.

3. Courage to speak up the truth, something which is absent today. Modernity has so gripped us that a lot of Gandhians too took to 'development' out of fear of social and political isolation if they decried development. One often heard, "...because we have to live in today's time". Ven. Rinpoche queried, "Why do we HAVE to live, if we cannot protect or struggle to protect the values of life?" Gandhiji had no such fears, he would stand alone and isolated rather than giving in to an idea he does not believe in. Thus Non-violence and Satyagraha form inseparable parts of *Hind Swaraj*.
4. Education: Though the chapter on education is comparatively small, in it lies the essence of Gandhiji's entire works and thought.

All the above four have to be taken together in order to be able to grasp the meaning of a problem: its nature, form and method of resolution. One-track approach would not work, which people generally employ by succumbing to the pressures of the immediate.

5. There is a fifth coordinate. Gandhiji has strongly commented on the parliamentary form of democracy. It invites serious attention. People falsely believe and hope that it will deliver. There is no way other than radical transformation of our political ideas and system of governance. The magnitude of violence involved and immorality involved in running the present system cannot be acceptable on any account if we cherish a moral society and truly a democratic polity.

With brief explanation on the fundamental defects of multi-party parliamentary democracy Ven. Rinpoche wondered if Gandhi had become too difficult and unbearable for the political class, for Gandhi demands selflessness, abdication of selfishness.

Each of these five points was independently discussed over the next three days. After each session we would have Ven Rinpoche clarify on emerging issues and participants would have free flowing discussion on these reflections. Each session raised several questions and issues such as:

- What is our position on modern civilization, modernity in the light of HS's position of absolute rejection?
- Is everything modern bad and everything traditional good?
- What is tradition — *parampara*?
- The problem of infatuation with modern science even among believers in HS

- The dialectical conflict model of progress and growth, process of change through the conflict of opposing forces
- Loss of common national idiom and cultural and mental distancing of the educated 'modernized' classes from the masses and vice a versa; the politics knowledge, science and technology
- Loss of self-esteem and self-identity and confidence in our people; loss sense of belonging to our people among the political classes and the economically powerful
- Loss of courage to speak up against the popular
- Should we allow structures to define our functions?
- What is the meaning in and purpose of living if values of life cannot be protected
- Globalization as latest aggression of the evil. Localization as an answer.

### **Test of (Hind) Swaraj Awareness:**

When Rajiv pointed out that there have been three kinds of responses to modernity in India; one, total rejection like Gandhiji's, total acceptance; and, synthesis, Ven Rinpoche asked a most pertinent question to all the participants to think about. He asked "what is our position on modernity?"

This was a difficult question for some though, not for the most. Most of us have an unambiguous position. We seek answer neither in correction, i.e. acceptance; nor in synthesis, the position of the defeated, the confused, and the over-confident 'spirituals' who believe that spirituality will tame, subordinate and reform modern science. Our understanding of Hind Swaraj has made it very clear that the choice is between the forces of darkness and the forces of Light; not between an electric powerhouse with a deficit power production-- at times fluctuating and power-shedding-- and a household lantern.

Ven Rinpoche emphasized that the doubts would no longer remain if we shift our attention to Hind Swaraj rather than aligning mentally with the present order of things, once the question is clear, answers will dawn by itself.

### **Hind Swaraj and Tibetan Freedom**

It was but natural for the Tibetan Struggle to be referred to quite often during the discussions. Reference to Tibetan Struggle was obvious for two reasons: First, it is the only one exemplifying the ideals of Swaraj and nonviolence; and, second, most of the participants have been closely associated with it as a matter of active commitment.

Participants requested Ven. Rinpoche to throw light on the perspective within which Tibetan Struggle could be meaningfully understood; and, on certain questions about nature and form of action.

In his explanation of the Tibetan freedom struggle, Ven Rinpoche clarified that it cannot be defined except within the dual context and limitations of the state of universal (as different from Global) aspirations and awareness of freedom on the one hand, and on the other of globalization of the power of the modern materialism. He specifically clarified how the Tibetan struggle cannot and must not be fought on an anti-China consciousness. Participants felt a strong, unwavering Hind Swaraj struggling to unfold in the form of Tibetan aspirations, their own unique history and the present struggle; and finally, in the teachings of H the Dalai Lama, who holds India as a Guru-Bhumi and Gandhi as Guru.

One evening we had heart touching poetry reading by Tibetan poet activist Tenzin Tsundue.

## **Conclusion**

The four days of interaction with each other and sharing the experiences helped each one to re-commit to their activities footed on Hind Swaraj principles.

Gandhiji demonstrated the power of one. The aspirants to Hind Swaraj vowed to derive encouragement and energy from it.

It was again and again brought to fore that there has to be an unwavering position on Swaraj, if we are to chart the path of deliverance, true freedom. There cannot be any compromise; no part of it can be seen or practiced in isolation. Whereas Gandhiji himself, even after 30 years of his writing Hind Swaraj did not find even a word to be deleted, there is much less to change today.

- The group will build communication among them;
- Inform each other about their HS work calendar; visit each-other;
- Organize Hind Swaraj awareness programmes/ dialogues;
- Lack of and need for a journal/News letter specific to Hind Swaraj is strongly felt;

- It goes without saying that people working on Hind Swaraj should be non-partisan;
- There was a general sentiment about holding such Conclave every year the same dates. Hansabahen and Arvinbhai said they would feel honored to be hosts to such an event every year;
- Group's identity should be unambiguous and so should be of its members in the light of the question about position on modernity and Swaraj. Dialogue is the process for crating this awareness.

*Rajiv Vora*

03-08-2013