

For August 2023 Weekly Meetings  
Swaraj as Law of Nature

■ G. Sivaramakrishnan

1. As human beings, we live in a double order reality. What is, what exists, or a factual order and what ought to be, should be, a normative order. This is unique to human society, not found among other social animals.
2. Swaraj is an idea, ideal and belongs to the realm of normative order. To conflate it with factual order of things would be problematic.
3. To say that forests, rivers and hills have Swaraj may be permitted as a metaphor and perhaps useful too in explicating things. How valid or correct are they literally? They are anthropomorphism at best and romanticism at worst.
4. Let us ask in what context the idea of Swaraj in Indian politics arose. There was an alien British rule for over a century before Tilak and Gandhi used the term Swaraj. There were 'alien' rulers earlier too perhaps and we seem to have not used the expression Swaraj. Perhaps the British rule can be perceived as truly alien as it imposed a whole set of norms totally alien to us. The establishment of courts to try criminal and civil cases on a jurisprudence that was totally alien to Indian culture was truly unprecedented. In fact, Gandhi and others considered this alien normative order being and our 'acceptance' of the same without much resistance as signalling total enslavement. Perhaps the earlier 'alien' rulers did not attempt or succeed in replacing our judicial systems or practices.
5. We seem to be using Swaraj, autonomy and community interchangeably. Our love for 'community', it seems, is in inverse proportion to its almost total disappearance worldwide. That Gesellschaft has replaced Gemeinschaft was observed by sociologists like Tonnies at least a century ago. Our own

experience in India seems to be no different, especially since independence. Even as we sometimes celebrate the continuance of khaps and jatis , we must remember that they are fast losing their functions and relevance.

6. I see a lot of 'voluntarism' in our explanations. Invoking the Sant parampara and tyaga, bhaichara all indicate this . Even as we cannot give up our emphasis on the primacy of human Will in social change, we must be aware that there are systems and structures that have been created in by us in our interactions as individuals and groups that have acquired coercive power over us and have become forces that are no longer under our control. These 'social facts', as they are described by Durkheim , exist 'independent' of our will but have coercive power over us. So explanations of these social facts have to be in terms other social facts. Voluntaristic explanations tend to reduce eminently social, structural phenomena to individual will and volition and therefore become reductionist.