

Swaraj is the law of nature

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Human beings are part of nature, not separate from it

The problems of environmental destruction facing humanity today can be correctly approached through an understanding of the law of Swaraj that permeates nature. We start our discussion by stating that human societies are an integral part of nature and therefore cannot claim an existence separate from nature. This is because the survival of human species is inextricably linked to the survival of nature. The moment human societies try to act as if they have an existence independent of nature, they will destroy themselves.

This view of human-nature relationships has been the hallmark of all traditional societies except those belonging to the Judeo-Christian tradition. The Judeo-Christian tradition is unique in that it assumes that human beings are a privileged species and the rest of the creation has been formed by God for its enjoyment and consumption. This denies, from the very beginning itself, any autonomy to nature because it is meant to be colonised by human species.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, there is only one supreme, all powerful, omnipotent, and omniscient God, who controls all creation, but exists outside of creation. By contrast, most other traditions believed in a pantheon of Gods and Goddesses, each of whom was considered to represent some force of nature and had its own autonomy and area of jurisdiction. Moreover, these Gods did not exist independent of creation; they were part of it. This non Judeo-Christian worldview naturally implied that power and knowledge was distributed in creation with no supreme Being controlling everything. This, I argue, led to a way of looking at the world as governed by a collection of autonomous forces none of whom could totally dominate others. In this way of looking at the world, ideas of autonomy and Swaraj take root naturally.

The Gaia Hypothesis and the conception of Earth as a Grand Ensemble of Ecosystems

An ecosystem may be considered to be an autonomous system that has the inherent capacities of self-regulation and self-governance that ensure its existence in equilibrium in the face of changing external environments. This ability of an ecosystem to self-regulate and self-govern may therefore be called its inherent

capacity of Swaraj. Every organism, itself being an ecosystem, possesses the property of Swaraj. Many ecosystems of nature manifest themselves in the form of cycles. The Carbon cycle, the Nitrogen cycle, the plant-herbivores-carnivores-plant cycle, the ocean-clouds-rains-rivers-ocean cycle, the cycle of seasons brought about by the orbital motion of Earth, all these may be termed nature's cyclical replenishing of itself and its embedded ecosystems. These inter-dependent but nevertheless autonomous cycles give rise to the idea that the Earth itself is a Grand Ensemble of ecosystems.

The Gaia hypothesis of Earth has been modelled on the concept of biological homeostasis. Homeostasis is the state of steady internal, physical, chemical, and social conditions maintained by living systems. Homeostasis is brought about by a natural resistance to change when the organism is already in optimal conditions, and equilibrium is maintained by many regulatory mechanisms. It is thought to be the central motivation for all organic action. The Gaia hypothesis claims that the resident life forms of Earth coupled with their environment act like a single, self-regulating system. This system includes the near-surface rocks, the soil, and the atmosphere. Thus Gaia, the Earth, can itself be conceived as an ecosystem or possessing the property of Swaraj. Since in addition to being an ecosystem itself, the Earth encompasses many embedded ecosystems, including human communities, we may call Earth an Autonomy of Autonomies.

Centralisation is anathema to the law of Swaraj

The above description of the ontological character of nature and its embedded ecosystems (including human societies) seems to be at odds with the interpretation of history as a teleological phenomenon. Here too, the Judeo-Christian traditions stand apart from other traditions. The Judeo-Christian traditions assume that human destiny is a one-way one-time journey from the day of creation to the day of apocalypse (the day of judgement) at which point humans will be sent to either heaven or hell depending on the evaluation of their good and bad deeds by God. Human destiny would then come to a full stop. This has many variations like, for the Jews, their entry into the Promised Land, for the Christians, the Second Coming of Christ and so on. All human striving is directed towards reaching that ultimate goal, be it the heaven, the promised land or something else. This teleological view of human destiny has been the obsession of many philosophies of life. These philosophies seek to prove, supported by Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest, that humans are destined to evolve into superhuman beings and conquer

not only the Earth, but also the Solar System, the Milky Way and ultimately the whole Universe in future. This conception of human destiny as the unfolding of a grand purpose planned by the supreme God, inevitably and logically leads to centralisation of power and knowledge in the hands of a select few (the rulers) who would claim exclusive knowledge of the grand scheme and also claim to be the ones chosen by God to implement it. This command structure leads the rulers on a path of progressive domination over nature and the rest of humanity, all justified in the name of God and His grand purpose.

The above linear conception of human destiny helps all centralised systems including the capitalist system to project themselves as the deliverers of the grand goal of human domination over the universe. This teleological narrative would justify all injustice, inequalities, exploitation as necessary and unavoidable sacrifices the majority of humanity have to make to realise the grand goals designed by the supreme Being.

Such a teleological view of human destiny negates the ideas of Autonomy of Autonomies and Swaraj. The premise that God's design is known only to a privileged few on whom God has bestowed responsibility to guide the ignorant masses to the promised land strikes at the very root of the conception of Swaraj as the law of nature. An irreconcilable contradiction exists between the teleological conception of a promised land and the ontological condition of Swaraj.

Swabhav, Swadharma and Swaraj

Swabhav and Swadharma are also concepts that easily meld into the idea of Swaraj.

Swabhav can be stated as the attributes that distinguish, among living organisms, one being from another and, among the non-living, one entity from another. Like in the case of the story of the mouse that was given a human form by a Rishi only for it to yearn to be given back its original form, every species has its own unique characteristics that distinguishes it from other species. These unique characteristics endow each species with its own swadharma, or role that it plays in nature. This leads us to the idea that every species is unique and occupy a special place in nature and is therefore irreplaceable. The selective wiping out of certain species, animals and plants both, as a result of human activity, irreversibly damages the autonomies of Earth's ecosystems.

When applied to non living entities, swabhav would imply that each entity or class of entities has its own specific characteristics that distinguishes it from other entities. This is like stating that the Earth, the Moon and the Sun all have distinct properties (swabhav) and consequently follow different swadharma. So, if we identify, following the nirgun tradition, the laws governing the creation with God(s) Himself(Themselves), then we can associate with each entity and being its own chetna, or knowledge of its own swadharma (role). This innate knowledge of every being or entity of its own swadharma would then naturally lead it (entity or being) to have its swaraj. This way of looking at the world would help us understand why the Law of Swaraj permeates all beings in creation, including human beings individually and collectively.

Naturally, where the autonomy (swaraj) of one (human) being tends to encroach upon the autonomy of another (human) being is a grey area. Different interpretations of the limits to autonomy (swaraj) that are binding on human beings and their communities in their mutual interactions (human-human, human-community, community-community) being are possible. Some of which may be so distorted and imbalanced as to render one of the above pairs to totally dominate the other (based on gender, caste, religion, race, language, and other differences) as to destroy the autonomy (swaraj) of the latter. Hence we need to emphasise that the basic rule to ensure Autonomy of autonomies is the principle of non-domination of one autonomous being (community) by another.

We are equal because we are incomparable

Applying the idea of Swabhav to human beings we come to a different conception of equality. Although the genetic composition of human beings are known to be 99.9% the same, yet the differences in the remaining 0.1% leads to large variations in features like colour of hair, eyes, skin and facial features. This and the additional differences in upbringing and cultural backgrounds result in each human being having unique characteristics. That being the case, no two human beings can be compared to judge that one is better or more perfect compared to the other. Thus the basis of equality among human beings is that each one of us is incomparable and unique and all attempts to measure our worth by the application of uniform standards (IQ, for example) will fail.