

Online Conversation: GSRK and

GSRK, Gandhi

BEFORE 29AUG2023 MEETING

[GSR Krishnan]

That Nature is law governed is a grand assumption . One might also view Nature as chaotic and meaningless. One may attribute any meaning one wants to Nature, that it is kindness personified or cruel or mean or vengeful. There is no intrinsic meaning to Nature. Poets have sung of

an angry moon or a pleasant moon depending on their own moods. It is the social world that is pregnant with meanings. Sociology was defined by Max Weber as a science that attempts to understand the meanings of human actions. These meanings are of course subjective and hence the challenge as to how can we 'objectively' understand these 'subjective' meanings.

There are two very broad models of viewing the world or society. One is to assume that there is a grand Order, despite all the conflicts and disruptions. There is an equally grand assumption that conflict is an inherent feature of Nature, society and everything in the Universe. These two theories have more or less circumscribe everything that has been written about society/ culture. These are not 'facts' in the strict sense of the term. These are better described as weltanschauung or world views. They have called the consensus model and the conflict model.

The consensus model of looking at the world has a problem explaining social change. The conflict model has the problem of accounting for stability and order

By the way, I was taught in my plus two logic class that the law of Uniformity of Nature and the law of Universal Causation are the postulates of induction or science that have no proof and have to be simply assumed!

[Gandhi]

There are definitely different ways of looking at the world. But the human mind is always trying to find certain patterns (spatial, temporal) in nature including humans. The laws governing the inanimate world is rather easier to discover but much more difficult for the animate world including plants. The difficulty gets compounded when

we go up the ladder of evolution in the animal kingdom. Consciousness has been little understood. Given all these, it is undeniable that the greatest minds were always trying to discover the laws of nature, evolution, consciousness, social organisation and behaviour and so on. A conception of nature as chaos, without any pattern or laws, is patently untenable and false. Because, the mere act of our living implies that there is some order. We may deny that there is no meaning or grand purpose to life, human life included, but that is a question of what is the future or what is the purpose of life, which may be beyond human comprehension, it being a question about what is going to happen in the distant future. But a denial of a purpose to life does not imply that there is no order in life as it exists. So what is comprehensible and within the realm of human perception is the present and its workings. And if we limit our discussion to the ontological aspect of life, we can definitely propose certain laws to explain the observed patterns in nature.

[GSR Krishnan]

The question before us is not whether we should look for Order and Laws in Nature. That I concede has been our pursuit for millennia. But the question actually is: Is Nature law bound or law governed? My point is we seek order and see order in Nature. Nature simply exists. It is. There is no intrinsic meaning to Nature. We attribute meanings to Nature.

[Gandhi]

I think the exercise of reading meanings to life and nature is a futile one. The words "mean" and "meaning" connote a purpose or grand design to nature which is the realm of faith and religion. Without at all going into the "meaning" of nature, we are confining ourselves to describing what exists, as perceived by us. The distinction between "nature as it exists, and "nature as perceived by humans" is irrelevant, because humans are incapable of "discovering nature as it exists", although in metaphysical terms we can posit such a concept. But our lives and nature will be totally unaffected in the absence of such a concept, which in the ultimate analysis is devoid of any meaning to us humans.

[GSR Krishnan]

How is the distinction between nature as it is and nature as perceived by us irrelevant? There are millions of stars and planets in the sky. We have carved out a Solar system out of these innumerable objects in the sky and believe that it influences us in many

ways. Solar system is our abstraction. All classifications and naming of objects in nature is our doing.

[Gandhi]

There may be a theoretical distinction between nature as it exists and nature as it is perceived by us. But in practice that distinction is irrelevant. Because we cannot reach nature as it exists directly except through our limited senses and mind, and there is no way we can bypass our senses and mind, (for example by transforming ourselves to other forms of life like fish, eagle, serpent and study nature as perceived by these creatures; and even if we could, the perceptions of nature by these creatures would also be limited by their respective senses and brains) so we cannot practically distinguish between the two. So all our interactions with nature will be based on our perceptions of nature, and not nature as it exists.

AFTER 29AUG2023 MEETING

[GSR Krishnan]

I was quite intrigued at the end of today's meeting. I wanted to respond to everyone, but couldn't organise my thoughts / responses properly. Hence this note.

Why or how did we pose the question about Swaraj being a natural law ? If I remember right, it was Krishna Gandhi who introduced this. Why? My guess is perhaps he wanted to say Swaraj is like our instincts, one cannot wish it away. This is like saying man is gregarious or pugnacious. I was trying to say that there is nothing 'natural' about Swaraj. It is more cultural in the sense that it is an ideal or value like freedom or democracy or equality. It has to be cultivated . It is normative in the sense of it being a product of human society, which alone has a normative order. That is, only human society has 'right' and wrong, 'good' and 'bad', 'moral' and 'immoral' and so on.

Budhey went on a tangent, in my view, by bringing in the so called western distinction between the analytical and the normative and almost accusing those who say Swaraj is normative as guilty of being trapped in Western / bourgeois categories.

In my view human society is unique in the sense it has not only gone against nature in a way but has tamed and subdued nature. From agriculture to domestication of animals to the technologies of the last two hundred years we are witness to this. Man to day is a

product of his own creations. Marx has a passage in which he says that a bee can put to shame the best of human engineers, but what distinguishes a human engineer from the bee is that the human engineer can imagine a structure before actually erecting one.

Man therefore has a dialectical relationship with nature. As part of nature, he is like other animals. But as a 'creator' he is alienated from nature. This alienation from nature is what has given rise to civilization. Therefore to condemn man for violating the law of nature is to miss the point. Capitalism is not the only enemy. Right from the first humans who cultivated food grains and domesticated animals, all of us are guilty of going against nature!

Finally, if Swaraj is so natural, we must ask why are we so far away from it?

[Gandhi]

If everything that happens in nature is natural, and that includes human interventions in nature, then agricultural revolution was natural, capitalism is natural, racial discrimination is natural, colonialism is natural, slavery was natural and so on. This will be an "objective" interpretation of history. But human beings are imbued with certain notions of justice, impulse of sacrificing one's privileges for others and sense of kinship with fellow beings. And therefore we are prone to say that some acts are right and some are wrong. So normative side of acts bothers us and in my opinion should bother us.

So we are driven to not only interpret the world but also change it. In the ultimate analysis, everyone whether communist, capitalist and swarajist, or of other disposition prescribe certain norms of human behaviour. These are reflected in their prescriptions for curing the ills of society, as perceived by them. A capitalist would swear by competition, individual enterprise, promoting production and productivity and so on and claim scientific reasons for advocating such policy prescriptions. A communist would propose collective or class actions for bringing about desired changes. So why should a swarajist be defensive about taking up a position that Swaraj is the law of nature? Why should a swarajist be accused of being normative when others are equally normative in their prescriptions? No amount of scientific rationality will hide the fact that a capitalist and a communist are normative in their prescriptions? Like their advocacy of ever-increasing levels of production and consumption?

That said, I genuinely believe that nature obeys the law of Swaraj. I mean to say that nature including humans were following largely the law of swaraj until the advent of the industrial revolution, which marks the start of a period in which the law of swaraj is being systematically violated. And we are paying huge price for it in the form of environmental degradation, loss of human autonomy and creativity, and enslavement of the vast majority by a miniscule minority who have centralised all power and knowledge in their hands.

It may be argued that previous human interventions in nature have wrought equal havoc on nature in terms of loss of biodiversity, deforestation and so on. And therefore Swaraj as a law does not hold. In answer I only want to point out that many of the changes in nature on earth were the results of cycles of warming and freezing that took place irrespective of human intervention. Or catastrophic events may have caused drastic changes like the disappearance of dinosaurs. Why I want to make a distinction between the pre industrial and post industrial human history is that systematic centralisation of power and knowledge took place only in the post industrial period. And all human interventions in nature in the pre-industrial era was and scattered spontaneous and decentralised. True, the Agricultural revolution irretrievably changed the biosphere, but in place of the old ecosystem of hunter gatherer period, new ecosystem of agriculture came into being. But because it was a decentralised mode of production, and nature's processes were integral to agriculture, even with a loss of biodiversity, swaraj still prevailed in an altered form.

But this cannot be said about the post industrial period which saw extraction of minerals, use of fossil fuels, and production and consumption going up by many orders of magnitude because of power getting concentrated in a few hands.

This huge scaling up of human intervention in nature disrupted previously established ecosystems without putting in place new ecosystems. This ever increasing disruption of ecosystems resulted in loss of autonomy or swaraj with negative consequences.

[GSR Krishnan]

I haven't said everything that happens in nature is natural. I have only said that our relationship with nature is dialectical. We are part of nature but are capable of modifying, controlling, subduing or even destroying parts of nature. What are called human civilizational achievements are the outcome of this ability of us. It is in this sense that man is also a 'creator'. What he creates is culture, that which is cultivated

in our interaction with nature and other human beings. Having created culture, we are governed by our own creations. Religion which is a unique cultural creation has controlled, shaped the course of history for over centuries. In short, we are conditioned by our own cultural norms, values, ideas etc. We are thus both 'natural' and cultural. In fact, our cultural practices have at times been at variance with our own biological requirements. We no longer eat whenever we are hungry but eat only at lunch time. Our own creations have created many problems for us. Freud's great work Civilization and its Discontents speaks of the consequences of repression of sex in human society. Just as our values like freedom, justice, democracy, equality are cultural, so is Swaraj a cultural construction. What I cannot understand is why should one insist on it being natural when as an ideal or value, Swaraj is as noble or valuable as freedom or justice or bhaichara.

[Gandhi]

The capitalist ideology exalts the competitive spirit, the unfettered accumulation of capital, setting targets of ever increasing targets of production and consumption (GDP), centralised factory mode systems of industrial production as the natural tendencies of humanity and the drivers of growth and development. The swarajist ideology counterpoises an alternative worldview that nature including human societies best thrive when Swaraj (Autonomy of autonomies), the natural tendency of self organisation of nature is not disrupted and destroyed as happened in the post industrial period, leading to the rise of chronic unemployment, hunger, ill-health, pollution, global warming, and acute inequalities in wealth, income and power.

Capitalism claims its norms of competition, accumulation as natural laws. The Swarajist ideology counterposes that Swaraj is the law of nature.

I do not claim that the statement "Swaraj is the law of nature" is an objective, valueless, non-normative law like the law of gravitation. Neither do I think that the capitalist proposition that "competition leads to human progress" is non-normative.

[GSR Krishnan]

The question is not about the false claim of capitalism. That has been decisively answered at least 150 years ago by Marx. The question is why should one claim Swaraj as a natural law? It in no way enhances the appeal of Swaraj as an alternative to capitalism. Isn't it sufficient to say we want Swaraj?

[Gandhi]

It is not just about the organisation/reorganisation of human society that the Swarajist ideology is concerned with. It is also about how humans should interact with nature and also about our understanding of nature and its organisation and working. It is not just that humans only want swaraj. All creation wants swaraj. Or swaraj is a fundamental tendency in nature. This is stated to be a law of nature. Just as various religions and associated worldviews have have their own interpretations of how nature/creation functions, an the underlying laws/principles, so also the Swarajist understanding and interpretation of nature is expressed in the form of a law or principle of organisation of nature: "Swaraj is the law of nature". This is not an inflexible law like a law of physics, but is more like a principle of organisation of nature. It can be violated occasionally, but most of nature obeys it. A sustained large-scale violation of this principle will have very adverse consequences for nature's as well as human well-being.

Capitalism may have been theoretically disposed off by Marx but that has not made it disappear. On the contrary, it is flourishing despite all odds and sadly it is Marxism that has disappeared.

And even the Marxist understanding of human's relationship with nature and how nature functions and organises itself, on all these questions the Marxist views are very unclear. But one thing is very clear: Marxism also advocates ever increasing production, productivity increases through application of more and more machines, centralisation of production and distribution and may be just about everything capitalism stands for except private property.