

## THE IDEAL OF SWARAJ

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IN EDUCATION AND GOVERNMENT

BY

NRIPENDRA CHANDRA BANERJI

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

C. F. ANDREWS

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**DEDICATED**  
**TO THE**  
**PHILOSOPHER RECLUSE**  
**OF**  
**SANTINIKETAN**  
**DWIJENDRA NATH TAGORE**

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## INTRODUCTION

THE author of this book has been my personal friend for nearly fifteen years, and I have watched with the deepest interest his independent judgment ripening and coming to its fruit-bearing season. He has been, for the greater part of his intellectual life, a professor in one or other of the Arts Colleges in Bengal. As a lecturer in English, he gained the affection of his students and inspired them with a love of study. They have told me frequently what help they gained from his keen intellectual mind and moral fervour. When the *Swaraj* movement reached Bengal, he was one of the first to respond. At that time he was Vice-Principal of the Government College at Chittagong. This government work was abandoned, as he entered into the national movement with all his heart and soul.

When he had thus been made free to devote himself to the service of his country and of humanity, in his own way, and according to his own natural bent of mind, he characteristically went among the poor and entered with eager enthusiasm into the labour problems of the Chittagong District. From Chandpur, at the end of May and the beginning of June, I witnessed some of the after effects of that first outbreak

of communal excitement. On the one hand, there was the devoted band of young student workers (many of them Nripendra Chandra Banerji's own pupils) who toiled night and day at the cholera camp among the sick and dying, and with whom I was throughout in closest touch and sympathy. On the other hand, I was obliged to stand out in opposition to a sudden development of this popular excitement, which I could not reconcile with wisdom. This was the strike movement on the steamships and railways. I felt that to be unwise and wrong.

In his later instance of the strikes, my friend's eager nature carried him along a path where I could not follow. He was ardently impatient for the strikes, while I was against them. But this difference of view-point in no way interrupted our common work in other directions; and I urged him, with all the strength in my power, to renew his own educational enthusiasm under the new conditions of the national movement, and map out for us his own ideas of national education.

Fortunately, he was laid aside by a short illness, which checked his outward political activities—fortunately, I say, because during his convalescence the greater part of the present volume was written. Had it not been for this illness, it is by no means improbable, that his political and social ardour, which was so intense, would have left him no time to spare for putting down his thoughts on paper.

My interest in the present volume is not merely due to a long unbroken personal friendship with the writer, but also because I feel that in the book there is presented freshly an ideal, which may prove to be one of sovereign value in India in the near future. Let me try to express it in my own language.

The modern world, whether in government, or production, or education, has been suffering from the malady of standardisation. To govern men on a large scale, to produce goods on a large scale, to educate men on a large scale, these have been the immediate aims, the short cuts to success. And the method followed has been always one of centralisation, combined with a perpetual standardising in the process.

But this method and process have almost turned human life into a machine. They have robbed it of its eccentricity. They have taken away that personal touch, which makes all the difference between a human being and an automaton. A man can, indeed, with terrible ease, turn himself into an automaton. And, no doubt, certain wheels of government turn very smoothly, whenever he does so. But all joy, all music, all poetry and art, vanish away wherever this process is at all drawing near to completion.

It needs to be remembered that this is not the first age in human history wherein this standardising process has been attempted. Every empire in the



past, from those of Babylon and Egypt down to the great Mediterranean Empire of Rome, has gained its strength, and also found its weakness, in these centralised powers of government. It is most probable that the Mauryan Empire in India showed the same tendency. The end has always been stagnation, decay and death.

But there were certain village republics in the North of India before the time of the Buddha; and there were certain sea-bordering city republics on the shores of the Mediterranean in the ancient Hellenic world, where there was no such deadening uniformity, but rather an extravagantly irregular individual citizen life, producing age after age unique, intellectual and artistic personalities. Does it need to be pointed out that the history of the world owes infinitely more to Athens than to Babylon or Rome? Is it difficult to understand that the religious life of man has been immeasurably more indebted to the *Sanghas*, or republics, from which Gautama the Buddha found the ideal for his own church, than to the military skill and administrative faculty of Chandragupta?

But if this is the true lesson of human history, then are we right in yielding at every turn, at the present time, both in our government and in our education, to the same fatal passion for centralisation? Is it not rather the local personality, which needs to be evoked — that *genius loci*, that spirit of the place,

which gives colour to human life, and prevents it from becoming too regular ?

When I went to Chittagong, I felt this sense of local patriotism, if I may so call it, in a remarkable degree. I have experienced it also in Hyderabad Sind and in other parts of India. The thought of a *Swaraj* for India, which means, not only political *Swaraj*, but also local and regional *Swaraj*, appeals to me intensely. For my longings and desires are for freedom; and it appears to me that there can be no beauty and joy of freedom in merely belonging to a huge and vast organisation. And just as I believe in the local and regional freedom which develops with intimate love and affection the personality, the individuality, the uniqueness, of the spot which we have learnt to call our home—our village centre, our town centre, our neighbourhood with which our childhood memories have become entwined—so also I believe that the school—the educational home of childhood—should not be a great barracks, or a huge institution, where no personal touch is possible, but rather a home, in intimate association with the local surroundings, carrying with it old and dear associations—a true second home of childhood, often more dear than the actual home itself.

When the time came for me to leave school and go to college, I can never be too thankful that my headmaster chose for me a college at Cambridge which was comparatively small in size, a college where every

one of us knew each one of our fellow students individually and where in consequence we lived a common life of personal friendships. The inspiration of those college days can never be forgotten in after life, and for fifteen years my college was literally and truly my second home to which I always returned with joy.

But when I came out to India and made a study of the intellectual and social life of the colleges of the Punjab and of Bengal, the huge unwieldy bulk of Calcutta University at once struck me with amazement. In the same way, on the side of the administration, the vast government secretariats and offices at Simla, with their never-ending rows of files and their numberless clerks and chuprassies, bewildered and distressed me. It was all so lifeless, machine-like and inhuman.

Slowly but inevitably my mind gravitated towards the ideal of Shantiniketan, where every child is known by every teacher. I am quite certain also that now, in my later life, if I were ever to live once again in modern Europe, I should be much happier in Switzerland or in Denmark, in Norway or in Sweden, than in one of those vast imperial systems (whether of France, or Germany, or England) whose very bulk and centralisation have robbed life of its individual beauty.

If it be answered that this local and regional interest may be altogether admirable when the world

is young and thinly populated, but it cannot solve the problems of hundreds of millions of human beings in the world to-day, then, in reply, I would say—Pray tell me, why not? Let us take India itself. It may be that, up to the end, some very slender central organisation will be needed in India, but have not the heart and soul of India been always in her villages? And is there any reason why these villages, clustering together, should not become, as it were, little village republics once more, each with a special hue and colour of its own, each with an individuality and personal character of its own? Only thus, at least, to my thinking, will the dreary monotonous dullness of endless repetition of offices and departments, of mills and factories, of monstrous school buildings and still more monstrous universities, be avoided.

While I have written thus strongly and almost vehemently about the need of local colour, I must guard myself against one implication. The wide atmosphere of humanity, encircling such a small but intense regional life, must be felt to the full; otherwise the deadening effects of a narrow parochialism will ensue, which are no less disastrous than those of huge machine-like organisation. The petty Indian States in Rajputana, or in the Himalayas, which are automatically sealed from the outside world, by no means represent the picture I would wish to give, when I speak of little village republics.

The contact of Athens or Florence, of Nalanda or Taxila, with the outside world was immediate and direct, vivid and keen. That is why the individual artistic and intellectual life (which was so local) was also so intense. Denmark to-day is in intimate spiritual touch with the great world outside. Our Shantiniketan Ashram, though retired from the world, is yet in closest spiritual contact with the widest ranges of human life and thought. The author of this book has recognised fully the need for the fullest and amplest scope, both in government and education, for this contact with the larger world. There is nothing narrowly national in his picture: his end is not India herself, but humanity.

I had not intended to go so far into the discussion of this question, but the subject has to me a fascination which traces back its origin to long years of dreaming and thinking. I trust that the reading of this book will do something to fill in the outline of the picture of the great word Swaraj, which is its title.

\* *Shantiniketan.*

C. F. ANDREWS

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