



**Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596**

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

[www.vidhyayanaejournal.org](http://www.vidhyayanaejournal.org)

Indexed in: Crossref, ROAD & Google Scholar

---

## **Sociolinguistic Peep into *Hind Swaraj* of Mahatma Gandhi**

**Preksha V Patel**

Research scholar, Gujarat University



## Abstract

*Hind Swaraj* or *Indian Home Rule* is a treatise penned by Mahatma Gandhi. The book was originally written in Gujarati language and it was translated by Gandhiji himself. Translation of the book was the demand of the time. The intent of the present paper is to analyse and study the select book through the Sociolinguistic lens. Sociolinguistic is a blend of two term i.e. i.e. “Socio” or “pertaining to society” and “linguistics or “pertaining to language”. Sociolinguistic technically, is the branch of linguistics that deals with the study of language in relation to society. Language and society are like hand and glove. They are inter related as language can’t exist without society. Sociolinguistics can throw much light both on the nature of language and the nature of society. The present paper makes a moderate attempt to study the language of Gandhi as he employed in his work. Gandhiji wanted to reach at the every corner and door of an Indian through his words so he wrote in a very simple language and he was very much conscious about his words. We find the impact of other authors in his works when we minutely analyse the technique, method and language he used in his works.

## Keywords:

Sociolinguistics, Society, Language, Hind Swaraj, Technique, Methods

## Sociolinguistic Peep into *Hind Swaraj* of Mahatma Gandhi

### [1] Introduction

Sociolinguistics focuses on Society and Language. These two terms catch the attention i.e. ‘socio’ or ‘pertaining to society’ and ‘linguistics’ or ‘pertaining to language’. It is blend of these two terms. Generally, a common person speculates that sociolinguistics has something to do with language and society. Technically, sociolinguistics is the branch of linguistics that deals with the study of language in relation to society. Language and society are two sides of a coin. Neither of them can sustain its existence without each other. Sociolinguistics can throw much light both on the nature of language and the nature of society. We talk in different styles in different social contexts. The sociolinguistics analyses the text approaching two elements simultaneously. Here, *Hind Swaraj* or *Indian Home Rule* is analysed on the basis of sociolinguistics theory. Gandhiji was a prolific writer, journalist, lawyer, leader and a freedom fighter. All the characteristics reflect in his writings. However, Gandhiji wrote in his mother tongue i.e. Gujarati. On



some occasion, with special objective he also wrote in Hindi and English as well. Through his writings he wanted to reach at each and every corner of the country and threshold of every house of Indians. *Hind Swaraj* or *Indian Home Rule* expresses Gandhiji's views on complete freedom (Purn Swaraj), education, language, civilization, machinery etc in a very simple and effective language.

## [2] The Concept of Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics, like other subjects, is partly theoretical, partly scientific. Sociolinguists study the interaction between language and society. They examine the language's social role and how the message is communicated through it. The growing understanding of language-society interrelationship has contributed to the development of the discipline known as 'sociolinguistics.' A study of language and its speakers undertaken simultaneously may be said to constitute the field of study of Sociolinguistics. An individual can not consistently use one homogeneous language variety for verbal communication in all situation and on all occasions. He may be using several varieties. Socio-cultural conditions influence the language varieties used. Sociolinguistics therefore examines the individual's verbal actions as a part of a speech culture. Florian Coulmas argues:

Sociolinguistics is the empirical study of how language is used in a society. Combining linguistic and sociological theories and methods, it is an interdisciplinary field of research, which attaches great significance both to the variability of language and to the multiplicity of languages, and language forms in a given society. (563)

Sociolinguists explain why we speak differently in different social contexts. According to Fishman sociolinguists are interested in knowing "who speaks, which language to whom and when" (46). To elaborate what Fishman has said, it matters to sociolinguists;

- (a) who the speaker is, what his role in society is;
- (b) which language he/she is using, whether it is formal or informal, dialect or standard;
- (c) who the listener is, whether he/she is a boss, a peer or a subordinate, a father, a mother, a sibling, or a child;



(d) when people are speaking, what the situation is, whether it is outside the office or in the office, at home or outside the home, in a meeting or at a party.

As commented by Peter Trudgill:

[---], language is very much a social phenomenon. A study of language totally without reference to its social context inevitably leads to the omission of some of the more complex and interesting aspects of language and to the loss of opportunities for further theoretical progress. One of the main factors that have led to the growth of sociolinguistic research has been the recognition of the importance of the fact that language is a very variable phenomenon, and that this variability may have as much to do with society as with language. (20)

The scope of sociolinguistics has widened further. Some of the areas covered under sociolinguistics are: speech variation and social stratification, social roles of different languages CO-existing in a speech community, language planning, development and spread of lingua franca, language acculturation, language and socialisation, occupations and language distribution, language judgment and evaluation, bilingualism/multilingualism, standardisation of language, and dialect studies. Thus, the sociolinguistics examine the text in context with the language is used and the society to which a text is addressed i.e. how the author uses language for the society to whom he wants to address.

### [3] *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*

*Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule* is a book originally written in Gujarati language when Gandhiji was on board the ship during the return from England to South Africa in 1909 and its English translation by Gandhiji himself was released in 1910. It was first published in the columns of 'Indian Opinion' of South Africa, and it is an answer to the Indian school of violence and its prototype in South Africa. However, the British government in India banned the book in 1910 as a seditious text. *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home-Rule* comprises of 20 short chapters. It is written in a dialogic form between the Reader and the Editor of a journal/newspaper. The advantage of the dialogic form is that it provides the Editor (here Gandhi) with an opportunity to discuss the entire gamut of issues with all their implications and intricacies.

Gandhiji expressed his views on the various issues like complete freedom (purn swaraj), education, laws, doctors, lawyers etc. His language is so simple whether in Gujarati or English that even a lawman can



understand it very easily. His objective was to make aware each and every Indian. He wanted to drive off the Britishers from India by practising nonviolence and truth. He appealed the Indians to boycott the foreign products. He advised every Indians to spine the cotton on charkha and also organise the home industry which make people economically independent. He did not blame only Britishers for slavery of Indians. He claimed that Indians for slavery. He also condemned the modern civilization because he believed that modern civilization might ruin the Indian culture.

Thus, in *Hind Swaraj* or *Indian Home Rule* Gandhiji expressed his doctrines of nonviolence and truth on every page of the book. Through the book, Gandhiji earned fame and name and also created a room in the hearts of Indians. However, when he published this book, Gandhiji did not earn his name as a freedom fighter.

#### [4] Sociolinguistics Approach in *Hind Swaraj* or *Indian Home Rule*

*Hind Swaraj* or *Indian Home Rule* is a book written in dialogue form. There is a conversation between editor and reader. Editor is Gandhiji himself who expresses his views on different issues to a reader. Sociolinguists claim that socio-cultural elements play a pivotal role in the selection of word and the manners in which person communicates. Gandhiji was very much aware about the situation of India and the mind-set of Indian when he wrote the book. The book was originally written in Gujarati and it was published from South Africa and within a year the British government banned the book in India. Gandhiji came to know about the banned of his book and he contemplated over it and wanted to clarify his intention to the British government so he published this book in English language. However, in Preface to the English Translation on 20<sup>th</sup> March, 1910 he clarified his intention that:

Had I written for English readers in the first instance, the subject would have been handled in a different manner. Moreover, the dialogue, as it has been given, actually took place between several friends, mostly readers of Indian Opinion, and myself. (8)

Gandhiji himself confess that, "I write to propagate my ideas" (210). Gandhiji did not only want to make India free from the clutches of British government but he also wanted complete freedom (*Purn Swaraj*). He wanted to make each Indian independent in all manners.



The mature Gandhi irrevocably emerged in *Hind Swaraj*. Gandhi had a brief visit to London in 1908. There were two big issues then. The first issue was the divide of Congress between moderates and extremists during the December 1907, Congress meeting at Surat, the younger generation and even some of the older generation became dissatisfied with petitioning activity. They wanted mass revolution and rebellion. They also incited aggression openly and implicitly. The moderates also trusted in gradualism, believed strongly in the British concept of fairness, and thought British law to be advantageous. Like the radical, Gandhi believed in widespread protest but opposed violence. Just like the moderates, he always believed in British justice just sincerely felt that India should be part of the empire. Gandhi's problem was nation's problem. The other issue was his perception that England can do little directly to alleviate Indians' complaints in South Africa. *Hind Swaraj* addressed these two main issues of that time. It analysed current Western technology dominated society and weaved a fresh paradigm for independent India.

The language is passionate and simple, written in a dialogue form. It is the most complete enunciation of the Gandhian thought. Gandhi's only formal author. In the writing of Gandhiji, the impact of Indian society, religion and Indian writers and foreign writers is marked. In the appendices to *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhiji gives a list of books which had left long lasting impression upon him. In addition to the known influences Gandhi was also influenced by Plato's *Defense and Death of Socrates*. Though he does not include Plato's *Republic*, he was definitely greatly influenced by the book. He in all likelihood adopted the dialogue form of writing from Plato's *Republic*. Dialogue form of analysis to arrive at truth remained with him till he breathed his last.

By expressing his views on Swaraj (Independence) in the chapter "What is Swaraj?", Gandhiji asks few questions to the Reader in *Hind Swaraj*. The conversation between Reader and Editor expresses the views of Gandhiji. Gandhiji asks, "Supposing we get Self-Government similar to what the Canadians and the South Africa have, will it be good enough?" (48). Reader replies;

That question also is useless. We may get it when we have the same powers; we shall then hoist our own flag. As is Japan, so must have our own splendour, and then will India's voice ring through the world. (48)

Gandhiji again expresses his views through Editor that;



You have drawn the picture well. In effect it means this; that we want English rule without Englishman. You want the tiger's nature, but not the tiger; that is to say, you would make India English. And when it becomes English, it will be called not Hindustan but Englistan. This is not the Swaraj that I want. (48)

From the above conversation, even a layman can understand the intention of Gandhiji. He gives an example of a tiger and his nature. Everyman can understand what Gandhiji wants to convey through that example. He expresses his views that Britishers are not only responsible for the slavery of India but to some extent, Indians are also responsible for that. Gandhiji wants complete freedom i.e. even free mind, though, courage, rights, quality etc.

When Editor is asked by the Reader about civilization, he condemns civilization by alluring few examples. He says that because of machinery, civilization destroys the peace of mind and country. With one machine gun, a man can destroy the lives of thousand people. A woman who before few years considered as the queen of the household things, wander in the streets or they slave away in factories. He claims that;

Formerly, men were made slaves under physical compulsion. Now they are enslaved by temptation of money and of the luxuries that money can buy. There are now new diseases of which people never dreamt before, and an army of doctors is engaged in finding out their cures, and so hospitals have increased. This is a set of Civilization. (55)

Thus, Gandhiji in a very simple and lucid language expresses his views on civilization and also conveys his message to the Indians that modern civilization may offer material comforts but it destroys the inner essence of an individual.

In 'Why was India Lost?' chapter, Gandhiji blames Indians for the slavery. Reader asks, "If civilization is a disease and if it has attacked England, why has she been able to take India, and why is she able to retain it?" (57). Gandhiji replies through Editor that:

The English have not taken India; we have given it to them. They are not in India because of their strength, but because we keep them. Let us now see whether these propositions can be sustained. They came to our country originally for purposes of trade. Recall the Company Bahadur. Who made it Bahadur? They had not the slightest intention at the time of establishing a kingdom. Who assisted





the Company's officers? Who was tempted at the sight of their silver? Who bought their goods? History testifies that we did all this. In order to become rich all at once we welcomed the Company's officers with open arms. We assisted them. If I am in the habit of drinking bhang and a seller thereof sells it to me, am I to blame him or myself? By blaming the seller, shall I be able to avoid the habit? And, if a particular retailer is driven away, will not another take his place? A true servant of India will have to go to the root of the matter.

From the above conversation, Gandhiji's views on slavery is very much explicit. In a very simple way, with common example of drinking bhang he blames Indians for their slavery.

In every conversation, we find the clear intention of Gandhiji. Gandhiji was well aware of the Indian society and Indians so he wrote in simple Gujarati and English as well. He did not want to earn his name and fame by writings. Neither he wanted to establish him as a scholar person. Each word of Gandhiji demonstrates Indian society, his religious views, simplicity, non-violence doctrine, and principle of truth.

## [5] Conclusion

Sociolinguists study the relationship between language and society. They explore the social function of the language and the way it is used to convey the meaning. Sociolinguists explain why we speak differently in different social contexts. From the sociolinguistic approach, we can understand the function of language as Gandhiji employs in *Hind Swaraj* or *Indian Home Rule*. The book expresses Gandhiji's views on the burning issues of India of his time.





## Works Cited

- Coulmas, Florian. “Sociolinguistics”. *The Handbook of Linguistics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001.
- Fishman, J. A. “The Relationship between Micro- and Macro-Sociolinguistics in the Study of Who Speaks What Language to Whom and When.” *In Pride and Holmes*, 1972.
- Gandhi, M.K. *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*. International Printing Press, 1910. (Reprinted Second Edition by Navjivan Publishing House, Feb.,2018).
- - -, “Harijan” June 18, 1948.
- Trudgill, Peter. *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society*. Rev. ed., Pelican Books, 1995.