The swaraj of Catalonia

For Gandhi, a nation cannot be built without previously forging the character of people

Ramin Jahanbegloo, March 15, 2019

In 'Hind Swaraj', a reference work, Gandhi uses the concept of 'swaraj' to designate self-control and self-governance. According to Gandhi, a follower of non-violence must be able to self-control: "Everyone has to experiment and personally practice the swaraj." The person who does it follows a disciplined and ethical life to become an example for others. In this sense, the swaraj at the individual level - that is to say, "if each one becomes his own ruler" - he would bring swaraj to the whole nation. For Gandhi, a nation can not be built without previously forging the character of people. Gandhi believed that the true test of a nation is his ability to instill moral values to his members. According to him, a nation will only be democratic when people feel independent with the heart and reason.

But how do we know if a nation is really independent? Only when the citizens of this nation have lost their fear and they also have dignity and respect themselves. In any case, this dignity requires a great discipline that can only be developed through the spiritual education of the citizens. Catalonia is now on its way to doing this spiritual development. That would be a mistake to consider that the debate on independence is only political. It is also a debate on ethics and spirituality. Spirituality refers to a well-informed public opinion, which is the only one that can serve as a foundation for an ethical society.
One of the most important characteristics of Catalan society as an ethical institution is the purity of the means, that is, the non-violence practiced by leaders and supporters of independence. Without a doubt, it would not be exaggerated to say that so far those who favored the independence of Catalonia have defended only nonviolent means, which are the ones that can guide us to a nonviolent end. They have been aware that unethical ends never end in moral ends. This nonviolent action can be considered as the spiritual element of Catalan independentism. In this sense, the process of self-development of Catalans as free moral agents is materialized through participation in the ethical process of independence. If the self-development of Catalans implies learning to be empathetic and compassionate, the debate on the independence of Catalonia must be characterized by the moral transformation and the internal illumination of the Catalan population.

The greatness and moral progress of a nation are judged by the deal that dispenses its minorities, marginalized and dissident. We should not forget that the greatness and moral progress of a nation are judged by the treatment that exempts its minorities, marginals and dissidents. Thus, the construction of a nation is linked to the development of the moral integrity of its citizens. There is no doubt that the Catalans have reached this level. There are people everywhere in the world to see many Catalans ready to go out and endure the blows without loosening or turning to violence. In fact, the capacity to voluntarily support suffering indicates the development of the moral integrity of Catalans and their spiritual metamorphosis. In addition, in the nucleus of 'swaraj' in Catalonia we find a constant concern to be responsible to themselves. This concern for the assumption of their own responsibilities is what infused moral power to the Catalan movement. This moral power is the seed from which the tree of the Catalan civic attitude has developed and developed to the fullest extent.
Many mistakenly believe that Catalan independence is a nationalist and populist movement. But the idea of independence is not based solely on the Catalan identity or the Catalan language. These two ideas or ideals are a very important reality for Catalans. But in Catalonia independence is, above all, a means of self-realization that emphasizes the need to acquire a civic and pacifist awareness. Catalan 'swaraj' must lead to a form of self-governance in which the entire community (unionists and independentists) can achieve civic reconciliation. According to this civic reconciliation, a Catalan is, first of all, a citizen of the swaraj of Catalonia, that is, a person capable of transforming and living together peacefully.

Consequently, Catalonia becomes a civic framework that aims to protect and promote the double capacity of Catalan swaraj: non-violent resistance against all forms of injustice and the constitution of a compassionate community.

Let's face it, while Europe suffers from a moral crisis, Catalans stand up in defense of the best moral and political dream of Europe: that of a democratic and illustrated soul. But they have also succeeded in bringing the whole world back to those great sources of empathy and compassion from the wombs of the earth by thinkers and activists such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela. Therefore, it is no longer a question of choosing between Catalan populism and Spanish nationalism. It is a moral struggle between non-Catalan violence and all those who believe that hatred, revenge and rigor can put an end to the anger that exists in the lives of those who think differently. It is time to share the lament of the Roman poet Ovid: "I see and I approve what is best, but I do the worst".