Gandhi did not contact any idea, institution and individual that he did not transform. Ideas gathered novel meaning and significance, individuals were inspired by new messages and aspirations and institutions acquired added relevance after association with Gandhi. Swaraj is one of those many ideas that obtained Gandhian imprint when it passed through the prism of Gandhian thought. Thus Albert Einstein said, “Generations to come will scarcely believe that such one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.”

The term Swaraj or independence as it is commonly understood was not a term of Gandhian coinage. The term Swaraj had already gained considerable currency in the political vocabulary of India before Gandhi gave serious thought to it. Of course Swami Dayananda gave the war-cry of ‘Swaraj is our birth right’. The term was used by Bal Gangadhar Tilak as late as 1896-97. Lala Lajpat Rai though was in America during partition of Bengal in 1905 advocated the slogan, “Swaraj” that India was for Indians. The extremists within the Congress had won an ideological victory on having Swaraj accepted as the goal of the Congress and announced as such from its platform at Kolkata. The Kolkata session was remarkable for the slogan Swaraj which Dadabhai gave and which at that time caught the people of the country in a frenzy of effort for the attainment of that ideal.

The term Swaraj appeared in Gandhi’s writings for the first time on Nov 3, 1905 while Gandhi was writing about Shyam Krishna Verma, an India patriot, scholar, administrator and humanist who had abandoned his lucrative profession in India and had gone to England, donned the life of an ascetic and had accepted an indicative mission to convert Indian students to the doctrine of Swaraj. Gandhi
gave serious thought to the question of Swaraj in the year 1903 and during his return from London to South Africa, in answer to the Indian School of Violence and it’s prototype in South Africa, he wrote for the columns of the Indian opinion, a series of articles on Swaraj that subsequently appeared in book form with the title “Hind Swaraj”. The spirits of Swaraj expounded in this booklet remained almost the throughout Gandhi’s life with slightest modifications in matters of details, hence his first blue-print on Swaraj.

For quite a long time, Gandhiji’s use of the term Swaraj did not signify anything beyond enjoyment of dominion status within the framework of British Empire. That under Gandhi’s leadership the Indian National Congress had made the campaign of Non-Co-operation in 1920 implies Gandhiji’s policy of co-operation with the British Government till this time even while participating in the nationalist struggle for Home Rule i.e. Self-Government. His objective was never snapping of relationship with Britain or with the British people. Even the ultimate objective as per Gandhi’s own admission was, ”Swaraj within the Empire if possible and without if necessary”. In Congress session of 1928 Gandhi moved the resolution on Dominion status against the demand of Swaraj or independence of progressives like Nehru and Bose.

In subsequent years complete independence or Purna Swaraj became Gandhi’s immediate goal. However if complete independence or Purna Swaraj implied falling of the fetters of British political control it did not signify for Gandhiji. With advancing years in course of his conversation with Fischer during Second World War he said, “I am not interested in future promises. I am not interested in independence after war. I want independence now.” All the same he did not wish that an independent India’s contact with British people and the British Government shall be snapped forthwith. After independence India would not pursue a policy of isolationism but healthy cooperation with British people. Hence although Gandhi was the champion of Swaraj as Earl Mountbatten of Myanmar styled him, he was real friend of British people. He laid a solid foundation for the development of Indo-British friendship.

The Gandhian concept of Swaraj has a far broader and deeper significance than English equivalents like freedom or independence. Swaraj for Gandhi had both negative and positive implications. Negatively speaking it of course implied severance of political relationships with British and particularly termination of British political control over India. It was meant the end of western culture, western system of value and western political system of which Britain stood as the living symbol. Hence Gandhi realized that what is very much significant for the attainment of Swaraj is not mere freedom from political control but freedom from the vicious influence of western civilization. The western civilization had promoted man’s goodness instead of goodness and worldliness instead of Godliness and under their weight India and Indians sank deeper and deeper. The materialistic civilization of the west was founded on machinery. The real Swaraj of Gandhi was freedom from the baneful effects of machinery or craze for machinery.

Besides, Swaraj in the political sense of the term did not mean for Gandhi mere freedom from British control, he also meant thereby freedom from western political influence. Not only British system of government, but all foreign systems of governments were discarded by him. Thus negatively speaking Swaraj for Gandhi meant freedom from the influence of western civilization, western system of value, machinery
and above all foreign type of political institutions apart from freedom from political control.

The termination of the darkness of the night may not necessarily presage the birth of the glorious day. The dawn may be the harbinger of a misty and foggy morning, a gale and storm-laden day and an inclement afternoon. Likewise freedom from foreign domination, of the clutches of western civilization sense of value and political institutions may not bring the desired outcome. Swaraj must aim at bringing far-reaching changes that will herald a new dawn where as he pointed out performance of duty will get optimum importance as he again said that civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty. What is more important for Gandhi, Swaraj as a positive concept signifying development of the nation in a definite direction. This positive aspect of Swaraj to Gandhi was four dimensional i.e. political, social, economical and moral. The positive aspects of Swaraj constitute the kernel, where as negative aspect like freedom from foreign domination form the shell or sheath of Swaraj.

**Political Dimension of Swaraj:**

Gandhi’s predecessors who indulged in much of intellectual and political gymnastics on Swaraj, considered Swaraj mainly from the political angle. Besides, this political aspect of Swaraj primarily concerned with the freedom from British imperialistic domination and transfer of political power from the British into the hands of Indians. They felt that once political power is acquired by Indians the power will be so utilized that Indians in general will profusely benefit. But Gandhi since the day he gave serious thought to the question of Swaraj gave equally important thought to the issue of instrumentality for the exercise of such power and the manner of such exercise. Gandhi believed that freedom from British yoke and introduction of Indian rule may not solve the real riddle. Nature of government and its spirit was more important for Gandhi than the colour of skin and the nationality of governing personnel. He was well aware of the oppression, humiliation and repression perpetrated by Indian princes over millions of innocent people of that time. He feared transfer of power might be concentrated in the hands of few Indian princes. Thus Gandhi while thinking of Swaraj understood it in the sense of people’s Swaraj. The peasants, the workers, the disabled and the incapacitated would not be excluded rather there would be emphasis on the lot of the weaker sections of the society. There must be democratization in the matter of possession and exercise of power and the purpose of such exercise would be in line with the language of Abraham Lincon that, the government should be one of the people, by the people and for the people.

**Social Dimension of Swaraj:**

While thinking of a type of people’s Swaraj Gandhi had in mind a state of social existence where each individual irrespective of his religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, residence or parentage will enjoy equal social status. Thus the society shall be an integrated community devoid of any artificial and manmade distinctions. It shall be a society inspired by the spirit of social equality, equality of status and identical dignity of all of its members irrespective of a variety of natural and manmade distinctions. Gandhi was even prepared to concede to the physically, mentally and economically deficient people additional privilege in order to enable them to make up their deficiencies. In his address at Sisgunj Gurudwara he emphasized that Purna Swaraj was the complete possession of all, because it was as much for the prince as for the peasant, as much for the rich land owner as for
the landless tiller of the soil, as much for the Hindus, as much for the Muslims, as much for the Parsis and of the Christians as for the Jains and Sikhs, irrespective of any distinction of caste or creed.

**Economic Dimension of Swaraj**

Swaraj as conceived by Gandhi has its economic dimensions too. Political domination of the country by Britain led to economic subjugation of India and provided an opportunity to the ruling power and the ruling class to indulge in an act of exploitation of India. Hence Gandhi like his compatriots realized that termination of British rule in India would free Indian economy from foreign control, put a halt to economic exploitation of India, prevent the draining out of resources from India to the metropolitan country, open the floodgates to India’s economic prosperity and thus lead to economic Swaraj apart from the Swaraj of the political sense of the term. The concept of economic Swaraj of Gandhi has an economic bias. Swaraj to Gandhi was a means to the economic emancipation of the masses. Gandhi was painfully aware of the conditions of destitute masses. Hence when Gandhi thought of Swaraj he considered it as poor man’s Swaraj. Swaraj for Gandhi signified removal of poverty, hunger, destitution, deprivation and exploitation. Negatively speaking economic Swaraj implied elimination of the exploiters and positively it meant providing some additional facilities to the poor and unprivileged so that they enjoy freedom or Swaraj from the excruciating pains of wants, scarcity, poverty, and destitution. Swaraj laid as much stress on material prosperity of all as on their intellectual development, moral upliftment, physical fitness and social elevation.

**Moral Dimension of Swaraj**

Without the moral dimension of Swaraj, the political, social and economic dimensions of Swaraj will lose their real significance. Gandhi treated Swaraj as a synonym of Ram Raj without any Hindu doctrinaire sense of the term. By this he meant Divine Raj, the Kingdom of God. Rama symbolized justice and equality, truth and charity. Under Swaraj moral precepts, sense of idealism, spiritualism and divine qualities and virtues should inspire the conduct of individuals and so also the political, social and economic system. Gandhi realized the irreligious and immoral tone in western civilization. Thus he warned against the vices of western civilization, materialistic craze and advocated freedom from its clutches.

Gandhi was a practical idealist and when he thought of Swaraj he also gave serious thought to the question of appropriate technique for the attainment of the same. But what is very much significant is that his approach to the question of technique for the attainment of Swaraj is as much novel as his concept of Swaraj itself. Like his idea of Swaraj, the techniques of Swaraj, described below are multi-dimensional in nature.

**Non-Violence**

Gandhi rejected violent technique in favour of non-violent one as various considerations weighed the balance in favour of the latter. He was sure that violence was not the appropriate answer to eradicate the ills of India. He emphasized a technique that was in conformity with Indian cultural heritage. His idealistic emphasis on the indivisible bond between the end and the means and practical, pragmatic and utilitarian outlook necessitated to adopt non-violence as the most appropriate technique for attainment of Swaraj. For him means and end were convertible terms and the nature, quality and character of the means adopted for the attainment of the same. **He was convinced that if the end was good and noble, it could not be attained by evil means.** When
he rejected violent techniques as inappropriate for the attainment of Swaraj he advised a militant-sort of non-violent technique that was differently styled at different times as passive resistance, civil resistance and Satyagrah with non-cooperation and civil disobedience as the modus operandi. Gandhi was an apostle of non-violence, yet he was not an apostle of cowardice. Non-violence for him was not the non-violence of the weak and the coward but the strong and the brave.

**Self-Control** : Gandhi argued India lost her freedom because her people shunned self-control and were enamoured of licentious conduct. They were tempted to the dazzling British wares by which the latter’s trade flourished in India. If sacrifice of her time honoured conduct of self-restraint and self-control spelt loss of freedom, readoption of the same norm may usher in an era of freedom. Indians would shed their passion for the dazzling wares produced in British factories. Then the British economic interest would receive a setback. He said the real home rule was self-restraint or self-control. The reaffirmation on self-control would halt the corrupting influence of foreign value system and materialistic civilization of the west. Economically self-control would enable the millions to share the property possessed by few. Socially it would lead to social equality. The higher caste people could mix with the so-called untouchables only by practicing self-control. Self-control on the part of the rulers is an independent state will enable the ruled to enjoy liberty and freedom. This will be a healthy and non-violent check on the power obsession of the men in power.

**Decentralized economic and political power** :

Swaraj presupposes adoption of technique of political and economic decentralization for the sake of its realization. Gandhi had thorough knowledge about how people’s liberties were being crushed in both capitalist and communist states. Centralization of power leads to tyranny in socialist countries. In such countries political and moral Swaraj of individuals suffered grave casualties because of its concentration of political, economic powers in the hands of the state. Gandhi also witnessed that in the so-called free world or the capitalistic world Swaraj in the social and moral sense was absent. He realized that in order that Swaraj shall be real people’s Swaraj, people in general should possess economic and political power for all practical purposes. In Purna Swaraj all must be prosperous, happy and villages would be self-contained villages and also village communities. Every village should be a republic or panchayats having full power. Every village has to be self-sufficient and capable of managing its own affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world.

To sum up the Gandhian doctrine of Swaraj is different from others in the sense that it is positive in nature. Apart from signifying termination of domination by British the positive aspect of Swaraj is a four dimensional concept and the means to achieve it is also three dimensional in nature. Therefore as Srinivash said, he is untouchable and unapproachable, he had reached the summit of purity.