MAHATMA GANDHI: AN APPROACH FOR DEMOCRACY IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi was an ardent believer in the theory and democracy. His belief was based on his own conception of democracy which was quite different from classical concept of democracy of the west. His innate love of equality, unflinching support of individual freedom, and his consistent plea for bringing about a just order through the brotherhood of man that recognized no barriers of sex, religion, language and culture testify to his faith in democracy of his conception. It is true that Gandhi was not a system builder as Plato or Aristotle. Gandhi’s ideas on democracy are to be found in his speeches and writings, though they do not appear to be systematically developed in the sense that he carried ideas to a logical conclusion. Gandhi expressed his views on democracy in response to questions put to him by his friends and well-wishers, depending upon his own study. Observations of life experiences and experiments.

INTRODUCTIONS

It may be here that the Gandhian model of democracy was conceived by him at two levels evolving from a grass root level. At one level he conceived of an ideal polity where there would not be any state or government to regulate the right of the individual. This form of polity was termed by him as Village Swaraj or Ram Rajya. The other level of polity was conceived at the sub-ideal level which would have a government that would permit maximum freedom to individuals. There two forms of polity evolved from one in to the other involving a movement from the lower to higher form of democracy.

If one analyses Gandhian thought, one finds that he lays stress on the essence and spirit of democracy. "Democracy must in essence mean the art and science of mobilizing the entire physical, economic and spiritual resources of all the various Sections of the people in the service of the common good of all" Gandhi was deeply uneasy with the modern state. It was abstracted from society, centralized, bureaucratic, obsessed with homogeneity, and suffused with the spirit of violence. He thought that since all the prevailing forms of government took the modern state for granted and represented different ways of organizing it, they were inherently incapable of tackling its structural defects." For Gandhi a society based on Swaraj, a 'true democracy' as he called it, was the only morally acceptable alternative to the modern state. It was shasanmukta, or (free of domination and coercion ), and institutionalized and lokshakti or people's power. People
here were and knew themselves to be the soul source of political power and government their affairs themselves. Swaraj involved not just the periodic accountability of government but the daily exercise of popular power, not just the enjoyment of civil and political rights but the constantly confirmed consciousness of being in charge of one's destiny not just liberty but power."

DEMOCRACY IN INDIA

Gandhi believed that a democracy, Which served the welfare of all, would be marked by Minimum state intervention in social life. He criticized parliamentary. However this system was certainly an advance over monarchy and oligarch. He remarked," I do not believer in any government is better than capricious rule." So he, accepted parliamentary Swaraj as an immediate goal and point in the struggle for Swaraj . In 1924, he said," Parliament is indeed barren. I do not imagine that its nature can change India I live, however, in the hope that our Parliament will only remain barren and not give birth to wicked son . I cannot abandon practical considerations. The ideal is one only namely Ramrajya........I am suggesting many ways to ensure that the voice of Parliament is really the voice of the people, and no the hired voters. With the end in view I am searching for a device which will enable us to listen to the voice of the entire people . All systems are bound to be defective. We are looking for a system which will yield maximum benefit of India."

Although in the Hind - Swaraj, Gandhi was bitterly hostile to the patterns of functioning of the British Parliament, he prescribed for India a parliamentary government based on Universal suffrage. His conception of Swaraj inculcated a government based on the consent of the people. This consent of the people was to be ascertained by the largest number of adult population. He wrote: " By Swaraj, I mean the government of India by the consent of the people as ascertained by the vote of the largest number of the adult population, male or female, native born of domiciled who have contributed by manual labour to the state and who have taken the trouble of having their names registered as voters."  

He felt that for the success of a democratic government it was essential that the representatives should be given only general instructions and should not be subjected to detailed dependence on the electorate. It would not be possible for the legislature to operate if the representatives were compelled to consult the constituencies on all issues. It can be said that he upheld the 'Mandate' and not the 'delegate' theory for the representative.

Gandhi wanted India to evolve "True Democracy" and laid six conditions for its realization in India.

1. Satyagraha expressed through Charkha;
2. Growth of Village Industries;
3. Primary education through Handicrafts;
4. Removal of Untouchability;
5. Communal Harmony; and

6. Non-violent Organization of labour

Gandhi also advised the Indians not to copy the western model. He remarked that one nation suited in one condition was not necessarily good enough of another differently suite. Accordingly, he suggested evolving a decentralized people's democracy on non-violent lines at the lower levels.

Gandhi declared: "The end to be sought is human happiness combined with full mental and moral growth. I use the adjective moral as synonymous with spiritual. This end be achieved under decentralization. Centralization as a system is inconsistent with a non-violent structure of society." His opposition to centralization was based on a fundamental ground. He held: "Centralization can not be defended without adequate force." According to him centralization leads to the concentration of power in the hands of a few and that in its turn, robs the people of its supreme authority in the matter of determination of public issues. Not only that, in an over-centralized state man loses his human dignity and becomes a cog in the wheel of the vast and impersonal state machines. Man becomes de-personalized. That is why he stood for thorough decentralization of political power and economic production. He wanted to give a new direction to politics and for that he went to the roots. According to Gandhi, India cannot be imagined without its village. To think of a developed India with its undeveloped village is a ridiculous idea for him. There fore, he championed the cause of an enriched village life. He propagated for making the villages self-sufficient and self-reliant. He maintained," Every village of India will almost be a self-supporting, Self-contained unit."

He stood for the improvement of villages and for success of democracy; democracy should originate from the grass root level.

He believed that power to be effective and genuine from the standpoint of the masses, must lie with the people which could only be possible in small communities of villages. "Society based on non-violence can only consist of groups settled in villages in which Voluntary Cooperation is the condition of dignified and peaceful existence." He projected the state as the servant of the people; it had the duty to carry out the will of the people. He was for the prevention of exploitation of any kind of the rural people. "Exploiting of village is itself organized violence. If we want Swaraj to be built on non-violence, we shall have to give village their proper place." Hence, he cried for village Swaraj, Panchayati Raj or democracy from below.

According to him," True democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village."

He advocated that in democracy the independence must begin at the bottom. It means that at grass-root level people must be independent in making their policies and implementing them without any rigid and strict control from the above. Thus, every Village, to him, could become a republic having the institution of panchayat with sufficient authority and powers. It means every village had to be self sustained and capable of managing its own affairs and even to the extent of defending itself against the whole. Ultimately, it would be the individual who to be the unit. He
clarified that it did not exclude dependence on and willing help and cooperation from the neighbors or from the world too. It would be free and voluntary play of mutual forces. Thus, he wanted India to evolve a decentralized structure of power based on the effective reconstruction of self-reliant and self-sufficient village. The village organization was to be based on the principle of constructive social and economic efforts, sacrifice and the abnegation of illegitimate self interest.

Similarly, he had also pointed out that the political structure of Independent India was to be not a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. In the Panchayat Raj the toiling labourer and the rich capitalist had to be treated as equal. There was to be solidarist spirit of mutual independence and harmonious co-operation. The communal tensions which were spreading to the rural areas from the towns had to be eliminated. The self-sustained village were to manage their own affairs. They were not to rely on the help of a central army for defense. They should morally develop themselves to the extent even of strength of perishing the attempt of self-defense.

He dreamed of village Swaraj where village have its own government in from of panchayat which would be independent in all spheres of administration. "The government of the village will be conducted by a panchayat of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. These will have all the authority and jurisdiction required. Since there will be no system of punishment in the accepted sense, this panchayat will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate for its year of office." In essence, the panchayat of every village republic was a key unit for decentralization of legislative, executive and judicial power. Every village with its characteristics of self-rule and self-sufficiency was supposed to represent the values of a true democracy, wherein authority and power were shared and exercised by different functionaries. The individual would have complete freedom to shape his destiny according to his wishes. His thoughts and actions would be pervaded by the spirit of non-violence in an atmosphere of all constructive actions in such a village republic. Gandhi argued that in such a setting it was possible to secure "Perfect democracy" based upon individual freedom. The individual is the architect of his own government. The law of non-violence rules him and his government. For the law government every village is that he will suffer death in defense of his and his village's honour.

The only way, according to Gandhi, to emancipate the nation from its age-long torture and frustration was to make the village of India self-sufficient and self-reliant through the decentralized structure of village republics. Thus alone could the villagers also develop their intellectual power and could acquire the social-economic consciousness necessary or the contemplate non-violent society of the future. Thus, according to Gandhi, decentralization was a technique for revolutionizing the psychology of the people for building a more perfect society.

This deep attachment to the concept of decentralization indicates the radical and fundamental nature of Gandhi’s theory of democracy because he wants to begin the reform at bottom.

According to him, the common masses have to feel thrill of participation in the exercise of power thus alone can the universal will of the people a reality.
Gandhi not only gave his ideas through Speeches and writings but he was a man who developed a model of 'exemplary, life by making his own life - including its most intimate aspects - a museum of national learning. He converted already widely discussed dilemmas of Indian social structure in to charismatic symbols: he labeled the vast masses of untouchables as Harijans (Sons of God ) and launched a powerful movement to ameliorate their oppression, which became a plank for the national movement. He championed the cause of women and spoke of their liberation almost in the style of feminism. He made the symbolism of Hindu - Muslim unity a general plank of social solidarity. He made the indigenous homespun cloth (Khadi) emblematic of all who would aspire to be nationalists, a symbolism that still continues to prevail among political cadres. He developed a comprehensive programme of constructive work in the village, and among tribes and dalits. He rarefied traditional concepts of sacrifice and austere living into minimum qualifications for nationalist workers. He ordered the educated middle classes to go into villages and serve the people. He transformed the whole appeal and draw of individual prayer into a routine institution of the nation during which his solutions for problems of politics were highlighted and diffused.

Gandhi turned the symbolism of a pacifist, saintly India to a militant organizational style, indeed the well - knit organizational drive of the Congress, with a programme of action and a powerful identity and discipline. This enabled him to include in the Congress all streams of ideological thought and all important social interests. It gave rise to a high tolerance of ambiguity in the concerns of the national movement, allowed dissent to become part of the overall consensual style of the Congress, and imbued the Congress with great flexibility and freedom to maneuver. By providing an overriding symbolism - that had the sanction of tradition and had passed the test of functionality -he built bridges all over. Gandhi had the great gift of transforming dimensions of time (the bridging of several centuries) into concrete dimensions of space (bridging the gap between the city and the village) and penetrating both with an idiom of modernization that had indigenous meaning, simplicity of communication and great organizational as well as personal potency. He constantly reinterpreted traditional concepts of authority, social obligation and self - realization, and furnished them with meaning that proved functional in the development of national consensus and political identity above all, he wielded tremendous personal authority - the Congress high command and the vast band of Gandhi workers - by resolving tensions and cleavages in the government through definitive solutions and formulae that could not be effectively challenged even by other popular heroes of the movement.

CONCLUSION

Gandhi made prominent a certain consensual style in India tradition by grafting and reinterpreting this aspect in the context of modern politics and giving it an ideological colour by invoking labels such as ' non - violent struggle' and 'Peaceful disobedience' waged by a 'Servant of the people' even he was combating a powerful enemy. As for his own rank and life in the Congress, he emphasized the great virtue of discipline in the maintenance of political potency; he accommodated men of diverse capacities and intellectual background, and always valued the cohesion and discipline of the movement above any ideological of doctrinal considerations, or even considerations of personal pride. He even symbolized and made functional the Indians tolerance of humiliation and deprivation, and turned these into programmatic plans of ' Civil disobedience' and mass imprisonment at the hands of the colonial power. All this enabled him to
build distinctive structure of political organization. It was the latter that ultimately succeeded in gaining power from the alien rules and provided the nation with a framework of political authority.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


