

GANDHI AND DEMOCRACY: A PHILOSOPHY OF SELF-RULE

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INTRODUCTION

Democracy literally means Power of the People. Modern democracy is meant to protect the freedom of the Individual. Democracy is based on the doctrine of self-rule. In the words of Gandhi democracy in essence must 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". In his conception democracy or serving as, he calls it is not restricted to a select few but it is the self-rule by many. True democracy will emerge not by the acquisition of authority by a few at the cost of the rest. All the people have to be given equal opportunity for self-development to enable them to participate in the activities of democracy freely. Swaraj of a people means the sum total of the Swaraj of a people means the total of the Swaraj of individuals. The spirit of democracy is not a mechanical thing to be adjusted by abolition of forms. It requires the change of heart, and the inculcation of the spirit of brotherhood. take into consideration the interest and will of the society. If every individual takes the law into his own hands, there is no state. It becomes anarchy and lawless. That way results in destruction of liberty. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the individuals to create the conditions of peace and order to facilitate the state to secure justice.

THE TEST OF DEMOCRACY

The truest test of democracy lies in the ability of anyone to act as he likes. So long as one does not injure the life or property of anyone else, he is successful in the test. It is not possible to control public morals by the acts of violence. A democrat is one who completely identifies with the poorest of mankind with an intense longing to live no better than them. When the democrat has corresponding conscious effort to approach that level to the best of his ability can entitle him to make the test.

Democracy comes naturally to him who is habituated normally to yield willing obedience to all laws, human or divine. A democrat must first of all qualify himself by satisfying this acid list of democracy if he is ambitions to serve democracy. A democrat must be utterly selfless. He must think and dream not in terms of self or party but only of democracy. Gandhi does not want anybody to give up his connections or to suppress himself. He believes that a healthy and honest difference of opinion will not injure the cause. But opportunism, patched-up compromises certainly will injure the cause. The opinions must be genuine but should not be of a party. Democracy can exist only in trust. The democracy lies in the labour.

REPRESENTATION IN DEMOCRACY

Gandhi holds that it is an utter delusion to believe that a large number of delegates is in any way a help to the better conduct of business or that it safe guards the principle of democracy. Fifteen hundred delegates, zealous of the interests of the people, broad minded and truthful, would anybody be a better safeguard for democracy than six thousand irresponsible men chosen anyhow. To safeguard democracy, the people must have a keen sense of independence, self-

respect and their oneness. The people should insist on choosing only such persons as are good and true as their representatives.

True democracy is not inconsistent with a few persons representing the spirit, the hope and the aspirations of those whom they claim to represent. Gandhi holds that democracy cannot be evolved by forcible methods. The spirit of democracy cannot be imposed from without but it has to come from within.

The very essence or democracy in that every person represents all the varied interests which compose the nations. It is true that it does not exclude and should not exclude special representation of special interests. Such representation is not its test but a sign of imperfection. Surely timidity has no place in democracy where people in general believe and want a particular thing. Their representatives have but to give shape to their demand and make feasible.

THE VOICE OF PEOPLE

The voice of people may be said to be voice of God and the voice of panchayat. When the people themselves are turned out to be exploiters, there cannot be the voice of God. If the voice of the people is the voice of God, they will be above party.

It is necessary for the people to keep themselves in constant touch with those whom they put in power. There is need for the people in a democracy to draw the attention of the government to mistakes if any. They could remove the government of they wish to. In democracy peoples will must rule.

MAJORITY AND MINORITY IN DEMOCRACY

Gandhi realized that in popular government, majority view heist to be basis of particular action. So, he says that the rule of majority has a narrow application for one should invariably yield to the majority in the matters of detail (Particular items). He considers these as mere slaveries to be amenable to the majority no matter what its decisions are. Gandhi says that democracy is not a state in which people act like sheep.

Under democracy individual liberty of opinion and action is zealously guarded. So, Gandhi believes that minority has a perfect right to act differently from the majority. So, he wants government not based on concern even of a minority but on its conversion. In the democracy as Gandhi visualises the minority would not be coerced but only persuaded, respected and converted. In order to get the just things done, the majority has to follow the methods of pursuance and even self-suffering, lest the tyranny of the majority should have place in democracy.

Gandhi holds that in the matters of conscience the law of majority has no place. In order to achieve the amicable and smooth relations between the majority and minority, Gandhi aims at the attitude of tolerance to be developed. Gandhi prescribes tolerance to the majority so that majority rule may prevail when it is morally binding and the opinions of minority may be respected. He says in a press conference that the rule of majority does not mean that it should suppress the opinion of even an individual if it is sound. The opinion of an individual should have greater weight than the opinion of many if the opinion is sound in merits. That is the view of real democracy of Gandhi. One should not become slaves to the resolutions of majorities. In a good democracy, the majority should be democratic enough to see with sympathy that the minority's interests do not suffer. On the other hand, the minority should be bold enough to stand up for

their moral and legitimate aspirations and should fight for them in the non-violent ways. But Gandhi believes that the individuals and minorities are apt to be ignored and neglected in huge representative septum of government. Therefore, he strongly favours a federation of decentralized units of ideal village republic.

INTOLERANCE

If one wants to cultivate a true spirit of democracy, he should not afford to be intolerant. He observes that no school of thought can claim a monopoly of right judgement. People have to try to understand the opponent's view point. If they cannot accept it, let it be respected as they expect him to respect theirs. It is one of the indispensable tests of a healthy public life and fitness for Swaraj (self-rule). Without charity, and tolerance the differences cannot be settled amicably. Therefore, people must always submit the arbitration of a third party. Intolerance, discourtesy and harshness are taboos (banned on ground of morality). They are surely contrary to the spirit of democracy.

Evolution of democracy is not possible if the people are not prepared to hear the otherwise. People refuse to hear to their opponents and make fun of them if they listen. If intolerance becomes a habit, truth will be missed. There is need for the people to act fearlessly. They must always keep an open mind and be ever ready to find that what they believed to be true is after all untruth. This openness of mind strengthens the truth.

PUBLIC OPINION

Public opinion alone can keep a society pure and healthy. A popular state can never act in advance of public opinion. If it goes against it, it will be destroyed. Healthy, well-informed and balanced criticism is the zone of public life. A public opinion is the only force at the disposal of democracy. But it becomes intolerable when it becomes violent and aggressive. Legislation in advance of public opinion is often worse than useless. Non-cooperation is the quickest method of creating public opinion.

MOBOCRACY

Gandhi emphasizes the need to train the masses of men who have a heart of gold. Who feel for the country and who want to be taught and led. With the help of a few intelligent and sincere local workers the whole nation can be organized to act intelligently. Democracy can be evolved by mobocracy. A democratic organization has to do the right at all cost. But he who ponders to the weakness of a people degrades both himself and the people. He leads them not to democratic but to mob rule.

MILITARISM

Dependence on the military and the police is incompatible with democracy. Military help would degrade the democratic value. Gandhi holds that democracy and the military spirit are contradictory in terms. A democrat relies upon the force not of the arms of his state but on the moral force. The spirit of democracy cannot be established in the midst of militarism.

DEMOCRACY AND NON-VIOLENCE

True democracy can never be based on violence and force. In order to promote the full and free growth of the individual, democratic society must be based on fellow feeling, reasonable understanding, mutual trust and co-operation. It is on such principles that humanity has so far progressed. It is on them again that mankind can progress still further. The main principle of

human love has always inspired man to seek the good of the self in the good of all. To the extent that this principle has been followed, there has been peace among men and men, groups and groups, nations and nations. The principle of love or non-violence should be the basis of every human organization from the smallest unit called the family to the largest organization, the international human family. If any of these component units be immoral i.e., based on violence, hatred, greed and the like, the character of the larger whole will be spoiled by strife, war and ruin. The peace of happiness of mankind will necessarily be endangered. Democracy can grow only by the voluntary efforts of the individual.

If the states are to become truly democratic, they must become courageously non-violent. If they are nominal, they have to become totalitarian. Gandhi holds that its blasphemy is a blasphemy to say that non-violence can only be practised by individuals and never by nations which are composed of individuals.

The true democrat is he who with purely non-violent means defends his liberty and his country's and ultimately of the whole of mankind. Gandhi says that true democracy can never come through untruthful and violent means for the simple reason that the natural corollary to their use would be to remove all opposition through the suppression or extermination of the antagonists. This does not make for individual freedom. Individual freedom which is of much importance in democracy can have the fullest play only under a Regime of un tolerated ahimsa (Non-violence).

In the notion of Gandhi democracy is that under which the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest. This can be possible only through non-violence. When the democracy is sustained by violence, there is no possibility for the protection of the weak.

Gandhi believes that the true democracy can only be an outcome of non-violence. No perfect democracy is possible without perfect non-violence at the back of it. He holds that non-violence of the weak is the derail of the basic principle of democracy. Which would never take the people to the good of freedom. The non-violence of the weak would use it is expediency and resorts to violence when the situation demands. Gandhi holds that democracy cannot be evolved by forcible methods. Non- violence plays a dominant role in establishing a true democracy.

DECENTRALIZATION

Gandhi aims at decentralization of many things if the nature is to evolve along non-violent lines. It is because centralization cannot be sustained and defended without adequate force. Gandhi holds that centralization as a system is inconsistent with non-violent structure of society.

In the centralized type of government there is no scope for the individual initiative and people's participation in the affairs of the state. The power is vested in the hands of a select few in the centralized type of government. He observes that an increase in power of the state with greatest fear because it destroys the individuality of individual which has at the root of all progress although it does good apparently by minimising exploitation. Human participation is possible only in a decentralized type of Government.

In Gandhism decentralized democracy, the dimensional setting of power is geographic. It starts necessarily from the village as a unit based on the self-rule with the individual participation. His idea of decentralization is broad based, thus keeping the village as a unit at the base and the centre at the apex to enable the democratic government to encounter any bombers. Gandhi

believes in reconstruction of villages alone to be the effective basis for the emancipation of the canters of national energy for the strength of the political system consists not in the magnification of the state but in the reorganization of the villages through the practice of constructure programme. He aims at the evolving of a decentralized structure of power based on the effective reconstruction of self-reliant and self-sufficient villages. The village organization is to be based on the constructure, social and economic efforts of individual participation and the repudiation of self-interest. Decentralised and autonomous village communities in natural healthy surroundings would help individuals live simpler lives, develop more of social sense, cooperative works intimate neighbouring love, and the virtues that follow there from.

Gandhi aims at Swaraj (self-rule) by which he means government by the consent of the people as ascertained by the large number of the adult population, male and female, native born or domiciled. He says that the people should not act like sheep but they should take an active part in determining their own forms of government in accordance with the genius of the people. Self-rule should be sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority. The participation of people becomes possible only when the government is of decentralized type. His notion of Purna swaraj (self-rule) is not isolated independence but healthy and dignified interdependence.

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