

Relevance of Gandhian Democracy for Peace and Betterment of Human Being

Shiw Balak Prasad

University Department of Political Science, B.N. Mandal University, Madheprua, India

Email: shivbalak85@gmail.com

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Abstract

Man, after all, is the child of the time and prisoner of his experiences. The contemporary stream of thought casts a great impact on the thought process of man. Examination of the contributions of Mahatma Gandhi seems necessary in view of the political and materialistic transformation of the modern world and the prevalence of ethical bankruptcy of the general masses due to growing materialism, progress of education and undue stress on physical well-being. Advance of Science and its sinister daughter technology has brought humanity and human values to stand nearer to the brink of total destruction. Concentration of power in the hands of a small minority whether in the field of Economics or politics leads to increase so many problems, as problems beget further problems. Forces are released that make each war the preamble to another and more devastating wars. The only consequence of war today is to enhance the impulse of revenge and retribution. The processes of change made the world much different from what it was in the early decades of the twentieth century. The explanation for this tragic paradox lies in the contradiction between the ends and means that characterizes the present age. "The wars of Liberation are becoming wars of annihilation". In this connection, Gandhiji showed us one of the ways of breaking this vicious circle for resolving the mounting tensions.

Keywords

Democracy, Ideal, Political, Spiritual, State, Classless, Society

1. Introduction

A rich and complex personality like Mahatma Gandhi would appear in different lights to different observers. As it appears, Gandhian Political Thought immediately concerns all individuals of all nations due to the nature of the ten-

sion-ridden-age. Being a child of the Indian tradition, his ideas have become a part of the intellectual heritage of modern man almost everywhere. Gandhiji was typical Indian but became international and did not belong to anyone country (Azad, 1953). As a philosopher of action in dependent India he struggled for Freedom, Equality and Democracy which had unique appeal to men and women all over the world. Consequently, he became a teacher and friend of humanity by fighting for the pillars of the edifice of democracy.

Gandhiji's attitude was essentially experimental and scientific. His ideas were tested in the furnace of his own experience. This is way he continually altered the details of his programme to suit the requirements of the particular situation. This flexibility and experimental attitude ensure that Gandhian principle can be applied to any country or any age provided the necessary modification in techniques is made.

As the child of the India cultural heritage, Gandhiji rediscovered the truth of the Indian ideas through his study of Tolstoy and Ruskin. His intuitive perception of the universality of truth helped him to give a new richness to the Indian religious tradition. Traditionalists in India often disapprove his approach to the concepts of Hindu religious thought. Actually, he was not breaking away from the Indian tradition but was recreating that tradition by finding new meanings in ancient religious faiths. He was simultaneously a prophet, a practicing economist, a politician, a humanist and democrat. Being a religious man, there was no divergence between his profession and his practice and he was bent upon spiritualizing and moralizing politics.

2. Gandhi's Views on Democracy

"Democracy", he defined as 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 (Harijan, 1939). Such a comprehensive definition of democracy far surpasses the previous one's. It is not only political or popular in its significance. Rather, it is at the sometime, materialistic, spiritual, as well as utilitarian having faith in equality, justice and fair play. His notion of democracy was that under it the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest. For realizing that ideal, he prescribed the instrument of non-violence. Non-violence for him, was not merely a principle to govern all battles against injustice, it was a life-long creed for him. In fact, he developed non-violence as a way of life. Achievement of political independence or Swaraj was dependent upon the Gandhian instrument of non-violent Satyagraha. Thus, his constructive programme is the modus operandi of ideal democracy. In India, it is practically village work which is indispensable for the emancipation of the nation.

"Swaraj", according to him is the government by many (Young India, 1921). Attainment and maintenance of Swaraj necessitated a group of dedicated and patriotic people to whom the good of the nation is paramount above all other considerations. Gandhiji wanted the educated classes to build up a large cadre of

wholly dedicated man for progress-social, economic and political. The aim was to enlist their support in the task of winning freedom of the country. That is why, instead of building one select political party of his own (Congress), he wanted to transform that biggest democratic organization of the country into the instrument of liberation of the masses of India. Majority of such loyal and, patriotic people were therefore called upon to work in a disciplined manner for the task of this constructive political reform. They were to give up selfish and immoral considerations including their personal profit. Gandhiji believed that such a body of determined spirit fired by an unflinching faith in their mission can alter the course of human history.

Since Swaraj meant self-government people must learn to rule themselves (Hind Swaraj, 1938). He believed in the concept of popular sovereignty. The political manifestation is but a concrete expression of the individual's soul force. As people get the government they deserve, self-government can come only through self-effort. He believed that, people are the roots, the State is the fruit. If the roots are sweet, the fruits are bound to be sweet (Young India, 1928). The outward expression of freedom should be proportionate to the inward freedom. Gandhiji thereby makes Swaraj more philosophical, spiritual and moral in character. Self-government is dependant entirely upon our internal strength, upon our ability to fight against the heaviest odds.

Swaraj of my dream is the poor man's Swarj (Young India, 1931). It is here that Gandhiji emerges as a proletarian Democrat who also thought of abridging the gulf between the rich and the poor, the weak and the strong. Ordinary amenities of life should be similarly and identically available to everyone in the Society. Consequently, there was to be the elimination of exploitation through perseverance and patience. Self-government was attainable through a continuous endeavor to be independent. He also distinguished between individual and national self-government. National or political self government was to be attained precisely by the same means that are required for individual self-government or self-rule. As every human institution is liable to be greatly abused, democracy is no exception to that universal principle. Democracy required reduction of possibility of abuse of power to a minimum.

Like John Stuart Mill, Gandhiji distinguished between Real and Deceptive democracy. (Prabhu, 1961) Real democracy cannot be imposed from without but comes from within spontaneously. To be a real democrat, there is the need for complete identification with the poorest of mankind. Further, a nation that runs its affairs smoothly without much State interference is truly democratic. Where such a condition is absent, the form of government may be democratic only in name. Individual freedom can have the fullest play under a regime of unadulterated Ahimsa (Non-Violence). Most modern States are either undemocratic or at best democratic in form rather than in spirit.

Gandhiji never believed either in aristocratic democracy or centralized government and administration. "True Democracy", he argued "cannot be worked

by twenty men sitting at the centre it had to be worked from below by the people of every village (Harijan, 1948). The end was “the greatest good of all”. This utilitarian end can be realized only in a classless and stateless society which he anticipated in the long run. It was to be a democracy of autonomous village republics based on non-violence instead of coercion, on service instead of exploitation, on renunciation or instead acquisitiveness and on local and individual initiative instead of centralization (Dhawan, 1946). This makes him a philosophical anarchist of first order.

He, like Mill, emerges as a reluctant democrat. By advocating the indispensability of education, he insisted on Basic education. Educational opportunity was considered fundamental to economic opportunity for developing the non-violent democratic system. In addition, to safeguard democracy, people must have a keen sense of independence, self-respect and oneness. They should insist upon choosing as their representatives only such persons as are good and true. He was wedded to the principle of Universal Adult Suffrage as it satisfied all the reasonable aspirations of all classes of people. Carlyle equates Manhood suffrage with Horsehood and Dog-hood, Ruskin distrusts the populace. Gandhiji’s ideal, like that of Carlyle, is the rule of the wisest.

The non-violent democracy of Gandhiji implied mass efforts and mass education. The devices were those of Satyagraha expressed through the Charkha, the village industries, primary education through handicrafts, removal of untouchability, communal harmony, prohibition and non-violent organization of labor. He wanted non-violence, to be the cardinal principle of democracy. “All Society is held together by non-violence, even as the earth is held in position by gravitation.” (Harijan, 1939) That is why he devoted his energies to the propagation of non-violence as the law of our life-individual, social, political, national and international. A non-violent democratic Society alone can provide adequate protection to the weak and the downtrodden. He had discovered the presence of violence in western democracies of England, America and France. Violence was better organized in Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy or even in Soviet Russia. That is why he often advocated non-violence as the means the end for every nation being complete independence. Accordingly, he anticipated the emergence of an International League consisting of all nations big or small when they are fully independent. In such a non-violent international community, the smallest nation will feel as tall as the tallest. The idea of superiority and inferiority will be wholly obliterated (Harijan, 1940). According to him constitutional or democratic government will be a distant dream so long as non-violence is not recognized as a living force, an inviolable creed, not a mere policy.

By spiritualizing politics, he championed the cause of individual liberty and freedom. In non-violent Swaraj, there can be no encroachment upon just rights; contrariwise, on one can possess unjust rights. In a well-organized State, usurpation should be an impossibility. Further, it should be unnecessary to resort to force for dispossessing a usurper. The aim was to realize the best hidden in hu-

man nature. Everyone will be his own master and the will be equal freedom for all. Enlightened Public opinion can alone keep a Society pure and healthy. Individual freedom can make a man voluntarily surrender himself completely to the service of Society. Unrestricted individualism is the law of the beast of the jungle. Willing submission to social restraint for the sake of well being of the whole Society, enriches both the individual and the Society of which he is a member.

He viewed with alarm the presence of politics and factions in the villages, as they are found in the cities. But it was to be the duty of majority to see that minorities receive a proper hearing. Swaraj will be an absurdity if individuals have to surrender their judgment to the majority. In matters of conscience, the law of majority should have application in matters of detail only. Democracy is not a state in which people act like sheep (Young India, 1922). The minority also has a perfect right to act differently from the majority.

The ideal both Gandhiji and the Socialists is non-violent democracy by bringing about refinement of the average man's nature to the demands of social service. Gandhiji, in fact, believes in an unrealizable ideal that is internal democracy based on pacificator discipline. The need was for spiritual transformation or psychological metamorphosis of both the ruler and the ruled since democracy cannot make fools wisemen necessarily. His constructive programme required a change of heart which seems impossible and impracticable in the contemporary materialistic world of ours. The Gandhian scheme envisages a kingdom of God on Earth. He refused to worry himself about the details of the distance goal. He considers the problems of democracy from moral rather than political point of view. As a champion of proletarian democracy, his ideas are different from the western ideas. His ideas on democracy bear the stamp of his passionate belief in non-violence, truth, self-sacrifice and individual freedom. He accepts many of the underlying ideas of liberal democracy like popular sovereignty, representative government, party system, freedom of thought and expression with moral and spiritual content. In this age of mass civilization and participation, Gandhian democratic thought have great significance when democracy is being threatened by dangers both internal and external.

3. Impact of Gandhism on the Indian Constitution

Making of the Constitution of India was not the result of a single individual or a single programme or proposal. Democratic decision-making of the Constituent Assembly helped to make possible, a generally acceptable Constitution. India became the largest Democracy in the world. Framing of the Constitution was perhaps the greatest political venture since the Philadelphia Convention of 1787 in order to achieve administrative and political unity, and an economic and social revolution under a democratic Constitution (Austin, 1966). The Constitution of India, therefore, has been the embodiment of influences of Euro-American constitutional precedents, aspirations of the nation, consensus and ultimately of several ideas, ideologies, schemes, programmes and proposals for

Constitution-making (Nehru Report, 1928). Mahatma Gandhi under whose leadership the country attained Purna Swaraj (Complete Independence) had been the dominant figure in the course of Indian Nationalist Movement and Constitutional development between the two World Wars and even when the Constituent Assembly was deliberating on the Constitution of India. Being pre-occupied with nation-building activities Gandhiji could not himself present a complete Constitution for India for want of time. A constitution of Gandhian conception had been prepared by Shri Shriman Narayan, the then Principal, Sakseria College of Commerce, Wardha entitled "Gandhian Constitution for free India" (Agarwal, 1946) published before the time when the Constituent Assembly was deliberating upon the Constitution of India. The framework is really Principal Agarwal's but based on his study of Gandhian writings and speeches on many matters of constitutional importance, and "the brochure contains ample evidence of the care bestowed upon it by the author to make it as accurate as he could".

As the chief architect of India's political destiny, Gandhiji represented the vox populi of India though he participated neither in the government nor in any legislature. He neither made any systematic approach to constitutional problems, nor supported any particular scheme for constitution making and refused to be member of the Constituent Assembly (Ranga, 1968).

India being a very ancient land had experienced almost all the possible varieties of political organization many years before the birth of Jesus Christ and had experimented with monarchy, autocracy, democracy, republicanism and every anarchy. India, therefore may be regarded as an ancient laboratory of constitutional experiments at a time when Europe and the New World had not even come within the place of civilization.

There is nothing like "the best Constitution" for all countries and for all times, forms of government must be shaped according to past historic traditions and present circumstances. The Constitution is not an end in itself, it is a means to an end. It is to be judged not by some standard of values peculiar to and distinctive of the state but by the standard of the quality of the lives of the people. While the ends of various types of the State may be fundamentally identical, their forms are bound to be dissimilar in accordance with local environments. Accordingly, Gandhiji wanted that a constitution should be framed with the background of Indian traditions and the ancient Indian institutions for national reconstruction. He never wanted to be blind to the experiences of other nations and to develop a kind of narrow nationalism. "But it is high time for us to realize that our sense of inferiority complex must go, and instead of always looking within. We have aped the West for long, let us now be proud of our Indian culture and institutions in the right spirit." (Agrawal, 1946) Administrative systems cannot and should not be transplanted, since "constitutions are not exportable commodities". Thus, Gandhiji wanted an India-made or home-made Constitution (Wheare, 1960). The Constituent Assembly should be an indigenous insti-

tution representing the will of the people in order to bring about representative manifestation of Indian tradition, Indian culture and institutions (Harijan, 1946).

Clear impact of Gandhian philosophy is evident from the Preamble, the Fundamental Rights, and the Directive principles of State policy (Agrawal, 1946). The term “we the people of India” is in the way different from the Gandhian concept of Constitution “to secure to all citizens Justice, social, economic and political; Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; Equality of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the Unity of the Nation...”

The Fundamental Rights in Part III of the Constitution constitutes one of the areas approximate to Gandhian ideology to usher in an era of political democracy of Swaraj. A code of written civil Rights for the India citizens appeared as an innovation. Protection of minority interests, religious and cultural freedom were some of the items in the memorandum circulated by Gandhiji in the second session of the Second Round Table Conference. His views found place in the Right to Freedom of Religion (Arts. 25 - 28) and Cultural and Educational Rights (Arts. 29 - 30) in the Constitution to promote secularism. His demand for equality and elimination of exploitation and discrimination resulted in Articles 15, 16 and Arts. 23 - 24. His fight for the removal of untouchability resulted in Arts 17.

For bringing about economic democracy, the Directive Principles of State Policy aim at social revolution and economic betterment. It was to be done through village industries (Art. 43), compulsory education for children (Art. 45) Prohibition (Art. 47), living wages for workers (Art. 43), village Panchayats (Art. 40) and ban on cow slaughter (Art. 48) etc. Article 38 is quite comprehensive in expecting the State to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting, as effectively as it may, a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of the national life. Articles 45 and 46 dealing with the provisions for free and compulsory education of children and with the promotion of educational and economic interests of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other weaker sections of the community can be termed as Articles bearing perceptible vibration of Gandhian ideology (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948).

Gandhiji by opposing communal electorate had advocated universal adult suffrage as a national and democratic measure (Markhandan, 1966). The doctrine found favour and adorned the Constitution as Articles 125 and 126. Though Gandhiji was opposed to bicameralism, it was considered advantageous and indispensable for a federal polity in modern times. Regarding the protection of interests of the minorities, Articles 331 and 333 empower the President and Governor respectively to nominate Anglo Indians, if not represented by election. Special reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the State Legislatures and the Union Parliament continues (Motilal Nehru Report,

1928). Arts. 336 and 340 provide a machinery to protect the interests of the minorities. Gandhiji wanted Hindustani i.e., a mixture of Hindi and Urdu as the Rastrabhasa of India. Art. 343 provides Hindi in Devangari script to be the official language of the Union.

The deviation from the Gandhian principles by the Constituent Assembly reveals in exaggerated terms, the gulf between the Congress and Gandhiji, and between the teacher and the taught. The Gandhian concept of decentralized political institutions came to be replaced by a liberal democratic parliamentary form of government with a centralized federation (*Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948*). All this proves that the Congress and the Congressmen had been slowly drifting away from Gandhian ideology. The leaders had gained considerable experience of the working of representative government. Based on the knowledge and experience in parliamentary system of government, there was more or less universal demand for such a form of government in the new Constitution, in view of the training and commitment of a large number of western-educated elites to western ideology. Further, the deviation was precipitated in view of the prevailing circumstances in the country. The Interim Government faced problems like famine, shortage of food grains, communal riots, partition, Pakistan invasion on Kashmir and the problems of the Native States. Such problems compelled the founding fathers to think in terms of a centralized federation, with wide powers to meet the challenge of the circumstances. Adoption of Decentralized Village Republics would have been simply divorced from reality.

4. His Ideal Society

Gandhiji in *Hind Swaraj*, and such other publications had outlined the nature and character of his Ideal Society or the India of his dreams. Like Plato's Ideal State, Gandhi's Ideal Society was a visionary conception. He wanted all communities to live in perfect harmony. This has not been possible so far. Racial unity and communal harmony have remained only as idealistic pronouncements and preaching. Along with it, there should be equality between man and man and between man and women. Since all human beings are basically unequal, it seems to be a pious aspiration. Further, Gandhiji wanted imposition of prohibition and removal of untouchability in all forms. Such a political system was to emerge ultimately as a stateless and classless society. Gandhiji was against the idea of State as the state represents violence in organized form. The Gandhian scheme was to be the embodiment of truth and non-violence. But violence is ingrained in the very nature of man and truth is as old as civilization.

According to Gandhiji, violence leads to concentration whereas non-violence encourages decentralization of administration. Gandhiji advocates the superstructure of an indirect decentralized democracy of self-sufficient and autonomous village Republics for India. India had carefully evolved and maintained it for centuries as a product of mature thought and serious experimentation. It was not a relic or survival of tribal communism. In order to suit the modern

conditions of civic life, the old system of local administration could be *mutatis mutandis* reintroduced. The concept of “Decentralized Democracy” was essentially a practical and feasible idea in order to implement his “Constructive Programme” to bring about a “social revolution”.

5. Decentralized Democracy

The village Panchayat was to be the primary political unit consisting of about five persons to be elected for a period of three years on the basis of universal adult suffrage. It was to be the basic unit of public administration, being self-governing and self-sufficient, and having autonomous status. Above it, was to be the Taluk (Tehsil), District, Provincial and the All-India Panchayat connected with each other by their Presidents on the basis of *ex-officio* composition (Socialist Party, 1948). Thus, the system of government was to be indirect and each unit was to exercise wide and comprehensive powers concerning all aspects of life in the concerned field. The President of all All-India Panchayat was to be the Head of the State and Government having the powers to appoint Ministers even from outside the panchayat. Consequently, the indirectly-elected executive was to be non-responsible also. However, Gandhiji wanted the Village Panchayat to be the basis of the indirect and decentralized system of government.

The Constituent Assembly which consisted of large number of Gandhites opted for parliamentary democracy of British variety based on direct election in preference to the Gandhian suggestion. Euro-American experience rather than indigenous practice counted much. The Debates and Minutes of the Constituent Assembly make no mention of the Panchayat as the basis of our political system. The Drafting Committee rejected the Gandhian idea of Village Republics as the basis of India’s democracy in view of the impracticability of the structure. Some members of the Constituent Assembly who were close associates of the Mahatma quite often referred to Gandhian ideology during the course of debates in order to reinforce their arguments and even some of the amendments to the Draft Constitution were moved under Gandhiji’s name. But all this could not produce any worthwhile effect.

6. Conclusion

The Gandhian ideas were a peculiar type of proletarian Socialism combined with non-violent democracy by bringing about refinement of the average man’s nature to the demands of social service. Thus, he believes in an unrealizable idea that is internal democracy based on pacificator discipline. But democracy cannot make fools wise men necessarily. His constructive programme required a change of heart and was highly idealistic in character. He himself had witnessed the failure of his scheme during his lifetime. It also seems impossible and impracticable in the contemporary materialistic world of ours to envisage a kingdom of God on Earth.

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