



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Social Science

THE RELEVANCE OF GANDHI'S DEMOCRATIC THEORY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

KEY WORDS: Democratic Theory, Non- Violence, Swaraj, Tansperency, Accountability, Equality

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ABSTRACT

The ideal government, according to Gandhi, as according to most of the political thinkers of our age is Democracy. Gandhi, however, wanted to emphasise the principle of non-violence in the actual working of democracy which is based on human love, to seek one's good in the good of all and sacrificing one's to realise the ideal. The Ideas of self rule, transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness which are associated with the basic ethos of democracy are fundamental to Gandhi's thought, life and practice. For Gandhi; democracy was not merely procedural but substantive in the sense that to him, the real purpose of democracy "is that under it the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest. This can never happen except through non violence". This statement clearly said that Gandhi's endorsement of democracy was very much linked with the patterns of social and civilizational life and less with what is now associated with the imperatives of the nation states. Gandhi clearly hoped to define political life in ways that emphasize the community rather than individual interests. He began from the premise that social life required both freedom and interdependence and we need the appropriate social setting to peruse these values effectively through the democratic theory. Gandhi also hoped to devise a system of government which secured freedom and individual integrity However, the true essence of Gandhian democracy is for the attainment of Swaraj where in the individual is of prime importance. In the core of Gandhian thought, promoting the idea of democracy was essential for a non violent, free society which was essentially premised on a dialogue conception seeking to promote tolerance and growth. Gandhi believe that democratic structure to be more inclusive because this is a good platform where individual's liberty, rights, opinion will be equal for all where everybody will be his own master. This paper tries to examine and evaluate the implications of Gandhi for Democratic theory. However, Gandhi's contribution to democratic theory offers a specific institutional alternatives to representative democracy and pluralism on one hand and alternative ways of thinking about politics in general and democracy in particular on the other. In twenty first century, the political theorist accepted the Gandhian ideas of democracy for the day to day affairs of the human relations. His concept of legitimacy of the responsive government, active citizenship, the concept of political equality, and individual plays an important role in the future of democratic prospect. As compare to the western democracy, in the modern democracy modernisation, stratification, industrialisation and urbanisation presented obstacles to the democratic prospects. To meet the challenges, the need for restrain, responsibility and community becomes more important and Gandhi's theory of democracy may help to understand and meet challenges.

INTRODUCTION:

According to Gandhi, The ideal government as according to most of the political thinkers of our age is Democracy. Democracy was instrumental to his larger goals of non violence and freedom. In his concept of democracy, Gandhi wanted to emphasise the principle of non-violence in the actual working of democracy which is based on human love, to seek one's good in the good of all and sacrificing one's to realise the ideal. He realised that no single political system could guarantee non- violence or freedom, but that democratic government coupled with an equitable society appeared to offer the greatest prospects to achieving his goals. He said that this democratic form of government is the best form to foster a diffusion of power and increased the prospects of equality and the freedom.

For Gandhi, Democracy was not merely procedural but also substantive in the sense that the real purpose of democracy is that, "under it the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest. This can never happen through non-violence." This statement clearly reveals that in democracy opportunities should be given to the each and every section of the society by the principles of non-violence. Non-violence is the ordering principles in Gandhi's Democracy. To Gandhi, majority rule would be inappropriate in democracy, because it ignored the great mass of the people and based on violence was terrorism and worse and really more godless than minority British rule. Moreover, this is the platform where the people must bear the mistakes they made rather than pay for the mistakes that others made. Sometimes majorities expected the minorities to pay as well as because the democratic majorities enacted policies which benefited them but the not the rest of the community. However, it is clearly said that In Gandhi's thought, the rule of the majority rule has a narrow application.

GANDHI AND DEMOCRACY:

Article 40 of the Indian Constitution under Directive

Principles of State Policy lays down that the State shall take steps to organise village Panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government. According to Gandhi, the real and ideal democracy could be realised in the village where life was simple, there is diffusion of power and economic decentralisation which is the hallmark of the Gandhi's democratic theory. He said that the development of India is only possible by the development at the village level. He preferred the village labour which could help to the villagers for the maintenance of self sufficient life. Gandhi argued that the development of the village could be possible only when a good relation between labour and production will be realised. He said that work should be localised at the village level because distribution can be equalised when production is localised. In other words, it can be said that when the distribution is simultaneous with production. For the strengthening the village democracy, Gandhi projected an agrarian based society in which each village will largely economically and politically self sustained. Gandhi concentrates on all activity at the village level for the production of elementary necessities of life which would remain in the control of the masses. For the development of the each and every aspect of life, production with labour is essential in the village democracy.

Along with the village democracy, Gandhi has also discussed about role and responsibility of the government which could be locally controlled by the people. The members of the village council should be directly elected by the people. Their prime role is to solve the village conflicts and make necessary arrangement for the development of the villages. Gandhi stated that for the decentralisation of the power at the grassroots level and the people's participation at the village level, village councils or the Panchayat is the best platform where people directly take part in the decision making process of the government. The government could be

constituted on the basis of the elements of non violence, no traditional armed forces, notion of decentralisation of the power and the popular government.

GANDHI AND HIS DEMOCRATIC THEORY:

As the John Locke, one of the social contractalist thinkers said that government should be based on the consent of the people, if the people not satisfy with the governance of the government, then peoples have the power to revolt that government and formed a new government in place of that government. Like that Gandhi has also stated that voters choose who will represent and govern for a period of time. If satisfied will return the incumbents, if dissatisfied will turn to alternative candidates. However, Gandhi preferred the institutional notion of democracy where individuals wanted a small setting with a relatively small economy. On the other hand, pluralists preferred the interest group populism. The pluralists concentrated with the problems of representation in highly diversified societies. In democracy, pluralists hold that politics is based on the interest of the group and individualistically generated which leads to conflicts and disagreement. To put it more simply, politics should be structured in ways which allows the free rest expression of the interests and institutions should be devised which plays a vibrant role in resolving the conflicts and disagreement. It leads to the politics of bargaining and dispersal of power takes the form of a compromise. According to the pluralists, the decision making is only meant for business of its own interests. Gandhi on the other hand, hoped that political life of any society emphasises the interests of the community as well as the individual. He said that social life and political life is complementary to each other, because the social life of any individual determines the political life. Freedom and independence are the two fundamental features which required for the social life and individuals peruse these values effectively from the social setting. However, it is getting remembered that politics should be institutionally structured which give supreme priority to the basic needs of the individuals. The interest group politics have a positive role in articulating the government in providing the service to the common good. The democratic theory of Gandhi can be summarised on the following grounds:

I. CONCEPT OF EQUALITY:

However, Gandhi argued that do not be worried about your property, income or job. People live in the real world and there they must be concerned about a variety of needs as well as how they adjust to the requirement of their society. For this purpose, social and economic institutions of the society must be restructured to diminish the societal issues or conflicts. At the societal level, Gandhi's concept of equality seems to very important to eliminate all causes of the interests as much as possible. In talking about equality, Gandhi did not meant about economic equality which applied to everyone in the same way. In the context of economic equality, he insisted that every body should have enough for his or her needs. He said that the goal of equality would be promoted and realised, when if everyone worked with his own hands and considered labour to be powerful unifying agent. It is a great equalizer. This type of equalizer gave everyone the same range of experiences to judge their conduct and appreciate its efforts on the others. Work for every one meant that no one was depending on others for survival and everyone has a recognised dignity. To point out the Gandhi concept of equality, John Scharr said that the heart of equality is the affirmation of equality of being and belonging. This affirmation helps identify those sector of life in which we should all be treated in common ways so that minimal conditions of a common life are available to all.

II. CONCEPT OF FREEDOM:

As John Stuart Mill said that Liberty addresses "over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign" To strengthening his democratic theory, Gandhi considered the concept of freedom for a just political order. According to

Gandhi, 'No society can be built on the denial of individual freedom'. Democracy is the best platform to enjoy freedom or liberty. According to Gandhi, freedom is based on the free choice of the individuals which meant that men and women should not be constrained by physical coercion, economic power or social position. He directly linked concept of freedom with choices or preferences of the individuals and held that everyone was responsible for the choices he made. Gandhi has also made a direct linked with the concept of responsibility for the success of democracy. Obligation and disobedience are the two fundamental principles to strengthen the concept of responsibility in democracy. In this regard, Gandhi insisted that people needed to be aware of the consequences of their own actions. Only when they realised that they were responsible for what they did and what they tolerated could they said to be free. However, Freedom meant that we made free choices about those things that seemed important to us that we accepted the costs of those choices. Gandhi makes a statement that responsibility and the freedom directly linked with individualism. It acknowledged that freedom is essential for the individuals but it should be based on the when individual is free, he must account for his own actions. According to Gandhi, freedom without responsibility is a contradiction. We may not want to join together, but Gandhi condemns us to recognise the realities of freedom, that is, the responsibilities of freedom. Someone cannot be free, from Gandhi's perspectives, who does not account for his actions or who dismisses unintended consequences. Thus, the freedom and responsibility are the two most prominent concepts in the model of Gandhi's Democracy.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF GANDHI FOR DEMOCRATIC THEORY:

According to Gandhi, his model of democratic theory offers specific institutional alternatives to representative democracy and pluralism on one hand and an alternative ways of thinking about politics in general and democracy in particular. He insisted that the system of government which secured freedom and individual integrity which also promoted non-violence. Government should be based on the cardinal principles of non-violence. If the Government works on the violence, then it may lost its legitimacy. For strengthening the model of democratic theory, government legitimacy is very essential which is based on the rights, justice and equality. For the security of these values or ideals, the government could use coercion. According to Gandhi, where there is violence in the democratic procedure, there is the failure in the governmental machinery to provide justice to all as a result conflicts came in to existence. To provide the legitimacy to the government, it is necessary to underline a dialogue and tolerance between individuals on one hand and role of the political leadership on the other hand. It promotes non-violence and mobilise political power in the conflict situations. To Gandhi, the prime objectives of the leadership should be confined to capture power, but avoiding conflict or providing solutions to societal conflicts.

In the Gandhi's model of Democracy, the notion of equality played a significant role to bring the economic equality. The problem with economic inequality is not so much that great wealth in the hands of a few generally deprives the many of their livelihood. The economic equality can be achieved through the equal distributions of the wealth of the society. It is because it can readily be translated in to political resources to influence public policies. On the other hand, inequalities in wealth tend to lead other kind of inequality including the political inequality. For the successful working of the democratic principles, political equality is essential by the slogan of 'one man, one vote'. Equal vote to all is the guiding principles of democracy. He said that economic in equality is the fundamental nature of the society. Economic equality can only possible when economic programmes were designed to assure employments for everyone and disperse concentrated

industrial and political power.

The reciprocal relationships between the responsible government and active citizens have direct implications of Gandhi for democratic theory. As we know, the present government works with the help of bureaucracy, as modern democracy become more complex and its diverse parts grow increasingly independent, the need for coordination and efficiency have increased. Bureaucracy gains its efficiency because of its hierarchical structure, division of labour, heavy reliance on specialists and impersonality. The irony of modern bureaucracy is that in attempting to rationalize diverse operation and introduce greater efficiency, it has become more removed from its constituencies and less responsible and responsive. Modern democratic theory and contemporary political science have been least helpful in solving the anti-democratic feature of bureaucracy. In calling attention to the danger posed by centralized bureaucracies, Gandhi held that bureaucratic norms could not be reconciled with democracy. For the successful working of the modern democracy in connection with the modern bureaucracy, modern institution must do the needful work with a true sense of efficiency, coordination, autonomy, citizen participation and equity.

CONCLUSION:

From the above discussion, it can be said that in searching of a true democracy in the political philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, it is necessary to underline the problems of modern democracy with the concentration of institutional and distributive aspects politics and society. As it is important as a matter of discussion in the 21st century, it is misleading to think that if they were set rights, democracy would flourish and freedom would be respected everywhere. The individual also play an important role in the future of the democratic prospect. To the extent that people emphasise only their own interests and ignore their responsibility to the border community, politics become a struggles for the society as well as for the individuals and political community could not functions for the betterment of the society. The interest of the community is the interests of the democracy. For reinventing democracy, Gandhi tried to study the psychological orientation of the individuals in national society in the theory and practice of democracy. Gandhi wants to restructure the society with a high notion of freedom and responsibilities which would be great improvement of democracy. Accordingly, Gandhi emphasised structuring a community of common purpose and individual responsibility to the community. As compared to the western Democracy, modern democracy has faced certain challenges like Modernisation, stratification, industrialisation and urbanisation. Present democracy is the outcome of the modern definition of democracy that, "form of government for the chair, by the chair and of the chair" However, to meet these challenges, need for restraint, responsibility and community becomes more important than in earlier. Gandhi's theory of democratic model is the best platform which may help to understand and meet these challenges. 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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