

## “GANDHI’S VIEWS ON DEMOCRACY AND ITS RELEVANCE IN PRESENT DAY”

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### **Abstract**

*“I understand democracy as something that gives the weak the same chance as the strong.”*

...M.K. Gandhi, the father of the nation.

This paper “Gandhi’s views on democracy and its relevance in present day”, basically deals with Gandhi’s ideas on democracy. Democracy is the most popular form of government, which is adopted by most of the countries of the world. Gandhi has forwarded many ideas like Non-violence, Stayagraha, Swaraj, ideas on democracy, ideas on politics, ideas on human nature, ideas on religion etc. This paper tries to conceptualize Gandhi’s idea of democracy in the present Indian context.

**Key Words:** Democracy, Non-violence, Swaraj, Stayagraha, India etc

## **Introduction**

Gandhi is universally known as the most renowned theorist and also the practitioner of truth, love, non-violence, tolerance, freedom and peace. He was very much concerned with the nature, poor, deprived, and the downtrodden and he has intended to alter the evil political, social and economic systems of the people. Mahatma Gandhi struggled to inculcate the sense of self-respect, self-confidence and self-reliance to promote the power of decision-making among the people. He said that, every individual should acquire the capacity to resist the abuse of power. He said that although he did not want to be reborn, yet if he had to be, "I should be born an untouchable so that I may... endeavor to free myself and them from that miserable condition."1 Removal of untouchability, Khadhi and Hindu-Muslim unity were to form the essential ingredients of Indian Swaraj (independence)

Mahatma Gandhi more commonly known as mahatma meaning great soul, was born in Porbandor, Gujarat in north west India, on 2<sup>nd</sup> Oct 1869, into a Hindu modh family. His father was the chief minister of Porbandar, and his mother's religious devotion mean that his upbringing was infused with the Jain pacifist teaching of mutual tolerance, on non-injury to living beings and vegetarianism.

## **Methodology**

This paper is both qualitative and quantitative in orientation. This paper is based on secondary data. Secondary data are collected from various sources like books, journals, research papers, annual reports of different government agencies, websites etc. It is be carried out by adopting empirical and analytical methods. This article tries to focus on the views of Gandhi on democracy and to search the relevance of Gandhi's views on democracy.

## **Discussion**

### **Gandhi's views on Democracy**

Democracy is a system of government in which all the people of a state or polity are involved in making decisions about its affairs, typically by voting to elect representatives to a parliament or similar assembly. The word comes from the Greek word demos and kratia means rule of the people (demos means people and kratia means power or rule). In this regard Abraham

Lincoln defines democracy as of the people by the people, and for the people. Gandhi did not subscribe to the view that democracy meant the rule of majority. He gave several definition of democracy on several occasions. When we put them together, Gandhi may say, "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 service of the common good of all." He further said, "true democracy or the Swaraj of the masses 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. That does not make the individual freedom. Individual freedom can have the fullest play only under a regime of unadulterated Ahimsa."

Democracy is a reflective and deliberative activity marking the presence of everyone. "In true democracy every man and woman is taught to think for him or herself. How this real revolution can be brought about I do not know expect that every reform, like charity must begin at home." Democracy extends consideration to the view point of others as it expects consideration to one's own viewpoint. The golden rule of conduct, he said, "is mutual toleration, seeing that we will never all think alike and that we shall always see Truth in fragments and from different angles of vision. Conscience is not the same thing for all. Whilst, therefore it is a good guide for individual conduct, imposition of that conduct upon all will be an insufferable interference with everybody else's freedom of conscience.

Freedom and justice had been the two basic pillars of democracy of Mahatma Gandhi's imagination. He saw the welfare of all, general and particular, in a democracy where equal freedom and justice are available. Particularly, he laid great stress on individual freedom in democracy as is evident from his following statement, "*...if individual liberty goes, then surely all is lost, for, if the individual ceases to count, what is left of society? Individual freedom also can make a man voluntarily surrender himself completely to the service of society. If it is wrested from him, he becomes automation and society is ruined. No society can possibly be built on denial of individual freedom...*" [Kumar, Gandhi and Gandhism, page 19]. Similarly, it is justice that along with freedom proves adaptability, significance and success of a democracy. To quote the Mahatma, "*The spirit of democracy is not a mechanical thing to be adjusted by abolition of forms. It requires change of heart.*"

Along with freedom and justice, the third most important thing, which requires special mention in context of Gandhi's views on democracy, relates to fundamental rights of citizens. As known to us, Gandhi always by laying great stress on morality and ethics in individual and social life –both, and calling on people to make **Ahimsa** the centre of their day-to-day activities, spoke of duties time and again. Undoubtedly, he accorded preference to duties over the rights. For example he said, *“In Swarajya based on Ahimsa people need not know their rights, but it is necessary for them to know their duties.”* [Harijan, March 25, 1939] On another occasion he wrote, *“Rights accrue automatically to him who duly performs his duties. In fact the right to perform one's duties is the only right that is worth living...It covers all legitimate rights...”*

Gandhi was wedded to adult suffrage. He felt that it is the only way to safeguard the interest of all: the minorities, the poor, the dalits, the peasants and woman. He hoped that the voters give weight to the qualification of the candidates, not their caste, community, or party affiliation. He wanted man of character to enter legislatures for even if they commit mistakes they would never do anything against the interest of the voters. Men and women without character elected by the people would destroy the democratic system. Referring to parliamentary democracy in 1931, Gandhi envisaged a constitution of independent India "which will release India from all thralldom and patronage, and give her, if need be, the right to sin". He laid down his vision of an independent India as follows: "I shall work for an India in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country in whose making they have an effective voice: an India in which all communities shall live in perfect harmony. There can be no room in such an India for the course of untouchability, or the curse of intoxicating drinks and drugs. Women will enjoy same rights as men. Since we shall be at peace with all the rest of the world, neither exploiting nor being exploited. We shall have the smallest army imaginable. All interests not in conflict with the interest of the dumb millions will be scrupulously respected whether foreign or indigenous. Personally, I hate distinctions between foreign and indigenous. That is the India of my dreams. ...I shall be satisfied with nothing less."

Gandhi followed the principle of decentralization in his democracy. Power shouldn't be concentrated in a single authority. Gandhiji's democracy shall be free from exploitation oppression. There shall be no scope for exploitation by one class to another class. It is based on the rule of majority. According to him, "The nearest approach to the purest anarchy would be

democracy based on non violence. In such a state everyone is his own ruler. However, Gandhi was highly critical of the parliamentary democracy in his monumental book “Hind Swaraj” (self rule or Home Rule, he has called the British parliament as a “sterile woman and a prostitute”, though for him good government is no substitute for self government. There is contradiction in the statement of Gandhi about parliamentary democracy but while diving deep in to the democratic ideals, he has said, “Democracy, disciplined and enlightened is the finest things in the world”. However, he has highest regards for democracy and he calls it as “A great institution” and again conscious people and says, “it is liable to the greatly abused”.

### **Gram Swaraj and Development from below**

According to Gandhian thinking, democracy can function smoothly and according to the concept of swaraj only if it is decentralized. "Centralization as a system is inconsistent with non violent structure of society." He wanted the centre of power to move from cities to villages. While conceptualizing the decentralized system of rule, Gandhi advanced his theory of Oceanic Circle, which he explained in the following words.

"In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever widening never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the circle of village, till at last the whole becomes a life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic of which they are integral units”.

Therefore, the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it. Gandhi defended such a position even at the cost being called a utopian. "I may be taunted with retort they this is all Utopian and therefore, not worth a single thought. If Euclid's point, though incapable of being drawn by human agency, has an imperishable value, my picture has its own for mankind to live. Let India live for this true picture, through never realizable in its completeness".

The building blocks of democracy have to be villages. Gandhi wanted each village to have an annually elected Panchayat to manage the affairs of the village. Each village following the oceanic circle theory would be autonomous yet interdependent. As Gandhi argued, "My idea

of village swarj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbors for its own vital wants, and yet inter dependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity".

## Relevance

Gandhian democracy is still relevant in India. It is clear from the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment of Indian constitution. That amendment is related only with rural administration of India. One significant provision of that amendment is decentralization of power up to the rural level. He was of the view that panchayat raj institution should be given priority and power should be decentralized. In this regard the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment has emphasis on the rural development from all spheres. And this amendment has already been implemented in India. Gandhian techniques are mostly following by Indian people to fulfillment of different demands. Gandhi's philosophy of life is relevant to all humanity.

Gandhi also expressed his view on rights of citizens. These are rights to speech, right to press, right to form association, right to consciences, right to religion, right to culture and language, right to equality, right to public service, right to profession, right to use public roads, educational institutions, tank and other public institutions rights. All these rights Gandhi mentioned before the preparation of Indian constitution. But ultimately these rights have been incorporated in the Indian constitution. From that point of view it is clear that rights which Gandhi mentioned many years ago still relevant in the contemporary India. Gandhi emphasis on adult suffrage. He felt it is only way to safeguard the interest of all, and we have seen that the adult suffrage is adopted by the entire world.

## Conclusion

Gandhian concept of democracy is not the only hope, where it must be practiced at the grass-root level, party system to be built up on accepted principles and not on partisan line, defection should be done away with and recall of recalcitrant representatives must be adhered to. Defects and demerits must be removed from the present democratic form of governance. People's power must be accepted to make democracy safe, otherwise if the democracy is abused or misused, the future of people is doomed.

Modern democracy is based on the will of the majority, where it ignores the minority. for e.g. If a political party win election with the majority of 51% votes than the other 49%

votes will go in vain. But for Gandhi democracy do not meant the rule of majority. He emphasis that the interest of the minority, dalits, women must be given equal importance. Gandhi believes that voters must weight to the qualification of the candidates not their caste, class, community or party affiliation but now in present time people cast their votes on the basis of all these ground, they even ignored the most capable person for not being from their caste and community. Gandhian techniques are mostly followed by the Indian people to fulfillment of different demands. Gandhi's philosophy of life is relevant to all humanity. He did not reserve any afford in serving India and humanity and sacrificed even his life. He was a scavenger, a manual labour, an economist, a politician, a religious man, a lover of humanity and above all his life itself is a message to humanity.

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