
GHANDHI'S CONTRIBUTION TO POLITICAL THOUGHT : NON -VIOLENT SOCIETY

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Abstract: Gandhi believed that the application of truth and non-violence for the solution of social, economic and political problems would promote the welfare of all. He did not write a treatise. I have purposely refrained from dealing with the nature of government based on non-violence. When society is deliberately constructed in accordance with the law of non-violence, its structure will be different in material particulars from what it is today. But I cannot say in advance what the government based wholly on non-violence will be like. He however, enunciated from time to time principles, which together constitute the content of the Sarvodaya order. His disciples, notably VinobaBhave and Jaya Prakash Narayan, have in recent times explained and attempted to apply some of those principles to end the misery and want of the people in the country. Gandhi used the word *sarvodaya*, found in the jain scripture by Samantabhadra, to explain his reaction to Ruskin's 'Unto This Last', the titled of which was inspired by a parable of Jesus. The *sarvodaya* doctrine is embedded in the vedic prayer of *sarve-janahasukhino-bhavantu*.

Introduction: Gandhi, as an anarchist, sought ultimately to establish a stateless society: he rejected the state as it represented violence in a concentrated and organized form. The state was, according to him, a soul-less machine and it could never be weaned away from violence to which it owed its very existence. There cannot, therefore, be a state, non-violent in toto. There can only be a non-violent stateless society, an enlightened anarchy. "In such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbor. In the ideal state, therefore, there is no political power because there is no state".

The *sarvodaya* super structure stands on a strong ethical foundation. Gandhi agreed with Ruskin that men could be happy only if they obeyed the moral law. A search as in the west for social and economic well-being prosecuted in disregard of morality is opposed to the divine law. Divine law insists that every one must perform his duties without insisting upon his rights, as rights followed duties like the day following the night.

The success of the moral order depends upon the spiritual discipline of those within it. All activities should invariably be informed of Saty, Ahimsa, Brammacharya, Asteya and Aparigraha. One who practices them can be fearless. A control over the palate and a spirit of self-sacrifice are other virtues that need be cultivated. Gandhi laid stress on the theory of bread-labour. His view was that the needs of the body must be supplied by the efforts of the body itself. Encouragement of swadeshi goods and religious tolerance were other virtues which he recommended. As the people imbibed in themselves increasingly the ethical virtues, the necessity for the existence of the state decreased proportionately. Self-regulation of the people made the power of the state superfluous.

Gandhi opposed totally the centralization of authority. It was repugnant to the non-violent

structure of society, because it could not be sustained without adequate force. The concentration of power in a few hands was likely to be abused. It curbed the freedom of the individual, which was essential for his progress in all spheres of activity. He therefore, advocated the formation of autonomous village communities. "The society based on non-violence", he said "can only consist of groups settled in villages in which voluntary co-operation is the condition of dignified and peaceful existence". He pointed out: "In this structure composed of innumerable villages, life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it would be an oceanic circle whose center will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals. 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". He had thought that the erstwhile village republic of India contained the germ of non-violent society.

Gandhi never preferred the dictates of government to the dictates of one's conscience. He looked upon the increase in the power of the state with the greatest fear because while apparently doing good by minimizing exploitation, it did greater harm to mankind by destroying the individuality itself which was at the root of all progress. If an individual subordinated his conscience to the state, he did not count at all. "If the individual ceases to count, what is left of society? Individual freedom alone can make a man surrender himself completely to the service of the society. If it is wrested from him, he becomes an automaton and society is ruined".

The individual need not accept the majority opinion if his conscience opposed it. Swaraj, he thought, would be an absurdity if individuals have to surrender their judgment to the majority. The

majority should be persuaded to see its error, unconsciously committed, by the exercise of one's freedom to act according to his conscience .

The people should, therefore, govern themselves: that is genuine democracy: it provides, as Jayprakashnarayan affirms, for a moral order: its success depends on "concern for truth, aversion to violence, love of liberty, courage to resist oppression and tyranny, spirit of co-operation, preparedness to sacrifice self-interest to the larger interest of the community, respect for other's opinions, readiness to take responsibility, belief in fundamental equality of man and faith in the goodness of human nature.

Morality is essentially a matter of inward choice as Mill, Green and Laski point out: it cannot be dictated by a state. "if we want to call an action moral, said Gandhi, it should have been done consciously and as a matter of duty. any action that is dictated by fear or by coercion of any kind ceases to be moral.

the state has a demoralizing and corruption influence on man. Who ever is attracted by it and participant in its functioning loses his individuality and moral strength. all his goodness disappears the moment he begins to wield power. As action observed, power is narcotic, a potent intoxicant.

Political Parties: Gandhi also rejected political parties as they became seats of power struggle. instead of promoting the welfare of all, a party invariably functioned as a propaganda machine in favor of a coterie. Political Parties are "less concerned with ideology than with organization, discipline and propaganda. the party is an instrument for political power. and power predominates while ideas are mere convenient trade marks used for power-political rivalry. Truth is often a casualty is silenced in the name of discipline, while the honest criticism by the opposition party is missed as unworthy, the party system reduces the people to the position of sheep. vinobasa said: "The common people are helpless and crippled: they think they cannot do without the government. The people have got only the formal right to vote. this right is like the right of the sheep to elect a shepherd. It Does not lead to any change in the condition of the sheep.

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Elections also do not guarantee a people's rule. experience in India as else has convinced that elections are for those who are rich and can afford to spend money ungrudgingly. in such a situation, the poor and the dumb have to remain helpless spectators. such elections which create democratic oligarchy can have no place in a truly non - violent society. Elections also divide the people into groups and promote rivalry between them, thereby undermining the true interests of the people as a whole. they, as vinobha said, at best established a democracy in which human intelligence occupied a subordinate position.

Legislative enactments are not conducive to springs of human action: they cannot inspire people to do the right. laws, as Gandhi said, show water to the horse but cannot make the horse drink it. What is, therefore, required is conversion of the people prior to the making of the laws. if such conversion takes place due to the action of love, the law becomes superfluous. Gandhi compared the law making bodies to liquor booths.

Gandhi insisted on adherence to dharma, as it played a vital role in sustaining social cohesion. It is, as Radhakrishnan urges, a living spirit which grows and moves in response to the development of society.

conclusion: As the qualification of people for the sarvodaya society being impossible of full attainment, Gandhi was conscious that the ideal society would ever remain an ideal "unrealized and unrealizable in its entirety: the ideal is never fully realized and unrealized and unrealizable in its entirety", the ideals is never fully realized in life He observed: A government cannot succeed in becoming entirely non -violent because it represents all the people. I do not conceive of such a golden age. but I do believe in the possibility of a predominantly non-violent society. and I am working for it. the progressive elimination of the evil tendencies of the people is its primary function. that function is performed to the extent the people decline to participate in social evils. As he stressed, the state evil is not the cause but the effect of social evil, just as the sea waves are the effect and not the cause of storm.

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