



Gandhi: Spirituality, Non-violence and Decentralization

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Abstract:

In trying to situate the principles behind the Khadi (the hand-spun cloth) movement in the context of democratic understanding and spirituality as expressed by Gandhi, we might reflect on the significance of their deep roots in the ancient Indian culture and heritage. In the wake of the democratic practices that are used to govern the country, it will be interesting to see how these principles facilitate the possible changes needed to impact the community of people and their governance by the administrative power. Hence, we need to revisit these principles in the context of the modern day democratic practices that Gandhi held in an innovative way. It may be said with much pain that what we largely experience as the principles of democracy today, appear to have remained to quite an extent as ideological pronouncements over the years. The way these principles have been underused in almost all strata of administration over the years is not quite adequate in describing facts often stranger than fiction. Hence, it is frustrating to observe how their non-application has worked towards alienation of people from participation in democratic process slowly but increasingly. Strangely, these same principles have been invoked to remove the iron curtain bringing Perestroika in Soviet Russia, the unification of Germany, freedom to Bangladesh and recently also to many other countries. That, we have a legacy in India inherited from some of the schools of thought expressing human welfare as major achievement both through physical and metaphysical paths. One such school of thought is that of the Jaina philosophy. The principles of this school appears to have made a lasting impression on Gandhi. He was much impressed much by its expression of many possibilities and spirituality and could relate to his creativity regarding the practice of charkha to produce Khadi cloth not only to oppose the mill-cloth that the British were marketing but also as an expression of freedom. It is thus important to explore this aspect of his journey to freedom.

Keywords: Khadi, democracy, Jaina, rights, ethics

1. Introduction

While accepting that the situations in which democratic principles have been followed provide some contentment on the surface it is simultaneously important to realize how the independent countries most of the times do not care to apply the same principles to their own citizens. Their behavior towards their citizens as far as the human rights are concerned does not match presumably their ideological understanding. Consequently, this fails to disclose the true meaning of democracy and in fact forecloses the possibilities of further explorations of these principles for alternate representations significant in the context of freedom and equality. If in democracy, people are to be represented equally then it is presumed that the human subject and the state will have to constitute the whole of reality. But what is experienced by people is that they are viewed as trespassers when they try to participate in state affairs. The state's understanding of people's representation becomes an assumption for which there is no logical warrant. Therefore, it also becomes necessary to clarify the understanding of the concept of representation and to explore what it really is. It is important to remember the oft mentioned paradox that democracy is always not able by democratic methodology to show what democracy is. In this regard therefore, we may be inclined to reflect with the hope that the exploration of the views from the

Khadi movement organized by Gandhi might open up an opportunity to inspire people to challenge the problems in the system. “The Khadi movement was ideologically woven around the need to provide supplementary work to idle or underemployed rural-hands. As it was designed to cater primarily to a rural workforce, Khadi required simple, comprehensible technology and a local resource-base for both its production and consumption” (Ramagundam 2008:3). Gandhi offers an alternative to the people through Khadi as a praxis and demonstrates a way to break away from the colonial economic structure.

2. The Philosophical Dimension

The credentials of democracy at the beginning of the modern century is said to be so high that it's main philosophical dimension is possibly not speculated on. However, it is through raising questions that one can explore alternate possibilities latent in the concept. It is also necessary to ask how the perception of the state is different than the peoples' perception of it. In fact, there is an ocean of difference between the two perceptions. In the past, leaders used to represent the countries and sign accords guaranteeing internal stability and friendship between them. But now, after the political integration in many countries it is people besides their leaders who have become more visible. In the context of the unification of Germany, it is the people who initiated the process of representing themselves for an improvement of relationship between the two parts of the country thus inspiring the leadership to break the ice and finally become one integrated country. This can be considered a positive development in the sense that countries can develop their relations with each other representing and respecting the will of the people their positive motive determining the spirit of fraternity and liberty. However, if it remains just a onetime activity only, it may also show how we disconnect from our consciousness the thesis about a different way of understanding representation an important element no doubt. It may further mean excluding from our consciousness a discovery of the empirical application of rights that has a theoretical support. What emerges from this is that an event like the unification of Germany mainly by peoples' representational efforts and struggle may become an isolated example unless put into a perspective which can help reveal this as a conscious new phenomenon that can possibly overlook any kind of cold war between countries. This unique feature, the adherents of democracy must study not just from a bureaucratic perspective but from a fundamental theoretical perspective. This is required because, it might be a possibility that provided by a deep understanding of Gandhi's thought regarding Khadi, we see the possibility of the power of transformation that could emerge from a proper practice of the principles associated with it and which in turn might enable us to comprehend the perspective involved in the power-structure prevalent of the then British administration which Gandhi did not want to treat with passivity. While the British government wanted to alienate people from expressing their voice, it was Gandhi who countered this by including more and more people through his innovative programs like Charkha and Khadi that required people's involvement all along. Conceptualizing about Khadi therefore, had the imaginative value, in this context.

3. Remapping Democratic Values

Calling in question the limited perception of democratic values in the post-colonial situations in the independent countries, it is important to note that the surreptitious substitution of peoples' representation is what people are experiencing. Hence, in this regard there can be some reflections on the views of school of Jainism as it represents a kind of Pluralistic realism as mentioned by Dr. S Radhakrishnan (Radhakrishnan 1929:286). In Jainism, the term used for an awakened soul is 'Tirthankara', it means a founder of the path. Vardhmana Mahavira was one such tirthankaras, believed to be a landmark in Jaina school of thought. The Jain ascetics believed that the important principles of ahimsa, sunrita, bramhacharya, asteya and aparigraha could make a very deep impact in people's thinking and could navigate them through life's journey. The significance of these principles are that no life should be destroyed (ahimsa), that no lies be uttered (Sunrita), that the ascetics should stick to celibacy (Bramhacharya), that when something is not given to him, he should not take it (asteya), and that all worldly things must not be possessed by him (aparigraha). Gandhi must have felt that these principles provide an important perspective and adopting these ideals in life may consequently result in excluding

greed from our mind while creating a world of values. This is as much true in the case of the ascetic as it is regarding a path that Gandhi wanted people to follow to strengthen themselves from the onslaught of the British market in Indian territory. And simultaneously it was also aimed at liberating the people from the enslavement of the British market. It is certain that Gandhi knew that the Jaina principles were related to suit the path to be followed by an ascetic to achieve his goal of liberation, but what was more important was to acquaint these values to in a way that they get engaged with the practice of these values. In this context, what is to be emphasized is that as the “Jainism considers it a bad karma to injure plants and other life forms” (Schmithausen 1991: 6-7), which was reflected in a major way when Gandhi made it clear that the English people are not to be treated as wicked and consequently, the behavior of the Indian people is not aimed at hurting the English but to create an alternative to liberate themselves. This approach of the Jaina thought that opened an avenue to many possibilities and to non-violence appear to have come from the Jaina perspective on the Syadvada theory, the thought which helped Gandhi formulate to bring in a major change and which in turn remained a strength for people for a long time. This was certainly a part of Gandhi’s one of the discursive strategies. How otherwise can one explain the manner of governance by rules of this nature as expressed in Jainism to suit the path that people are supposed to tread? Reading between the lines, we see how these values persuade us that we cannot be attached to any permanent possession of things shared by community as others also must have their share of participation. This is particularly important in the case of political party members sticking to their temporary habitat while in power, denying opportunity to new entrants who are given the opportunity to participate in the process of governance. On the other hand, we should also note in this context that it is of prime importance to understand how even the institutions like the monasteries in general also get associated with powers, perennially maintaining the gap between the realm of ethics and people. Therefore, it may be speculated that even symbolically this perspective renders an insight that emphasizes the need to distribute power among people and, not having any permanent possession. Perhaps Gandhi believed that this was certainly an action that could be seen as paving the way for a democratic expression by the people of India.

We always see that the beggars and the homeless are found as much in the streets of the first world as they are in the lanes of the third world. In both, it is the policy of exclusion of people that work towards making them succumb to poverty and homelessness. But how many of them when questioned about their intolerance of people-oriented policies and activities that create economic and political environment not conducive to people and do not care for their rights, amend their mistakes or prefer people’s priorities for basic needs? The perspective behind creating Khadi can be interpreted as rendering a balance much needed for the communities to serve the cause of humanism. Gandhi envisaged that as the involvement in Khadi needs co-operation from the community, the colonial act of subversion and appropriation could be avoided. On the other hand, it could help extending solidarity to many people belonging to various strata of the society. This is one way of representing people and their actions. The selfish objectives of power-hungry governance lay bare the incurable aspects of the decadent ways of bourgeois undemocratic politics averse to change their perspectives towards paradigms quite apart from what is there in people’s interest. People are kept away from any kind of representation and participation through various means. In the modern times, the rift between people and such governance is increasingly creating insecurity and instability all over the world. Once such a stage is reached the object of democracy remains no longer people but selfish acts reflecting on selfish acts indicating that the crisis has arrived and it is time to do the rethinking. In this context therefore, Khadi-clothes was like creating alternatives not only for an alternate employment but it also stands inspired by the basic principles of social justice and can be termed as non-violent because of its idea of inclusion, the idea that can reassure to plan for people-oriented policies and their implementation. We see how it is certainly a matter of grave concern with governments which go against people’s solidarity and injure them for asserting their rights. It is tragic that the partial practice of democratic principles even by the democratic governments portend grave danger destabilizing endless people and their lives the worst nightmare that keep haunting people. It brings in the question of the right to representation as

a question of Human Rights through the practice of creating their own product in their own communities without causing any violence.

4. Theory of Representation

The Syadvada-theory can be seen therefore, as an expression of representation which is both a philosophical concept as well as a political one as it could be the means to achieve peoples' rights. The conceptual aspects of representation must be studied deeply to find that there may appear new ways when the world of people organizing themselves against injustice gets shut out. The theory recognizes that exploring new possibilities or efforts must consciously be made so as not to lose the perception that one should not be misguided by the existing habits and prejudices acquired in earlier contexts. For instance, representing people by using language / phrases like the 'third world', 'black/brown people', 'under-developed' and so on with reference to a group of people or nation of people, show a brutal attitude of the selfish interests implying that only a particular view alone matters while not the others. There are many other terms taken for granted and used without any concern that they could cause injuries to people. This uncivilized practice must come under the purview of Human Rights since it is a dehumanizing practice. Ahimsa is a universal principle, the practice of which can make representation effective. Representation is at once the world constituting subjectivity and yet is incorporated in that same world--as an important part of Constitution. It is possible to see representation as a universal phenomenon of democracy and as an individual right. When my individual right enables me to conceive it as a universal phenomenon and not merely as particular individual experience, it has finally got to the subject matter of philosophy. It is the universal presence in all human subjectivity that can be realized. Representation is thus the analysis of the objective domain within the subjective rights and becomes the basis of all rights. One can potentially experience these rights in the world, and also may analyze each of them without associating it to any particular case in the external world. In the conceptual world one may find many possibilities which can be applied in the context of a particular case in the external world. Thus, it happens to be a twofold process providing a socio-spiritual dimension that on the one hand does not allow discriminatory attitude to persist and on the other is capable of transcending the caste, class, color and other barriers besides questioning the constant attempts of those countries and the media which want to project a partial view of representation of people and arrive at prejudiced judgments. For instance, Africa and India are always seen as lands of lions and snakes respectively and their people dying from wretched poverty, all other representations of people being willfully overlooked. Jain thinking opens up a myriad of possibilities through the theory of Syadvada also termed as theory of probabilities and offers a challenged to such prejudices in those perspectives.

Further, this philosophical dimension presupposes the existence of other alternate representations innate in the concept of democracy and helps transcending the dichotomies made evident by facts, for instance, in caste-class relationship. This picture is not simple. The process of transcendence also helps consciously and subliminally to be aware that one is being bracketed. And yet this bounded being can go beyond. The alternative possibilities innate in the ideology can take a position where the ego shifts it's stance to look upon the other alternative imposed by the so called rational truth. There is yet another aspect to this which is freedom to move to other alternatives. The very possibility to this freedom implies that no intentionality or understanding of an idea ought to be static. The tension between the 'is' and the 'ought' calls for an alternative and the human being has an inbuilt impetus to be on the move that goes beyond 'is' to the 'alternative'. It is ultimately the choice of the individual to accept the limited ad be bounded by it or to go for freedom for transcendence. However, as evidenced in history, it has been imperative for humans to cross boundaries as democracy has been the cause for this then as much it is now as we see in the people's movement in many parts of different countries. The barriers imposed by the governments using policies which are anti- people and posing to 'represent' them through these are being continuously challenged by people which are a necessary indicator of the inner pressure people feel to express not only at the cost of every humiliation but also at the expense of their

lives. The participation of the monks in Burma against the state show an alternate dimension people can choose through the progressive ideals of religion and can lead the struggle to offer challenge. This may happen similarly with Christianity, Taoism, Buddhism or Indigenous belief systems which can contribute to transformative perceptions to complex social landscape. The contributions of Jesus, Chaitanya, Kabir, Mahavira, Buddha and others have their implications in the discourse of liberty. Their resistance and struggle against oppressive ideology and practice using much of their religious principles innovatively were as much relevant in their context and time as they are now in the context of neo-colonial barbarism. Can people then deal adequately with this barbarism? Can democracy especially in countries where it is very fragile or where it is supervised by the imperialist's concerns function properly in the neo-colonial contexts? It is difficult to say. But it is one of the reasons to argue that democracy will function effectively if the flawed understanding of the fundamentals of democracy is discarded. The ideology of the Jaina school helps us to understand the flaws and work out solutions for the same.

5. People-oriented Perspective

Democracy, as Lincoln had mentioned, is Government 'of the people, by the people and for the people'. If the first phrase, 'of the people' is considered, it can be seen that people's representation is implied very much by this phrase. However, the technical and mechanical representation has been imposed in these terms that create a mere formula to be followed repeatedly. In this context it is necessary to note that Medha Patkar of National Alliance for People's Movements (NAPM) was pained to observe that the parliamentarians have deviated considerably from the politics of Representation to politics of numbers. She reflected that people who are marginalized repose trust in their elected representatives and continue to vote for them. This trust of the vast majority of India has been shattered yet again and the hidden faces and agendas are in the open for all to witness (Narula 2008: 14). While the terms 'government of Africa' or 'government of India' appear very impressive implying government of the people, nothing of the sort actually happens. It is presumed that the people of these governments can question the 'intentionality' of not representing them lock, stock and barrel in all the functioning of their governments. The conceptualization of policies, analysis of plans and action followed by the state thereon do not reflect the claim that people are represented. Actions of the state show that people are generally treated as numbers than as human beings. It is important to note that the term 'people' is understood generally by the neo-colonial governance as mass, mob or some large group of individuals presumed to have no individuality, less or not educated but eligible as voters. This bias treats them neither as existence nor as essence in the act of governance implying that they are an irrelevant category with which you do nothing. It further implies that since 'people' is just a number, you may, with the help of this category legitimize any form of power with no intention whatsoever to be with the avowed task of building a society based on egalitarian principles.

If we want to refer to an egalitarian principle, we can appreciate the Jaina view on Soul. "Souls begin their journey in a primordial state, and exist in a state of consciousness continuum that is constantly evolving through Samsara" (Jaini 1980:227) The Jaina view that every being has soul implies an egalitarian perspective, therefore, whatever the area of work, everyone is supposed to be equal. We see how there are obvious signs of anxiety about people's relation with the governments because of the unwillingness on the part of the latter to consider the possibility that people in fact are required to make decisions in administration. But according to the Jaina view everyone is naturally eligible to participate by virtue of being an equal being. Because, the principle of equality is innate in the participant's rights. Tragically, the representation of people has taken a back seat as the representatives of the people whom people have voted and elected, have proclaimed themselves as 'separate entities' standing for their own interests. However, an exception to this behavior are a few individuals like the former President A. Kalam or the West Bengal Governor Gopalkrishna Gandhi whose understanding of people have been exemplary and in their views people have been the centre of focus.

Even when Shri Somnath Chatterjee, one of the finest parliamentarians refused to resign from the Speaker's post during the controversial Indo-US nuclear deal issue, the CPM expelled him from the party. Chaterjee's argument was that speaker stands above the party hence he was free to follow his conscience and not party's admonishing order to follow the line it thought reasonable. Taking into consideration the role of the monolithic reason, the adequacy of its theoretical ground has to be questioned. Some of the revolutionary groups use violent means recklessly. Police-men are slaughtered in their police stations, civilians killed by landmines set off on roads and much such violence are inflicted by them. Their treatment of dissenters is especially savage; they are tried in 'people's courts' and then sentenced to amputation or death. They use reason to assert that the only way to represent people is to overthrow the elected government since democracy is not a viable way to govern. While the fact is that they have used the tribal's (adivasis) as a stepping stone or one might say as common fodder. Tragically, the same method is used by the elected state government of Chattisgarh forming an army called Salwa Judum recruiting tribal youths equipped with guns, as a tit-for-tat way to counter such groups and their sympathizers. It claims people's support and vows to protect them while the fact is that sandwiched between them are mostly the innocent villagers who live in constant terror. The practice of ahimsa has become almost a farce.

Much before Lincoln's usage of the term 'people' focused on people-centric administration which appear to imply that the people as the ruler and people as ruled are not different, the Jaina school of thought shows the importance of people-oriented work as a worthy achievement in life. It's classification on different values termed as Gunasthana can go a long way to make a human being not only worthy of society but also help good governance if and when opportunities are provided. It is a reminder even in modern times of values that are necessary in providing with a people-oriented administration. It is in these terms or Gunasthana that the representatives of people should try to understand the theory of power and must emphasize how the term 'people' be finally understood. Lincoln's idea appears to have been based on a vision that is endowed with a fairly stable mechanism concerning the transformation of society marking distinctive changes in the social conditions of mankind. On an ideological level it accommodates many possibilities which engender systems susceptible to explore human relations. Representation is one such possibility. It is described as an important and rational dimension of democracy. It may, therefore, entrust us to understand its philosophical and rational considerations. One may relentlessly argue that philosophical considerations do not take note of concrete contexts in which liberty, way of life, and culture of people make sense in a complex society. But this observation only deepens the suspicion that the dimension of representation is ignored much to arrive at such conclusion. If democracy means that power resides with people and it is the people who are sovereign as declared in the Constitution, then it is only fair if they rule through their representatives. Chaterjee accepted this in one of his talks recently saying that over the years we have not been able to honour many of the commitments made to our people through the Constitution. Aberrations and distortions have taken place in the functioning not only of the state but also of the political system. As a result, large sections of the people are unable to enjoy even the minimum rights the Constitution intended for them.

This has good reason to believe how a democratic country like India has not been able to represent people's cause as evidenced by the problems of child mortality, illiteracy, lack of job opportunities, health care and similar other problems raising a question which forms the background of most thinking about politics: what is the quality of representation? Here, we can see how an alternate like Gunasthana suggest that the Jaina thinking offers, can facilitate proper stages of development of a human being by doing away with Mithya-drishti or wrong perception and also discarding Mishra-drishti or confusing between the and wrong beliefs. Such a perspective will not only help practice of non-injury to all forms of life (Preece 1999: 212-217) but also pave the way for such human beings who would represent the well-being of both the human and the other beings. It appears the terms used by Lincoln have a consistent ideological standpoint. The emphasis appears to be on how not to alienate people (ruled)

from people (ruling) to avoid any disintegrative effect that can wreck both. Tragically, this fear has become a truth. The alienation is increasing in neo-colonial contexts contributing to situations becoming acute and almost uncompromising. People's dependency both mental and material, on the state, has become a part of their critical identity. If people take initiatives to voice their protest against any kind of oppression, the state is in no mood to listen to. Anyone who tries to check such acts cannot escape being ostracized or even elimination. Ajay T G, portrayed the tribal life and their conditions and earned the wrath of the state government. The Chhattisgarh government arrested him under the Chattisgarh Special Protection Act which is alleged to be a draconian law. This is exemplary to show how the conscientizing aspect present in the terms of Lincoln is being successfully wiped out by the neo-colonial governance.

6. Conclusion

Hence, as far as the reality regarding 'government for the people' is concerned, it has been in contradiction with the neo-colonial attitudes perennially. The socio-political consciousness associated with this aspect rarely expresses itself. The power equation in typically neo-colonial governance stands for the privileged sections deliberately. The peasants, workers and other non-privileged citizens, the vast majority of the people remain outside this equation. Given the relative non-flexibility of this, bureaucratic centralization, religious universalization and institutionalism are features that induce the passage to dangerous identities and loyalties. The well-known German philosopher, Immanuel Kant's views in this context expressed by Scruton are surely noteworthy regarding the importance of representation, "The process of representation translates the inherent sovereignty of the people into an actual sovereign power, which Kant sees as a forum of collective decision making, in which the interests of the people as a whole are advanced through law" (Scruton 2001:121). Through the idea of responsibility that is implied in the practice of Jaina ethical values, we also see a parallel in Kant's exposition, "Kant can be seen as the greatest precursor of the modern doctrine of human rights and he was not feeble minded to support that there can be rights without duties. I can claim rights only if I am prepared to pay the price, which is the acceptance of the very same duties that I impose upon you through my claim" (Scruton 2001:120). We can only hope that in revisiting the ideas that the Jaina school brings forth, we will be provided with a source of inspiration to understand the importance of these concepts and to act upon with conviction as the need arises.

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