

The Concepts of Ideal State and Freedom in Gandhi's Philosophy and Underlying Relation

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Abstract: The aim of this work is to assess and discuss the relation between the concepts of freedom and ideal state in Gandhi's philosophy – the father of nation and one of the very rare personalities of modern times. The concept of state and society, concept of freedom, polity, social order, economic order, educational reconstruction, are discussed in brief in the light of Gandhian's thought and belief. The ideal state can be established only when there exist social, political and economic harmony. It is tried to make this study conceptual and analytic as far as possible and also to correlate different concepts to reflect their mutual consistency. His concept of swaraj, sarvodaya, man, truth, god, ramrajya, education reform and all-round development of human personality in the light of soul, truth and nonviolence is appraised. The concept of freedom is one of the core ideals of the philosophy of Gandhi and this is the driving force for the concept of ideal state.

Keywords: Freedom, ideal, state, society, belief, harmony, swaraj, sarvodaya, truth.

INTRODUCTION

We know that man is a social animal. Society is the whole in which the individual is the unit. Society may be considered as the whole complex of the relationships of individuals. Though born alone, man is a social being by nature. Life of an individual man is inconceivable apart from society. Aristotle, the father of social sciences called man a social animal. It means that without society, without the support of the social heritage the individual personality cannot develop. Society is the whole in which the individual is the unit. So, social relations grow and change in accordance with attitudes and interests of the members who compose it. The present society is the product of a series of the evolutionary process. History of social evolutions reveals that man tries to shape and reshape society which, in its turn, again transforms and retransforms him. There is an inseparable relation between the two. Man outside society is no longer a man and society without man is absurd. But no one can say what exactly the original nature of society was millions of years ago. Human history have passed unrecorded, but still the available data logically reveal that there must be a society organised or unorganised at the beginning of man's life and that the history of human society is the history of human struggle in which he tries to secure

equality and justice so that he may develop himself towards perfection. But society cannot concede man's demand fully because if they are granted to the full extent, it hurts society. Society is the basic organisation which nurtures and sustains individuals.

Society in essence means a state or condition, relationships. Society is an organisation, a system or pattern of relationships among human beings. Society has a character distinct from that of the individuals composing it, and affects them all in the same way by its collective character though not always producing the same effect. Every man is born into a social group and as he grows up, he comes in contact with new fellows and develops an ever-expanding circle of social intercourse. His social universe grows as he grows. This expansion of his social universe is an expansion of his self. Man's personality is well developed in a well organised society. So to form a good society management should be in the hands of the wise and virtuous.

Socrates said that without society man is merely a dumb driven animal and society without man is absurd and meaningless. Man needs society to realise his basic needs and to safeguard his life and property.

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Science, art, culture and all other human values can be developed and become meaningful only in the social context. Man's personality is well developed in a well organised society.

ANALYSIS

State and Society

The vital task before Gandhi was to explore alternatives not just to the contemporary forms of government but to the very institution of the state. Gandhi felt deeply uneasy with the modern state. It was abstracted from the society, centralized, bureaucratic obsessed with homogeneity and suffused with the spirit of violence. He thought that since all the prevailing forms of government took the modern state for granted and represented different ways of organizing it, they were inherently incapable of tackling its structural defects. Even liberal democracy, the least objectionable of them all, did little to integrate state and society, decentralize political power, involve citizen in the conduct of public affairs, and reduce the extent and depth of internal and external violence.

For Gandhi a society is based on Swaraj, a true democracy as he called it was the only morally acceptable alternative to the modern state. It was shasanmukta, or free of domination and coercion, and institutionalized and nurtured lokshakti or people's power. People here were, and knew themselves to be, the role source of political power, and successful had to be non-violent one. Non violent revolution is the noblest way to achieve the desired result, since it teaches people to suffer voluntarily for the cause of truth and justice. Gandhi told that it was his search for Truth which led him to politics. Fighting for the eternal principle to truth, relying on inner strength and without caring for the amount of suffering inflicted upon, he fought against evils.

By Swaraj Gandhi meant not only the political freedom from foreign rule but also it meant making the people of India economically self-reliant, politically self-governing and morally self-respecting and courageous.

Gandhi's Concept of Society

Gandhi held that he did not evolve any new philosophical system, of course, he stood for certain ideals which were of universal significance till date. In order to see this clearly let us review his thought - political, social and economic. Gandhi considered human personality as an integrated whole.

Political Order

Gandhi introduced religion - religion that was not of the superstitions one but it was the Religion of toleration. According to him politics without morality is a thing to be avoided. Gandhi's freedom struggle represented the struggle of the exploited. Gandhi held that the Indian movement was not so much national in

character in as much as it stressed on the establishment of a universal, humanistic and global world order.

Social Order

Gandhian social reform starts from the individual. Gandhi was of the opinion that by due performance of duties by all individuals, there will be peace in the society.

Mahatma Gandhi wanted to harmonise the dignity and integrity of the individual with social development. Gandhi wanted to place man on a high moral level and at the same time, wanted that the social atmosphere should be congenial to his full development. It is not possible under materialism. Gandhi recognised this peculiarity of human nature. Even though he retains his brutal instincts he also has his moral instincts. But though Gandhi tried for the progress of individuals, he could not be considered as an individualist. Gandhi stressed on individuals in the same measure as he stressed over the establishment of a good society. But, at the same time, he did not want the society to stand in the way of the full expression of the genius of its best members.

The social goal that Gandhi strove for, throughout life, was the establishment of a society free from all forms of exploitation. As a means to achieve this end, Gandhi laid emphasis on Swaraj and spinning wheel. Besides Khadi, the chief tenets of his social reforms are (1) Establishment of Hindu - Muslim unity, (2) Removal of untouchability, (3) Prohibition of intoxicating drinks and drugs, (4) Emancipation of women, (5) Substitution of Indian vernaculars for English as medium of instruction and (6) Cow Protection.

Gandhi gave importance to social Problems rather than to political ones. Further, to prevent exploitation, he gave out his "Sarvodaya" philosophy of "from each according to his capacity to each according to his needs."

Gandhian thought is the mixture of the ideal and the practical. They are describable in his ideas of two levels of thinking; the ideal termed as the first level norms and the practical or the second level norms. The first is unattainable but it has at least as much value as Euclid's point in Mathematics. Gandhi's picture of the ideal society may be utopian, but we must have a proper picture of what we want before we can have something approaching it. In connection with the working for an ideal society Gandhi observed, "If we continue to work for such a society, it will slowly come into being to an extent, such that the people can benefit by it. Euclid's line is one without breath but no one has so far been able to draw it and never will. All the same it is only by keeping the ideal line in mind that we have made progress in geometry. What is true here is true of every ideal" [1]. For Gandhi an ideal state is a perfect state,

which cannot be realized. He said "Let us be sure of our ideal. We shall ever fail to realize it, but should never cease to strive for it, between the ideal and practice there must always be gulf. The ideal will cease to be one if it becomes possible to realize it" [2].

For the development of morality in man, Gandhi prescribed a very strenuous discipline which consists in taking certain vows such as "Brahmacharya, control of Palate, fearlessness, non-stealing, non-possession, hard labour, Swadeshi, removal of untouchability, equal respect for all religions and humanity. The success in a nonviolent society is based on the endurance of the non-violent soldiers who undergo suffering.

Mahatma Gandhi believed that the central theme in man is the soul and the highest good is self-realization. It means the realization of one's own self that is God which is omnipresent in this human body. Even though attainment of perfection is difficult, a sincere quest of the perfection is desirable. Hence, man must live in such a way that he is in view of this final goal and should faithfully discharge his duties in all walks of life.

Recognition of goal itself is a difficult thing, God is infinite and His attributes are innumerable. Each and everyone have his own conception of God and the approach to God varies in each and every individual. Gandhi recognised God as Truth and hence for him the aim of man is realization of "Truth" in thought, word and action.

Mahatma Gandhi wanted (a) the restoration of a spiritual social order not only in India but throughout the world and (b) the freedom of India from foreign domination which was for him an essential goal to achieve his primary goal.

Economic Order

Gandhi introduced religion in the field of economics also. He was against mechanisation. According to him the real growth is moral growth and the possession of riches is a hindrance to moral growth. Gandhi stressed on limitation of wants. Man should not consider the search of wealth as his ideal. As man is a social animal and his place is in a society and that too in a society which has order and purpose.

Gandhi opposed the development of industrialisation which depends on mechanisation. In fact, he realised that the growth of mechanisation sapped the growth of man. Forgetting this, man tries to raise the standard of living. As a check to the growing interest of this money-making tendency, Gandhi set up the theory of Aparigraha and the minimisation of wants.

Gandhi thought that, "labour was far superior to capital. Without labour gold, silver and copper were

a useless burden. It was labour which extracted precious one from the bowels of the earth" [3].

He thus came quite close to Marx's labour theory of value. He also thought like Marx that the combination of labour against capital could subvert capitalism. No society can thrive on hatred and violence in any form. Just as it is immoral for the capitalist to steal the legitimate fruits of the worker's labour, it is equally immoral for labourer to wreck the industries and tyrannize over the capitalist, by exaggerated demands. Gandhi's whole moral philosophy and the belief in the inner goodness of man discounted the Marxist conception that class struggle was the basic truth of human history and that it must be accentuated more and more until the working class become the rulers of society and state" [4].

Mahatma Gandhi strove for the revival of village industries and for the restoration of the traditional village institutions of self - government. In fact, his basic emphasis on the villages as key to India's new social order remained unaffected. To remove the exploitation of one class by another, he stressed on the theory of trusteeship and looked for the change of heart in the rich for using their wealth in the interest of the poor. There should be a true partnership between the capital and labour with the state functioning as the mediator between the two with the minimum use of force.

When the world is running after mad rush for power Gandhi laid the foundation of "Sarvodaya" which he regarded as the only way to salvation of India and the world. Gandhi chose the path of Karma yoga as a means to the ultimate goal of realisation of truth and set as the ultimate goal in this life the achievement of a Sarvodaya society wherein each individual will be free from want, free from exploitation, free from envy and selfishness, free from pride or the ridicule of others, free from communal problems and free from external control.

Mahatma Gandhi believed in truth and non-violence as the basis of his socio-political dynamics. Where there will be truth and non-violence there will be peace and bliss.

So he gave importance to the means and ends. If the means are good the ends would also prove good. By keeping non-violence as means we can attain the end truth.

Gandhi defined his ideal society as Ram-Rajya. It is conceived as a society where truth prevails, people lead moral and spiritual life and evil is eliminated. His ideal society is based on love and co-operation. It is an idealised society where ethical considerations would govern the life of the individuals.

Every individual becomes a Satyagrahi - seeker after truth and lives a life of non-violence.

Gandhi formulated a complete ethics for remaking man. So his ideal society is based on moral principle. According to him moral discipline of the individual is the most important means of social reconstruction, and it is these moral principles which determine the structure of non-violent social order. So Gandhi believed "He who is not prepared to regulate his life in questioning obedience to the laws of morality cannot be said to be a man in the full sense of the term" [5].

Social freedom is for Gandhi a much wider concept than political freedom. The Marxian concept of ideal society corresponds to Gandhi's concept of Ramrajya, where everybody rules himself. Even though their approaches are different, Gandhi was also fighting against the ills of capitalism, Gandhi's social system is really the unification of all individuals with a view to eliminating all types of conflicts either intrapersonal or interpersonal, either political or economic, either social or global on the basis of his spiritual and ethical principles of truth and non-violence. He visualized the social system as an undivided whole in which all the departments of social life-political, economic, and religious are inseparably inter related. He said "I claim that human mind or human society is not divided into watertight compartments called social, political and religious" [6].

Mahatma Gandhi wanted to restructure the human society under such a democratic ideal that all members should avail themselves of the equal opportunities in the political economic and social development. He did not propound any particular theory for this objective, but his ideas and concepts relating to these branches of human knowledge have a great relevance to the present trend of development of science and technology not only in the Indian society but also in the human society as a whole.

Mahatma Gandhi was not a systematic thinker of the academic type in the field of metaphysics and political philosophy, but certainly he has stressed some fundamental ideas for the regeneration of man and the reconstitution of the moral and political thinker. He was a prophet, teacher and leader but not a rational dialectician of the type of Sankara or Kant. He is far more akin to Socrates and Buddha pouring forth his feelings and the results of his realisation of truth.

Gandhi had propagated the doctrine of a classless Gandhi's conception of a new economic order in the village included a programme of co-operative farming in agriculture.

- Every village will be a republic or panchayat having powers. Indian independence must begin at the bottom.

- Ultimately, it is the individual who is the unit. But this does not exclude dependence on the willing help from willing neighbours or from the world. It will be a free and voluntary play of mutual forces.
- Such a society is necessarily highly cultured in which every man or woman knows what he or she wants, and what is more, knows that no one should want anything that others can not have with equal labour.
- 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 for the higher cause of village, circle of villages etc. Therefore, the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle, but will give strength to all within and will derive its own strength from it.
- In it there is no room for machines that would displace human labour and that would concentrate power in a few hands.
- Gandhi wanted that India should live for this true and utopian picture, though never realised in its completeness.

Educational Reconstruction

Gandhi realised the necessity of educational reconstruction for the general and political regeneration of his country. He and his followers devoted themselves to educational work in different parts of India. According to Gandhi, "By education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in the child in mind, body and spirit" [7]. Every individual is born with certain capacities which can be developed to the best advantage of the individual and society by proper education. All round development is possible only if education can combine knowledge with work, precept with example. The first responsibility lays with the parents whose action, thought, feeling according to Gandhi influence the child imperceptibly but very deeply, even from the very time of conception. "Unless the parents live up to high ideals, children can not be properly trained" [8].

Gandhi was a firm believer in teaching art, music and drill to develop the ecstatic and rhythmic sense of the young people. Gandhi said that "Music means rhythm, order. Its effect is electrical. It immediately soothes. There is a rhythm and music in drill that makes action effortless and eliminates fatigue. All these should be combined to ensure the all round development of the young" [9].

Gandhi thought that character building, the development of strength, courage, virtue and ability to forget oneself in working towards great aims; this was the aim of education.

Mahatma Gandhi believed that truth and love are the most important basis of human society and the

individual's progress. Each person should be physically, mentally and spiritually educated to realize truth and love in every sphere of life, so that the individual society and humanity can progress towards increasing happiness.

Gandhi's philosophy as well as the plan of social work was grounded on a broad strategy of total social development. Gandhi was not satisfied with the mere change of the external structure of the society. So he taught Meta social solution which postulates a rational interpretation of the human soul. When the world is running after mad rush for power Gandhi laid the foundation of Sarvodaya which he regarded as the only way to salvation of India and the world. Sarvodaya appeals are implicitly present in our culture. Sarvodaya stands for the emancipation or elevation of all. Gandhi derived the theoretical roots of it from the Vedic and vedantic technique with regard to all beings as participants of a super material reality. Sarvodaya emphasises on the distributive social and economic justice. It accepts the concepts that all forms of wealth belong to society. According to Gandhi, "Real socialism has been handed down to us by our ancestors who taught that all land belongs to Gopal" [10]. The real credit of Gandhi, however, lies in the fact that he brought about a synthesis of the theological, the metaphysical and the scientific positive attitude, Gandhi was able to reconcile the age old belief in the Karma, rebirth, inner voice etc. with the mechanical objectivists' value, neutral value of modern science. Gandhi says that Swaraj is the only goal of Indian people. So, Jawaharlal Nehru writes, "I have been attracted by Gandhi's stress on the right means and think one of the greatest contributions to our public life has been this emphasis. This idea is by no means new, but his application of ethical doctrine in public activity was certainly novel" [11].

CONCLUSION

There are different shades of opinion about Gandhi - the man - his philosophy, and his sociopolitical activities. Gandhi has been regarded as a great leader of freedom struggle and a tool of the British, as a mahatma and also a shrew's political manipulator as a muddling politician and also as accomplished strategist and political innovator. He has been variously described as a liberal, a sociologist, a radical, a communist, a philosopher anarchist, a revivalist, a conservative and non-violence revolutionary where many of the opinions are rarely based upon deep knowledge and understanding of the life and work of Gandhi, most of the above characterisation about him are true, although taken together they appear paradoxical. This is because of the fact that Gandhi is a multi-dimensional personality. Above all he was an individualist. The individual was his supreme consideration. He maintained that the individual is an end in itself. The state exists for the individuals. It is the means for the development of the

personality of the individual. He was an advocate of individual freedom. The individual is prior to the state. But his individual is not the solitary and isolated one. He is a social being, whose welfare is linked with the welfare of other individuals in the society. He is the individual who has duties only but little rights, one whose actions are meant for the welfare of other member of the society. Gandhi's life reflects his philosophy. His life shows that example is better than mere precept - for him life means action - it means struggle in which the higher you aim the more you wish to achieve, the greater is the work and sacrifice demanded of you.

One important aspect which should not be forgotten here is the fact that there is greater awareness of Gandhi's contribution to humanity now more than ever before, no matter that in India, Gandhi's relevance is a favourite topic for academic discussions. The big question here is does Gandhi mean anything to the present day men and women? During the last fifty years that separate us from Gandhi, humanity has witnessed breath-taking achievements in science and technology and even the texture and rhythm of our life seem to have been altered. A life in harmony with nature, a life of simplicity, a life which recognised the pain in others, and a society which ensures minimum for everybody to live like decent human beings - A world vision which extols the virtue of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakan" (world is one family).

We cannot say that Gandhian insistence on simple life, Gandhian insistence on purity between ends and means, Gandhian insistence on the core values that sustain humanity is irrelevant just because we are in a new century. Gandhi's belief that nobody does any evil on his own volition, that everybody is a spark of the Divine and that nobody is capable of doing anything that would hurt anybody or anything, went well with a considerable segment of international community. This distinguishes Gandhi from all other philosophers and teachers we have. So we need to adopt a new method to understand Gandhi's concept of society. Gandhi cannot be discovered through an academic approach either. So at last we can say that Gandhian concept of society have a relevance that is timeless.

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