

Perspective of Mahatma Gandhi and Modern State

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ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi was the most important political figure of 20th Century. His principles inspired million of people all over World. In Gandhi's assessment the State (Western type) was the symbol of violence in a concentrated form. He learned from his experience in South Africa that excessive power with the State meant more violence or greater amount of coercion. In the name of maintenance of law and order, the South African white government acquired enormous power and this led to the ruthless administration, exploitation and end of individual's liberty. So his philosophy was 'anti modernist' and opposed the idea of Modern State. Gandhi's critique of the Modern State was central to his political thinking. The case of Gandhiji theory of politics is to show that the citizen is the true political subject and not the State. Gandhi's book 'Hind Swaraj' give us an idea of Gandhian vision of a modern Indian State. He believed that in the 'Ideal State' there will be no political state therefore there will be no political Institution and political power. He said in his classical statement "That government is the best which governs least"

1. Introduction

The middle of the 19th century had seen the British become, in effect, the rulers of India. Their control was organised in a bureaucracy that boasted of a tradition of justice and fair dealing in the matters concerning the State and its subject. From the standpoint of administrative theories, there had emerged a Modern State with claims to democracy in India. The basic framework of this modern State was provided by a Rule of Law for the maintenance of public order and a political arrangement, the real motive of which were, however, commercial in nature. A workable basis for this State was provided by a taxation method that was essentially a combination of a tax assessment and tax collection.

Mahatma Gandhi's perspective on the theory of the State questions, at the theoretical plane, the very basis of the Modern State. It reflects a growing dissatisfaction with the working of the State and contents its unsuitability for India. Gandhi ji found in the Modern State a System considerably nonadjustable with the socio-economic characteristics of the Indian Society. His study of the functioning of British State in England and in the colonial territory of South Africa seemed to have given him a deep understanding of the theoretical framework of the Modern State and its actual working in a variety of situation. Consequently, he developed an understanding of the Modern State that was profoundly original in its approach and refreshingly analytical in its assessment. These features made possible a model of polity whose guiding principles and functional doctrine constitute an innovative system known as "Swaraj". Gandhiji talks about "Swaraj" in the framework of a code that should determine the constitutional formulation of Indian Home rule. Hind Swaraj signals the need for an alternative approach to civil society beyond Modernism. This approach combines 'Swaraj' with the practical tenets of a non-violent, self contained, grass roots level society. He clearly said "To me political power is not an end but one of the means of enabling people to better their condition in every

department of life. In such a state everyone in his own master. He rules himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbour"¹ This paper attempt to understand the vision of Mahatma Gandhi on Modern State and some of the principles concerning the theory of the State in consonance with the Gandhiji perspective. It is a clear exposition can be found in Hind Swaraj written in 1909, with its succinct on the Western ideals of techno-modernism and its expression of the elements of "Swaraj".

The first section briefly analysis the perspective of Gandhi and the Modern State. Second section discusses the difference between Modern State and India. The third section about the model of polity "Swaraj" with functional Doctrine and understanding of swaraj. The fourth section briefly outlines Liberalism and Trusteeship as Gandhi's novel contribution in the sphere of Political Philosophy.

2. Perspective of Gandhi ji and Modern State

Mahatma Gandhi is widely recognized as one of the most original and influential political thinker and activist of the 20th Century. His perspective on the theory of the state questions, at the theoretical plane, the very basis of the Modern State. The basic framework of this Modern State was provided by a Rule of Law for the maintenance of public order which defined the State as "necessary evil", but welfare promoter. According to Gandhi, the 'Western State' was the symbol of violence. He strongly believed that the state or the system like democracy can not be final ideal. These institutions are based on political power, therefore, they can only be the means of improving the conditions of people at different level walks of life, but it cannot lead human welfare.

A western state runs on the foundation of the taxation method that is essentially a combination of tax calculation and

¹ M.K.Gandhi, Young India 2 July, 1931.

tax collection. The State, with its stress on commerce and industry, and its emphasis on demonstrable competence, projected a contradictory picture in which the privileged class was favored and the needy ignored. He had a deep understanding of the theoretical frame work of the modern state and its actual working in a variety of situations. Therefore, the State to the 'Rule of law' and its impact on the society were matters that were very disquieting to Gandhi. Consequently, he presented an original approach to the Modern State.

3. Gandhi's critique of the Modern State

At a basic level, the model of the Modern State was linked to his concepts of non-violence. According to Gandhiji democracy can not be ideal in the form of Institution like State. Institution which are based on political power are only a means to make people comfortable in their daily life but not success to achieve the goal of human beings. An individual cannot be forced to do any work against his will or spontaneous desire. In the other word according to him the progress of society can be achieved only when the individuals perform willingly i.e in autonomy.

The concept of autonomy was the key element in his critique. According to him individuality means two things – one that citizens should neither be dominated by others members of the society nor by the State and other idea that individuals should be 'self governed'. He believed that modernity was an obstacle to autonomy since it introduced and justified new forms of domination based on a predetermined, external process of economic productivity. He stated that since 'autonomy' is absent in the Modern State, hence the objective of self governance also missing in it.

He found that the character of Modern State is too rigid. Another noteworthy feature of Gandhi's critique was related to the intrinsic homogenising tendency of the Modern State. The uniform rules and bureaucratic management were the two principle tools of the State with the help of which a society was governed. In a write up Mahatma Gandhi said "The State represents violence in a concentrated and organised form. The individual has a soul, but as the State is a soulless machine, it can never be weaned from violence to which it owes its very existence".²

4. Modern State and India

Modern State and India was an important issue in Gandhi's thought. A close understanding of Modern State and its allied institutions during Gandhi's South Africa days had opened his mind to various questions. Gandhi's case for the incongruity of Modern State in India can be understood by following comparative study:

- Indian civilization is spiritual in essence.
 - State is a product of materialistic civilization.
- In Indian culture 'Non-violence' is deeply ingrained.
 - The State is violent character.
- India has a rich diversity of customs, religions and social norms.

- The Modern State promotes homogeneity in nature.
- Basically India is a rural country.
 - Promotion of urban civilization is the base of Modern State.
- Stratified Indian Society has autonomous and self governing castes, sects and ethnic groups as its constituent units which require a variegated system of governance.
- A uniform system of laws and a set of rules and procedures that ironed out variations was Modern State's unequivocal commitment.
- Indian Society values and is based on direct and unmediated relations between human beings.
- The Modern State is a highly abstract institution.
- Decentralised power structure that could take care of India's diversity was needed for Independent India.
- Based on these differences Gandhiji rejected the Modern State as a suitable for independent India.

5. Mahatma Gandhi's Model of Polity: "SWARAJ"

The concept of Swaraj has received a very prominent place in Gandhi's spiritual, political, social and economic ideas and has been expressed in his writings and speeches. Swaraj generally mean 'self governance or 'Self rule' and is used as the concept of 'home-rule' by Mahatma Gandhi. But the world usually refers to Gandhiji concept for India freedom from foreign rules. Swaraj lays stress on governance not by a hierarchical government, but self governance through individuals and community building. Swaraj- the main elements of swaraj autonomy of individual, self-governing, self responsibility and self respect. Gandhi ji strongly argued for the abolition of Modern state which was the English rule. It is swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves, it is therefore in the palm of our hand, but such swaraj has to be experienced by each one for himself. One drowning man will never save another. Formulation of the idea of 'Swaraj' can be seen in his other writings from young India, Hind swaraj, Harijan and published elsewhere.

Gandhi had envisioned for independent India a polity that would be based on the principle of democratic self - government or self rule. Gandhi opted for "Ordered Anarchy' under which citizen enjoyed maximum freedom consistent with minimum necessary order."³

Self governance or Self-rule at a general level carried the meaning of 'Swaraj'. Thus, 'Swaraj' was a collective goal of the Indians as well as their individual goal and it did not necessarily mean an alternative State or a reformed structure of the Modern State. 'Hind Swaraj is a text where a clear sighted formulation of the idea of 'Swaraj' can be seen. This has to be supplemented by Gandhiji's views in Young India and Harijan and those published elsewhere.

³ Parekh, Bhiku, Gandhi's Political Philosophy: A Critical Examination, 1989

⁴ M K Gandhi 1909, Hind Swaraj , Chapter XV"

² M.K.Gandhi, The Modern Review, 1935

The main principles of 'Swaraj'

- Non violence was the bedrock of Gandhian ideology, it was obvious that polity was firmly rooted in it.
- Second was the individual's autonomy which was equally required for Swaraj
- Self- realization of power to build up courage among its people.
- It was also required in the new polity to respect the Indian society diversity which boost-up Indians.
- Establishment of national unity and end of those things which create differences among people.
- New polity would be in favour of self- governing local communities.
- The importance and requirement regeneration of Indian culture could not be neglected in this new policy.

Gandhi's thought that the real foundation of the new polity was co-operation amongst the people. He firmly believed that co-operation of the people, whether active or passive, would lay the foundation of the new polity. He said " I believe that you want the millions of Indian to be happy, not that you want the reins of government in your hands. If that be so, we have to consider only one thing: how can the million obtain self rule" ⁴ According to Gandhiji real India lived in village. The functional doctrine of new polity was therefore provided by the famous 'Village republics' of Gandhian conception. The village communities were supposed to manage their affairs through panchayats elected annually by every literate adult. The village panchayat in the model of republic were to have legislative, executive and judicial powers. He believed in strong sense of local strength and solidarity by village panchayat which provide meaning full interpersonal relationship, encourage a sense of social responsibility and the spirit of cooperation and act as a 'nursery of civil virtues'.

In an interview given by Gandhi on 28th July 1946 in Harijan, he said "We must have a proper picture of what we want before we can have something approaching it. It there ever is to be a republic of every village in India, then I claim verify for my picture in which the last is equal to the first or, in other words, no one is to be the first and none the last.

In this picture every religion has its full and equal place. We are all leaves of a majestic tree whose trunk cannot be shaken of its roots, which are deep down in the bowels of the earth. The mightiest wind cannot move it."

A. Understanding, Swaraj

Swaraj is a more than basic concept of non-violence since non-violence is only a means to 'Swaraj' whereas 'Swaraj' is an individual's state of being. The concept of 'Swaraj' can be summarized as

- Independence of a country from alien rule.
- Political freedom of the individual.
- Economic freedom of the individual
- Attainment of spiritual freedom or autonomy of the individual.

Gandhiji said "Self government means continuous effort to be independent of government control, whether it is foreign government or whose it is national. Swaraj governance will be a sorry affair if people look up to it for the regulation of every

detail of life."⁴ He was unequivocal in his recommendation of the non-violent means. "Violent means will give violent Swaraj. That would be a menace to the world and India herself. " ⁵

He dreamed of a "casteless and classless society in which there are no vertical division but only horizontal' no high no law, all service has equal status and carries equal wages..... women will enjoy the same right as men. Since we shall be at peace with all the rest of the world neither exploiting, nor being exploited, we should have the smallest army imaginable."⁶

The national movement, which was organised in India before his (Gandhiji) entry in the movement suggested that principal objective of the movement was gaining an administrative control of the country. The picture of this movement was clear in his mind before he participated in it. He had written in Hind Swaraj, "In effect it means this: that we want English rule without the Englishman. you want the tiger's nature, but not the tiger; that is to say, you would make India English and when it becomes English. It will be called not Hindustan but Englستان. This is not the Swaraj that I want"⁷. The autonomy of the individual completes the Gandhian sketch of 'Swaraj'.

He said "The individual ceases to count, what is left of society ? His weariness of the Modern State was also on the count that in it the individual was completely replaced by an abstract complexity -the State, which was therefore impersonal to individual member of society. This autonomy, however, was not an unbridled license for individual will to prevail in all matters."⁷

B. Liberalism and Trusteeship:

After understang of 'Swaraj' it become clear that Gandhian theory of the State holds a ground of Liberal perspective. In his view only a federally constituted polity based on vigorous and self governing local communities was truly democratic. The fundamental fact of democracy was the recognition that citizens were self-determining moral agents. The principal objective of democracy was to organise the conduct of collective affairs without any governmental domination.

According to Gandhiji Liberalism was a way of life. 'Swaraj' describes 'true democracy'. According to Gandhiji, "True democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village."⁸

He had elaborated his concept "My notion of democracy is that under it the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest. That can never happen except through non-violence. No country in the world today show any but patronising regard for the weak..... western democracy, as it function today, is diluted Nazism or Facism - India is trying to evolve true democracy, i.e. without violence . Our weapons are

⁶ M.K.Gandhi, Young India, 6 August, 1925

⁷ Hind swaraj 1938 IVth chapter

⁸ M.K.Gandhi, Young India, 17 July, 1924

⁹ M.K.Gandhi, Young India, 10 September, 1931.

¹⁰ M.K.Gandhi, Harijan, 1 February, 1942.

¹¹ M.K.Gandhi, Harijan, 18 January, 1948.

those of 'Satyagraha' expressed through the 'Charkha' the village industries removal of untouchability, communal harmony, prohibition, and non-violent organization of labor as in Ahmedabad. These means mass effort and mass education. We have big agencies for conducting these activities, they are purely voluntary, and their only sanction is service of the lowliest."⁹

Gandhiji further wrote in a letter to Jawahar Lal Nehru "The village of my dreams is still in my mind. After all every man lives in the world of his dreams, My ideal village will contain intelligent human beings. They will not live in dirt and darkness as animals. Men and Women will be free and able to hold their own against anyone in the world. There will be neither plague, nor cholera nor smallpox, no one will be idle, no one will wallow in luxury. Everyone will have to contribute his quota of manual labour. I do not want to draw a large scale picture in detail."¹⁰

In the sphere of political philosophy "Trusteeship" is the great and novel contribution of Gandhiji, and it was the economic extension of his political philosophy.

Gandhi ji had a view of 'social trust' of all material property. The owner of property must not take more than what was needed for a moderately comfortable life. The other members of society who were associated with the property were jointly responsible with the owner for its management and were to provide welfare scheme to all. The owner and the rest of people should regard themselves as trustees of the property. He elaborated his concept about Trusteeship in his editorial saying, "Suppose I have come by a fair amount of wealth either by way of legacy, or by means of trade and industry, I must know that all that wealth does not belong to me, what belongs to me is the right to an honourable livelihood, no better than that enjoyed by millions of others. The rest of my wealth belongs to the community and must be used for the welfare of the community" He further wrote and opposed Zamindars and ruling Chief,... "The labourer has to realise that the wealthy man is less owner of his wealth than the labourer is owner of his own, viz, the power to work."¹¹.

The writing of a draft on Trusteeship was the result of long discussion with Gandhiji and a group of socialists. The final text of the draft said:

- Trusteeship provides a means of transforming the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one. Instead of the capitalist, it gives the owning class a chance of reforming itself.
- It does not support the right to private ownership of property.
- It does not exclude legislative regulation of the ownership and use of wealth.
- It calls for both a decent minimum living wages and the fixation of a maximum income that allowed to any person in society. The difference between such minimum and maximum income limit should be reasonable, equitable and variable over time.

- Economic production should be determined by social necessity and not by personal whim or greed. He said, "you may say that Trusteeship is a legal fiction. But if people mediate over it constantly and try to act up to it, then life on earth would be governed for more by love than it is at present."¹²

6. Conclusion

Thus, we find that in Gandhian perspective state, democracy, Swaraj, non violence, liberalism and trusteeship all are closely connected. Gandhi ji was the great social activist who always make effort for the upliftment of weaker section of society. He believed India is a country of village's and its countrymen are economically poor as well as socially. So he advocated swaraj for self development but he believed swaraj-self governing should be come with self responsibility and for economically growth trusteeship is best option. He has deep understanding of theoretical and practical framework of modern state so he always denied its acceptance for the India and developed his theory for the build up a good nation-India.

Gandhiji strongly advocated swaraj and trusteeship, for him the well being of every individual consists in swaraj and trusteeship is the best mean to attain the ends of capitalist which insure the autonomy and liberty of individual

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¹² M.K.Gandhi, Harijan, 18 May 1940.

¹³ 5 October, 1945.

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