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Gandhian concept of decentralization

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Abstract

India is a country of villages. The imagination of Panchayati Raj is the cornerstone of Indian culture. Mahatma Gandhi thought that democracy can be established in real sense only by decentralization of power. After independence, Gandhiji made it clear that exploitation of villages is itself an organized violence, if we have to create Swaraj on the basis of non-violence, then the villages have to give their proper place. Therefore, Mahatma Gandhi emphasized the need to revive panchayats, Mahatma Gandhi's structure of Panchayati Raj is not a pyramid like modern states, but a oceanic circle, in which the individual holds an important position. Gandhiji wanted a fair distribution of political power through the Panchayati Raj.

Keywords: Panchayati raj, decentralization, democracy, bureaucracy, exploitation, violence, oceanic circle

Introduction

Preface

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. The source of the concept of Panchayati Raj is ancient Indian rule. In ancient India, power was in the hands of gram-panchayats. In Vedic period, not only from the village to the nation, but the governance of the world was based on the panchayat system. Gradually, the breakdown of the gram panchayat system started in the medieval period. The establishment of British rule in India marked the beginning of the erosion of the power of gram panchayats. The British gradually destroyed the identity of self-sufficient villages by destroying the panchayat, administration, industry, etc. of the villages. The British government exploited Indians and established a centralized power, which was repressive in form. After independence, Mahatma Gandhi emphasized the revival of panchayats, so that decentralization and democracy can be achieved in the real sense.

Decentralization of political power

Decentralization or decentralisation is the process by which the activities of an organization, particularly those regarding planning and decision making, are distributed or delegated away from a central, authoritative location or group. Political decentralization aims to give citizens or their elected representatives more power in public decision-making. It is often associated with the pluralistic politics and representative Government, but it can also support democratization by giving citizens, or their representatives, more influence in the formulation and implementation of policies. Gandhiji firmly believed that the basic ideals of democracy can be achieved only by decentralization of power. In his words, "If India has to develop its path towards non-violence, it will have to decentralize many things." According to Gandhiji, "I know that if the world is not saved today through India ^[1]." One has to live in the countryside, not in the huts, not the palaces. Many Arab men can never live in cities and palaces with happiness and peace ^[2]. "Gandhiji believed that if the village was destroyed, India would also be destroyed. For Gandhi, swaraj of the people meant the sum total of the swaraj (self-rule) of individuals and so he clarified that for him swaraj meant freedom for the meanest of his countrymen. In other words, swaraj is to be attained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority."

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Under the Gandhian conception of self-governing decentralization, the higher units of the government get their strength and power from the lower units. As a result, the panchayat has to be the basic unit of democratic devolution and the higher units will have to tender sound advice, give expert guidance and information, and co-ordinate the actions of the village panchayats with a view to increasing the efficiency and skill of administration and public service. These village panchayats have some imperative functions. The functions of the village panchayats would be very wide and comprehensive covering almost all aspects of social, economic and political life of the village community. Education, Recreation, Protection, Agriculture, Industries, Trade and Commerce, Sanitation and Medical Relief, Justice, Finance and Taxation these are the functions of the village panchayat. Therefore, Gandhi wants village panchayats to perform a variety of functions covering practically all aspects of the village welfare. Ahimsa, Satyagraha, Swaraj, Swadeshi, Sarvodaya all are the instrument to achieve decentralized political structure. Individual freedom and empowerment ensures in this decentralized democracy. In this society there is no place to hierarchy and any other variations. Gandhian conception politics of democratic decentralization is very much important and relevant to the present day situation of the political as well as social field for welfare of the world. Comparatively the concept of democracy is the best to governance, especially Gandhian model of decentralized democracy is very suitable to create equality and fraternity. So it is called democracy of with in democracy. The system of Panchayatiraj has extremely helped to implement successful democracy. This is giving great opportunity to villagers to participate decision making and governance process. Gandhi's concept of political decentralization not only helped to people in the field of politics and also helped to social and economic. This is the method of all round growth of the people. This is the Gandhian political ideal as based on ethical and spiritual grounds raising real democratic values. In the state of Gandhian enlightened anarchy, there is no place for injustice, immoral actions, any kind of variations based on caste or religion, possessions or non-possessions, sex etc. Equality and fraternity only remaining there and people are enjoying their life peacefully. Decentralisation of Political and economic power provides for the working of democracy based upon individual freedom and initiative, and for the individual being allowed to participate in the government of the country [7]. It would also regulate automatically both the production and the distribution of the commodities necessary to human life; and both the production and the consumption of these would be in the same locality rather than having production concentrated in particular area only, thus necessitating regulations for the distribution of products and wealth. Decentralisation would also bring about the regulation of the use of machinery.

Panchayati Raj

Mahatma Gandhi proposed the idea of 'Panchayati Raj' structure based on 'decentralization of power'. "The self-rule of my imagination will come when it is well settled in our mind that we have to achieve our self-rule only through true and pure means of non-violence, only by that we have to govern it and by them we will maintain it [3]." According to him, "According to him, every year a panchayat of five

people will be elected to run the village rule [4]." Goes here, life like the waves of the sea will be in the shape of circles one after the other and the person will be its midpoint [5]." So the structure of Gandhiji's Panchayati Raj is like the Oceanic circle, under which each circle of its power. Oceanic circle describes Gandhi's vision of social organization. Gandhi believed that for a non-violent society to achieve a lasting peace, it must be organized in a decentralized way. In Gandhi's own words:

"Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus, every village will be a republic or panchayat having full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world. It will be trained and prepared to perish in the attempt to defend itself against any onslaught from without. Thus, ultimately, it is the individual who is the unit. This does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbours or from the world. It will be free and voluntary play of mutual forces. Such a society is necessarily highly cultured in which every man and woman knows what he or she wants and what is more, knows that no one should want anything that others cannot 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 to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance, but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.

Therefore, the outermost circumference will not exercise power to crush the inner circle, but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it. I may be taunted with the retort that 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, though never realizable in its completeness. We must have a proper picture of what we want before we can have something approaching it. If there ever is to be a republic of every village in India, then I claim verity 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 [6]."

The experiment will not crush the inner circle but will empower them all and earn power from them. The villagers directly select the panches, the panch selects the district administrators and the district administrators select the provincial level individuals. The provincial level person selects the Central Legislative Assembly and the Central Legislative Assembly, the National Executive. He has given important place to the person. While the principle of bureaucracy is applicable, everyone has equal status from top to bottom under Gandhiji's Panchayati Raj. Decentralization signifies the devolution of powers and authority of governance of the Union Government and State Governments to the sub-state level organizations

Conclusion

Mahatma Gandhi strongly condemned the modern states. The structure of modern-day states is pyramidal, with the flow of political power from top to bottom. Political power

and bureaucracy are based on centralized power. In the Gandhian concept of a decentralized state, the structure of Panchayati Raj is not pyramidal, but the Oceanic Circle, in which the flow of political power has equal status from bottom to top and the individual, occupies an important position. In contrast, in the bureaucratic structure the principle of control of subordinate from top to bottom applies.

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