

Gandhi, Citizenship, and the Idea of a Good Civil Society

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ABSTRACT

The Gandhi' the man of action rather than the man of thought, the actor of real life, who attempted to the class conflicts of society by his own method. Gandhi meant to change the world as well as interpret it, and he did. His ideas of individual community relationship, concept of a civilized society, freedom and state individual relationship still has the relevance, particularly in today's diverse and complex world. He taught us the method of celebrating diversity in a uniform manner.

Keywords : Civilized Society, Freedom, Diversity, Philosopher

I. INTRODUCTION

Gandhi is the least understood philosopher and thinker of the modern world By being a man of action, he reacted with vigour to every critical situation of political, social, religious and cultural conflict during his time and tried successfully to resolve it by truthful and non-violent means. While civil society also works in conflict resolution. What is crucial to the notion of Civil Society is that families and individuals connect with others beyond homes and talk about matter of public relevance without the interference or sponsorship of the state. Here Gandhian notion of state follow the path of civil society because Gandhi sees state as the fool of violence and concern.

He was the man who believed in peaceful revolution "Gandhi was a revolutionary" it makes some dilemmas but if one studies about Gandhi and his action there

are a lot of his revolutionary ideas which led India on the path of liberations. The Masses began to enter in Indian Politics from the time Gandhi appeared on the political scene. He believed that no one can represent the masses unless he identifies himself with them.

Gandhi never explicitly talked about the civil society but implicitly it is mentioned in his action and thought, like his approach of conflict management or conflict resolution, theory of tolerance, solidarity, and establishment of Ashram society etc. Here, civil society insists that each leave room for the others. He treated ethics as the guiding star of all human behaviour, including politics, because his definition of 'Democracy' has a wider connotations like democracy is the art & science of mobilizing the entire physical, economic and spiritual resources of all the various sections of the people in the service of the common good of all.

Gandhi's achievements spanned an extraordinarily wide array of fields, even though to the outside world he is known principally as the chief architect of Indian independence and history's most creative theorist and practitioner of mass nonviolent resistance. In India, he is remembered for much else, from his ardent advocacy of Hindu-Muslim unity and what would today be called interfaith dialogue to his hard-fought campaigns for the abolition of untouchability and his stress on economic self-reliance. The history of Indian journalism, for example, would be woefully incomplete without an elaborate mention of the several newspapers that Gandhi founded and edited in his lifetime, and similarly his advocacy of vegetarianism, nature cure, and so-called alternative systems of medicine, for which he has been mocked by many of his contemporaries and other believers in modern science, now time: fortunately, however, it is neither my brief nor my ambition to catalog Gandhi's achievements. Even the word 'achievement', howsoever amplified it may be by sumptuous descriptions, seems to be too small a word to convey the epic contours of his life.

I have spoken of Gandhi's relationship to the law because it furnishes the first clues we require in order to unravel Gandhi's conception of citizenship and his idea of a good civil society. Several years ago, when I sought to understand the myriad ways in which Gandhi lived a life of remarkable ecological awareness, I also discovered that the word 'ecology' is not at all encountered in his writings. There were no national parks in India as such in Gandhi's time, and the modern environmental movements were nowhere on the horizon, but nonetheless it is true that Gandhi has been the inspiration behind many of the principal ecological movements of our times, from Chipko to the Narmada Bachao Andolan. Similarly, Gandhi did not often speak of citizenship, but that is not surprising considering that the discourse of citizenship is comparatively recent to our times.

The idea of the 'rights Vinay Lal, "Gandhi, Citizenship, and the Idea of a Good Civil Society", p. 6 of the citizen' received full expression in the French Revolution of 1789, but in a colonial state there are few, if any, citizens. Following the Indian Rebellion of 1857-58, the British and Indians alike became subjects of Victoria, though as subjects they had vastly differing rights. As subjects of Victoria, and of her successors, the British in India could claim certain rights as citizens within the Empire; Indians, on the other hand, had only the right to petition the Queen, though the vast majority of them would not have known how to exercise this right to seek more rights.

Let me turn first to Gandhi's conception of duty and how he brought it into play with the idea of rights. Though the notion of rights and duties might seem to bear a symbiotic relationship to each other, it is, in my view, an indubitable fact that the two have seldom been brought into conversation with each other, and seldom have they been the subjects of conjoined political inquiry. If you look, for example, at the question of rights and duties in relation to the sexes, it is transparently clear that women were almost never seen as the bearers of rights and privileges but rather were saddled with duties. Before the revolutions of the late 18th century, which began to stress (in the words of Thomas Paine's political tract) the 'rights of man', the conception of duties would have weighed most heavily with social commentators. I am mindful of the fact that political philosophers since the 17th century had begun to weigh the rights of individuals against the state, but it required the revolutions of the 18th century to eventually make the discourse of rights into a widely shared discourse of civil society. Thereafter, over a long period of time, as anti-colonial struggles developed around the world, and there was the political awakening of the masses and the working classes in the industrialized nations, the notion of rights began to hold sway over the imagination of common people. At this present juncture, I would

urge you to reflect upon the fact that the language of 'duty' has almost entirely disappeared from our political vocabulary. Indeed, in a world where identity politics thrives on its insistence of rights for distinct political, ethnic, racial, linguistic, or religious groups, the very notion of duties has been rendered obsolete.

Finally, to gauge just how radical Gandhi was in his thinking and practice of ideas, let me suggest to you that he had in mind a vastly different relationship of the local to the global than has so far been envisioned by anyone. You may recall that during the 1960s, an idea supposedly appropriated from Gandhi began to circulate very widely in activist and dissenting circles. The slogan that became current then was, 'Think globally, act locally.'

The idea of cosmopolitanism attributed to Gandhi was that one should think about the whole world but should confine one's political activism to the local area where one can be most effective. It is my submission to you that Gandhi had in mind the inverse of what has been imagined: he would have said 'think locally, act globally'. This thought appears to be both counter-intuitive and contradictory of Gandhi's practices: after all, he counseled people to engage in those struggles that were in their proximity or held the most meaning for them. I would urge for your consideration the thought that nearly our entire conceptual frameworks of knowledge have been borrowed from the West, and though Gandhi was neither parochial nor a nativist, he did not think it possible that the emancipation of a people is possible if they are living someone else's history. At the same time, he was catholic enough in his tastes to recognize that good thoughts emanate from everywhere, and that freedom is indivisible: one cannot be free if others are enslaved. Therefore, the 'citizen of the world', if we are to at all use that phrase, takes the entire world as the canvas of his or her action. This is how we are to understand his implicit injunction to 'think locally, act globally'. The 'citizen

of the world' accepts that every struggle around the world is his or her own struggle; similarly, though one should open oneself up to thoughts from around the world, Gandhi was also quite certain that those relying on the conceptual and intellectual frameworks of others are living on borrowed time. There is, as Gandhi was fully aware, no more profound colonialism than the colonialism of the mind. Gandhi commenced this struggle against colonialism over a century ago, and as the present history of India suggests, the greater part of this struggle remains today. It is this struggle that we must all join.

II. REFERENCES

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