

Beyond parties with in Democracy: Movement for Party less Democracy

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India is an ancient civilization which has given many things to the world and has also been a homeland of various culture and religion. India is an old civilization which had some kind of politics and has a history of democratic republics. Ancient Indian democracy was exercised directly by the people of the country. This historical experience of India with democracy of a certain form might also have helped India to adopt a parliamentary democracy after independence. However the kind of democratic republic envisioned by Gandhi was far more different from what Indian constituent assembly chooses for itself. This form of democracy unlike direct democracy has representation as a category for participation, which rests on the principle that people can choose for themselves who they want to make laws for them and from whom they want to be governed. This conception of representation and governance from some other has come to India through its colonial experience with the British. Since Indians had a recent example of the kind of representational democracy practiced in Britain and Europe, Indians also decided to go for this kind of parliamentary representative democracy. This paper would argue about the theoretical underpinnings of such a system and further would problematize this model of democracy which essentially depends on parties to run government and hence limits human choice and constraints human agency. It not only restrains but rather corrodes human capacity of self governance and actually turns them into subjects who are meant to be governed. Hence this paper would explore ideas of two leading thinkers of modern India i.e. Gandhi and Jayprakash Naryan to make a case for party less democracy which not only make people free of constraints but will also let people govern themselves independently.

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What is wrong with Parliamentary Democracy?

The present forms of parliamentary democracy have some foundational flaws in it. It is based on a particular moral understanding of human nature and society. It is based on an understanding of an atomized society where individuals are like atoms and collectives of whom form a society. These individuals are also taken as equally free moral being viz. generally not the case especially in a country like India where individuals are deeply embedded in their social location and continuously acts under domination on their individuality, so an individual is never an individual in the real sense. Beside this basic assumption the foundation of such kind of democracy lies on a selfish understanding of human nature who is engaged in his/her selfish motives and working for securing one's life and one's right before others. It is natural then to assume that any kind of institution or structure that develops from these premises would be based on maintaining these innate assumed qualities of human beings. So in parliamentary democracies it is always natural and legal freedom (in reality which means people may be un-free or dominated) of individual that become the matter of supremacy. This is further extended in aspects of representation that these legally free individuals can actually choose whom they want to be their representatives in the institutions of democracy. This is what the basic assumption behind the idea of one man one vote. Although the issue of freedom of individual is important but an individual is never an individual in itself, he/she is always part of the larger community and hence bears certain responsibility as part of the collective so what Michael sandel called "an unencumbered self" (Sandel 1984). But the present form of democracy nor held individual responsible for the larger part of the society neither makes an individual really free to perform its function independently.

"The fundamental defect from which arise other serious defects is that this form of democracy is based on the vote of the individual". (Bhattacharjea 2002)

Besides this there are other serious fundamental errors upon which rests the paraphernalia of the parliamentary democracy, the organization of the present democracy is on the principle of greatest happiness of the greatest number which means that persons or parties that got the highest number of vote in an election actually get a chance to form government. This principle of democracy further gets complicated when actually in the name of majority and popular will it is literally the

minority that forms the government. A country like India which has a large number of parties to fight in general election actually leads to the formation of governments by small majority of population. Which means even if the principle of representation and for the formation of government has to be by a brute majority in actual process it turns out that only those who are relatively in majority get a chance of representation and hence to form government. Here lies the another flaw of the system that it is never ever based on a popular will as parties fragments masses into competitive lots. So it is not only the threat of tyranny of majority but actually the tyranny of relative majority which this system breeds. This system of getting a relative majority further deceives voters by manipulating their choice and by limiting voters' choices by the different parties. Since all the parties now wants majority to form government they involve themselves in different activities too change voter preferences and to lure voters into their plank. This is often done by the parties through various tactics like giving money to the people, by booth capturing, by forcefully making people vote or through advertising.

Further another most serious fault of the parliamentary democracy from the view of democracy is its tendency towards centralization. By making people dependent on representative it actually takes of our capacity to rule ourselves. Hence every now and then people look for the help from above even for the matters which could easily be resolved by them sitting in the community. So there are two issues that are involved here one is the unnecessary distinction between the subject and the sovereign. Given the fact that every individual is sovereign or has the capacity to be sovereign, the idea of representation by some other actually rob off our imagination of being rule ourselves. Related with this issue is the matter of centralization of power. By creating a category of representation and by making individual incapable of self rule parliamentary democracy by virtue of representative and the elected rulers orients the polity towards centre and concentrates power in the hands of few. So it actually becomes the rule by an oligarchy who is regularly elected in a due time. This centralization of power further gets reflected in the making of mega institutions of democracy like national institutions and national bodies that look after the state and the local bodies. So now for any matter at the local level it is the national (centre) which has to give orders to the local. This structuring of the polity actually reverses the order of power from above to below where power is expected to flow from the centre to the locals, whereas naturally

in a direct democracy it should be below to above where power should flow from below to above.

Since now election become an important tool to get power in a democracy so it becomes an arena of contestation and competition among the individual and parties which claims to represent the voters. So now parties and individuals fight election to represent the masses but actually they never fight it to represent rather they do so for the gain of power. So elections only become an affair of the powerful to get more power, election in a democracy is no more a weapon of the weak i.e. ruled, election as a process of selection is actually a process that involves violence, since one would always try to win and to win one would always try to suppress the difference by the methods of suppression or would eventually try to get more and more support by mobilizing people against the difference. So election as a process is quite violent and is always a game of power and manipulation by the few of the larger masses.

What role do parties play in election?

Actually a party does nothing more than playing this power game more shrewdly and in more organized form, a party fight in election to get himself elected to the seat of power by putting more winnable candidates from its plank. So eventually parties also indulge in the same cut throat competition, manipulation and all other violent activities to get hold of power, and once they are elected to the seat of power they immediately turn the general will into the party whip. So every decision that a party takes after coming to power in the name of those whom they represent are actually partisan and taken to further their base and to lure more voters into their plank in the next election. So it becomes a vicious circle in which an individual got trapped, he really do not have any choice in the system just to elect on a hope that the next government viz. no one but the other party, would do something for the people. But in the end voters found them back in the same situation of being deceived and dejected.

Further is the disabling de-politicizing effect that parties produce on voters, the exhibition of mindless violence by the parties in election actually put people in fear and generates distrust in the system. Further this distrust in the system makes people disinterested in politics as an activity essential for human being. The projection of politics through election disperses a negative view of politics which is actually meant only for the manipulators and powerful. Hence a general disinterest occurs in the system which philosophers like Habermas have referred to as "civil privatism" which he actually perceived of emerging from the

economic crisis which further brings legitimation crisis to the state. Though Habermas locates the cause in the nature of the economy I think the cause also lies in nature and the kind of polity developed on liberal foundations on the category of representation.

Towards a non- violent and self organized democracy:

This present form of democracy which is based on violence and non-truth needs a reconstruction or rather a revision on the lines where the people are not only treated as sovereign but actually made capable of ruling themselves. Ideas for such kind of democracy are prevalent in Gandhi's thought further elaborated by Jayprakash narayan and Vinobha bhava. Although there is a bit of difference in their thoughts on the methods for bringing this kind of democracy, there is a common threading in all three of them viz. a concern for all human beings and the rise of all 'Sarvodya'. Gandhi first spoke about this idea taking idea from a paper on economics by John Ruskin and titled as 'Unto this last'. This essay had a powerful influence on Gandhi's thought and basically could be said to be the foundation stone of the democracy which I propose to bring to your concern here.

This kind of democracy will not only upturn the political system of the present kind but would simultaneously require changes in the nature of the economy, institutions, attitude towards politics and more fundamentally it would require a bigger change in the hearts, soul and mind of the people. This democracy first of all expects the need of politics for people not for the State. Politics will only be required for a betterment of the all concerned. The nature of the economy has to undergo a radical change, it has to become localized and the technology would have to be used for bringing self sufficiency in the country. Production for benefit could only be allowed in such a society if it helps to further people making self sufficient. Gandhiji was strictly against the use for technology and modern industries because it all gets engaged in mass production for profit. So on the one hand there is a mass production on the other hand there remains lies great deprivation, nakedness and hunger. If the nature of the economy and technology is changed and it is utilized to produce for the masses it would solve many problems and this could only happen when the politics become localized.

When the politics would become localized it would become healthy and non violent as it would have direct participation of people. So big institutions of representation would be transformed and would be devoid of powers relating to the local issues. The orientation of politics

would become from below to above. In the most local unit there would not be leaders every person would be a leader and would have due consideration in politics. Decisions would be taken collectively towards the promotion of self sufficiency, work would be performed cooperatively and the fruits of cooperation would also be served aptly. There would be no concentration of power in the hands of few; all will have the power and the voice to say and to get heard. This sharing of power or rather diffusion of power within a micro polity will make people do things cooperatively for the benefit of one and all. Selfish interest of each would be coupled and will be depended on others in a manner that the individual freedom would be upheld with the pursuit of common good. These small republics would be cornerstone of freedom and cooperation emphatically pursued together. However this should not be taken as if majority would guide individuals and override individual freedom in such democracy. Freedom to be different and views of the minorities would be respected and there will a mutual tolerance of each other's views. So Gandhiji would repeatedly say in his writings

"Democracy is not a state in which people act like sheep. Under democracy, individual liberty of opinion and action I jealously guarded. I, therefore, believe that the minority has a perfect right to act differently from the majority." (YI, 2-3-1922, p. 129)

So democracy would be founded on the values invoked by Gandhiji in his various writings. These would be non-violence, truth, cooperation, love, mutual tolerance and much more on a belief of developing and making individuals' capable self ruler. This would involve a continuous self development towards becoming self ruler.

Institutional structure of Partyless Democracy

As already said above the institutions of a partyless democracy would be small and self serving. However in this section I would make an effort for giving a clearer image of the institutional design of a partyless democracy. Like the philosophical base of this democracy, ideas for institutional design are also laden by Gandhiji. His idea of making non violent democracy considers villages as building blocks. It is the idea of village republics or "gram swaraj" that is envisioned by Gandhi ji. He believed that a good life and a life of perfect freedom can only be enjoyed in a village which has a simple lifestyle, since democracy stands for freedom and self rule it can only be made possible by making villages as independent self-sufficient units independent even from the neighbor except in areas of necessity. Villages following swaraj will grow their

own crops for themselves, will keep cattle for milk, will make education compulsory till a basic course; it would grow cotton for its own need of cloth and will have cottage industries. The village will have theatre, its playground and a common place for meetings, people would regard each other as equals as also evident in Gandhiji's thought

"If we would see our dream of Panchayat Raj, i.e., true democracy realized, we would regard the humblest and lowest Indian as being equally the ruler of India with the tallest in the land. This presupposes that all are pure or will become pure if they are not. And purity must go hand-in-hand with wisdom. No one would then harbor any distinction between community, caste and out-caste everybody would regard all as equal with one and hold them together in the silken net of love. No one would regard another as untouchable." (Narayan 1968)

Although it is not that there would be no government in the village as such, Gandhi has spoken on the village government as well. The government of the village will have to be elected annually by adult male and female villagers. This government will be constitutive of five people who will possess some qualifications and a vision and love for the village. Although they would possess powers but these will never be abused as there would be check and balances from other ruled. The work of this government would be to look after the issues of the village and to work constructively to turn village into complete independent, self ruling, self sufficient village. Although this idea of having a village government is antithetical to the idea of swaraj but I suppose that this government would be a transient one which will wither away after people achieved complete capability of ruling them.

Further on relation of this self-sufficient village with other villages Gandhi chalked out an idea of oceanic circles which will be formed by keeping individual at the centre. In this setup the innumerable villages will be like oceanic circle where each will be circled by another ring which is further encircled by another ring. This is the image which Gandhi sees of the world as well. Here the individual is seen as supreme but a part of community, village, region, nation and the world in such a manner that all these structures above the individual do not take away human freedom and agency to rule them.

Conclusion

As has already been discussed at length, the foundation of true democracy is individual and its freedom. A true democracy should stand

for making people capable of ruling themselves with their choice. But as we have also seen the present form of democracy not only constraint our choice in terms of choosing the ruler but also renders us incapable of imagining a situation of self rule. The movement for partyless democracy was the only effort made by Jayprakash to make us realize the value of our freedom and our lost capacity of self-rule. The ideas of Gandhi and Jayprakash are important source that make us realize the importance of citizen and subject and how citizen are to be essentially self governing individuals. Their ideas remain important to prepare ground for more substantive democracy, where people realize that they can rule themselves with their own capacity.

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