

ANALYZING THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE INDIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT

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Abstract

While examining the Indian national movement, it is significant to understand its characteristics in terms of its ideas, charismatic leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and the framework of the colonial state marked by manipulations and machinations. The rise of national consciousness awakened the Indian masses to their exclusion from any share in the government of their land. The Indian national movement was wide in scope and comprised of heterogeneous protesting groups. Several movements such as the movement of Indian women's empowerment were nurtured by the churnings of the Indian national movement. The Indian national movement gained momentum with Mahatma Gandhi assuming its leadership. It was his moral analysis that gave a firm foundation to his political aims and programmes. Mahatma Gandhi's world views were normative and his role seems much wider as the emancipator of mankind as a whole. His principle of satya(truth), ahima(non violence), self restraint and community welfare served as an emancipating force. His gospel of passive resistance lent a force of morality to the Indian national movement. In present times too, the world needs to be a disciple of moral philosophy preached by Mahatma Gandhi.

Keywords

Indian national movement, Ideology, Mahatma Gandhi, Masses, Passive resistance, Moral philosophy.

Introduction

To understand the Indian national movement, it is significant to understand the meaning of the term and what constitutes a movement. Ideology and ideological beliefs constitute significantly towards the emergence of a movement. People may join a movement, not because they have rationally balanced the selective rewards that participation may bring them, as against the collective rewards that they can reap by letting someone else do it; people may join a movement because they feel ideologically compelled to changing society. Ideas are a critical resource not only for emergence of a movement, but also for its growth and success. The transformation of public consciousness is crucial for the dual goals of moving the state and altering society. One of the main tasks of a movement is to develop and disseminate ideas that challenge the status quo and suggest more satisfying alternatives. There need not be a fully developed ideology that comprehensively analyzes society's problems and gives specific, detailed guidelines for action, although this, and the charismatic leadership that sometimes accompanies it, may be the best mobilizers of movements. The national movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi is the best example of the same. The belief may instead be a more vague sense that a wrong needs to be highlighted and corrected.¹

The British held India more by bluff than force. Law too was utilized by the colonial state as a coercive force to help secure order and restructure social relations to suit the British interests. The manipulations and machinations of colonialism were justified by the process often referred to as the civilizing mission or the white man's burden to civilize the backward or more crudely put the barbarians. This mission was legitimized by imported western law so that traditional customs and rules would be replaced with those assumed to be more civilized. The style of government prevailing in British India can be characterized as occidental despotism. Rampant economic exploitation of India is evident from fact that it emerged as the largest source of tribute for the British empire after the decline of the Caribbean plantations. The colonial government's economic policies were dictated by the requirements of Britain which used the administrative and military set up in India and in other parts of Asia at India's cost to control India and other British possessions in Asia.² Colonial administrators claimed to have instituted a regime of law and order in the country, but the law was what has been appropriately styled as the law of emergency.³

The Indian national movement gained sustenance with the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi assuming its leadership. His moral analysis gave a solid foundation to his political aims and programmes. As for example, Mahatma Gandhi's definition of civilization was pure and simple: "civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty." Within this definition, the path of duty which one is expected to follow is certainly the moral path which is not possible without some control over one's senses which constitutes a vital element of the Indian civilization.

Mahatma Gandhi's belief in Indian civilization is evident in the following quote:

"I believe that the civilization India evolved in not to be beaten in the world. Nothing can equal the seeds sown by our ancestors, Rome went, Greece shared the same fate; the might of the pharaohs was broken; Japan became westernized; of China nothing can be said; but India is still, somehow or other, sound at the foundation."

The rise and growth of national consciousness paved the way towards political agitation for self-government in India. This process made the Indian masses conscious of their exclusion by the British law from any share in the government of their land.⁴ The nationalist movement after 1917 is characterized by a widening of its scope to include heterogeneous actors of protests such as the workers on plantations and in textile mills, as well as wives of male workers, widows, and deserted women were among the female force. It is pertinent that from the early 1920s the ideas of emancipation that were emerging stressed not so much on sacrifice and service but on self-rule and strength. To substantiate with an example, the demand for votes for women was made on the notion of social equality and insisted on woman's right to participate equally in the process of government. The movement of women's empowerment in India was nurtured by the social and political churning caused by the national movement.

'Swaraj' or 'self rule', is beautifully elaborated by Mahatma Gandhiji and needs to be mentioned here. It should be imbibed by the future generations as well. Mahatma Gandhi's conception of 'Swaraj' is significant as it was the first time in history that a mass orientation has been given to the understanding of freedom. The mere transfer of power from one ruler to another did not satisfy him. The freedom Mahatma Gandhi conceived in terms of attainment of 'Swaraj' was not merely the absence of bondage but was accompanied by economic freedom. Mahatma Gandhi was well acquainted with the economic condition of India and the adverse impact on its economy caused by the British. He read Rudra Dutta's book, 'Economic History of India' and began to deeply understand the economic drain by Britain. Mahatma Gandhi comprehended that even the politically free nations were not free in the real sense as power did not belong to the masses. It is pertinent to understand that the politics that Mahatma Gandhi professed was not power oriented. For him, power was a means to enable

people better their condition in every aspect of life. The primary facet of his concept of 'Swaraj' was that power must belong to the people. For him, 'masses' was not an abstract concept but represented true India.

Mahatma Gandhi understood that India being predominantly an agricultural country, the toiling Indian peasants comprised the country's life line. It was for this toiling humanity that Mahatma Gandhi wanted freedom in political, economic and social terms as well. Thus his conception of Swaraj was based on his personal encounter with reality.⁵

The concept is explained well in the following words :

"By Swaraj I mean the government of India by the consent of the people by the largest number of the adult population, male or female, native born or domiciled, who have contributed by manual labour to the service of the state and who have taken the trouble of having registered their names as voters....Real Swaraj will come not by the acquisition of capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused. In other words, Swaraj is to be obtained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority."⁶

Though, Mahatma Gandhi has been looked upon as the leader of Indian national movement, however his role seems much wider as an emancipator of mankind as a whole. Mahatma Gandhi's world view is normative and value centric containing elements of historical and cosmological evolution. In his vivid writings, it comes out clearly that Mahatma Gandhi mastered the art of expostulating world events but deduced the knowledge to comprehending the normative constitution of human beings. He made a psychological analysis of collective human behavior, its downside and resurgence. This is why he was successful in inspiring mass movements with wide participation. Attaching utmost importance to the conscience of a man, he was well versed with the perennial conflicts going on inside a man's interior, his instincts, his weaknesses and thus exhorted every individual to take a journey inwards. True to the title of Leo Tolstoy's book, 'The Kingdom of God Is Within You', Mahatma Gandhi's whole life was an attempt in realizing this kingdom and inspiring mankind to make similar efforts.⁷

Mahatma Gandhi's gospel of passive resistance which gave strength to his political movements is characterized as a force of morality from within for which one requires to be strong enough with one's true consciousness and therefore is a tool of bravery. As passive resistance does not use any form of resistance in the shape of physical force, it is in line with the Buddhist philosophy of 'Ahimsa' or non violence which was a cardinal principle of Mahatma Gandhi and was firmly adhered to in all his movements. Mahatma Gandhi himself describes passive resistance in a short story in his writing Hind Swaraj as follows:

"In a small principality of India, the villagers were offended by some command issued by the prince. The villagers had no choice before the prince. But they were brave enough and aware of the powerful effect of passive resistance. They said no wrong word against their prince nor did they do any harm to anybody. They immediately adopted passive resistance and began vacating the village. The prince became nervous, apologized to his subjects and withdrew his command."⁸

The fact that Mahatma Gandhi was a major driving force in India can be well understood by the emergence of what is referred to as Gandhian consciousness which manifested itself in all realms - socially, culturally and of course politically. Thus, Mahatma Gandhi was not just a patriot, politician and nation builder but a formidable moral force whose appeal was to the conscience of man. Mahatma Gandhi's gospels created a 'spirit of sacrifice' among the masses. The Gandhian principles such as *satya*(truth), *ahimsa*(non violence),and self-

restraint served as an emancipating force. These ideas also significantly impacted the literary practices of the colonial era. While, the British endorsed the ideas of colonial masculinity and aligned their courageous dominion over India with masculine power, Mahatma Gandhi based the Indian resistance against the colonial rule on the power of feminine virtues such as purity, tolerance, self-control, and spiritual strength. Therefore, Mahatma Gandhi countered European ideology by feminizing politics, thereby defeating west's stereotype of masculine power.

Some scholars claims that the male conception of the world impacted the Orientalist discourse by making it "static, frozen and fixed eternally." Thus, the Orient—like a woman to a man —has been perceived as a weak and inferior partner.⁹

There is an assertion that Mahatma Gandhi denounced "all the material as well as political rewards of the modern civilization and the modern state"¹⁰. Mahatma Gandhi's answer to the European materialism was the spirituality of Indians which was located in the ancient past. Therefore, the discourses of Indian nationalism emerged from the mythical and religious connotations of India's past. The national identity was determined by shared beliefs wetted in antiquity and common ancestry which helped in evoking national solidarity and communal consciousness. This process was achieved by the wide translation of the ancient canonical Hindu scriptures, circulated by the Orientalist scholars culminating in a heightened sense of nationalism. As for example, Aurobindo's introductory remark in his book *Kalidasa*; glorifies Hinduism as "noble, forbearing and gentle" thereby emphasizing on the superiority of the Indian way of life by contrasting it with the European civilization.¹¹

Gandhian hermeneutics points out to the wisdom derived by Mahatma Gandhi from Indian philosophy. It is significant to understand Gandhian philosophy for ushering in a just and humane social and economic order both nationally as well as internationally. The philosophy of Satyagraha remains one of the most potent tools employed in freedom struggles the world over. Mahatma Gandhi has inspired leaders undertaking civil and human rights movements across the globe such as Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Dalai Lama, Aung San Suu Kyi among others.

Mahatma Gandhi throughout his life, performed several experiments to have restrain (sayam) and control over his desires. Somewhere in these experiments of restrain lies the solution to present problems of the world. The world needs to be a disciple of moral philosophy which envisages interface between education, medicine and planning. The urge for materialism needs to be resisted and the emphasis on interdependence and coexistence needs to be strengthened.

The epistemology of crisis is best understood by the theology of experience. Ancient Indian philosophy provides the necessary spiritual sustenance to tide over any form of crisis as for example the philosophy inscribed in Upanishads seeks happiness and wellbeing as the ultimate goal. The ancient philosophical thought is 'dialogical' and refers to war itself as a religious and cultural activity. No other civilization has such a wonderful way to alleviate the sufferings of the past as is referred to in the aesthetics of resolution in the Indian sutra tradition. Delving deep into the past, it is observed that the ancient civilizations emphasized on 'cosmic order' which bred fatalism and helplessness with man's energies being focused on dominating the power

structures. In the medieval times, the monarchs were attributed with divine powers. Marc Bloch refers to the royal touch or the king's touch which was a form of laying out of hands whereby the English and French monarchs touched their subjects regardless of their social status to cure them of various diseased conditions. Bloch also brings out the hiatus between agrarian and industrial societies as follows, "successive technological revolutions have immeasurably widened the psychological gap between generations. With some reasons, perhaps, the man of the age of electricity and the airplane feels himself removed from his masters."¹²

The civilization that India represents is best explained in the following words of Mark Twain "India is the cradle of the human race, the birthplace of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of tradition. Our most valuable and most instructive materials in the history of man are treasured up in India only."

The genesis of all this development lies in the Indian national movement. It is within the context of a successful movement that participants gain access to decision making, personal autonomy and a growing self esteem.¹³

Thus, the Indian national movement was a soulful journey towards ethical and moral accomplishments apart from realizing its political goal.

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