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DEMOCRACY, STATE AND GANDHI-AMBEDKAR DEBATE OVER POLITICAL ORDER IN INDIA

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The Gandhian and the Ambedkarian perspective represent two divergent and opposite approaches to the issue of the establishment of political order. They provide conceptual as well as moral philosophical foundations to the argument of what constitutes the ideal though workable political order in India. Both are absolutely committed to the idea of democracy and therefore their approach to the question of State, Stateness and State as the collective repository of the collective sovereign power of its constituent element- the people. These two divergent and opposing perspectives are a critique to each other as well as enrich the argument at the deepest levels of the divergent perspectives on the ordering of the political society. Gandhi and Ambedkar provide more innovative tools of analysis of political arrangements and the application of conceptual categories. Both the perspectives are limited by the criticism of the other and provide an open ended framework of taking the argument further in a contextualized condition. In that they rely upon both the social and the epistemological in a context centric Universalist argument thereby providing a very original contribution to the body of political philosophy.

Introduction

The political debate of the 20th century India apart from the freedom movement that we see against the British colonial rule is also a struggle to understand and formulate the political order of Independent India. Much of the ideas relating to the political future of India as well as the kind of polity that it would like to be was debated during this period including the issues that were the bone of contention like those of the very structure of the state and representation, the structure of the federation, the issues pertaining to the polity those of caste and untouchability, communalism and communal nationalism, the majority and minority, the structure of rights, rule of law, constitutionalism etc. Given the heterogeneity of the social and political lineages there emerged equally heterogenous voices and ideologies during that period that ranged from the extreme left to the extreme right; from anarchist to statist etc. Thus we see the emergence of communal nationalism, left marxist/communist ideological politics, with the emergence of Gandhi a brand of Gandhian ideology to started taking shape, the anti-caste politics in the leadership of Ambedkar and Periar, various shades of Socialism those of Nehru, Lohia and J.P Narayan and so on. However, the lasting effect on the Indian political ideas as well as the formulation of the political society with its conceptual framework had been to my mind that of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi who spear headed the national movement for independence and saw its culmination in independent India and Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar who championed the freedom movement of the lowest of the castes in India and later spearheaded the making of the Indian Constitution in Independent India crystallizing the very core values and foundational ideas which constitute India.

The Gandhian and the Ambedkarian perspective represent two divergent and opposite approaches to the issue of the establishment of political order. They provide conceptual as well as moral philosophical foundations to the argument of what constitutes the ideal though workable political order in India. Both are absolutely committed to the idea of democracy and therefore their approach to the question of State, Stateness and State as the collective repository of the collective sovereign power of its constituent element- the people. On the one hand Gandhi sees state as a modern construction inherently as a instrument of violence whose power naturally flows from the sovereign powers of the people which gets concentrated in this abstract entity. He sees state from the conceptual domain of freedom and therefore his understanding of democracy is contained within the conceptual domain of the idea of freedom. State is an instrument of curtailment of freedom through its capacity to influence violence. Violence which Gandhi understands as the arbitrary imposition of ones will over the other in this case by the state over the people and hence State is antithetical to liberty and hence the idea of democracy. To the best Gandhi is willing to provide a concession to this thought with the idea of minimum government and even governance.

Contrary to Gandhi, Ambedkar locates the

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argument in the necessity of the state. State to him is the only instrument which is a personal in its nature and character and therefore can be the only best bet to bring in the required changes in the Indian society which he considers is archaic and traditional based upon the notions of inequality and exploitation. He locates the conceptual domain of equal liberties as foundational for the idea of democracy. Indian society he argues is extremely undemocratic in its nature and character and therefore change can only be possible within this society through an intervention of the state. State has according to Ambedkar the obligation of justice to perform. State is thus an instrument of justice despite the fact that it is the instrument of collective power. Ambedkar's formulation of the positive notion of the state in the performance of justice obligations, the framework of fundamental rights of the citizens of the citizens as claims against the state in case of violations and the establishment of a competitive civil society through the notions of elected governments and the notion of rule of law through adult franchise is the framework in which he also sees the checks over the powers and the capacity to commit violence by the state.

These two divergent and opposing perspectives are a critique to each other as well as enrich the argument at the deepest levels of the divergent perspectives on the ordering of the political society. Gandhi and Ambedkar provide more innovative tools of analysis of political arrangements and the application of conceptual categories. Both the perspectives are limited by the criticism of the other and provide an open ended framework of taking the argument further in a contextualized condition. In that they rely upon both the social and the epistemological in a context centric Universalist argument thereby providing a very original contribution to the body of political philosophy.

Gandhi, Democracy and the State

To Gandhi Democracy has a deeper meaning to what appears apparent in the western conceptual debate. In the west the idea of democracy is about the way the government has to be formed. That means, the political order established in the form of the State has to be functioned through the body of executives that will be primarily elected by the people. The people will have the right and the choice to choose their government which is going to govern them. Gandhi however moves beyond the argument of this apparent instrumental and technical view of democracy and has a deeper understanding which cannot be represented within the lexicon of the conceptual domain of 'democracy' a product of the thinking of the west. Gandhi's ideas can be located within his own conceptual ecology of nonviolence, satyagraha, and Swaraj. Akil Bilgrami, while writing on Gandhi as a political philosopher maintains that the concept of Non-violence is central to Gandhi's nationalist mobalization agaist the british rule deeply seated within the religious temperament which he builds as an argument and a critique of the western enlightenment and the idea of modernity.[1] To Gandhi the goal of human life is the attainment of truth. However, the very idea of the attainment of truth is a personal experiential phenomena which cannot be equated, compared and substituted by the other. The individual is the sole master of his own truth. Yet, he also maintains that one cannot be sure of the attainment of truth and therefore since one is at the first place not sure of his own truth cannot impose his ideas on the other, and at the second level even if one is sure of the attainment of truth still it is his own truth and not the truth of the other and hence even in this sense he cannot impose his idea of truth on the other.. Imposition of ones view over the other is sinful. What therefore implicit in this argument is that the idea of truth carries the idea that restricts and constrains human action over the other. The imposition of ones conception of truth over the other is eventually a form of violence of one over the other and especially if enforced through the apparatus of state.[2]

Thus, the Gandhian notion of democracy is deeply rooted in his ideas of non-violence and truth which he sees as the ultimate aim of the human political and social life. Truth is a subjective notion which is reduced to the individual level. Any claim to truth can only be at the individual level and therefore restricted by its own experience. Thus the situation of the truth claim within the atomic domain of an individual only restricts in Gandhian sense the imposition of it on the other thereby making every individual the absolute owner of his/her experience, absolutely entitled to speak for herself/himself to which no other has legitimate claim and hence any question of imposition leading to the condition of conflict or violence. By making the truth claim and right to speak for oneself only as a precondition Gandhi takes the argument of democratic practice to the core of the subjective lives of individuals which breeds not of universal claims to truth and knowledge but which are endlessly plural and diversified by the individual experiences and life conditions. It is within this context that Gandhi problematizes the western notion of universal claim to knowledge and truth and the subsequent violence it can impose upon innumerable masses.

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To Gandhi, truth is a moral notion, it cannot be divorced from the conception of ones notions of what is right or good or wrong or bad. It is not a cognitive notion which is external to the self and can be known objectively despite any experience of the phenomena. It is experiential as it is deeply entrenched within our own moral understandings of the things. The entrenchment of the notion of truth within the individual's moral understanding brings the diversity of claims whatever that might be, but however, is legitimate to the experience of an individual. Truth therefore is not a description of the world and cannot be situated or seeked in the intellectual understanding of the world out of our moral understanding.[3]

Thus Gandhi's understanding of democracy is not just the will to elect a government but on the contrary it is a deep understanding of the freedom of an individual. The freedom of an individual is constrained by the so called will of the government, which in his understanding is the exercise of violence over the people. Thus, the Gandhian schema is to return to the individual the sovereignty that it has unrestrained by the notion of the state but guided by the notions of non-violence and truth. It is within this that the notions of self government and self sustenance of a society is located.

Non-cooperation and Swaraj

To Gandhi Non-cooperation is a protest against the unwitting and unwilling participation in evil. This unwillingness in the 'participation in the evil' is the unwillingness to participate in the process of the British state. The experience of the British state as a modern means of governing the mass and the establishment of a political order to Gandhi is full of violence and injustices. It debases men, their honour, and their ability to stand for their own. It robs the individual of their agency to decide for themselves guided by their moral understandings and therefore become the cognitive slave of the idea of the modern State. Gandhi while responding to Tagore's concerns over the idea of non-cooperation writes in regards to the colonialist compulsory system of cooperation (the government which imposes its will upon its people through law which it claims to be the will of the people) against one sided combination, against the armed imposition of modern methods of exploitation masquerading under the name of civilization. To him the government builds its reputation upon the voluntary association of the governed. The nations non-cooperation is an invitation to the government to cooperate with it on its own terms as is every nation's right and every good government's duty...the nation has taken a harmless, natural and religious doctrine of non-cooperation in the place of the unnatural and irreligious doctrine of violence..... If India is ever to attain Swaraj she will do so only by non-violent non-cooperation [4]. To Gandhi, Independence must mean that of the people of India....Independence therefore must begin at the bottom. It is here that Gandhi places the importance of village republics in his schema of the political organization. He envisages that every village must be an independent village where individual perform their functions constrained only by their moral notions of truth and non-violence. To him '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.' Ultimately for Gandhi despite the fact that he considered the importance of village as autonomous units within the national frame of political organization, he still wants that the individual should be the unit of this village republic. The village republic for Gandhi has to be a self sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world. The structure of the arrangement of the political life of the villages is conceptualized within the notion of oceanic circles not arranged in a pyramid order but horizontal circles which places all the individuals, the villages and religions in an equal order.

To Gandhi elsewhere, he had advocated for minimum government or he considered the government best that governs the least. This argument is contextualized within the above argument of the village republic which in the Gandhian schema are autonomous and self regulated and that there should be nothing above that should dictate the life of the village republic and if so that should be the minimum. Gandhi given the experience of the colonial national government is vary of the idea of a centralized state which has the ultimate power to dictate its terms over the provinces and also wield the power to use arms and force in its endeavour to maintain what is the so called law of the state and order. This according to the Gandhian conception does not promote the freedom of the individual on the contrary reduces the freedom and will of the individual to the will of the state and law. The subsuming of the individual freedom at the altar of the state, law and centralized power to Gandhi is violence intrinsic to the nature of modern state and therefore is not the just political order one should be seeking. The conception of Swaraj is the ultimate freedom of the individual from the imposing

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power of the state and law. To him ultimately Swaraj remains the state of freedom of individual in which the individual is guided by his moral sense not only towards himself but also towards the other and remains in perfect harmony of mutual respect and equality, guided by the principles of non-violence and truth. It is a stateless society of village republics self governed into absolute equality and freedom and justice.

Ambedkar's notion of Democracy and State

Ambedkar's commitment to democracy and the attendant institution of state is absolute and takes a route which apparently appears western but remains rooted again like Gandhi within the context of the emerging Indian political scenario and the society which have had an adverse relationship with the institutions of modern governance collated with the rising momentum of anti- British and colonial instruments of government and governance. But unlike Gandhi he takes a divergently different routes to reach to the principles of democracy, and the conceptual necessity of the state as the only instrument which has the capacity and the will to bring the required change in the society without compromising with the notions of non-violent reconciliation of the resolution of conflicts within a political community. Ambedkar's approach to democracy in India too remains widely divergent with the instrumental notions of it of the west. His deeper understanding of democracy too is morally embedded within the conscience of the society where it need to be addressed and reformed. He unlike Gandhi who would like to see the individual governing their lives in absolute moral self guided by their notions of truth in a stateless/ or minimally governed political structure sees a fundamental flaw of unchecked discrimination and moral and normative lacuna that will guide the moral conduct of the individual. Ambedkar sees that the state provides those moral and normative standards that will guide the moral conduct of the individual there filling the lacuna which the Gandhian philosophy has not been able to address. Personalised experiences are no guarantees to expected normative behaviour and have led to unbridled exploitation of the majority section of the Indian society to the extent of abject slavery. Gandhian conceptualization has no recourse to address the violence of the established normative political order which he is trying to suggests or slides along with. Ambedkar is thus addressing violence at two levels while he is dealing with the principles of democracy and the organization of political order in the form of State and thereby addressing to check the power of the state and the attendant representative structure which has inherent in it the power of violence and authoritarian imposition and other at the societal level which he sees is seamlessly enmeshed with the political or rather on the contrary the political is always informed and shaped by the social. One, the violence of the colonial western conceptualization of the political order and the other at the violence of the internal social order conditioned by the slavery conditions of caste un-tempered by the normative of the liberating idea and which have throughout the period of history been in the habit of institutionalizing the idea of injustice and humiliation which had over the period of time become a normal normative unimaginable to be challenged. Ambedkar is critical of Gandhi for sliding with this tradition and have attempted a strong resistance to the change in the normative structure of the Caste society and the unjust social order. Gandhi he charges is unable to notice the violence associated with the philosophy he was propagating.

As valerian Rodrigues argues, to Ambedkar 'State is an organised power that claims for itself sovereignty which is envisaged as an instrument of dominance but also as a collective resolve for the furtherance of a set of objectives. In the later sense Ambedkar thought that the State can be a civilising agency and a resource to undermine dominance'.[5] In this sense the state effectivizes the transfer of sovereignty from the individual to itself and thereby establishes it domination. However, this effectivization is conditional on the principles and norms set by the people, the objectives the fulfilment of which only the state comes into existence. This resolve of the people constitutionalized and chartered remains the very purpose of stateness. In this manner the new normative which has an explicit public character is the manifestation of common civic truth which is arrived at by an agreement of all the individuals and is not a personalized invisibalised normative experience of truth. It is in this sense that the state has the accumulated power of the people of their agreement to execute the mandate of their will. This universal normative is the guiding factor of the state. It is in this sense that this normative can undermine the individualized experience. However, in this sense the State will subsume the individual which certainly is a State despotism and absolutism. It is here that the state has to be tempered with the constitutionally recognised another layer of protection in the form of fundamental rights of the individual and groups as well as minorities and in the Indian case an another layer of guidelines to fulfil the positive obligation of providing welfare. This is

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where Ambedkar brings in the idea of democracy. As Valerian argues, 'the principle that should guard against the state is democracy. Democracy as a way of life is independent of a state but also contends against the pervasive presence of power in everyday life and transform it into self regulation....It is not just an institutional arrangement but enables people to reach out to other and other reach out to them thereby bringing collective resources. Therefore, it has to be an open ended system which defines and redefines itself in an indefinite future'.[6]

Ambedkar thus conceives the political order at multiple levels of interplay. First, as a political organization- the state is tempered with the political checks and balance of the institutions; as checks of the party structure and the arrangement of rights and powers and obligations of the individual and the state. This structural arrangement is necessary as like Gandhi Ambedkar also recognizes state as an instrument of power and domination and eventual violence and but unlike Gandhi sees virtue in the organization as it can be an instrument in the furtherance of the furtherance of the common objectives. The most important objective is the undermining the power and the prevalence of the omnipotent and omnipresent system of caste and its framework of unchecked violence. He realizes that it is the State only which has the power and authority to dislodge the institution of caste from the socio-political life of the Indian society and thereby usher the establishment of a new normative or rather dislodge the old normative of caste by the new normative of the civic state.

Second, as a political process which is best understood as democracy, but not in the sense of electing the government which is the very limited understanding of democracy. For him democracy is a bloodless revolution, an instrument of change in a non-violent manner. It is is a process which breaks open the hierarchical society and opens up the points of communication between people and societies making it possible for people to interact and exchange freely unencumbered by the normative of caste and primordial identities but on the new established norms of equal citizenship. Thus democracy is a new way of life unencoumbered with the caste normative, a new civilization of equal and free citizenship.

Thus, the concept of democracy appears as an interlocutor between the idea of state and the people in Ambedkar which though separate in the organization of social life yet informs the very constitution and socialization of the normative of the state.

Gandhi Ambedkar and the point of Intersection

Though both Gandhi and Ambedkar are situated on different axioms of the argument regarding the organization of the political society, there is certainly a point of intersection where both meet. This point of intersection is that of the conception of democratic society that both of them wanted to conceive albeit on different conceptual formulations. The instituting and the formation of a democratic society, the 'public' is what is more important for Gandhi and his idea of Swaraj similarly for Ambedkar too the reformulation of the social fabric free from all barriers of communication is a pure conception of a 'casteless society' as the ideal form of the organization of this very same political society.

In Gandhi who frames his ideas on the conceptual foregrounding of nonviolence and truth leads him to the rejection of the modern notions and epestime and eventually its fall out the modern state and a society un-interfered by state autonomously regulated through its institutions of caste. In Ambedkar, the very same establishment of the democratic order which he sees as impossibility in an existing immoral normative- the change is possible only through the notions of the state attended with the conception of constitutional morality and the acceptance of state as the agency of leading to such non-violent transformation. In Ambedkar it makes the necessity of the state an imperative. Thus, to Gandhi the political imagination is within the spontaneous caste society devoid of state, to Ambedkar the State is the imperative to remove the very institutions of caste which he sees as the most undemocratic.

In both the debate over the core issue of the conception is important and informs the political philosophy of the deeper meaning of the process of democracy as a organising principle of the society. What is important for philosophical discourse to explore the extreme relativism that Gandhi employs in defence of non-violent social order, ie., basing it upon the individual notions of truth emerging from his own ideas of morality, the imposition of anything which constitute the common normative will constitute violence. Thus, in analogy, the Rousseanian General will over the particular will of the individual violates the nonviolence principle, so does the Benthamian notions of greatest happiness of greatest number overtaking the happiness of the few or the Hegelian idea of an individual subsumed in the larger idea of a nation. Gandhi thus rejects any common notion of normative that can be universalized and identified and imposed upon an individual. The sovereignty

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of the individual cannot be subsumed under any notions of political order. Thus, leading us to the logical conclusion of a stateless situation in which the autonomous individuals function within the society with a free will, only restrained by the free will and sovereignty of the other. It is a Hobsian pre-state but with a realization of the attending principles of respect of individual sovereignty to his/her integrity. Thus, Gandhian position too like Marx leads us to an enlightened spontaneously governed absolute relativist social context.

Having laid down the logical culmination of the Gandhian sequence of things, the flaws of practicality however remains. For Gandhi this spontaneity is overlooked by the reality of the caste which is neither spontaneous nor individually normative rather there are adherence of common normative to which every individual in the hierarchy must perform thus contradicting the very framework Gandhi would like to build.

Ambedkar understands this difficulty. To him Gandhi and to many the problem of modernity is the problem of the normative world view one holds and their ability to question it for change. Ambedkar's acceptance of the modernity though not in the western sense but through the material tradition within India pitches the argument which is philosophically contradictory to the caste normative. To him politics is not just a individual living in isolation but a social activity and thus requires common norms to govern individual behaviours. The scope of the acceptability of individual behaviour is a matter of social discourse and contestation within the framework of the common normative. Political societies cannot remain spontaneous and autonomous which is considered as political anarchy in which the lives of the individuals are always at an uncertain plain and in the absence of any common normative always at the mercy of those who could wield power to themselves. State and not caste institutions are best situated to perform the function of an interlocutor between the individuals and their interests. As caste institutions are primordial institutions whose membership is based upon birth and which are arranged in a hierarchical order of privileges and rights and which will only function in the interest of the privileged caste, whereas the state is an impersonal organization which will have no axe to grind in the name of caste or any primordial identities and will therefore act as a neutral interlocutor in the administration of the common normative. However, Ambedkar has to confront the critique of Marx who has demonstrated that in the West the state is the interlocutor of the propertied class rather than the workers thus leading to a class exploited social structure, maintained by force. However, Ambedkar though recognizing the dominating aspect of state takes an intermediatery route, which even Marx too takes. That is, the expected change within any political society is only possible through the State. In Marx it is the dictatorship of the proliterate. In Ambedkar is is the institution of a robust democracy not just at the political level but at the social level, establishing not just a representative governments but by the establishment of a republic which will empower the individual as a sovereign for which the state will function within the new transformative normative which is an agenda of justice. Thus, as an instruction manual for the communists in India in his Buddha or karl Marx he is trying to put a non-violent revolution through the Institution of state and parliamentary democracy as the only method of non-violent peace and reconciliation of interests.

One thus need to recognise the core issues identified by both Gandhi and Ambedkar and note the debate which on the one hand argues within the framework of individual subjectivity and another on the other bases itself on the rational universals as guiding factors for the political philosophical debate. It requires rather than reconciling both the thought a thorough investigation further in the thread of such argument to address the concerns of a political society and contextualize the debate.

In the present context where much of the arguments of politics are subsumed within the majoritarian discourse both the Gandhian framework of individual subjective truth as well as the ideas of constitutional morality are worth exploring to find out the answers to the current crisis. It surely will enrich the Indian debate on State and the theory of democracy and the overall debate on political philosophy.

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