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## GANDHIAN PERSPECTIVE OF GOVERNANCE

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**Abstract:-**The 21 century world is witnessing the evils of poverty, exploitation, unemployment, environment degradation, violence, hatred and animosity. Under this paradigm, humanity is struggling for change and improvement. Human suffering has propelled human collectives to search for a more effective development and governance model. In this search for a new model and framework- a model which is inclusive enough to include even the last, a model which is based on the principle of ethics and morality, a model which is sustainable for the present and enough for the future, Gandhian perspective of governance could be the final destination.

**Keywords:** Swaraj, Democratic decentralisation, Sarvodaya, Trusteeship, Sustainable Development.

### INTRODUCTION

The concept of governance and its varied models has always been a key area of study among political and administrative thinkers. The liberal model, the feminist model, the subaltern model, the Marxist model, are some models of governance, based on key underlying principles viz, liberty, gender equality, abolition of caste and class distinctions respectively. However, there is one model of governance which is inclusive enough to incorporate all the key elements of above models. This is the model of governance from the perspective of Gandhi. At the time when the world is at large in a deep crisis of governance and development, Gandhian framework of governance holds relevance.

### METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed in this paper is analytical based upon secondary data. Since the present study deals with the Gandhian perspective of governance, its varied nuances and its contemporary relevance, a deep analysis of Gandhian views and its connect with present scenario is required. For this I have mostly relied on journals, articles and books related with this concept.

#### Gandhian model of Governance

Gandhi's framework of governance includes following features-

##### (1) Decentralization and gram swaraj

One of the foundational principle of the Gandhian framework of governance is the concept of 'swaraj'. The whole concept of swaraj revolves around three basic principles-

**a) Self rule :** laid stress on India Swaraj, in that sense means refers to the independence of India from foreign domination.

**c) Minimum scope of state function :** Gandhi was a philosophical anarchist and was heavily influenced by thinkers like Leo Tolstoy and Kropotkin. He criticized state on all three grounds- moral, historical and economic. According to him, “ The state represents violence in a concentrated and organized form. The individual has a soul but as the state is a soulless machine, it can never be weaned from violence to which it bows its very existence.” Though principally, he was totally against the state, but keeping into mind the present conditions, he was not in the favour of demolishing the state immediately. According to him, man is far too perfect to do without the state, thus state and political power both are necessary, though minimally. Thus in principle Gandhi was an anarchist but in practice, an individualist ( though not the western variety individualist).Influenced by Thoreau, Gandhi believed that government is best that governs the least.

In a way, aims to bring an integrated revolution at three levels-

At political level, swaraj means self-government. It meant a perpetual any kind of government control, be it foreign or national. centralized economy since it paves way to exploitation and concentration of wealth in hands of few.

“Independence begins at the bottom... A society must be built in which every village has to be self sustained and capable of managing its own affairs... It will be trained and prepared to perish in the attempt to defend itself against any onslaught from without... This does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbors or from the world. It will be a free and voluntary play of mutual forces...

Growth will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose center will be the individual. Therefore the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it.”

## **(2) Governance to be people centric- ‘strengthening of Panchayats’**

His model of governance, therefore stresses on strengthening grassroot organizations and turning them more people centric, participative and democratic. For this he conceptualized a governance model with greater power at the ground level. ‘Bottom heavy and top light’ was the key note. This ‘bottom up’ governance model rests on panchayats at the bottom level. In his framework of governance, “ the village republic will be managed by a Panchayat which will be a living political force and entity. Panchayats will be united in a free and voluntary association by an ever widening circle of ‘ Village Republic’ . It is not an apex sustained by the bottom but an oceanic circle where the centre will be the individuals, always ready to perish for the village, latter ready to perish for the circle of villages and so on, sharing the majesty of oceanic circle of which they are part.” The village Panchayat conceptualized by Gandhi will cover under its domains

## **(3) Constructive Programme**

With the aim to encourage civility among people at the community level and as a key for development engagement, Gandhi advocated constructive works as yet another pillar for efficient governance. In this regard, he formulated a constructive programme of:

### **(i) Communal Unity**

Gandhi wanted the society to be seen not as a conglomeration of people divided on religious lines, but as people belonging to one common unified land. His ideal state grants no preference to any particular religion or sect. All religions would be respected and their followers would live together with unity and harmony. He repudiated the two nation theory propounded by the Muslim League. Such was his belief in communal unity that when partition became a reality, he even staked his life to stop Hindu Muslim riots.

**(ii) Removal of untouchability**

Gandhi spearheaded the crusade against untouchability and was all out for the abolition of this age old blot of our society. Gandhi knew that untouchability was one curse which was bleeding our society and would completely destroy its edifice. He stood for equal rights of both upper and lower castes. He emphasized temple entry by the untouchables as one step for instilling self respect among them. He even insisted on marriage relations, adoption, and inter dining between the upper and lower caste people. Gandhi, in order to instill self respect and dignity among untouchables, proclaimed them as ‘ Harijan’ or people of god, since they serve the society more than anyone else.

**(iii) Prohibition**

Prohibition emerges to be a vital component for social and moral regeneration of society. This could prove to be one way for pulling out people from According to Gandhi, He believed that women, students and especially medical professionals should carry forward the objective of removing this evil from the society.

**(iv) Khadi**

Khadi, which was seen as the symbol of ‘ swaraj’, was considered as the panacea for India’s political and economic problems. Khadi, in fact has several connotations. It signifies India’s quest of economic freedom from the colonial exploitative regime, symbolizes equality of all, hails the labour power and upholds In his work, ‘Constructive Programme, its meaning and place’, Gandhi opines, “Khadi

**(v) Other Village Industries**

Gandhi stood for decentralized economy in which village was economy. He stood against big and centralized industries which according to him were the centers of profit making and exploitation. Thus, village and cottage industries should be given more importance. The village economy should incorporate in itself In other words, Gandhi strives for self sufficient village economy which will instill self reliance and will reduce dependence on machine made western products.

**(vi) New or Basic education**

According to Gandhi, the education system under the aegis of British rulers was dehumanizing, alienating and ruinous. He thus formulated a form of education for Indians, which he termed as basic or new education. He once said, “... throughout life” and considered his model of education , the agent for spearheading social reconstruction and movement in the country.

The key features of ‘Basic education or the Wardha scheme of education’ are-

- (i) It was first suggested for children between the ages of 7 and 14. This was called basic education. This was later on extended to all the stages. Gandhi felt that it should include the education of everybody, at every stage of life; including the university stage.
- (ii) Gandhi felt that work and knowledge must never be separated since this results in social injustices. In dynamic societies, education has necessary for them to adapt to changing conditions, and for constructive participation
- (iii) Mother tongue of the pupil should be the medium of instruction.
- (iv) Gandhi also supported free education which does not mean education which is supported or subsidized by state or any other agency. Rather this implied a system of education which was self supported by people out of their own work experience. People should learn some art and meet out their expenses of education. , thus instilling courage and self reliance among them.
- (v) It involved character building and social service. Since Gandhi stood for universal education, his scheme of education was an important tool for materializing his dream of Sarvodaya Samaj, in which the vertical and horizontal distance between people is reduced to a minimum.
- (vii) Women development

Gandhi emerged as a crusader for women development and progress. He vehemently opposed social evils like, purdha, child marriage, devdasi system, polygamy, sati etc. It was largely, because of his efforts that women, for the first time overpowered their isolation and participated in the mainstream political movement. The massive participation of women in civil disobedience movement bears the testimony. He empowered women with Khadi and spinning wheel thereby instilling among them the spirit of courage and self reliance. He thus believed that a nation can progress only when women are treated at an equal footing with men.

#### **(viii) Economic equality**

Gandhi strongly supported economic equality and . He was a strong votary of classless society. He believed that the class division of the society was the product of a condition in which one type of labour i.e. physical labour was regarded as inferior to another type of labour i.e. mental labour. To create a sense of equality among masses, Gandhi propounded the theory of ‘bread labour’, wherein everyone was expected to do physical labour towards production, at least to compensate for the bread that he consumed. In short the principle of bread labour is designed to promote three things-

- (i) simple living among all citizens
- (ii) dignity of labour
- (iii) a sense of equality transcending the prevailing division of labour

#### **(4) Gandhian concept of common good**

Commitment of common good is the essence of Gandhian framework of governance. His doctrine of trusteeship and the concept of sarvodaya holds key to his idea of common good.

##### **(i) Doctrine of trusteeship**

This doctrine is based upon his principle of non possession or aparigraha, which holds that world possession makes one morally deprave. Thus men should not hold wealth more than required for meeting his sustainable needs. Also his principle of non stealing ( asteya) implies that possessing more than one need amounts to theft. Based on these lines, his principle of trusteeship seeks to address the conscience of the rich and resourceful in the society. He urges them not to consider themselves, sole proprietor of their possessions but only ‘ trustees’ of a gift bestowed upon them by god for the service of humanity. As Gandhi wrote in Amrit Bazar Patrika(1934):

“ What is needed is not the extinction of landlords and capitalists, but a transformation of the existing relationship between them and the masses into something healthier and purer.”

##### **(ii) Concept of Sarvodaya**

‘Sarvodaya’, i.e. ‘upliftment of all’, ‘rise of all’ or ‘awakening of all’ is the bedrock of this inclusive model of governance. Inspired by John Ruskin’ ‘unto this last’, Sarvodaya implies upliftment of the last man or the most deprived and underprivileged lot.

The Gandhian model of governance based on Sarvodaya, rejected the utilitarian view of the ‘greatest happiness of the greatest number’ in favour of ‘ greatest good of all’.

#### **(5) Gandhian model of development**

Gandhi as such , did not propounded any specific model of development. But the ideas expressed by him in his works do provides a path for an alternative paradigm of development.

Gandhi believed in the spiritualization of politics and gave precedence to morality over politics. Gandhi was opposed to any notion of development that seeks to multiply only material wants. Material advancement and increased living standard was not the true measure of development. Real development lies in improving the conscience of individual; in self purification and self realization. Gandhi felt that individual should consume only that minimum quantity of material things which is necessary for keeping them fit. Additional consumption means grabbing the rightful share of others. As a visionary he observed-

“ Earth as enough resources to satisfy everybody’s need but not their greeds”.

To curb the scarcity of resources, one need to control his desire and exercise self restraint; which is also the key to moral character. In this regard, Gandhi also enunciated the principle of ‘bread labour’.

Gandhi’s principle of non violence is not confined to human behavior but even touches nature. He denounced any

human activity that degrades nature, exploit and impoverish it. He says, “How can we be non violent to nature, unless the ethics of non violence become central to the ethos of human culture.”

### Contemporary Relevance

That Gandhi is relevant today and for centuries to come is not in doubt at all. Gandhian model of governance do seems relevant, especially when the world is facing deep crises. At one hand, thanks to the forces of globalization, the connect between the nations is strengthening but at the other end the disconnect between the possessed and dispossessed is growing even faster. At one hand progress of science has revolutionized the human life, on the other hand modern scientific experiments are posing danger of nuclear and hydrogen bomb. Human has evolved the art of exploiting the nature but could not find the solution to stop the depleting resources. In this ‘me first’ decade, individuals are engaged in the rat race for success but have failed to achieve excellence and inner peace. States are caught on the crossroads of democracy and even democratic states are witnessing severe problem of legitimacy crisis. At one hand, rise of supranational elements like terrorism are posing severe danger to state sovereignty and mankind at large, on the other hand, the cancer of corruption is bleeding nations white.

Under these multiple anomalies, the existing governance arrangement has become completely destabilized. Societies are struggling within the existing governance model and do not know which path to follow. A series of anti establishment movements, identity movements, anti corruption crusade, democratic movements like Arab spring uprising, workers movement demonstrates the desire among the masses for a constructive change and an alternative paradigm of governance. In this context, we can look to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi for a solution as he had evolved a basic framework for governance. It is worth noting that, some elements of Gandhian model of governance are adopted and some are yet to be adopted.

The series of violent upheavals in the world, the two world wars, the Iraq war, the Afghanistan war, the menace of terrorism and the tremendous loss of men and material has exposed to the world and the humanity at large, the horrendous effect of violence and have made them realize the power of truth and nonviolence as propounded by Gandhi.

The recent series of non violent movements like the occupy movements, the wall street movements in the west and the recent anti corruption non violent movement spearheaded by Gandhian Anna Hazare and its tremendous support and success, has once again shown the world, the relevance of Gandhi and his means of governance.

was considered utopian and unrealistic by some quarters of thinkers. However, two major historic non violent movements which ushered for bringing socio- economic and political transformation in India and which also turned a huge success.

His vision of democratic decentralization was even adopted by our constitution under Article 40 of Directive Principles Of State Policy, which calls upon the state "to take steps to organize village panchayats and endow them with such power and authority, as may be necessary, to enable them to function as units of self-government.” The enactment of 11th and 12th schedule was another revolutionary move towards democratic decentralization, which gave constitutional status to rural and urban local bodies.

It is also worth noting that the subjects of new UN Millennium Development Goal are no longer different from Gandhi’s constructive programme. Guided by this programme Art. 18 was adopted in our constitution which strives for the abolition of untouchability.

Gandhi in his programme highlighted the importance of communal harmony which holds even more relevance now, keeping into mind the frequent instances of communal violence and bloodshed.

Gandhi’s view of prohibition also holds relevance especially when drug abuse and alcoholism has been frequent among youngsters. In this regard, our constitution has also directed the state to prohibit drug abuse and intoxicants under directive principles of state policy, Art.47.

Under his constructive programme, Gandhi also emphasized on universal education which even becomes more relevant especially when education is considered as a privilege enjoyed by only few. The introduction of ‘Right to education’ under Art 21 A of our constitution, which aims to provide free and compulsory education to all till the age of 14, is a welcome step.

His concept of ‘sarvodaya’ or the ‘upliftment of the last’ has now been adopted by our policy makers in various development plans. The recent initiatives like ‘Antyodaya yojana’ and ‘Annapurna yojana’ are reflective of Gandhian thinking.

Similarly his concept of trusteeship guided by the vision of ‘changing the heart’ of the rich was considered as unrealizable in actual practice by some critics. However, corporate houses are adopting this concept in form of Corporate Social Responsibility and much talked ‘Giving Pledge Initiative’.

Gandhian model of development, where he encourages individual to consume resources to meet their basic minimal needs and where he denounces any human activity which degrades nature, is now emerging as an alternative development paradigm. Suffering from the danger of depletion of mother nature, this model of development has been appreciated, in the modern times by the champions of sustainable development.

Though the massive industrialization which Gandhi rejected could not be wholly avoided in this 21st century, yet his principle of economic decentralization and encouragement of village and cottage industries are adopted seriously by policy makers.

CONCLUSION

After Gandhi’s sudden exit from this world, Nehru said, “The light is gone and yet it will shine for a thousand years”. This holds true since Gandhi’s teachings are highly inspiring and serves as a signpost to humanity marching towards a better, happier and more harmonious world. The problems that Gandhi identified decades ago still remain the most pressing yet unresolved problems of our time—poverty, inequality, unemployment, and environmental degradation, violence etc. Even after a century of economic growth, material progress and increasing consumerism, mankind has not assumed higher level of human happiness. At this juncture the Gandhian model of governance appears relevant and could prove to be a viable alternative. The relevance of a man or his message can be said to have many aspects. It can be immediate or remote; it can be local, regional or general; it can be personally relevant to some or universally for all.”

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