

Political Party And Election In Indian Democracy: A Study of Achayravinoba Bhave's Critical View

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Abstract

Acharya VinobaBhave was a non-violence activist, freedom activist, social reformer, and spiritual teacher. An avid follower of Mahatma Gandhi, VinobaBhave upheld his concepts of Sarvodaya and tried to make a new social order on love, peace, and ahimsa in India. He dedicated his life to serving the poor and the downtrodden and stood up for their rights. For most of his adult life, he led an ascetic style of existence centered on spiritual beliefs of right and wrong. He is best known for his 'Bhoodan Movement' (Gift of the Land). Vinoba once said, "All revolutions are spiritual at the source. All my activities have the sole purpose of achieving a union of hearts." He strongly raised his voice against dominant party politics, corruption in electoral procedure, and parliamentary democracy in India. He gave his critical views on Indian democracy to establish a casteless, classless, and egalitarian society in India. As a Gandhian follower, he never compromised with truth, justice, and people's rights and justice.

Keywords: non-violence, truth, equality, fraternity, democracy, justice, Sarvodaya, development, Political Party, Participatory democracy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Acharya VinobaBhave, a true Gandhian who devoted his life to the all-round development of the downtrodden and landless people in the Post-independence period. This Spiritual leader after Gandhiji's assassination tried his best to bring about a change in the economic and political setup of our country. He dedicated himself to establishing a new social order through peaceful and non-violent means. For this purpose, he elaborated on a lot of socio-political and reformative ideologies and contributed to evolving Gandhian philosophies pragmatically. This study has been focused on his socio-political ideas with critical views.

VinobaBhave whom Mahatma Gandhi called to be the first individual Satyagrahee. It was due to Mahatma Gandhi's encouragement; VinobaBhave joined active political life and joined in the numerous movement and activities launched by Mahatma Gandhi. He participated with an acute interest in the activities like studying, spinning, teaching, and community development at Gandhi's ashram. Gandhiji assigned him with the responsibility of running the ashram at Wardha, where Vinobaji worked relentlessly in the constructive plans related to Khadi, Village Industry, HarijanSeva, Sanitation, NaiTalm, etc. Later Pavnar Ashram became the center of his activities. Vinobaji also worked in the campaign of Satyagraha for Swarajya (self-rule). The bond between Gandhiji and VinobaBhave was

symbiotic because for both of them morality and purity of means were of prime position. They took up the service of the underprivileged. Jayprakash Narayan made an apt remark about the relationship between the two. He said, “Revolutionary and pathfinding thinkers in history have usually been followed by mere interpreters, systematizers, and analysts. There have been rare exceptions, such as Luxemburg and Lenin in the case of Karl Marx. VinobaBhave was such an exception in the case of Mahatma Gandhil (Viswanath, Tandon, 1981).

Acharya Vinoba, no doubt acknowledged Gandhi as his guide and philosopher but he never followed Gandhi like a blind follower. He warned people not to idolize Gandhi but look upon him Gandhiji’s ideas in the present contest. Vinoba himself, after the death of Mahatma after the attainment of Swaraj, tried to give a new program and orientation to the Gandhian philosophy. He started new activities like ok Bhoodan, Gramdan, and Gram Rajya and supplied full content of the concept of Satyagraha by adding new dimensions to the concept of Satyagraha.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- a) To know the role of VinobaBhave as a Gandhian disciple after Independence.
- b) To study his critical views on the Parliamentary democracy in India.
- c) To know his view on party-dominant politics.
- d) To realize his suggestions for people’s democracy in India.
- e) To know his critical views on the electoral procedure of India.

III. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY:

The methodology of this study is mainly qualitative. This secondary data based-research has been done by reviewing many books, articles, journals and newspaper reports on Vinoba Bhave. Vinoba’s writings are very useful to collect the necessary data for this study. Many biographical works on Acharya VinobaBhave have been reviewed for this paper.

IV. CRITICISM OF PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

VinobaBhave’s greatest contribution in terms of the theory of the state was his persistent efforts to the indigenous theory of state and model of governance, consistent with Indian traditions, culture, and socio-economic conditions. He criticized India’s blind imitation of the parliamentary democracy of the west. Though he considered parliamentary democracy as one of the better forms of government, he knew its limitations. Secondly, he also pointed out that while adopting parliamentary democracy in our country, peculiar questions like poverty, caste, inequality, untouchability, multilingualism, etc. were not taken into consideration. Therefore, Acharya Vinoba believed that, while evolving a polity for India there should have been independent thinking, and on that basis, the Indian democratic system should have evolved (Bharati, K.S, 1998).

VinobaBhave said, “The democracy adopted in our country was a senseless imitation of the West. Here conditions are not like those prevalent there. Hence lots of problems, troubles, and obstacles have arisen. So long as we do not evolve and adopt a democracy that suits the conditions of our country, our quandary will not end. We shall have to seek measures that avoid conflicts and differences within the country.” In other European countries, where democracy was established, due importance was given to local circumstances. In India, a democratic setup has to be built up, consistent with the peculiar conditions and circumstances of the country. We have fourteen major languages and an equal number of

states. The country is vast, about five times in the area and six to seven times in population compared to England. In our country, we have an easily perceptible difference, and yet we try to fully imitate England. As such how can a democracy alien to our soil be successful in India? (Bhoodan, 17-12-1958). Besides, VinobaBhave was also aware of the fact that the people of England were well-educated and could not be misled. Poverty was a negligible aspect of their society; hence, there was no question of buying their votes. Compared to European countries people in India were not literate. The political parties tried to drag them on their side. The appalling poverty made people easy victims of all kinds of bribery. These conditions were not suitable for the functioning of democracy.

Democracy, according to VinobaBhave was one of the best systems, among all the political systems that had existed so far. However, it was not an ideal system. It had various drawbacks (Bhave, Vinoba, 1995). Vinobaji pointed out these in the following manner: 1) like other systems of governance, democratic government was not out of violence. 2) Political parties had become inevitable in a representative democracy. These parties used immoral procedures to win elections, leading to dangerous consequences. 3) Democracy had not succeeded in curtailing parochial, communal, and regional feelings, including nationalism competitive politics encouraged them. 4) In a democracy, decisions were taken not by All the people, but by a few individuals. Thus it corrupted the principle of people's sovereignty. 5) Vinoba also criticized democracy which did not allow political and economic freedom in real meaning, which was an essential prerequisite of a true democracy. 6) In democracy undue importance was given to numerical calculations, harming the unity and humanity of the people.

V. VIEWS ON POLITICAL PARTIES

Acharya VinobaBhave was a strong critic of party politics. He was in favor of the dissolution of the various parties and their combination in a United front made up of all good and honest people in the country carrying out commonly agreed programs (Masani, R.P,1958). Vinobaji remarked, "I do not recognize at all. Moreover, my study of history, my experience of current affairs, and my thinking, all lead me to the conclusion that parties in our country can not do much good but are in the long run likely to prove calamitous(Ram, Suresh, 1962). VinobaBhave was a vehement critic of political parties for making a lot of trouble instead of people's good, which had become an essential feature of Parliamentary democracy.

He criticized political parties for the following reasons:

1. In a parliamentary democracy, it was expected that the opposition party would play a corrective role. But in practice, it was found that opposition parties had not succeeded in this Endeavor. Vinoba argued, "They perform the role of a magnet, i.e., they only point out the drawbacks of the ruling party, and fail to perform the role of constructive opposition this has primarily happened because all political parties have become power-hungry, they rotate around politics" (Bhave, Vinoba, 1999).
2. According to Vinoba, "Political parties have weakened the initiative and the capacity of the people. At the time of elections, political parties ambush the people by giving false promises; that their interests would be safeguarded, provided they cast their votes in their favor. They successfully misguide the people. They successfully convince the people that their destiny lies in the hands of political parties. But the fact is that people themselves are responsible for their welfare" (Bhave, Vinoba, 1997).
3. According to VinobaBhave, "Party means part, nevertheless, the fact is that human beings are Complete' they are organic entities". When an individual accepts a particular ideology, i.e. when he

becomes a socialist or a communist, he no more remains completely an organic being. This in turn weakens the strength of the nation. Differences of opinion are important, but not to the extent of spoiling the entire political process. Political parties have however distorted the unity by accentuating differences. On the background of the omnipresence of politics, such divisive forces hamper human development”.

4. Political parties had created conflicts and divisions in society, they have created an atmosphere of suspicion and fear. Hence, people did not cooperate, not even for any good work.
5. Political parties did not adhere to the truth. To sustain the interest of the party and to maintain party loyalty many a time, the truth was kept hidden. Thus, party loyalty had turned a virtuous man into a dreadful one. They could criticize the action privately inside the party, but they should never utter a word openly against a majority decision of the party. Acharya Vinoba said, “I am opposed to this kind of party spirit. Loyalty to the party had become superior to that of loyalty to truth. That means, one can never be loyal to the truth one is loyal to the party”(Bhoodan, 5-12-1956).
6. In India there were already religious, linguistic, caste, and other differences. Political parties had added to these differences. Even within political parties, there were groups. More important was that the political party’s center of attention was only the outer world, they did not urge for inner development (Bhave, Vinoba, 2003). All this led to conflicts and tensions in society, which consequently weakened the country. The political parties were different. But it was their delusion. 7) According to VinobaBhave, the contemporary Political parties were weak internally, they were detached from morality. Without morality, no state could work, nor could any party sustain itself. 8) Ultimately, Vinoba emphasized that the Political parties were not essential, as they did not contribute to our day-to-day life based on good ways.

VI. OPINION ON THE ELECTORAL PROCEDURE

Elections were an important aspect of Democracy, through which people elected their representatives. However, Vinoba criticized, “the entire process of elections and the method of making decisions, which had come from the west, and the western people, consider it to be a progressive political idea. To us, it is a crude idea” (VinobaPravachan, 22.8.1957). Vinoba criticized the principle of the majority because it gave undue importance to numbers. He compared the western majority principle with that of the teaching of the Geeta. He said, “In Democracy each one has one vote, whereas in Geeta the principle of human unity i.e. all human beings have one soul,‘ was emphasized. Although both principles appeared similar overtly, the fact was that the first principle gave birth to division, whereas the other principle put an end to division. The first one took care of the majority; the second took care of all. The first one counted the numbers; the other one touched the inner recesses” (Bhave, Vinoba, 2001).

Criticizing the principle of the majority on which the democratic system was based Vinoba said that the principle itself was defective therefore the system had become faulty. In 19th century England, the philosophy greatest good of the greatest number was put forth, which meant that the welfare of the greatest number could be achieved at the cost of the interest of the majority, at the cost of the lives of the people. Criticizing this philosophy Vinoba said that —this was a poisonous and dangerous philosophy. This principle was a reaction to the monarchical form of government where the minority ruled over the majority.

Explaining the emptiness of the principle of majority, Vinoba argued that it was a rule of the minority in the name of the majority. He explained, “A person who secures 40 percent votes gets elected in the

election. It should have been that the person who secures 51 percent of votes must be declared elected. If no candidate secures that percentage of votes, the elections would be declared null and void. Moreover, when a particular bill is brought by the party, it is first discussed within the party, here 18 percent of party legislators, vote against the bill. When the Bill is presented in the assembly, those 18 percent of legislators who had voted against the Bill, within the party, support the bill in the assembly” (Bhave, Vinoba, 1996).

The members elected in the democratic elections, according to Vinobaji, were of average intelligence. The intelligent and virtuous people did not get elected, because elections were won by criticizing the opponents, by self-appraising, by deceiving, and by lying. Such things could not be adopted by virtuous people. Thus people gave up the strings of their lives in the hands of people with average intelligence. Secondly, once members get elected they followed the whip of the party; if the party asked them to keep mum, they keep quiet, and they follow party discipline. They raised a hand in the assembly when the party asked them to do so. The question of intelligence and self-opinion did not arise. They might not participate in the discussion but raise a hand when the bill was presented. All this was permissible in a representative democracy. Another important drawback in this system, according to Acharya VinobaBhave was those candidates to be elected were imposed by political parties. The voters were not acquainted with selecting the better one amongst the two appalling ones. Moreover, in the elections the poverty-ridden people had no place; their welfare could not be achieved through elections. Moreover, Vinoba argued that we had borrowed the election procedure from the west; it was not suitable for India. There was a vast difference between the circumstances in Britain and India. In England, there were no communal differences. Therefore compared to India, party differences did not harm British society as they did here. In India the masses were poor; they neither had the money nor, arms nor knowledge. Only those who had all these were in a position to contest elections. The common people could not contest elections. If such awful were the results of elections, the method of election needed to be changed (Bhave, Vinoba, 1999).

As far as voters were concerned Vinobaji questioned the age limit of 21 years and said that all adults who had attained the age of 21 years were considered to have attained maturity, but the fact was that the voters of this age were confused, they were not in a position to make their choice. Secondly, this system did not impose any responsibility. Thus their votes became inactive. VinobaBhave also pointed out an important limitation of the elections in India. Vinobaji said, “Fifty percent of voters are women, who have no access to the outer world of their homes, yet they are supposed to give votes. Therefore they just follow the terms dictated by the men of the party, they do not vote freely” (Bhave, Vinoba, 1999).

VII. VIEWS ON STATE-DOMINANT POLITICS

Both communist and parliamentary systems were state-centric, Vinobaji’s perspective, on the other hand, was people-oriented. He wanted a system in which not the state, but common people would be at the center. He pointed out the defects in the institutions of state and government and questioned the necessity of having a government. He stressed the need of freeing humanity from two institutions; religious institutions and governmental institutions. Vinobaji believed that the objectives behind the establishment of these institutions were very noble. But since these objectives had not been fulfilled, the continuation of these would serve no good.

VinobaBhave’s criticism against the government was on the following grounds:

- a. The government was ineffective to inculcate civic virtues in its citizens because it did not encourage people's initiative.
- b. The government in the contemporary world is competing with each other; which had created fear and envy in the minds of the people.
- c. State government enhanced the dependency on the other states. The government motivates farmers to grow tobacco (cash crops) for the sake of revenue and the government uses that money to import other things.
- d. VinobaBhaveblamed the managerial class or the bureaucratic class which included politicians, officers, policemen, military officers, lawyers, judges, and religious leaders, who instead of creating stability had created without it. The managerial class usurped the power and concentrated it in its hand.
- e. VinobaBhave challenged the concept of good government (Su-Shasan) and said that it was an illusion, either there would be a bad government or there would be a government-less society. This was because governments based on armaments whether they were democratic, communist, fascist, or monarchical; all ultimately had the sanction of armaments. Thus, according to VinobaBhave, good governance was a self-contradictory concept. He opined that the State, in which an individual's intellectual development did not take place, was not good. It would be benevolent but we cannot call it the best system (Bhave, Vinoba, 1996).
- f. People had developed an illusion that the existence of humanity depended upon the government, without government people cannot survive. The fact was that people did not need government; it just developed in a stream of history. g) Vinobajithought that the government was the worst thing ever developed in the history of humanity. In the contemporary period, it had been only the strongest institution, its control over the people had been such that only a people rule on behalf of all the people. People had been helpless; they just had a nominal right to vote.
- g. Ultimately VinobaBhave said, "The institution of State was created by man, to secure individual and societal development. But the experience till today was that the state whether run by good people, great emperors or religious leaders, could help people to a limited extent" (Bhave, Vinoba, 1996).

VIII. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF DEMOCRACY

Although Acharya Vinoba criticized Democracy and propounded an alternative of Lokniti and Gram Swaraj, he was aware that this was a distant goal, and for time being efforts must be made to improve the existing democratic system in India and make it more people-oriented.

He gave the following suggestion in that direction:

1. Vinobaji said that we in India have adopted parliamentary Democracy from the west. It was stable there because they are having it for a long time. But before adopting it in India we should have made changes to it, according to our circumstances
2. Undue importance was given to elections in the current politics and the minor thing (elections) has assumed greater importance, this has misled the society.
3. In institutions like Municipalities and local boards, where the only service to people was expected, political parties should not get involved.
4. The elections should take place in a very friendly manner. There should be a conflict of thought, and conflict at the personal level should be avoided.
5. The elected member and the ministers should work in a non-partisan manner once elections are over.

6. Political leaders should opt out of politics and retire at the age of 65.
7. Voters should give votes very consciously.
8. There should be a national government representing all political parties. A common manifesto should be prepared for it.
9. Elections should be indirect elections. Elections to the Gram Panchayat should be held directly and elections to the representative bodies at the upper level should be conducted indirectly.
10. Democracy should become more participatory. We should secure the substance more than its appearance.
11. Elected members should consider themselves official servants, who were entrusted by the people to govern.
12. Students and teachers should remain away from party politics.
13. A woman should observe politics minutely and take a vow to free men from Rajniti (Politics)
14. Virtuous people should take part in politics and they must develop the strength of controlling power.
15. We should create a non-partisan society and also a non-party society.
16. We should create a non-partisan society and also a non-party society that will put pressure on both the government and the opposition party.

Acharya VinobaBhave suggested the following rules to create such a society: 1. People should follow a virtuous path of life and must constantly attempt self-purification as well as to others. 2. People must pay attention to the neglected sections of society. 3. In case of an error or a mistake on the part of the government, people should point out that mistake to improve. 4. All the issues and problems should be solved by non-violent methods (Bharati, KS, 1998).

IX. CONCLUSION

Acharya Vinoba Bhave is popularly considered a spiritual heir of Mahatma Gandhi. Many thinkers said that he practiced Gandhian mottos with blind faith. But this was not true. Though he carried forward Gandhian philosophy after the death of Bapu, he gave birth to the Bhoodan Movement and Gramdan to help the poor and downtrodden. His movements were welcomed throughout the nation. He looted land with love and ahimsa to donate to the poor as a history maker, and Sarvodaya activist. He never detached him from the path of truth and non-violence up to the last breath of life. Vinoba was always fearless to criticize any injustice and untruth practices in society, especially in the democracy of India. He was a man of wisdom himself and was enough qualified to provide his socio-political thought. Once, Gandhiji admired Vinoba saying that Vinoba understood Gandhian ideas better than himself. In 1940, Gandhiji showed his regard by selecting Vinoba over Pandit Nehru to lead off a national protest campaign against the British war policies. (Shephard, Mark, 1987)

Acarya Vinoba wanted to set up people's socialism through Sarvodaya actions for the upliftment of all. Vinoba contributed to women's empowerment with equal status in every sphere of life. He strongly criticized power politics (rajniti) and corrupted the democratic process in Post-independent India. Execution of Gram swaraj must be freedom from the government. His ideologies and activities are very relevant to this contemporary crisis in the Indian socio-economic system. He told us that human society should be based on mutual non-violence, love, and cooperation. The basis of the new society will be love. Its objective will be the happiness and prosperity of all (Srivastava, G.P,1967).

In reality, Sarvodaya incorporates all the religions of the world with the aim of equal prosperity and happiness in the human community. In these revolutionary processes of Sarvodaya, the organization of

the masses' strength must destroy corrupted ruling entities from any type of unjust rule. Saint, Vinoba was a man of action and he applied idealistic concepts through his dedicated social service. Therefore, common people cannot judge his saintly visions and do not value his thought after his death.

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