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Reformation Of the Democracy Within the Concept of Spirituality

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Abstract

Democracy may be compared to the spiritual structure of Indian Philosophy, and the erosion of the democratic features, which is largely seen in the present era, can be prevented by having democracy reformed by spirituality. Like the individual soul (Jivātman) is the enjoyer of the consequences (phala) of the action (karma), people in a democracy enjoy the result of the action of implementing their voting rights in the ballot box. Like the individual soul loses its true nature in association with the body and its accessories, the ordinary people gradually forget their true nature of impartiality and consequently avoid their duty of watching the government's performance when the people come into contact and associate with the government. The mind strives to keep the true nature of the soul intact and is always vigilant to restrain the senses so that they do not go astray. Similarly, the opposition tries to make the people aware of their impartial nature and restrains the different wings of the government from doing anything adverse to the public interest. Like the body is the external abode of the soul, the government is the factor upon which the ordinary people of a state depend for getting uninterrupted service. The people, like the soul, throw out a government and take another government elected by franchising their votes. Above all, equality, the main pillar of democracy, truly can be had in terms of spirit.

Keywords: Democracy, Spirituality, Soul, Mind, Liberty, Equality

When India was under colonial rule, particularly under British rule, many great Indians tried their best to give Mother India Independence. This task then was not so easy. Those brave sons of Mother India, awakening their inner strength and values, embarked on the difficult task of freeing Mother India from the fetter of foreign ruler. As they adhered to their aim and tried their best to fulfill it, they had to give up everything they had, their own interest, even their lives in some cases. Their sacrifice was not only for independence from colonial rules but also for providing a healthy atmosphere for their successors to live in free India. The best way to live in an independent country, they then thought, is the perfect democracy where the people can take part, either directly or indirectly, in governing the country. But the hope of providing their descendants with a beautiful and suitable environment to live in a democratic system is doomed to failure, when the current democracy is dysfunctional. The present democracy is entirely different from the democracy expected by our great freedom fighters. If we want to pay homage to our great freedom fighters, we should stop this decline

in democracy. This degradation is forcing the ordinary people to think that they are not enjoying the proper status granted to them by their constitution, but rather that they are oppressed by a certain group of people chosen by them. The ordinary people are really oppressed by their representatives if they are not the supporters of the ruling party or merely apolitical people with voting rights. Naturally, ordinary citizens are accustomed to thinking that they are not really free at all in independent India, they were oppressed by the colonial rulers under colonial rule and are now being oppressed by their elected representatives. Oppressors have been changed, but not oppression. This is a very familiar scene in the current democratic systems of all countries, and our country, India, is no exception to this scene. Thus, the objective of the freedom fighters and the framers of the Constitution to protect the common citizen from the hands of opportunists by establishing a proper democracy is thwarted when democracy is misguided.

Democracy, as a political structure and form of government, has become politically quite popular in the modern world. It is often said to be the best and the most civilized form of political system. The term 'Democracy' is derived from two Greek words 'demos' which means the people and 'kratia' which means the power. Literally, in a democracy, all the power to form the government is vested on the people. Therefore, in a democracy, the people are the ones who hold the real power. Sardar Panikkar, a noted Indian Historian, writes,

"Democracy is in fact, not merely a form of government; it is a complex of social, economic and political factors, affecting the relationship of the state of the individual, guaranteeing essential freedoms, personal liberty, freedom of expression of organization and of governing activities."¹

U.S. President Abraham Lincoln has said in the Gettysburg Address on 19th November in 1863 "that these dead shall not have died in vain-- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth." It is one of the best-known speeches in world history and perhaps one of the greatest and the most influential statement for any form of democracy.²

Democracy can be compared to the spiritual frame of Indian Philosophy, and the downfall of the democratic features, which is largely seen in the present era, can be prevented by having democracy reformed by spirituality. After having presented the essential features of democracy, now let us go ahead and see what democracy should be for being a perfect democracy through the comparison between the true concept of democracy and that of spirituality cited in Indian Philosophy.

Democracy requires some amount of political maturity and education on the part of its people. People in democracy, particularly those with voting rights can be compared to the soul. The absolute soul is unconditional (upādhirohātman) and so devoid of body, sense-organs, etc.; and consequently, can have no enjoyer ship. But the soul, due to the result of work (karmaphal), is associated with the body, sense-organs, mind, etc.; it becomes the enjoyer (bhoktā), the transmigrating soul. Actually, it's enjoyership is created by its limiting adjuncts or conditions (upādhi) such as body, sense-organs, mind and intellect, etc. So, here the soul, compared to people, is regarded as the individual soul (Jivātman), conditional soul (upādhi viśiṣṭātmān). For the sake of soul, the body is constituted and sensory organs, mind, intellect, etc. are there as the soul's instrument for doing work either for its development i.e., for having liberation or for its deteriorating condition i.e., for having bondage. Like the individual soul is the enjoyer of the fruits or results (phala) of the action (karma), people in

democracy enjoy the result of their action of exercising their voting rights in the ballot box. Though they are not directly participating in the formation of the government, the representatives, who are directly elected by the people, form the government from the political party having majority. Just as the soul takes on a body as a result of its actions, in a democracy the people receive the government as a result of their actions, i.e., the exercise of their voting rights. They should have the target of reaching the destiny, the target of getting good governance favourable for their well-being in the state. Though they have a government, they are not getting sufficient service from the government for fulfilling their basic demands. The people should remain always alert of their real nature and should release their duty according to their true nature. Like the individual soul becomes bound when it forgets its true nature of inseparability from the Supreme soul, people, too, forget their true nature and suffer in democracy from being deprived of good governance. But what should be the real nature of people? The real job on the part of the people is to elect the representative impartially and to watch or vigil the work of the government throughout the term. But now it is seen that people are, more or less, losing their impartiality and they often try to have the favour of the government and support the ruling party and therefore refrain from finding fault with the government. Nowadays, people behave like liquid and they, guided by their interests, are frequently changing their political base leaving ideology aside. After getting something from the ruling party, the people forget common and greater interests and offer the chance to that ruling party to oppress their neighbours. Of course, there are so many people supporting other political parties, who are trying their best to come into power and now playing the role of opposition. Robert A. Dahl rightly says,

“.....Politics is one of the unavoidable facts of human existence. Everyone is involved in some fashion at some time in some kind of political system.”³

Like individual soul loses its true nature in association with the body and its accessories, the ordinary people are gradually forgetting their true nature of impartiality and consequently avoiding their duty of watching the government's performance. Eternal vigilance is the best price of democracy and people should be alert to protect it at all costs. But the people, the soul of the democracy, are not educated adequately for getting awareness of their true nature and become bound by being attached to the political domain, either directly or indirectly. The individual soul, guided by the ignorance of inseparable state with paramōtman or Supreme soul and being devoid of the knowledge of Supreme Being (Brahma-vidyā), regards herself as conditional (upādhiviśiṣṭha) and regards the body as really belonging to her. So long as the people, like the individual soul, do not aware of their true nature, democracy would not get its proper importance. Democracy survives if people must have the strong desire of keeping their true nature intact.

Democracy works well if it holds a strong, well-organized, ever-vigilant opposition. The mind (mana) tries to keep true nature of soul intact and is always vigilant to restrain sense-organs from going astray. The opposition, like the mind, should restrain the government from doing anything which goes against the interest of the citizen and compels the government for doing the wellbeing of the people through the control over the unnecessary interference of the government in the work of legislative, judiciary and executive. In democracy, the government really rules the country depending on the three pillars of legislative, judiciary and executive. In modern era all types of Medias are regarded as the fourth pillar of democracy for keeping their eyes on the activities of the government. All

pillars should do their respective work without any bias from the government or the opposition. The work of the opposition is not only to oppose the government but to give good advice to it for the welfare of the people, for keeping the sense-organs, i.e., the sense-organs of legislative, judiciary, executive, and all types of Media in the right tract without any unnecessary interference from the government. The opposition must have an important role in running the democracy in the right way by guiding the government towards public welfare. So, the opposition has a significant role in democracy, in looking after people's interest. But in doing so the opposition must have suitable strength to bridle the government. When the members of the opposition are small in number, they become unable to raise their voices against the corruption and whimsical decisions made by the government, and the government can take any bill passed in the assembly by their majority. So, an insufficient number of members in opposition cannot force the government from taking any arbitrary decision through the control over the work of legislative, judiciary, and executive. The interest of the people will naturally be violated. Here also the people, the soul of the democracy, should be alert to cast their vote in such a way that the opposition can get enough strength in the democracy and it is one of the duties on the part of the citizen for getting favourable service in future. Moreover, sometimes we see that the opposition, motivated by political interest, does not raise voice against the government and the people also are included in the political party belonging to the opposition and lose their true nature of impartiality; and thus, democracy cannot be true democracy.

The government of a democratic state is like the human body. In Indian Philosophy, the Soul is eternal. Bhagavad Gita says that which is born, must be died and that which is dead, must be born again.

“Jātasya hi dhruvomṛtyurdhruvaṁjanmamṛtasya cha |
tasmād aparihārye ’rthe na tvaṁ śochitum arhasi | |”⁴

There is no birth or death in soul life. The soul is eternal and immortal. The body is its outward form and the outward form has its cause in the mental form. Death is the death of a particular outward form, and again birth is the reproduction of another outward form. Death and birth are not the death and birth of the soul, which is substance, the force. Death of one form reproduces or gives birth to another form, like death of seed form gives birth to the tree form. The change of the form, which is called evolution, is determined by the soul's desire, tendency, longing, work etc. The soul cannot be destroyed after death, and it has some purpose to fulfill, and it must continue to take another form according to its desires and works. When the soul cannot be able to fulfill its purpose with the body and its accessories, it again throws the body away. This idea is beautifully explained in the Bhagavad Gita:

“Vāsāsi jirṇāni yathā vihāya nabāni gṛhṇāti naro’parāṇi |
tathā śarīrāni vihāya jirṇānya nyāni sanyāti navāni dehī | |”⁵

As we throw away our old, worn-out garments and put on new ones, the living soul, after using the body, which is the gross physical garment, throws it away when it is worn out and manufactures a new one.

Just as the body is the external shelter of the soul, so too is the government an entity upon which the common people of a state depend for continuous service. In democracy, the political party/parties having won the majority in the election gets/get the responsibility to form the government. So, the people elect the government with a hope to fulfil their desire

of suitable livelihood in a democratic state. But, when the government avoids the welfare of the people and prefers their own interest to the people's interest, the people, like the soul, throw the government away and take another government to be elected by franchising their votes. Thus, in democracy, government is formed indirectly by the people and it is entirely an outward form caused by the people. Destruction and creation of a government does not mean destruction and creation of the people. In the democratic system people are the permanent force which is beyond the destruction and creation of the government. Thus, the existing government is destroyed and another government comes in its place when people take initiative after a scheduled period. A government may be survived for the next time if it succeeds to meet people's demand, otherwise it must be demolished. Just as the soul leaves the body when the body fails to fulfil the soul's expectations, similarly, the general public throws out a government that fails to fulfil its expectations and forms a new government through democratic means of voting. When a government cannot realize the nature of people, want of people, power of people; it considers itself overestimated and begins to underestimate people, the soul of democracy. It, as a consequence, does whatever it should not do and faces downfall ultimately

Democracy not only grants its citizens the right to vote, but also some fundamental rights enshrined in part-III of the Indian Constitution. These fundamental rights guarantee civil rights to all Indians, and prevent the State from encroaching on individual liberty while simultaneously placing upon it an obligation to protect the citizens' rights from encroachment by society. So, these rights are really the pivotal factors of individual freedom. The government and its different wings have their duty to preserve these fundamental rights so that no people can be deprived of these rights in any way. But the present scenario is quite different. The elected members of the empowered Political party compel the common people to stay with them, to obey what they say. They usually oppress the people who protest against their corruption. Nonetheless, they are elected by the majority of people; they seldom remember that they are for all the people. But they, after having the power in hand, begin to torture the people who have not cast their vote in favour of them. They try their best to bring these people under their umbrella by exercising their power. They never think of getting these people to their side by showing compassion, by doing what they want. This type of tendency of the empowered political party is repugnant to the ideal democracy. In modern political era, even the people are not free at all in casting their vote for electing the candidate of their choice. Very often the empowered political parties or regionally strong parties interrupt the people in casting their vote and they begin to proxy in voting station. So, the freedom of electing the representatives, which is the core feature of democracy, is violated enormously in India by the ruling parties. Here, the basic fault is that the members of the empowered Political party, who are elected to govern the country, cannot differentiate themselves from their political entity. Though the party having the majority to form the government; it is not the same as the government. When the parties get official responsibility, they have been ascribed to secure the prosperity of all the people apart from the particular political colour. Here also ignorance of reality, of the power of the people in democracy entices the government to avoid welfare of the people of different political opinion. They only give importance to the bodily aspect, the appearance, not to the spiritual aspect. If they look into the spirituality, they realize that souls have no difference among themselves; people have no difference although they may have different political views

which are their outward appearance. Giving stress on the outward appearance and neglecting the people, the government and the opposition behave like a political party and torture people in place of giving service. As a result, the people are cast off the government due to the lack of expected service from the government.

Political parties are an essential part of democracy. Different political parties participate in the election to represent their candidate. Though two or more than two political parties participate in democratic process, anybody apart from any political parties can participate in the election process and may be elected for his /her individual charismatic quality. But it is quite impossible for one or more than one non-political winning members to form a government with absolute majority. So, these non-political elected members are compelled to support either the political parties having majority for forming government or the parties holding the position of opposition. Thus, in democracy the so-called non-political elected members are like the golden earthen pot, and they are not so crucial in democratic system until and unless they support any political party, keep off their apolitical attitude. As part and parcel of the democracy all the political parties must be based on some ideology and all the members of a political party should abide by that ideology adopted by their party. After independence in India, when democracy began to flourish, political ideology was so important that the common people, too, chose the political parties in terms of their ideology to franchise their vote. In course of time the concept of ideology becomes fade, vague. Of late, so many members of political parties are frequently changing their political parties keeping the ideology aside and they are giving preference merely to their interest. Ordinary people having voting rights, too, like political personalities forget to give importance on ideology, instead they only think of their benefits. When ideology gets no importance and self-interest takes the place of ideology, democracy is in peril, as the ideology plays a significant role to form a party. If a party avoids maintaining its ideology, it can no longer unite its members. Ideology like a rope holds the people together. Ideology brings forth we-feeling instead of I-feeling, collectively in place of fraction.

The important features of democracy are equality, liberty and fraternity. These three ideals seem to be different from one another, but these are so inter-connected and interdependent that these are regarded as one. The constitution of a democratic state guarantees these for the people and all the three pillars of democracy namely legislative, judiciary and executive take the responsibility to restore these features for the people. Among these three i.e., equality, liberty and fraternity, equality is paramount; because if equality is maintained, rest others will automatically be in action. The need for establishing equality of opportunity in democracy is essential; otherwise economically and socially privileged group becomes a means of oppression on the less gifted. The sense of equality creates the fundamental consciousness of collectively in the mind of people living in democratic framework

“That no one could be called happy without his share in public happiness, that no one could be called free without his experience in public freedom, and that no one could be called either happy or free without participating, and having a share, in public power.”⁶

Though the constitution includes equality for the people, they only get political equality in exercising their voting rights. The value of the vote is equal to all people irrespective of caste, creed, religion, language, region, gender, etc. But without social and economic rights, these

political rights, in a true sense, are void. Above all, equality indeed can be had in terms of spirit. If we take body and realm of body as real, economic and social equality will never be implemented in true sense and then the political equality will be pseudo, only existed in records, nothing more. But, if we give importance to the spirit beyond body, we can realize that the soul is eternal entity, and remains above birth and death, production and decay, it is identical to the supreme self or part of the supreme self. No difference among the individual souls will be realised. They are same in quality, only differ from each other in terms of quantity and appearance. Thus, in respect of soul, all the people apart from the body and bodily aspects are equal. So, if the constitution of a democratic state wants to establish equality among the citizens, it should give importance to the inherent spiritual nature of the people. Considering spirituality, the government and its three pillars and the opposition and the people should follow the democracy.

Thus, when equality is established in true sense on the basis of spirituality, other two features viz., liberty and fraternity come in democracy automatically. In this context, Professor D.D. Raphael should be reminded as he makes a difference between these two democratic ideals and says,

“The concept of fraternity expresses the idea of common responsibility..... the concept of liberty expresses the idea of responsibility for oneself.”⁷

So, fraternity is essentially needed for the common welfare, the welfare of the entire group; and on the contrary, liberty for the self-development of the individual. In the democratic state like ours the concept of liberty has been preferred to the concept of fraternity. But, to make the democracy true democracy fraternity should be given more importance. From the concept of equality based on spirituality, liberty for individual development becomes faded and fraternity for common interest takes its place. Thus, when the democracy tries to restore equality with the concept of spirit, these three essential ideals begin to nourish democracy in such a way that the oppression on the less gifted by the affluent class will be stopped, because they begin to realize the equality of their eternal spirit.

On the way to having Spiritual equality, ego is the main road block. Ego is the mind's way of keeping us from having contact with our spiritual nature and is the greatest veil, which never allows you to see the truth. In democracy people, who are elected for ruling their co-fellows, consider themselves alienated from these co-fellows and make themselves people of different stature and as a consequence their ego hinders them to feel the reality. Their ignorance of transient power gives birth to ego and due to ego, they forget their real nature and consider themselves as the permanent authority of the country and behave in such a way that they will never be deposed from the power. They forget all about the people by whom they are empowered. This is the pivotal drawback of the modern distorted democracy.

Our journey of ego should be directed from individuality to collectively, from particular to universal, from self-welfare to collective welfare; we will surely reach spirituality. All the men of the great soul, known as Mahātmās, direct their ego to the welfare of the people and as a result, feel the true vision of the soul and realize inseparable unity with all. Our great freedom fighters, too, are Mahātmās who manifested the true meaning of the soul by guiding their own ego to the humanity, and proved to us the ultimate truth of humanity. As they made themselves free from the thralldom of ignorance that darkens consciousness and

tends to limit it within the boundaries of personal ego and self-seeking, they could devote themselves to the act of bringing freedom from the thralldom of colonial rule facing calumny and persecution, deprivation and death in their service for the country and humanity. Like our Mahōtmās, we, all the stakeholders of democratic India, must know with absolute certainty that essentially, we are spirit. This can only be possible by winning mastery over our ego, by rising above all pride and greed and fear, by knowing that worldly losses and physical death can take nothing away from the truth. The democracy, which was shaped in our constitution by great Revealers thinking that people of free India would get finest taste of independence, becomes distorted. This distortion of democracy can only be obliterated and true democracy can only be had if the democracy is run by the stakeholders guiding the ego towards the infinite, keeping the spirituality in mind. As a result, the difference among all human beings must be wiped out and all men would be independent equally within the purview of democracy.

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