

# Harmony of Citizenship Ideas and Historic Values - A Critical Analysis

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## Abstract

Gandhi wrote this in connection with one of his many local satyagrahas which he conceived as being more of a political education program than a confrontation with the British. In an article written a week earlier for the same purpose, he had asked, "Responsible government will come, but will the people be able to shoulder the burden and rise equal to the task?" He stressed his aim of "educating the public" in the urgent need for social reform so that they should "cultivate the spirit of corporate service," but for this they must "learn to be disciplined." This was the way that he used his theory of satyagraha to resolve contradictions between freedom and obligation, rights and responsibilities. Gandhi does have fundamental differences with liberal democracy and these have been explained or defended by Parekh, Ronald Terchek, Thomas Pantham, Iyer and Bondurant. (Parekh, Gandhi's Political Philosophy. Ch.5, pp. 110-141; Colonialism, Tradition and Reform, pp. 74,102; Ronald Terchek, "Gandhi and Democratic Theory" and Thomas Pantham, Beyond Liberal Democracy: Thinking with Mahatma Gandhi," in Political Thought in Modern India, edited by Pantham and Kenneth L. Deutesh, 1986, pp. 307-346, Iyer, Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi: Joan Bondurant, Conquest of Violence, 1988, chs. 4,5) This paper has tried to focus on concepts of freedom, rights and responsibility, but Gandhi's critique of liberal democracy raises other issues as well. He criticized it for being "individualistic in the sense of stressing rights rather than duties and self-interest rather than altruism, and materialistic in the sense of being concerned solely with deriving its moral legitimacy from its ability to promote the material interests of its citizens. When he says, in the long passage quoted above, that swaraj does not require knowledge of rights as much as duties, he certainly does not mean to imply an inattention to the need for the former.

*Key words: Gandhi, freedom, swaraj, citizens.*

## Introduction

It is especially for the reason that social justice is one of the main problems of India. Hundreds of thousands of people are still in want of social justice. Consequently, they suffer in political, economic and intellectual spheres. Hence, Mahatma Gandhi laid a great stress on decentralization of power so that participation of each and everyone in political and economic fields could ascertain. Moreover, on the strength of this participation common men could also enjoy a standard of living, and along with intellectual growth they could find a way to achieve equality in society. To quote Gandhi himself, "Democracy is an impossible thing until the power is shared by all...Even a pariah, a labourer, who makes it possible for you to earn your living, will have his share in self-government –Swarajya or democracy."

Fundamental Rights: Along with freedom and justice, the third most important thing, which requires special mention in context of Gandhi's views on democracy, relates to fundamental rights of citizens. As known to us, Gandhi always by laying great stress on morality and ethics in individual and social life –both, and calling on people to make Ahimsa the centre of their day-to-day activities, spoke of duties time and again. Undoubtedly, he accorded preference to duties over the rights. For example he said, "In Swarajya based on Ahimsa people need not know their rights, but it is necessary for

them to know their duties.” [Harijan, March 25, 1939] On another occasion he wrote, “Rights accrue automatically to him who duly performs his duties. In fact the right to perform one’s duties is the only right that is worth living...It covers all legitimate rights...” [Harijan, May 27, 1939]. Not only this, a few months before his passing away Gandhi went to the extent of saying, “Today capitalist and zamindar talk of their rights, the labourer on the other hand of his, the prince of his divine right to rule, the ryot of his to resist it. If all simply insist on rights and no duties, there will be utter confusion and chaos.”

Therefore, he said further, “If instead of insisting on rights everyone does his duty, there will immediately be the rule of order established among mankind. There is no such thing as the divine right of kings to rule and the humble duty of the riots to pay respectful obedience to their masters.” [Harijan, July 6, 1947]

From the above statements of Mahatma Gandhi it generally seems that in comparison to fundamental rights he prefers duties of people. It also becomes apparent that perhaps he is indifferent towards human rights. But, it is only a momentary perplexity. There is not the slightest want of truth in it. Gandhi was a great defender of equal liberty for all. Till his last breath he fought for social, religious, rational, political, and economic freedom of all. How was then it possible that he could ignore the question of fundamental rights of people?.

## Conclusion

Undoubtedly, along with freedom and justice, Gandhi wished equal rights for all. As it is known to us, Gandhi not only accepted the importance of fundamental rights of citizens, but made the issue of people’s rights indispensable in all of his non-violent actions he carried out for the freedom of India. Prior to it in his actions in South Africa equality of rights of the people was a vital issue. Therefore, those who are of the opinion that Gandhi ever overlooked human rights, or he preferred duties over rights, are not correct. Gandhi was committed to justice for all. For the establishment of justice he not only called on people time and again, but launched non-violent actions and some of them remained exemplary from the success viewpoint. Through them he introduced an adaptable and effective way to the world. How could he minimize the importance of people’s rights? He categorically spoke of social, political and economic growth and prosperity of all. He led the way to Sarvodaya through his worth mentioning ideas of decentralization of power and Trusteeship. Hence, for us it is beyond imagination that a person like Gandhi could overlook the question of fundamental rights of the people?

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