
Democracy and *Anekānta*

Prof. Pratibha J. Mishra

Head Department of Social Work, Guru Ghassidas Vishwavidyalaya, Koni, Bilaspur, (C.G.), India,

ABSTRACT

Truth is a relative experience. Absolute and total truth is knowable only to omniscient. Each substance has countless/infinite modes. Man cannot know all the modes of one substance. The knowledge of all modes of all substances by a common man is thus out of question. Even within one substance each atom has infinite modes. The concept of atom is age old and still research on atom in the contemporary world is continuing. Atom bomb has been invented yet there is much still to be known. Man becomes aware of his deep rooted ignorance with the increasing knowledge. In such a situation understanding of relativity is quite essential. Relativism is necessary for functioning of democracy.

KEY WORDS : *Anekanta, Relativism, Democracy, Knowledge, Survival.*

INTRODUCTION

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Nature of Democracy

Abraham Lincoln defined democracy as the government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Man has, since the beginning of history, tried various forms of rule or governance. In all kinds of rule whether based on might or consent, man has remained the central concern. Good governance rests on wider and accommodating thinking; as narrow and selfish thinking creates problems always. It is for this reason that democracy is so popular form of government and rule in the present world. Democracy is deemed to be the best form of political system because it is believed, that it provides to everyone the opportunity to grow and excel. Imperialism has now become a history. Almost everywhere in the world democracy is triumphant and even in those states where kings still exist as heads of state, they are only ceremonial, actual power has virtually slipped into the hands of people.

Salient Features (tenates) of Democracy

Freedom and liberty, equality, co-operation, sympathy, co-existence and tolerance are some of the essentials to anekanta which are found to be the features that make democracy so desirable. But these features cannot be absolute, as absolutism of values tends to generate imbalances. Thus these values have to be relative.

Undoubtedly freedom is an important and a great achievement. No one wants to be dominated or bonded. Not only man, even the birds and animals are lovers of freedom. Man puts everything at stake in order to be free. No wealth can equal freedom. Man's desire for freedom is so dominant that he tends to acquire freedom even at the cost of virtual starvation and life. The history of world is replete with examples of laying down life for freedom. But the question is—can freedom be absolute? The logical answer to this question should be—that even freedom has to be relative, not absolute. One Nation attained independence. All people had bitter memories of domination and in the moments of independence all were jubilant. All were celebrating newly gained freedom. One old woman was so excited that she came to lie down across the road. A truck that was approaching that side blew its horn but the old woman remained unmoved. Finally the driver came close to the old woman and pleaded— please don't obstruct the road and move to the side. Old woman angrily replied—why should I get to side! My country is independent now and I am free to sleep anywhere I like. The driver of the truck politely replied—If you are free to sleep in middle of the road then I am also free to run my truck over your. The old woman had to give way to the truck.

In society everyone has to live relative to others at every stage. Individual freedom is indeed

Valuable, but only up to the limit of not encroaching other person's freedom. Mahatama Gandhi had

Beautifully said—

'My freedom extends only up to the boundary of my compound, beyond that my neighbour's Freedom starts.'

Neighbour's freedom is really very important in democracy. Any one cannot be so free that he may ignore or disregard other person's freedom. Man has to be careful for others in everything he does. On a multistoried building there lived a family in a flat on the ground floor. The smoke rising from the hearth of this family was causing inconvenience to the family living in a flat on a higher story. Later requested the former to manage smoke but the man from ground floor said that he could not stop it as it was the nature of smoke to rise and go up. But the difficulty for the family at higher floor was unbearable. It finally made a hole in the floor of that story and allowed drain water to pass through it. The water was now falling in the flat of man who refused to manage the smoke. He complained about the drain water and inconvenience caused to his family by it. The man from upper story replied that he could not stop it as it was the nature of water to flow down. Ultimately both had to make a compromise. Both mended their ways and checked inconvenience to each other. Thus a compromise and co-operation amongst neighbour's is must for smooth life. Freedom can be enjoyed and exercised only through this co-operation and compromise. If anyone tends to become absolutistic the freedom of all is jeopardized.

For smooth social functioning, there are various laws and constitution of the country and the world. But just the existence of laws and constitution is not enough. Unless the relativistic

approach and intention of laws is not understood there can be no actual peace and harmony in the society.

Only he who can exercise control over himself can be said to be free in actual sense. He who fails to check his desires and leads a restrain less life is actually not free, but slave of his passions. To be conscious implies to be self-disciplined. Those who are not self-disciplined are outrageous, not free.

Freedom of expression is an important achievement of democracy. There is no doubt that everyone wishes to express him or herself. But when this expression ignores relativism and tends to be absolutistic; then even one word causes problems and results in major conflicts like Mahabharata. Sometimes unrestrained expression sure adds to disputes. In fact unrestrained expression is a piercing assault. It is a fact that ignoring relativism in expressions leads to conflict and disputes. Words are some times more dangerous than deeds. A truly democratic person has not only to restrain his verbal and written expression, but he also has to understand and be accommodative of other person's view.

Prior to establishment of democracy freedom of expression was non-existent. Any one desirous to express was more cautious of the ill consequences and the rage of society and the ruler. To say or express something opposite or contrary to popular belief amounted to social and political exile, but democracy has provided the right to express to all. Anyone can express his view about anybody else or anything. But this freedom of expression should not be taken to make unbecoming criticism. The cultural pollution being dispensed by modern media is actually not a use but a misuse of this freedom of expression. Such a situation arises only when individual freedom is emphasized more than social values and freedom of society.

The right to vote provided by democracy is a kind of privilege of expression and it is also a kind of participation in power. Even the humblest has the right to rise up to the highest political office. But even this freedom is not limitless. No one should be free to exercise fanaticism and hamper communal harmony. Such a practice is actually a misuse of freedom. To value other persons' freedom is possible only with anekant approach and attitude.

Ruling and opposition wings of democracy

Opposition is one of the essential requisites of democracy. Any view ought to be complimented by its opposing view. Actually thesis and antithesis always go together. It is the nature of things that a thesis is always complemented and accompanied by its antithesis. Democracy too shall fail if there is only one absolute view in this. Opposition or the counter view always does the necessary function of reasonable check and balance. Democratic opposition should not be taken to imply adversary or enemy. On the other hand adversary by default is of the nature of opposing any thing, good or bad. The principle of thesis and its antithesis is supported by philosophy.

Equality

Equality is one of the major principles of democracy. No democracy can survive if it does not support equality. Equality is always accompanied by a kind of inequality. All Indians are equal qua Indians, but unequal in form of different castes, classes, language etc. Disparity or diversity

is as much a truth as equality is. Neither can be done away with. In such a situation only *anekānta* approach can serve the purpose of democracy.

Co-ordination/ co-existence

India is a huge country with extensive landmass. It has mountains at some places while at others it has plain fields. A single river flows through many provinces. If there is no co-ordination the situation shall become very bad. The division of country into various states is based on many factors like— administrative, geographical, cultural linguistic and considerations. These divisions are necessary for good governance. States are further divided into districts. Such divisions are necessary to maintain overall unity of Nation. Pandit Nehru had placed co-existence in his principle of '*Pañchaśīla*'. Nations can't be removed from the world map. There are various kinds of diversities in the world like differences in beliefs, views, like-dislikes, natures, cultures, and passions. Cults or religion originate on the basis of beliefs. Ideas give birth to reflective thinking. Senses follow the likes-dislikes and natures produce attitudes and habits. The cause of behaviour is volition. Democracy demands co-ordination amongst all these inevitable differences in absence of which there can be no peace and co-existence on earth.

He who understands relativism rises above these narrow and manmade differences. Only such people can truly practice the ideal of "*VasudhaivaKutūmbakam*" or "*Ekka manussa jai*". All and everything are inter-related and mutually dependent. Not to realize unity in diversity and respect diversity within unity is the cause of all frictions in society. Non-relativism in attitude and practice fails democracy.

Co-operation

Every atom of the universe contributes to a harmonious system called universe. Each has its definite place and function. Motion and rest co-operate to constitute the world. All life forms are related with other life forms. "*Parasparapgrahojivānām*" is an expression of this truism. A democracy cannot survive in society which is not based on co-operation. Imperialism was an exploitative system virtually enslaving the people of colonies. Success of democracy depends on the upliftment of all classes of society. Selfish and parochial interests tend to make one class stronger and others weak and thus seriously undermine the value of democracy. Only welfare democracy is good democracy. Interests of all are interlinked and interests of all can be realized only when there is a proper and just balance of interests and fairness in their pursuance. Imbalance causes chaos.

A Gardner and a potter were going to town to sell their produce in the market. They loaded their respective produces i.e. gardener the vegetables and potter the earthen vessels and pots on the two sides of camel back. The gardener was walking ahead of camel and potter behind the camel and the loaded camel walked with a balance of weight on his back with load of vegetables on one side and pots on the other side of his back. On the way hungry camel started eating vegetables. Since gardener was ahead of camel he could not know camel's eating up of vegetables and the potter who could well observe what the camel did neither stop the camel nor did he tell this to gardener. He thought the loss is of gardener which does not affect me at all, thus why should I bother. After some time the camel ate most of the vegetables. This caused imbalance and the entire load of pots fell on the ground.

The sound of breaking and falling pots attracted gardener's attention and he inquired from the potter as to what had happened? Ashamed potter replied that some of the vegetables are still safe but I have lost all my pots. This has happened due to my non-cooperation with you. Had I co-operated and been careful, this would not have happened.

Thus co-operation is must for a social system to work. But sometimes even non-cooperation is also necessary. Mahatma Gandhi's non-cooperation with the imperialist British in India is well known in history. Such non-cooperation was necessary for India's freedom. On other occasions he had co-operated with the British for a fair cause. One should have non-cooperation with evils and co-operation with good.

Sympathy

Sympathy also has an important place in democracy. Sympathy is must for functioning of family, society and Nation. It is true that only he who wears knows exactly where the shoe pinches but others can put themselves in the sufferer's shoes so as to understand and allay his pain. Sympathy makes life easy.

Tolerance

Tolerance is necessary for success of democracy. It is true that 51% forms majority and reduces 49% to minority but this does not mean that majority can have disregard for the feelings or wishes of minority. The majority must be tolerant of minority view. Tolerance is a virtue for all but more so for those who have power. Those out of power must also realize that the powerful should not be needlessly and unreasonably irritated.

CONCLUSION

Thus Anekanta plays a significant and important role in the success of democracy.

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