Exploring the idea of democratic decentralization in historical perspective: A Comparative Study of Vinoba and Jai Prakash Narayan

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Abstract

In this research paper an attempt has been made to analyse and compare the thoughts of two eminent political thinkers, Jai Prakash Narayan known as social constructionist and Acharaya Vinoba Bhave known as national teacher, on the concept of Panchayat raj in India. Acharya Vinoba Bhave is considered as a true disciple of Gandhi jib and is also known for his contribution in “Bhoodan movement” in which land was donated to landless farmers and poor people and has also translated GITA in Marathi language which is known as GEETAI. JP Narayan is also known as Lok Nayak in India was a great social activist and is considered as a hero of Quit India Movement. The Panchayats exists in India from ancient times but they constitutionally got recognised after Independence through 73rd constitutional amendment act 1992 after the discussions of various committees. The meaning of Panchayat is ‘local government’ or ‘village council’, where group of people can take decisions for their village to solve immediate problems, it consists of three levels Gram panchayat at village level, Block panchayat at intermediate level and Zila parishad at district level. To create Panchayats in India was the dream of Gandhi jib as he wanted each individual, each village and each society to be independent and self-reliant as he believed in the concept of Sarvodya, the main part of Gandhian ideology. This ideology of Gandhi jib attracted various thinkers and philosophers and JP Narayan and Acharaya Vinoba Bhave were among those. These both thinkers were the ardent followers of Gandhi jib and his philosophies and followed his path and ideology of truth, non-violence, sarvodya, decentralisation, partless democracy etc. But in this paper focus is given on the concept of Panchayat Raj. Both the thinkers have some similarities and differences regarding the concept of Panchayat Raj or Decentralisation which is discussed in this research paper.

Key Words: Democratic Decentralization, Thoughts of Vinoba and J. P Narayan, Panchayati Raj

Jai Prakash Narayan’s Conception of Democratic Decentralization:

Jai Prakash Narayan also known as Lok Nayak was a great a social activist and initially was a socialist thinker and follower of Marxist theory he truly believed in the theories of Marx before independence but after independence he became the true follower of Gandhi jib and worked on his footsteps for reconstructing the society. JP Narayan was against the parliamentary democracy as it was only in the interest of political parties and was favours in opting of democratic decentralisation so that every individual can participate in political process.

“We have to decide whether for the sake of efficiency, power should be centralized. But centralization of power will not be as democratic as decentralization of power”. (JP Naryan, 1962)

According to him only decentralisation structure can help each and every individual to participate in political process and especially at local level and this was the main solution to end party dominance. He further suggested that democracy could be ‘communitarian’ or ‘participating’.
“A Community in order to be real ….in order that it might be infused with the sense of community , must emphasize in its internal life such ethical values as adjustment , harmony and co-operation” .(JP Narayan)

He suggested communitarian because for him it was the only way where people could learn the way of life and this system will make every village , every individual and every community self reliant and self sufficient .

“The representative political institutions …should be so constituted as to represent not individuals, but their communities; beginning with the primary (or village ) community and going outward to embrace wider and wider circles”.(JP Narayan )

He was in favour of creating responsible local government at villages ,he gave the whole structure how the powers should be divided in local government ,the highest local institution of the local community was ‘gram sabha ’ which was responsible for providing foshelter, clothethestes and primary education , the second institution was regional known as ‘gram panchayat ’ which was responsible for economic and political development, these gram panchayats further make ‘panchayats samitis ’ which is selected by all the members of gram panchayat and the third institution is ‘district council ’ which is elected by samitis .

“The most basic cause of difference ….arises out of the difference between the Parliamentary and Panchayat systems. The Parliamentary system based as it is on the mass of unorganized individual voters, cannot, in its very nature, function without the intervention of political parties”.(JP Narayan 1962 )

JP narayan was of view that that election procedure regarding vidhan sabha and lok sabha should also be modified so that people of gram sabha can also participate .He also stressed that decentralisation and economic decentralisation should co-exist together so that over all development can take place . He suggested that industries should be linked with agriculture so that every village could develop as an agro-industrial community, he always stressed that PRI’S was very important for economic development and it will also decrease the dependency of villages at centre because it will make them economically strong . For him rural development was the only way for the development of the country and the true implementation of the concept of ‘SARVODYA’

Vinoba’s Conception of Democratic Decentralization:

Vinoba Bhave is known as disciple of Gandhi ji ,he like him believed in the concept of non-violence, human values and love. He gave the famous slogan ‘Jai Jagat’ ,he wrote various books and published his many articles some of his famous works were ‘Maharashtra Dharma ’,swarajya shastra etc his writings covered vast areas of religion,phillosphy,education and sarvodya . It was Vinoba Bhave who gave the idea of ‘Sarvodya samaj ’in 1948 at sevagram ashram in the presence of Gandhi jib and Pandit Jawhar Lal Nehru. For him

“Sarvodaya does not mean good government or majority rule, it means freedom from government, it means decentralization of power”(Vinoba Bhave ,1962 )

He was always in the favour of creating an equitable society from top to bottom and for him Panchayat raj system was the only instruement for making bottom ie villages independent and solving their own problems .For him

“Decentralization of power so that there are maximum powers at the lowest level ,minimum powers at higher levels and only moral power at the highest level…Cooperation ….Full opportunity for individual development…spirit of dedication for society ..activity in education”(Vinoba Bhave 1965 )

He was also invited by the then Prime Minister for discussing about the functioning of planning commission and he suggested that it is important for India to attain self sufficiency and to opt for decentralisation which is important for an independent India.

“India can become truly free only if it could avoid such centralization and thereby the show to the world an example of true independence.” (VinobaBhave ,1948 )
According to him decentralisation was needed immediately as he was against the present system of government and favoured the establishment of sarvodaya society, he favoured that villages should have freedom in conducting their own affairs.

“The things have changed since then and today we find that though the villages still produce all the raw material, they depend for the most of their wants on cities”. (Vinoba Bhave 1953)

They should not be dependent on centre for their immediate wants. He also gave the concept of ‘Ram raj’ which could be attained through achieving ‘Village swaraj’ by giving independence to every individual and creating a self-reliant community,

“Self–reliant village community will be built on three pillars - Gramdan, Gram Sabha an Lok Vastra. This, I think I will be quite revolutionary”. (Vinoba Bhave 1973).

He was in favour that every individual in village should be happy and prosperous, should have self-sufficiency in clothes, should be given proper education and it is the responsibility of the panchayats to fulfil these needs as people are dependent upon them and vice versa,

“The real Power of the Panchayats lies in the people’s support. The Panchayat should therefore follow their will and act under their control”. (Vinoba Bhave 1954).

He was of view that villages should have their own industries and each village should stress upon integrated and comprehensive development and agriculture should given more importance as for him agriculture was ‘Sita’ and villages were ‘Ram’ and he said they both will be happy if they will be united, so that every village will be self-sufficient and can also do import and export of the commodities, he also suggested that every village will solve their problems themselves at village only,

“Disputes of the village will not be decided outside….The village will defend itself by its own strength….It will control its imports and exports. It will produce its own food.” (Vinoba Bhave, 1957).

Vinoba Bhave saw that panchayats and decentralisation was the only way to establish true democracy as he was against the modern democracy in India and making each and every individual self-sufficient.

COMPARITIVE ANALYSIS:

JP Narayan and Vinoba Bhave both were the true followers of Gandhi jib, both share almost the same views and thoughts regarding the importance of panchayats and decentralisation of power, both wanted to create ‘village swaraj’ so that each village could become self-dependent, both the philosophers were against the concept of modern democracy and was in favour of decentralised democracy, both the thinkers share almost similar view point regarding the defective electoral system and have suggested direct elections instead of indirect elections, both wanted to have party less democracy as both are of view that part works only for their own benefits and not for the welfare of people. Both wanted that every village should have industries and should stress on agriculture, they even share the similar views regarding the functions of the panchayats that it should be the responsibility of panchayats to fulfill basic needs like food, shelter, education, clothes, medicine of the people living in the villages. Both believed in establishing the sarvodya society for over all development of the individual and were in favour of giving more rights and responsibilities to panchayats both wanted decentralised form of government to establish democracy in the true sense and also to decrease dependency of villages on centre.

RELEVANCE:

The views given by both the philosophers are relevant even today, because panchayats are an important part of our democratic and decentralised structure and after the 72nd Constitutional Amendment have gain more importance. The panchayats are playing effective role in today’s scenario, as they are more aware about their
responsibilities, they are working towards the effective development of their villages, they are efficiently providing basic needs and facilities to the people in villages but still it is facing various problems like lack of participation of people, lack of conceptual clarity, lack of education, lack of women participation, interference of political parties, caste politics etc. even after so many years, these problems are still need to be curbed and these problems can be resolved by implementing the ideas of philosophers like JP Narayan and Vinoba Bhave and making the functioning of panchayats more accountable and improving their role in decision making process.

CONCLUSION:

It can be concluded that Panchayats were and are important part of democracy and it cannot be separated from it for the effective working of the government. The suggestion given by both the philosophers were partially implemented and not completely but India has opted decentralisation and power is divided among the three tiers for effective working. At village level panchayats are working at state government state government is looking after the state affairs and at centre, centre government is at work. Panchayats are working effectively as an independent entity which was the dream of our philosophers. To some extent the dream of creating Sarvodya society is fulfilled but still it will took time to flourish. More steps should be taken by government to resolve the problems faced by panchayats today to achieve and also to fulfil the dreams of our two eminent philosopher JP Narayan a true social constructionist and Vinoba Bhave a true spiritual leader and a disciple of Gandhiji.

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