Democracy: Western and Indian

Schooled in western outlook, we have come to believe that democracy is foreign to our land and has been imported from the west. This implanted belief has blinded our sense of perception so much that we fail to see the ground under our feet. We fail to realize that India has been the bedrock on which democracy has been practiced throughout, in our day to day life, and through the ages.

Civilization of industrial west is of comparatively recent origin. Theirs has been a path of grouping for the deal, of forms and norms, of trial and error. Total concentration of power in the monarch had led to colossal abuse and misrule which inspired the people of the west for a republican way of life. Replacing the hereditary monarchs by elected representatives of the people, with tenure of office limited to short periods, the west abolished the rule of one man for the Government by the Senate and the Syndicate. The western institution of democracy was, thus, a measure of exigency, a device implemented under the compulsion of social and economic events. Out and out a secular product, democracy was condemned by Papal authority several times. The clergymen, who were the protagonists of the divine right of the King never gave their sanction to the new order ushered in by the popular will. Western democracy, thus, lacks the halo of spiritual enlightenment. It has not been even linked to the laws of nature to provide a permanent sustenance for it. Time and again, protagonists of a different political order have challenged the validity of western democracy. Its basis has been ridiculed as the rule by a thousand fools that can hardly stand comparison with the rule of a single head. Western democracy has thus taken different forms in different countries according to the respective historical developments, the shape of one different from the other even in the basic pattern. Time and again, it has been replaced by autocratic rule of oligarchy, fascism or communism, completely wiping out the liberty of the common man.

In India, democracy is not a device designed simply to run the

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Government. It was the way of life itself. Democracy in India was in its grassroots form, not merely on the political superstructure of social life. The Indian fashioned his life to live closer to nature. Laws of nature, being paramount to Indian society, placed them as an immutable factor. Since nature has created the individual, society recognized the personality of each individual and gave fullest liberty for its growth and flowering. Since nature creates man as a social being, the individual has to remain within the social bounds. In other words, the individuals' conduct should be in consonance with the common will of the society. The Indian village was built on a synthesis of the two concepts: individual liberty and social will. To harmonize the two and bind them together in a peaceful and lasting accord, the Indian thought of living together in small numbers in village rather than being jostled up in big cities like the Greeks, or in formidable citadels like the Romans. The social, economic and political organization of Indian life thus built up in a decentralized pattern keeping with the spiritual enlightenment of the ancient Rishis who inculcated the idea that each individual is an embodiment of the Infinite, each man is an incarnation of God (Nar- narayan), and therefore deserved to be regarded with respect by all high and low, irrespective of his social, economic or political status.

Indian culture, thus, lay scattered through the vast country called Aryavarta. The village constituted the cells of the body, both socially and politically. The village community was a semi independent organization and acted as the primary unit of the wider and ever widening circle of "Bisha", "Desha", "Rajya" (district/state/country) and so on.

The village government was a self sufficient unit. It took decisions over all sorts of matters from time to time by occasional sitting of the village elders. They executed their decrees. They needed no white collar officers to solve their problems, no magistrates to decide their disputes. The villagers deputed their nominees to large bodies to represent the village and had the power to recall them at their will. The ruler was little concerned. The internal affairs of the village were left to the villagers in most matters. Violent changes in the political arena hardly touched the villagers where life flowed peacefully as the natural stream. It was a rule of the people, for the people and by the people. The west

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has not yet achieved the ideals of democracy by which the Indian village used to live. This way of Indian life was simple and graceful, enabling each to put forth his best and come to live with love and affection with the neighbors. It brought a sense of fulfillment to each one's life. Men enjoyed peace and freedom while nature fulfilled her purpose through the creation of human race. This way of life was spiritually sound and was full of bliss.

It was lamentable that we have gone in for the glittering matter casting aside the sterling gold. People at the helm of affairs have opted to part ways with our way of life and seek to replace it with western way of life. Our present problem with a sense of deepening frustration for each individual is concomitant of the industrial civilization in the west. Gandhiji, in his visionary wisdom, had advised us to keep away from imitating the west. He had categorically pronounced that western democracy was unsuited to our conditions. We ignored his advice. Now we find ourselves in a quagmire. It is time we reacted before we are swept away and swallowed up in deep mud.

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