

Walzer and Gandhi: Relevance for Indian Democracy in the Contemporary Times



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Abstract

Democratic form of government was established in India after Independence in 1947. In India, the democracy has survived, since then, due to a well drafted Constitution, which has acted as the soul of the Indian democracy. The feature of the Indian Constitution to mould itself according to the changing needs and aspirations of the people have helped democracy to strengthen its root in India. Also, along with this malleable feature, the Constitution itself has provided for certain mechanism to safeguard the democratic system in India. But, despite of this beautiful soul, in the actual working of the Indian democracy, there has been a gradual decline in the quality of democracy and democratic values in the nation. The paper seeks to investigate and comprehend the reasons for the survival of democracy in India. The present study also focuses on examining the various challenges faced by the democratic system of the nation. Further, the paper tries to explore the relevance of Walzer's theory of Complex equality and of Gandhian philosophy, in serving the democratic system of India to advance ahead on the path of development. The paper argues that an amalgamation of the theory of Complex equality and Gandhian theory of the non-violent democracy can assist in further increasing the legitimacy of the democratic institutions in India.

Keywords: Democracy, Complex Equality, Democratic Decentralization, Non-Violent Democracy, Spiritualization of Politics.

Introduction

In the present times, Democracy is regarded as the most popular form of government but simultaneously, it has also been observed during the last few decades that the people are not as confident and hopeful about democracy as they used to be few decades ago. The story of success as well as failure of democratic institutions in different parts of the world has become a common phenomenon during the last few decades. Due to which there has been a growing concern for reforms in democratic institutions and processes so as to strengthen the roots of democracy. The success of democracy should not be measured only by the number of nations accepting it as a form of government rather it should be measured by how much change it has been able to bring about in the lives of the people particularly people belonging to the developing and third world countries.

Democracy, as the form of government, provides essential ingredients which are necessary for the development of an individual as well as for the progress of the society. Democracy ensures basic liberties and rights to all the individuals, and thus, creates an environment which leads to the comprehensive development of an individual's personality. Similarly, with the evolution of the concept of welfare state, the modern democracies have also focused on eradicating the inequalities, exploitation and evils present in the social as well as economic spheres. So, the democratic set up also contributes towards social and economic progress. Thus, democracy as a system of governance must be essentially based on the notions of liberty and equality, and then only it can ensure justice in the society. However, in the present times, due to the model of welfare state, the scope of the functions of the democratic institutions has greatly increased. This has led to the rise of several problems like corruption, red tapism, nepotism, criminalization etc. before the political systems, particularly those of the third world countries.

Objectives of the Study

The paper seeks to understand the causes for the continuance of democratic institutions in India. It also tries to realize the major challenges faced by the Indian political system. In order to counter these challenges,

the present study examines the practical aspects of the concept of Complex equality, propounded by Walzer and that of Gandhian philosophy, in order to improve the efficiency of democratic institutions in India.

Methodology

The present study uses Historical and Diagnostic methods to understand the reasons for the survival of democracy in India. Further, the paper employs Empirical and Analytical approach to explore the challenges before the political system of India. A detailed Descriptive, Scientific and Comparative analysis is done of the theory of complex equality and that of the various aspects of Gandhian philosophy, in order to discover their contemporary relevance in resolving the problems of democratic institutions.

Review of Literature

Austin, Granville (2003) *Working in a Democratic Constitution: A History of the Indian Experience*, Oxford. This book discusses in detail the history of the functioning of the Constitution of India from 1950 to 1985 and also deals with certain important events of after years as well. The book deals with the Indian politics as well as examines all those factors which influenced the shaping of the Indian political system.

Dahl, Robert (2001), *On Democracy*, East-West Press Eds., New Delhi. An important work on Democracy, the book discusses that how other form of governments have disappeared whereas democracy has not only survived but is more and more accepted as form of government by different nations. In this work the author clarifies the real meaning and nature of democracy, why it is important for the development of mankind? And what are the challenges it faces in the future?

Dhawan, G.N. (1990) *The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi*, Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi. The book extensively deals, not only with the political beliefs of Gandhi, but it also tries to explain the Gandhian outlook about the life. The book discusses in detail Gandhi's views about non-violent state and how it can be realized in actual practice. The author have also tried to throw light on the notion of justice, which is intrinsically present in all the political ideas of Gandhi.

Walzer, Michael (1983) *Spheres of Justice: A Defence of Pluralism and Equality*, Robertson And Company Ltd., Oxford. In this work, Walzer has presented the Communitarian perspective of justice, as against the Rawlsian conception of liberal justice. The author has described justice as community specific and has developed the notion of complex equality, as a means to establish justice in the various communities. In this book, Walzer has given various examples, of different spheres, to put into practice his notion of complex equality.

Democracy in India

With the dawn of freedom, democracy was established in India, after a long struggle against British colonialism. In west, democracy has gradually evolved with the awakening and enlightenment of the people but the peculiar thing about Indian experiment

with the democratic system, was the establishment of democracy by a single stroke through the implementation of universal adult franchise. Several political analysts, at that time, believed that this Indian experiment would not survive for long because democracy requires certain essential conditions to grow, which do not exist in a poor, illiterate, diverse and divided country like India. However, the continuous existence and growth of democratic practices in India have proved all these claims as myths.

An important reason for the survival and growth of democracy in India is the well drafted constitution, which has ensured social, economic and political justice to all the sections of the society in India. The philosophy which has influenced the evolution of Indian constitution and also guided the working of democratic institutions in India has been well expressed by J. L. Nehru in the following words 'while we want this constitution to be solid and permanent as we make it, there is no permanence in constitutions. There should be certain flexibility. If you make anything rigid and permanent, you stop the nation's growth, the growth of a living, vital organic people..... In any event, we could not make this constitution as rigid that it cannot be adapted to changing conditions. When the world is in turmoil and we are passing through a very swift period of transition, what we may do today may not be wholly capable tomorrow.' (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948: 322-23)

Thus, an important aspect of the Indian constitution is that it is more flexible than rigid. This elasticity of the Indian constitution has enabled the democratic institutions in India to adjust themselves according to the progressive aspirations of the people. The amendment procedure of the constitution itself highlights this important feature. For amendment, only few provisions of the constitution require ratification by just half of the states in addition to special majority of the parliament. Some other provisions can be amended by a special majority of the parliament, that is, two-third majority of the members of each house present and voting and a majority of the total membership of each house. Many other provisions of the constitution can be amended by a simple majority of the parliament, but such amendments shall not fall under Article 368. This unique characteristic of Indian constitution has been admired by Prof. Wheare in following words 'This variety in the amending process is wise but is rarely found.' (Wheare, 1966:143)

Moreover, what makes Indian constitution different from other constitutions is that '....it was not intended to serve merely as a charter of government but as a means to achieve the social and economic transformation of the country peacefully.....'(Basu, 2008:418). Thus the Indian constitution is not merely a document for the government but it is also an instrument for securing socio-economic justice for the citizens.

The Indian Constitution, through fundamental rights and directive principles of the state policy has tried to establish political as well as socio-economic democracy in the country. Democratic institution

would not have been able to gain legitimacy in India if the Constitution would have aimed only for political democracy. The constitution by regarding every individual as equal before law and ensuring universal adult franchise has tried to establish political democracy in India. By abolishing untouchability, providing reservations in the government job and legislative bodies, the Constitution seeks to work for the upliftment of the downtrodden and backward sections of the society thereby securing social justice to them. Similarly, the Directive principles seek to establish economic democracy in the country by providing for minimizing inequalities among people in the spheres of income, status, facilities and opportunities.

Another attribute of Indian constitution that has enabled it to establish best democratic practices in India, is that it has borrowed various provisions from different constitutions of the world. However, the constitution framers were wise enough to appropriately modify the borrowed features to suit the Indian conditions and also at the same time avoided their shortcomings. This was possible because the members of the Indian constituent assembly were fully aware of the socio-economic, cultural and ethnic conditions and demands of the Indian people.

Apart from these constructive aspects, the Constitution has provided for decentralized peoples' institutions from Panchayats and Municipalities at the lowest level to Parliament at the highest level, representing the sovereign power of the people. The constitution has given enough power to these bodies to work for the development of the society and meet the socio-economic aspirations of the people through affirmative legislation. Similarly, the integrated independent judicial system functions to safeguard the constitution as well as the liberties of the people. Judiciary ensures that the spirit of the constitution is followed and implemented in the Indian state. It ensures legal justice to the people and in the present context is playing an important role in improving the living standards of the people through environmental activism.

In addition to these institutions, the bodies like Election Commission, National Commission for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), the UPSC, the Comptroller and Auditor General etc. plays an important role in safeguarding and developing the social, economic and political character of the Indian democracy. The growth of democracy in India since Independence is synonymous to the development of these institutions. As a result, the Constitution enables these institutions to work freely within its ambit to secure political and socio-economic justice and at the same time tries to protect the integrity of these democratic institutions, through its various provisions.

Deteriorating Quality of Democracy in India

However, in the recent past there have been decline in the legitimacy of democratic institutions in India. The actual working of these political institutions, during the last few decades, have highlighted the fact that they have not been able to meet the aspirations of the people and has also failed to act according to

the objectives of the constitution. For example, in the present century, there have been gradual decline in the institutional capacity of the Parliament, as the supreme law making body of the nation.

Parliament, as the law-making body, had an average sitting for 125-130 days in a year during the decade 1950 to 1960s. This has come down to just 65-70 days during the last decade (2002-2011). Thus, the duration of time during which Parliament sits and deliberates have declined by almost 50 percent between 1960 and 2011. In fact, in 2017 Parliament recorded the lowest number of sittings, 57, as per the data of PRS Legislative research. (<https://www.deccanherald.com/content/655966/decline-parliament.html>)

During the first Lok Sabha (1952-57), 319 bills were passed. In the 15th Lok Sabha, 181 bills were passed whereas during the 16th Lok Sabha, only 129 bills have been passed (up to the 11th session). (ibid.) This highlights the fact that Parliament's role as the supreme legislative body is under threat and corrective steps have to be taken to enhance the legitimacy and efficiency of this institution.

Parliament also has to be the representative of the Indian society, that is, it has to provide adequate representation to the various sections and interests of the society. The representation to SCs/STs, women and minorities shows the politically inclusive character of the Indian Parliament. But, again, in this sphere, Parliament has failed the constitutional mandate. The current Lok Sabha (16th) consists of 81 MPs of SC category- 14.9% of its strength - against 16.6% of the total population of Scheduled Castes; 49 MPs of ST category- 9% of its strength - against an ST population of 8.6%; 62 women MPs constitute 11.4% of the Lok Sabha, while women constitute 49% of India's population; there are 23 Muslim MPs - 4.2% of Lok Sabha - while the community makes up 10.5% of the country's population. (ibid.)

The criminalization of politics is also a serious issue of concern. Parliament as an institution should encourage- diffusion of healthy political culture, ethics and individual integrity in public sphere, professionalism in politics, socially sensitive and politically conscious MPs, but the criminalization of politics is adversely affecting these objectives, which are essential for the growth and survival of Parliamentary system in India. (ibid.) The present Lok Sabha, elected in 2014, have the maximum number of MPs with criminal cases registered against them. As per the data of Association of Democratic Reforms, 34 percent of the MPs of present Lok Sabha, faces criminal charges. This percentage of MPs in 2009 Lok Sabha and 2004 Lok Sabha was 30 and 24 percent respectively. (The Hindu, May 19, 2014)

Thus, if these trends of deterioration of Parliamentary functioning continue, it can seriously affect the growth of democratic values and traditions in the Indian society.

Similarly, Judiciary, as the supreme institution in legal sphere, has failed to render quick and inexpensive justice to the vast majority of the Indian people. It has been observed that, in the legal

sphere, the politically and economically capable people have been able to interfere and influence the courts in their favor. In the same way, another pillar of the Indian democracy, the Election Commission of India has failed to check the growing money and muscle power in the elections. Here, it is important to point out that the dominant element of one sphere (that is money of economic sphere) is interfering with the working of other spheres. This has hampered the proper functioning of the democratic institutions in India, at present and in future, can become a serious problem for their independent working.

This interference of the dominant element of one sphere, say money of economic sphere, in the working of another sphere (political sphere), like buying political offices through money, have led to the rise of corruption and nepotism in India. Corruption is one of the major challenges before the political institutions, which is slowly eroding the integrity and legitimacy of these institutions. According to the Transparency International's, corruption perception index, 2017 India has ranked 81st out of total 180 countries. The report has placed India among the "worst offenders" in terms of graft and press freedom in the Asia Pacific region. There has been a decline in the ranking of India as compared to the previous year's corruption perception index, 2016. (Times of India, Feb 22, 2018)

Apart from corruption and nepotism, the rising economic inequality among the Indian masses is also bound to affect the quality of democracy in India. The economic inequality persistent in India is highlighted by the statement that "the richest top quintile of population has 85 percent of the income. In India, the poorest quintile has only 1.5 percent of the country's income. The second, third and the fourth quintile from top have 8 percent, 3.5 percent and 2 percent of the income respectively. (Kashyap, 2008:347) As it has been rightly observed that in the absence of economic equality, the political democracy cannot thrive, so it is important that the gap between the rich and the poor should be minimized and the benefits of economic development should trickle down to the last man.

Further, the Economist Intelligence Unit's 2017 Democracy Index report shows that democracy is in decline across the world. India is one of the countries whose score have declined the most. It fell ten places in the ranking from 32 to 42 and remained classified among 'flawed democracies.' The report highlighted that the 'rise of conservative religious ideologies, in an otherwise secular country, led to a rise of vigilantism & violence against minority communities.' (<https://scroll.in/latest/867091/india-slips-10-places-to-42-in-economist-intelligence-units-democracy-index>) Therefore, reforms need to be introduced to transform the Indian political system from 'flawed democracy' into a 'developed, efficient and sensitive democracy'.

Thus, in theory, the essential conditions required for the success of the democracy in a nation are present in India like fair and periodic elections, freedom to contest elections, guaranteed fundamental rights, representative government elected on the

basis of the will of the people etc. But, in actual practice, during the last few decades, several problems have aroused before the Indian Political system which has led to the decline in the legitimacy of the political institutions in India. The recent movements against corruption, red tapism, secrecy in the working of governmental institutions and several other instances highlights the anguish and despair of the people towards the democratic system of the country. Such atmosphere, in future, can prove to be dangerous for the survival and growth of democracy in India.

One of the key objectives of democratic institutions is to provide equal participation and opportunities to all its members so that they can develop their personalities in various spheres of life. However, in modern democracies few dominant institutions or goods are being monopolized by few people. Thereafter, these institutions are being used to gain access to other institutions. The use of monopolized institutions to influence the working of other democratic institutions signals towards the flexibility of the democratic institutions, but this kind of flexibility is not good for the life of democratic institutions. This results in institutional decay. In India and other Third world countries this problem exists, where the political sphere has dominated the other spheres and has influenced the working of other spheres. Along with this there has been a rapid decline in the moral standards of the Indian society. All this, has led to rise of problems like corruption, nepotism, criminalization of politics, lack of ethics in politics, concentration of wealth in few hands resulting in economic inequality etc.

The theory of 'Complex Equality' given by Michael Walzer and Gandhian principles of Democratic decentralization, spiritualization of politics and Non-violent democracy can be helpful in resolving the contemporary problems arising before the democratic institutions and thereby improving the quality of democracy in India.

Walzer's theory of Complex Equality

Walzer has developed the concept of complex equality as a theory of justice. It seeks to explain the method of distribution of various resources of the society among its members in a just manner. However, it is important to point out, at this initial stage that, here attempt has been made to use only that portion of the theory of complex equality which is useful in strengthening democracy, particularly in the developing and third world countries.

In his theory of complex equality, Walzer has differentiated between Dominance and Monopoly. According to him, the control over a good in a particular sphere by an individual is called as Monopoly, whereas when this monopoly is used to gain control over the goods belonging to different spheres then it is called as Dominance. According to him, the various theories of justice focuses only on the elimination of monopoly whereas to create a just society, in the real sense of the term, it is essential to eliminate the dominance, which Walzer believes can be done through his theory of complex equality. For example, the people in politics first establish their

monopoly over political sphere and then use their political power to dominate other sphere like economic, sport or education. According to theory of complex equality this is wrong and unjust. This condition is prevailing in the developing and third world countries.

Further, Walzer has distinguished between simple equality and complex equality. According to him, simple equality means equal distribution of the dominant good, that is, the dominant good should not be controlled by few people rather, as far as possible it should be equally distributed among the people. So, the notion of simple equality is against monopoly. However, Walzer believes that as the idea of simple equality is not concerned with dominance, so the people who monopolizes the dominant good in one sphere uses their monopoly to gain access to various goods in different spheres. Thus, the same group of people dominates several spheres in the regime of simple equality which leads to inequality in the society.

So, Walzer believes that the aim of any theory of distributive justice should be to reduce the dominance in order to establish perfect equality in the society and this can be done through complex equality. Likewise, the democratic system, in order to flourish in the third world countries, should prevent the control of few people over all the spheres (resources) of the society.

Walzer's theory of complex equality states that every society has a number of spheres having a single or set of dominant goods. Every good has a social meaning which differs from one society to another. Justice demands that the autonomy of each sphere should be protected and there should be separate distributive principles for different spheres. The distributive principle should be determined on the basis of the social meanings of the goods and the social meaning can be judged through the analysis of the values and practices of the basic institutions of the society which are engaged in the process of the distribution of goods. The theory of complex equality demands that a good belonging to a particular sphere should not be allowed to influence the distribution of goods belonging to other spheres. Complex equality prohibits the conversion of one dominant good into another good. The significant thing in Walzer's theory, for the supporters of democracy, is that- a democratic state should be pluralistic in nature, that is, power should be diffused. Only few spheres, like political and economic, should not be able to control all the other spheres.

According to Walzer, the regime of complex equality will lead to establishment of equality in society because different people will monopolize different goods in different spheres so in the final analysis they will enjoy equal social status in the society.

Walzer believes that the notion of complex equality is against Tyranny. According to him, when monopoly over one good is used to establish dominance over other goods belonging to different sphere, that is, when one good is converted into another then it results in tyranny. On the other hand,

complex equality recognizes and respects the autonomy of various spheres. It prohibits the conversion between goods belonging to different spheres.

Walzer regards decentralized democratic socialist society as just society. In such a society there will be large number of spheres of goods and the autonomy of each sphere will be protected. As power is decentralized in such a society so it cannot be abused to gain access over goods belonging to different spheres. According to Walzer, the role of state is to safeguard the boundaries of all the spheres and prevent the conversion of one good into another.

Gandhian model of Democracy

Though Gandhi was a strong critic of western democracy, but as in practice, he was an individualist, so he supported a non-violent democratic state which would be based on the principles of individual liberty, swaraj, decentralization of authority and spiritualization of politics.

Gandhi, in his non-violent democracy believes in the concept of moral man, who will always be guided by his inner self conscience, so he demands maximum freedom for individual. Such an individual will not only use his freedom for his personal progress, but he will also fulfill his social obligations. Gandhi also supported decentralization of authority to prevent misuse of the power and to enable the people to have share in the state power. He believed that power should flow from people to parliament and not vice-versa.

A major problem which has led to increase in corruption, particularly in developing and third world countries, has been decline in the moral character of the people's representatives. This has also resulted in the criminalization of politics. However, this can be checked through Gandhian concept of Spiritualization of politics. Gandhi laid great emphasis on elevating the character of the representatives. He believed that politics should not be regarded as a profit motive business rather it should be regarded as a duty to serve the nation.

According to Gandhi, the representatives should not use their position for fulfilling their own interests rather they should be honest and self-sacrificing. The representatives should realize their social responsibility and should act accordingly for the welfare of the society. Gandhi believed that the representatives should understand that in the development of the society lies their own development and so, the representatives should work for the advancement of the society.

Conclusion

Democratic institutions have survived in India, since Independence, but this does not signify that they have worked up to the satisfaction of the majority of Indian population. Problems like poverty, growing economic inequality, caste discrimination and exploitation, corruption depriving poor of their legitimate share in economic and social security domain etc. have raised serious questions on the legitimacy of the Democratic institutions. If these problems get aggravated in the next few decades,

then the existence of democratic institutions, in India, will be in danger.

Complex Equality and Democracy

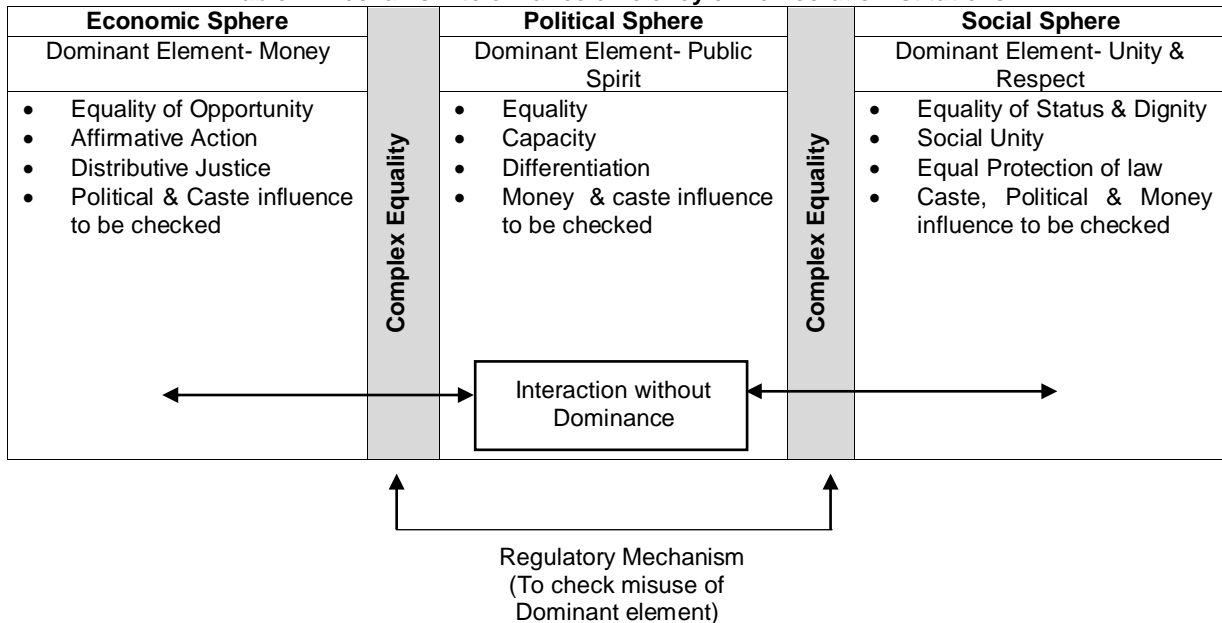
For democracy to survive in developing or third world countries, it is essential that there should exist different spheres like political, economic, education, health, sports, art etc so that individual, according to his personality, can achieve high social status in the field of his choice. This will satisfy the merit element of his personality and he will show allegiance to his political system as well. The problem in democratic system today, in most of the developing and third world countries is that, there are only few spheres like political and economic, which plays a dominant role and so people try to acquire higher positions in these spheres by any means. This leads to corrupt practices, as those acquiring higher economic or political positions, also tries to gain control over other spheres for fulfilling their own interest. For example, the politicians in India through their political and economic power occupies higher position in the fields like education, art, sports etc where they have no or very little knowledge.

Corruption occurs when there are loop holes in the rules/laws of a particular sphere or sector and these loop holes are utilized by influential people for their own benefits at the expense of the welfare of the common people. But when there will be different

spheres and each sphere will have its own principles, and then it will not be possible to establish dominance over other spheres. But, for this it is essential that, every sphere should lay down its working principles and should opt for transparency in its functioning. For example, the different institutions and departments in India should make detailed rules regarding their work and should bring in transparency in their functioning. By doing so they can reduce the influence of political and economic sphere over their working and so the chances of corruption will also be minimized.

Further, the existence of different spheres, which enjoy more or less equal social status, will greatly help in reducing the economic disparities existing in most of the developing nation. It will also help in reducing poverty in these nations. The economic disparities exist because only few elites are enjoying monopoly over dominant spheres of politics and economy. There is less career options for the people, as firstly, other spheres like art, culture, sport etc does not enjoy higher social status and secondly, the top most positions in these spheres are been controlled by few elites. So, if the government in the third world countries develop different spheres, then certainly there will be improvement in the social and economic status of millions of people, who has the ability to perform well in these spheres.

Table 1: Mechanism to enhance efficiency of Democratic Institutions



Gandhian Model of Democracy

Gandhi believed in decentralized economic and political structure. The democracy, in the present times, to enhance its legitimacy, must be pluralistic in nature. It must be all inclusive and work for the social and economic upliftment of all the sections of the society. Good governance can be ensured only when there is transparency in the political system. This transparency can be ensured through decentralized economic and political structures, to which the people have direct and easy access.

Spiritualization of politics is essential, not only to wipe out the existing evils from politics but also to develop political leaders, who work for the progress of the whole society. People with wide public support and having a proven record of social service, should be encouraged to enter the political sphere. The people having criminal cases registered against them should not be allowed to contest elections. The peoples representatives should publicly present their annual report card, which should include the work done by him/her in previous year and his/her vision for the coming year. Annual audit of the work done by a M.L.A. or M.P. should be conducted by the people of

his/her constituency. Such steps should be encouraged to develop strong political leadership, which could take nation ahead on the path of development.

Gandhi believed that social development should precede the political growth. A nation can attain higher economic and political development, only when its society is developed. In Indian society emphasis should be given on social unity and harmony. Eradication of social discrimination and diffusion of healthy political and social culture is essential for bringing about social transformation in India. 'Social-political educational camps' should be organized in rural and urban areas for making people politically and socially conscious and active citizens.

Thus, the democratic institutions in India faces several challenges, which in future can seriously harm the legitimacy and reputation of these institutions. Due to these issues, there has been a decline in the quality of democracy in India. So, in order to maintain the quality of democracy and enhance the legitimacy of the democratic institutions, the theory of complex equality and Gandhian model of non-violent democracy should be put into practice. An amalgamation of the theories of Walzer and Gandhi will help in rejuvenating the political institutions, which will efficiently work for the realization of the aims and objectives of the Indian constitution.

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