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Exploring the Deliberative Ideal through the lens of Gandhian Thought

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ABSTRACT

Deliberative Democracy theory is an ever-expanding field in political theory. In the present article, I aim to present the significance of Gandhian thought for the theory of deliberative democracy. Gandhi never used the term deliberation or articulated a theory of deliberative democracy specifically while expressing his notion of ideal democracy. For him, discussion, exchange of thoughts, reasoning, etc. was instinctive for democracy and not something that required to be defended within the boundaries of scholarship. I trace the central elements of democracy in Gandhian thought and examine them through the lens of deliberative democracy theory. I also examine the implication of Gandhi's formulations in India. In doing so, I would develop a richer understanding of democracy by bringing clarity to the contribution of Gandhi to the cause of deliberative democracy.

Keywords: Gandhi; Deliberative Democracy; Political Theory; Democracy; Indian Democracy

I. Introduction

LIBERAL DEMOCRACY HAS the tendency of being overwhelmingly totalitarian. The fear of this tendency was expressed by Tocqueville long ago when he was mesmerised by the democracy in America. The totalitarian tendency is capable of manifesting in multiple ways, for instance, a highly bureaucratic central system can be organised to conduct the affairs of democracy, people can become vigilantes in a system that represents an ideal form of liberal democracy, the

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democratic procedures can be rigged, so on and so forth. Deliberative democrats have criticised existing liberal democracy on these grounds and propagated a deliberative form of democracy that allows people to actively participate in the political processes consistently rather than voting once whenever the elections take place. However, even the deliberative democrats who supported a proceduralist model of deliberative democracy have faced numerous backlashes due to the exclusive nature of the deliberative ideal that has been professed voraciously by them. The critique of modern democracy is not new. Gandhi has termed the modern democratic state as a “soulless machine” due to its amoral nature because the state ends up inflicting violence upon its own citizens¹. He makes such remarks in the context of European states that are ‘nominally democratic’ in his viewpoint because citizens lack an active role within the political processes of the states. In the absence of a defined political role, people do not know where they should direct their spirit and passion for the nation².

But then what political framework really captures the essence of democracy? Was Gandhi hinting upon the importance of deliberation long before deliberative democrats could formulate their defence of the practice of deliberation in democracy? What did Gandhi imply by democracy and was his formulation ahead of the prescriptions of deliberative democracy?

In the present article, I aim to present the significance of Gandhian thought for the theory of deliberative democracy. Gandhi never used the term deliberation or articulated a theory of deliberative democracy specifically while expressing his notion of ideal democracy. For him, discussion, exchange of thoughts, reasoning, etc. was instinctive for democracy and not something that required to be defended within the boundaries of scholarship. I trace the central elements of democracy in Gandhian thought and examine them through the lens of deliberative democracy theory. I also examine the implication of Gandhi’s formulations in India. In doing so, I would develop a richer understanding of democracy by bringing clarity to the contribution of Gandhi to the cause of deliberative democracy.

II. Deliberative democratic theory and Gandhi’s postulates- An Overview

At the heart of the entire deliberative democracy theory lies a basic premise that defends a non-coercive public debate that is utterly unforced in nature. They delegate the responsibility of opinion formation or preference formation to the individual and the collective of the governed. It allows enhancing ways through which an individual who is a part of democracy can move ahead in the direction of decision-

making. Hence, Jurgen Habermas's communicative action is significant. However, the limitation is there because Habermas isn't flexible about the ways through which people can participate in deliberative procedures³. It creates limitations at a theoretical level when the idea of people participating in democratic processes beyond elections isn't even entertained in a context where a high level of expertise can't be achieved by all. How are people supposed to sustain their political agency when there isn't any formal space designated specifically for the development of democratic decision-making? Surely, the informal spaces are there where people can enjoy basic freedoms of discussing and enhancing their agency but they aren't immune to perverse forms of verbal persuasions such as rumour mongering, mockery, misguidance, etc. Apart from this, people fall prey to intense information spread through media forms such as broadcast media and digital social media. These are features of modern life where political evolution is not as quick as it should be. Liberal democracy relies heavily on the ability of people to decide but is absolutely silent when it comes to nurturing people's decision-making skills. Mahatma Gandhi, an Indian philosopher, and leader, detected these possible negative outcomes of liberal democracy and pushed forward the ideals of decentralised democracy. Gandhi has not referred to a deliberative form of democracy in the same manner as it developed as a sub-area within political theory a lot later, however, has advocated staunchly regarding people's ability to discuss and deliberate. The foundational core principle that acts as a ground from which the significance of deliberation can be derived is that of freedom. For Gandhi, a democracy cannot prosper if there is some form of restriction upon people's opinion because this type of restriction will inhibit the true realisation of freedom or as Gandhi calls it, *Swaraj*. Gandhi advocated participatory democracy. In this context, the participation of people can be understood as the ability to form a public opinion regarding an issue and the process of legislation should not precede the formation of public opinion. Discussion, exchange of views, ability to understand opposing views, tolerance, and expression of opinion are part of democratic political processes in Gandhi's understanding. Similarly, they are also core values of deliberative democracy, for instance, Gutmann and Thompson explain that reciprocity, public spiritedness, mutual respect, accountability, and publicity are defining features⁴. Deliberation within a democracy cannot be brought to life without participatory mechanisms, however, not every deliberative democracy scholar is in favour of it due to reasons of feasibility. Without a healthy public discussion, a democracy is comprised of moral grounds where people are reduced to passive spectators who outsource

their power to the representatives. The outsourcing of power leads to the concentration of power in the hands of a few and at this point, democracy ceases to be a democracy.

Gandhi is blatantly critical of the democracies in Europe and contrasts it with Nazism and Fascism. He propagates the functions of democracy if it has to be truly the rule of the people. Gandhi intends for “social democratisation of the entire structure” A state where people are concerned with only electing or not electing a representative and nothing more beyond is where the freedom of the individual is also attacked. In order to maintain a balanced democracy, freedom, and social harmony, people are ought to participate in the democracy to make it more substantive rather than keeping it a procedural and amoral democracy.

Alternative imaginings can be drawn from Gandhian thought in contrast to the dominant western paradigm in deliberative democratic theory. Gandhi in his works philosophises the principles that are similar to those that appear in the theoretical foundations of deliberative democracy. The central driving principle for Gandhi is the attainment of *Swaraj* or self-rule. This, in turn, informs the democracy and without this a democracy is flawed. The true architect of the government is the individual. It is wrong to let the outcome of an important issue rest upon the ‘will of one person’. Precisely, the following are the premises that Gandhi pursues when he describes his vision of democracy: tolerance regarding opposing views, discussion upon even the most revolutionary matters, respect for diversity of thoughts, openness, legislation of the basis of people’s participation, self-sufficiency, and oneness. The essence of the second-order theory is echoed throughout the writings of Gandhi.

Let me provide an overview of the arguments put forth by deliberative democracy. The trajectory of arguments is wide. Scholars like Amy Gutmann, Denis Thompson, John Dryzek, Joshua Cohen, Simone Chambers, David Estlund, and James Bohman focus on the theoretical foundations of deliberative democracy and its merits over procedural democracy. They adapted the ideals suggested by philosophers such as John Stuart Mill, John Rawls, Habermas, and others to put together a normative background for deliberative democracy theory. Cardinal principles highlighted by them are reciprocity, mutual respect, publicity, consensus-building, and reaching an agreement.

The second set of scholars such as James Fishkin, Bruce Ackerman, Jurg Steiner, and Habermas too, focus on creating the best possible procedure in terms doing deliberations. They strictly focus on arriving at a procedure for deliberation and ways of measuring the quality of

deliberation in a controlled setting.

The third set of scholars such as Lynn Sanders, Iris Marion Young, Carol Patemen, Jane Mansbridge, Ian Shapiro, and Albert Weale focus on maintaining the contested spaces alive within the deliberation as opposed to the mainstream goal of striving towards consensus or agreement. For them, deliberation is a way of constantly evolving in terms of thought-process and it is wrong to strive for agreement at all because this agreement could mean numerous negative things such as domination of the powerful over the repressed, invisibility of minority argument, majoritarianism, suppression of critical thinking and loss of the possibility of evolution in terms of ideas.

The fourth set of Scholars such as Ian O' Flynn, Nicole Curato, Baogang He, Vijeyandra Rao, and Paromita Sanyal seeks to widen the scope of deliberation by highlighting diverse sites of deliberation in various contexts that do not have favourable conditions as demanded by the earlier theoretical principles of deliberative democracy. For instance, tracing the quality of deliberations in conflict areas or within deeply divided societies can be challenging. Ian O' Flynn questions the reliance on political representatives in an ethically divided society. He argues in favour of making more room for deliberations across people via civil society and also via elected representatives⁵. Others argue in favour of deliberative forums such as mini-publics, a move towards deliberative governance, and regularisation of deliberations among citizens that are able to inform the parliamentary governance⁶. Deliberative democratic theory imbibes the spirit of constant evolution and makes it more inclusive which will expand its boundaries.

How do people refine their abilities to shape the political reality around them? Is it possible that the deliberative tradition can benefit from the Gandhian philosophy? Gandhi's ideas on democracy have been extensively traced within intellectual history and political theory. But how can any form of interlinkages be drawn out between deliberative democracy and the Gandhian conception of democracy? Gandhi has been interpreted as an idealist and a moralist⁷. However, Gandhi has been characterised as a practical idealist or even realist when his norms are examined through the lens of strategic context⁸. A confluence of ideas between Gandhi's ideas on democracy and the theoretical formulations of deliberative democracy is visible at four major points- the notion of the individual, critique of procedural democracy, deontological approach towards political reality, and decentralisation within a democratic political structure. It can be argued that Mahatma Gandhi propounded the directions for deliberative institutions in India and for substantiating the Indian

democracy as opposed to the highly bureaucratic democracy. Let me explain each point out of the four points stated above.

The notion of the individual isn't oriented towards a highly atomised one who is isolated from the larger network of society because that is how the structure of society directs. Instead, the individual is the primary unit or building block of the larger society. Without an empowered individual who is able to exercise one's autonomy for the greater good, society will cease to exist. Gandhi's understanding of the political world involves a moral-psychological understanding⁹. In this world, an individual is capable of reaching their best possible outcome and not succumbing to their brute nature¹⁰. The reasoning capacity of one individual should be nurtured. Similarly, deliberative democrats lay emphasis on the development of political agency at the level of the individual rather than focusing on a group since every individual ideally matters for the health of democracy. And this can be done through participation in political deliberation.

Gandhi is concerned with the preservation of the character of the people in democracy. The virtues and ethical nature of a human will always allow one to take the correct course of action irrespective of immediate outcomes. Similarly, few deliberative democrats do not focus only on the usage of deliberation as a mere instrument for reaching an agreement over some issue according to the context¹¹. Rather, deliberation has a substantive nature. Ideally, it is supposed to be a method for training people to be democratic citizens. It should let people responsibly develop their skills rather than relying on political propaganda or scintillating media reports or unverified social media arguments. This points towards the emphasis on the deontological approach that exists both in Gandhi's thought and theory of deliberative democracy where we must focus on the means and not only the outcome of the democratic procedures.

Gandhi was vehemently against a procedural democracy because the realisation of such a political structure calls for centralised political system that is governed from the top. It would effectively become another tool for the exploitation of the poor and subjugated sections of society. He perceives parliamentary democracy skeptically as the members of it may act selfishly and people who vote for them could be completely misguided through newspapers or other sources of information¹². Similar arguments are echoed in the deliberative democratic theory regarding the procedural or aggregate form of democracy. It subdues the political agency of people over time and may function in a way that entirely defeats the purpose of democracy. It is evident from the political functioning of aggregate democracies all over the world as majoritarianism is prevalent. The time of the

electoral campaign before elections resembles a turbulent time as the propaganda to sway people's opinions is at its peak.

Lastly, the practice of deliberation calls for decentralised institutions such as civic bodies, mini-publics, citizens' assemblies, and public forums. People should directly participate in institutions that help them to deliberate upon any issue at hand. This would allow citizens to come face to face with information about the particular issue and reflect upon it. The main goal of it is to create a discourse irrespective of the diversity within the population of any locality or area. It can also help in developing a channel of communication between any deliberative institutions and parliamentary institutions at the centre of the political structure of the polity. Gandhi's vision for a political framework of a democratic state encompasses the decentralised version in opposition to a centralised structure. For him, the ideal democracy consists of a society that is self-sufficient and self-regulated¹³. Each political unit of the democracy, that is villages in Gandhian philosophy, should coordinate with other units to create a peaceful existence. Interdependence between individuals and society is intrinsic to the management of affairs. It will help in the realisation of the goal of *Swaraj* or self-rule. For such a political structure to exist, it is not prudent to assume that Gandhi expected an individual to quietly participate without making an effort to defend the ideal of liberty¹⁴. Any defence is impossible without discussion over the matter. It wouldn't be wrong to infer that deliberation among people is a valuable part for creating a self-regulating political unit.

In every political theory and philosophy, the impact of any norm or value is understood through its influence on the individual in the beginning since the individual is the primary political unit. Deliberative democracy as a theory expresses its significance in terms of giving every individual importance as one carries political agency. Similar sentiments are echoed by Gandhi when he defends the principle of *Swaraj*

*"Swaraj will be an absurdity if individuals have to Surrender their judgement to majority"*¹⁵

However, the question remains- how is one ought to maintain all of the above?

III. Maintaining Democracy: Finding directions

As mentioned at the beginning of the article, Gandhi doesn't use the term deliberative democracy. However, the idea of democracy upheld by Gandhi cannot exist without an active culture of communication and discussion among citizens. In that regard, it is not wrong to argue that Gandhian directions for democracy are automatically valid for

deliberative democracy too. So, can Gandhi's normative guidance enrich the existing normative claims of deliberative democracy and even make substantive additions?

Gandhi had an unconventional view regarding how a modern democratic state ought to be. Unlike his western counterparts, Gandhi created another vision for it for his time because he could detect the demerits of representative democracy and labelled it as nominally democratic. It could either convert into a full dictatorship or a deeper and true form of democracy.¹⁶ We get to see an amalgamation of philosophical inquiry as well as contextualization within the contours of Gandhian democratic theory.

There is no doubt about the essentiality of democracy for the modern state and the actions of citizens that ensure cooperation is essential for any type of democracy. However, it is even more significant for a deliberative form of democracy. How can we gain a richer understanding of Gandhi's contribution in this regard? Gandhi's main goal is to preserve the ideal of *Swaraj* or self-rule that preserves people's freedom to manage their own affairs¹⁷. This will allow disciplining of the rule from within because the person can achieve self-realisation. In this regard, a person would be capable of practicing self-restraint when required. People should have the freedom to commit mistakes too so that they learn from them and correct them. In order to understand this, let us analyse the major tenets such as individuality, non-violence, and democracy in the Gandhian sense. Gandhi professes staunch individuality but the conception of it differs from liberal understanding influenced by Lockean thought or classic liberalism that influences democracy largely. Let me explain Gandhi's understanding of individuality. The citizen is an individual and this individual is a basic unit of democracy. Every individual is responsible for maintaining the political character of a nation. The moral capacities of the individual must be preserved and one of the ways of doing so is to not forsake participation in decision-making processes and accept an easy role¹⁸. In this regard, a duty-based discourse is being invoked to highlight the responsibility endowed upon people. Gandhi does not only envision the achievement of favourable circumstances, that is, a free democratic country where the laws are just for its citizens, but also the way to ensure sustenance of these favourable circumstances so that the moral and political character of democracy is not compromised like it did in European countries. Within the duty-based discourse, the citizen is an active and moral individual who acknowledges one's duty to do good and ensure cooperation with other citizens in political matters because ultimately it impacts all¹⁹. In the absence of such an active role, the citizen would not be able to

ensure the justness of the law because the state, on its own, is capable of using violent means for its self-interest due to its amoral nature. Therefore, the individuals or citizens are responsible for maintaining the moral character of the state since the state itself cannot do it by default. The ability to express one's opinion and inform legislation is not only the right of the masses but also the duty of the masses. For Gandhi, the public opinion holds more power than any other means²⁰. It is one of the means to practice non-violence. Non-violence as a principle is the precursor to other principles. Gandhi is vehemently critical of violence in general. For him, violence endangers free discussion, and that in turn endangers democracy²¹. And through such practices of non-violence, a culture of inclusion can be developed and divisions along the lines of class and caste can be eradicated. The conception of non-violence is intrinsic to the thought of Gandhi and in this scenario without it, democracy is a sham. One of the means of non-violence is communal harmony among others²². The key to the maintenance of communal harmony is the free expression of an individual's opinion. However, this expression of opinion should not trigger any form of violence²³. For the situation of disagreement or conflict, "rational discussion and persuasion" are the best means of seeking a resolution²⁴. Rather than defending the need for an external moderator or spectator, one's own sincerity and humility should make sure that the discussion is carried out fairly²⁵. Moral improvement is a significant prerequisite here²⁶. Such practice encapsulates the act of *Satyagraha*. *Satyagraha* or the search for truth is not necessarily a means of non-violence used against the government. It can be used to ensure stability during the interaction with any individual. In conventional understanding, *Satyagraha* is understood as a means of non-violence and civil disobedience against the oppressive state power in an extreme sense. However, in a less extreme sense, it can be used as a guiding force within any decision-making process where there is disagreement. It persuades a citizen to realize the value of fellow-human beings and the common quest of searching for the truth. It also beseeches one to be insistent upon the quest for truth due to common humanity²⁷. This will eventually let the harmony in the community prosper since the value of humility will be realised by all members. Such variation of *Satyagraha* consisted of three elements i.e., argument, suffering love, and insistence upon the truth that invoked the genuine 'reason'. So, is it possible for *Satyagraha* or forms of it be understood as a tool of deliberation in situations of disagreement? For Gandhi, the use of it has been motivated by the idea of making the person or group or British, during colonial times, see the merit of the argument he's putting forward fairly rather than

outrightly dismissing it or even suppressing it in a situation where no consensus can be achieved like formal processes of deliberation promote.

After highlighting the significance of the active role of the individual in a democracy that is required for ensuring cooperation and the overall functioning of the democratic state, Gandhi propagates the ideal way of moving towards a true democracy. In order to make sure that the individual remains in charge, decentralisation is of the true essence²⁸. It should be clearly understood that pre-independence India consisted of a population that was majorly from villages and Gandhi mobilised them during the independence struggle. He realised that after independence, people in the villages should not be marginalised in the political process and hence, the suggestions are directives for organising the rural areas. The suggestions, however, invoke such theoretical principles that they are normatively significant for any small unit of the country such as a town or electoral constituency. Compulsory education and completion of community services in any way are ways through which an individual can contribute such as by being a teacher or guard or doctor etc. along with ensuring the self-reliance of the unit and election of village government or *panchayat* are the ways of maintaining decentralisation. The village government is the local government and is responsible for cultivating public opinion. Public opinion should be the real force in maintaining the affairs of the unit. These units ultimately make the individual the unit that connects with other units and together, they form a whole, that is, the nation. He labels this as an oceanic circle. The interlinkages between the various directives are very much visible in the context of an ideal way of preserving democracy. Gandhi explains what he means by participation that helps in achieving decentralisation and helps in realising the best form of democracy. Participation is substantive when the individual understands one's role and is active through the means of discussions in the political realm of decentralised spaces such as villages. The individuals should be able to practice non-violence and collectively form a political opinion. In the absence of a platform where the individual can participate actively in a democracy, the risk of the rise of mobocracy increases because the people who feel intensely for the nation do not in any way perform their duty.

The deliberative democracy discourses argue in favour of a substantive form of democracy where individuals can actively participate in the political processes of the state. The unit of importance is an individual who is a citizen and as a citizen is capable of actively participating in the deliberative processes. Such a collection of citizens is intrinsic in preserving the character of democracy by understanding

their role as deliberators. The aggregate form of democracy faces criticism for erasing the active role of citizens and promoting rational ignorance among them. Situations of conflict or disagreements are not easily resolved due to no proper mechanism and also, due to the persistent lack of communication among the people. Lines of divisions are maintained and preserved based on caste, class, region, religion, gender, etc. because people fail to realise the principle of oneness in the absence of regular participatory processes. Two major philosophical influences over the development and strengthening of the requirement of deliberation, in general, have been Jurgen Habermas and John Rawls. Habermas gives more importance to the 'communicative action' and Rawls highlights the significance of deliberation in the formation of overlapping consensus in the context of diversity. Deliberative democracy scholars have been trying to approach the task of deliberation holistically. For instance, Gutmann and Thompson claim that deliberative processes foster mutual respect even when a consensus is not achieved at the end of process²⁹. James Fishkin has worked and developed the method of deliberative polling in order to make a pathway for conducting public deliberation on matters of national significance³⁰. Similarly, other conventional writings that give prominence to deliberative democracy, such as Jane Mansbridge, John Dryzek, Jon Elster, etc. have concentrated on building theoretical defence regarding public deliberation.

But how can all these theoretical approaches be contrasted with the approach of Gandhi toward democracy? First, Gandhi doesn't differentiate between the types of democracy as for him there can't be many forms of true democracy. Ontologically, there is only one type of true democracy. Democracy cannot exist without people directly engaging in the political processes regularly. The major point of divergence between the deliberative democracy discourse and Gandhi's arguments is regarding the idea of the application. The dominant theoretical arguments within deliberative democracy scholarship do not encourage deliberations without a clear procedural pathway, for instance, deliberative polling focuses a lot on methodological precision in order to have the desired outcome through it. Obviously, such applicability is not contested in nature. However, the problem of feasibility is regularly faced when the question of implementation of deliberative process is raised, for instance, deliberative polls require heavy budgets in order to be implemented. Such arrangements are possible in a specific context like that of America, however, it hasn't been viewed as a regular feature. In the context of Third World countries, budget requirements of deliberative polling can act as a constraint. In citizen juries or assemblies, the

problem is caused by the outsourcing of the thinking process. The sample may not accurately represent the interests of the sampled and there can be a displacement of the sampled³¹. Other forms of sites of deliberation such as the mini-publics can promote the participation of people, however, some parts of the population like the economically well-off may participate more than the disadvantaged sections. So, it creates the problem of misrepresentation and lack of procedural regulation. Such problems get exacerbated when such deliberative solutions are applied in countries that are categorized as developing or underdeveloped.

In contrast, Gandhi had a better hold of the context that is chaotic or unstable by the standard of deliberative democracy theory. The context was provided by British India and its struggle to adopt democracy after Independence. The significance of participation by all people of the country in the political processes where they should be able to 'discuss' was expressed in a time when there was no discourse of deliberative democracy. In the absence of a mechanism that ensures the preservation of the voice of the people, centralised democracy would be just like replacing imperial rule with another newer form of imperialism that will concentrate the power in the hands of the few. How can it be ensured that democracy in India is a democracy in the true sense? A decentralised democracy as propagated by Gandhi is a mechanism to ensure that it helps democracy to gain roots within India too and not be left behind Europe in terms of political development. What is the best way possible to preserve the democratic character of a country that is newly independent and be at par with other countries that do not have the same recent history of political turmoil? The philosophical guidance of Gandhi in this regard is ambitious but not utopian. The goals of the present-day deliberative democracy discourse are the same as that of Gandhi. The difference appears in principles and approach. So, what do principles translate into when they are implemented? The next section focuses on the deliberative culture promoted by local political institutions that are based upon the democratic principles of Gandhi.

IV- Impact of Gandhian Philosophy on Democracy in India

What is the influence and contribution of Gandhian philosophy in matters of democracy? For Gandhi, it seems that it was really important to have intellectual freedom. It was the only element responsible for the preservation of the substantive character of the political freedom gained by India from imperial British colonial rule. Democracy requires the masses to develop consciousness, a sense of power, and responsibility held by the political unit i.e., the citizen so

that democracy could be sustained after implementation. Did Gandhi view local institutions as a means to promote discussions, thereby deliberations, as a way to preserve the character of democracy as a whole? Gandhi defended a change that could have an impact on the political structure as well as on its substantive nature.

Gandhi not only perceived the state as sovereign but also the people and recognised various non-conventional ways of unifying people, for instance, he appealed to religious leaders or Hindu *sadhus* to create solidarity among people through their mass-appeal mechanisms³². He acknowledged that people do not conform to standard rational argumentation styles but rather use various emotive techniques to put forth their concerns such as public shaming of the person in charge who has been accused of corruption with the budgetary funds for public works in the area.³³

The enactment of the 73rd amendment and 74th amendment was done to jumpstart the process of local-level democracy in India that is based upon the principles of Village Swaraj. *Gram Sabha* or village assembly was the site for public deliberation in the rural areas. Participation of people within the local democracy was never understood as a non-deliberative form. It has served as the largest forum for the people. The push for it came in the 1990s when the entire discipline of democracy was witnessing the 'deliberative turn'.³⁴ During this time, the modern *Gram Sabhas* were created but were first initiated by the Government of Karnataka in 1985 when the *mandal panchayat* (it consisted of *gram sabhas*) was democratically constituted for discussing and deciding upon the developmental problems and plans³⁵. In the villages, people make claims regarding their personal interests such as declaring their economic status, whether they are below the poverty line or above the poverty line³⁶. They demand governance and put forth the developmental issues at hand. They do shed the skin of other identities and become citizens when they are discussing the matters that impact all. People do not have prior experience participating in these *sabhas*. They do not grasp the concept of deliberation and they assume that the meetings held here are a platform for putting forth complaints and problems in front of the authorities. However, *gram sabhas* act as a training ground for the people participating here. They are the 'training ground' in Indian democracy and it is not just about arriving at decisions and developing consensus. People eventually learn that the village assembly is not a forum to put forth their complaints but a way to do a lot more. The education-oriented role of *gram sabha* is present that allows people to cooperate and take a collective decision upon the matters that impact all of them. Along with this, the duty function is fulfilled too. People

realise the responsibility they have towards the democratic society they live in and they are the source of power³⁷. Can institutions such as local institutions be of deliberative nature that helps to bridge the gap between state and people? Is it possible for state agents and other public institutions to promote a culture of deliberation in an attempt to preserve democracy? In order to move ahead in a direction to find an answer to this, let's turn to urban local institutions and analyse them.

The deliberation within the local village assembly is often a place of interest. In urban spaces, the adaptation of Gandhian principles has been done. Various local institutions have been created to let people participate in daily affairs, usually developmental. Few examples of these institutions have been Municipal corporations, Residential Welfare Associations, Ward Committees, Nagar Panchayats, and many more. The main role of the citizens is limited to that of consultancy³⁸. People do participate directly, though not everywhere. People are consulted in very limited affairs and this consultation may involve deliberations, for instance in the matter of budgeting. In some cases, people are supposed to nominate representatives, such as representatives of the wards or welfare associations, who can deliberate on limited matters on behalf of the people they are representing. Is such a form of participation, that can be labelled as nominal in practice even when it shouldn't be theoretically, in line with the Gandhian principles for democracy?

However, not in all places, citizens are even consulted. The local institutions are allocating budgets for various infrastructure needs and overseeing the works of the designated area. Participation that involves deliberation in any sense is largely missing. Communication regarding policies and other decisions is told to people by various heads, councillors, and in charge reflects the lack of democratic spirit because people do not have an active presence. They can try to reach the local representatives to express themselves, however, a platform or practice ensuring democratic empowerment remains absent. Discussion and deliberation as prominent features have been lacking here. So how can people or citizens be incorporated into the political processes that are more substantive and regular in nature? Is it possible to truly move ahead in a direction that is closer to Gandhi's concept of democracy? The answer to such a question is complex. Yet, instead of it, one interesting development that has taken place in contemporary times is that of Mohalla Sabha. Urban areas like Delhi are often associated with centralised forms of government because of the demographic landscape and its political status as a Union territory in the present time. Gandhi posited village *swaraj* as a counterforce to

the centralised structure of the cities so that the spirit of democracy is truly kept intact. However, local government that involves active participation on behalf of the citizens is highly significant for urban areas as well. The local units of the city are intrinsic to the participatory democracy that is deliberative in nature. Through the adoption of the same Gandhian principles, Mohalla Sabha has been established as the site for ensuring the active presence of people in the political processes. The core idea behind it has been that a true form of democracy can't be achieved if people participate in the political sphere only during elections. The element of discussion and deliberation within the structure of Mohalla sabha sets it aside from other urban institutions. It has the potential, theoretically, to fully realise democracy. In order to stabilise the functioning of the Mohalla Sabhas and to let an active political participation culture prosper, only developmental issues are at the pinnacle of the discussions. However, sometimes development issues are caused by political reasons and hence, the percolation of political issues such as corruption or information regarding the political progress has been part of the agendas for Mohalla Sabha. The central vision behind the institution has been to let people exercise an active role in democracy. There are 2972 Mohalla Sabhas in 70 constituencies of Delhi. Similar institutions for urban spaces have existed in Kerala and West Bengal. In Kerala, the municipal act of 1994 exists that allows for the formation of ward committees and in West Bengal, the West Bengal Municipal rules 2003 allows for the formation of ward committees. However, the deliberative aspect is not extended to all the people of the wards but rather to the nominated members of the ward. The problem arises in this regard when there is a lack of structure that allows for the opportunity for the people to get involved in deliberative practices that reflects positively upon the democratic aspect of political. So how does the urban local institution imbibe the principles professed by Gandhi about decentralisation and democracy? Is it capable? Can Gandhi's principles for democracy inform the deliberative form of democracy in general at all? I believe they can. Let me briefly put forth in following points to support my claim.

First, Gandhi promotes large-scale participation of people in the democratic functioning of the polity. Such participation involves deliberations too. The recognition of deliberation as the crux of participation implies large-scale deliberations among people. A deliberative exercise can be used as a trust-building mechanism within a population.

Second, incorporation of the local values can be expected which can produce vibrant deliberations. Such outcomes can't be anticipated sometimes but only observed such as vernacular verbalisation allows

people to express themselves more freely without any inhibitions.

Third, regular participation in politics is possible even at the local level since Gandhi does talk about ensuring self-sufficiency along with the promotion of people-oriented institutions. People can use deliberative institutions to promote the cause of self-sufficiency since the issues can directly inform the institutions at the centre.

Fourth, it will fulfil the large gap in informing the people. Since deliberative institutions are supposed to give space to people to bring up issues about their well-being. They are also capable of protecting people from falling prey to propaganda. The educative function is embedded within the functioning of deliberation. Communication and exchange of reasoning allow one to educate themselves.

V. Conclusion

The potential of adopting Gandhian thought and principles for deliberative democratic theory is vast. Existing trends point towards accommodating diverse principles so that it is made feasible in nature. There will be some loopholes always but still, a clear-cut way of making deliberation possible in a wide range of contexts would help in retrieving the moral script of democracy in general. Gandhi can be referred to as the torch bearer for a deliberative form of democracy. His understanding of democracy is inclusive of deliberative function, unlike the dominant understanding within the area of democratic theory where one can classify types of democracy such as representative democracy or competitive democracy, etc. that do not consider deliberative practices as intrinsic to the overall health of democracy. Gandhi's point of view is different and can be summarised as any democracy that does not promote active people's participation where they use their agency fully then it's just another form of political structure that has imperialist tendencies just like the British colonial rule in India.

Notes and References

1. M.K Gandhi, *Democracy: Real and Deceptive* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1961) Pg 29.
2. *Ibid.* Pg 75
3. Simone Chambers, *Reasonable democracy: Jurgen Habermas and the Politics of Discourse* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996).
4. Amy Gutmann and Dennis F. Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?* (Princeton University Press, 2009)

5. Ian O' Flynn, *Deliberative democracy and divided society*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006) Pg 12
6. Nicole Curato, et. Al. "Deliberative Democracy in the age of Serial crisis", *International Political Science Review*, 43, 1 (January 2022).
7. The works of Anthony Parel, Bhikkhu Parekh, Thomas Pantham, Raghavan Iyer have often described Gandhi as an idealist.
8. Karuna Mantena, *Another Realism: The Politics of Gandhian Nonviolence*, *American Political Science Review*, 106, 02, (May 2012).
9. Ibid.
10. Gopinath Dhawan, *The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1946) p. 106.
11. There is a difference of understanding regarding what deliberative procedures should lead to in any given context at theoretical level.
12. Gopinath Dhawan, *The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1946) p. 296.
13. Ibid. pg 282.
14. Ibid. pg. 293
15. M.K Gandhi, *Democracy: Real and Deceptive* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1961) p. 173
16. Ibid. p. 75
17. Gopinath Dhawan, *The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1946) Pg 293
18. Ibid. Pg 124
19. Duty based approach is often discussed when political rights of citizens in a democracy are analysed. For more clarification refer to Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).
20. M.K Gandhi, *Democracy: Real and Deceptive* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1961) p. 74
21. *Young India 1921 Hind Swaraj or the Indian Home Rule* (By M. K Gandhi) in *Young India 1919-1922* By Mahatma Gandhi (Madras: S. Ganesan Publisher, 1924) p. 870.
22. There are many means of non-violence such as satyagraha, spinning of charkha, education of masses etc. that should be replace the means of violence within a free democracy. For Gandhi, if violence will exist in any form in a country, then the weakest person or section will never be able to have a voice and a democracy cannot be true if the weakest isn't able to have same voice as the strongest in a substantive way. Existence of violence in any form, whether it's at the social level or political, would mean compromise of political equality and in the absence of political equality democracy cannot prosper in the truest form.
23. M.K Gandhi, *Democracy: Real and Deceptive* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1961) p. 34
24. Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy: A Critical Examination* (Macmillan, 1989) Pg 143.
25. M.K Gandhi, *Democracy: Real and Deceptive* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1961) p. 143

26. Robert Sparling, M.K. Gandhi: Reconciling Agonism and Deliberative Democracy, *Representation*, 45, 4 (October, 2009)
27. M.K Gandhi, Democracy: Real and Deceptive (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1961) p. 149
28. Ibid. P. 71
29. Amy Gutmann and Dennis F. Thompson, Why Deliberative Democracy? (Princeton University Press, 2009)
30. Bruce Ackerman and James Fishkin, *Deliberation Day*, (Yale University Press New Haven & London, 2004)
31. Walzer points out in an endnote by saying- " If the purpose of the juries is simply to add their own conclusions to the mix of ideas and proposals that are already being debated in the political arena, then they are useful in the same way that think tanks and presidential commissions are useful. If any sort of democratic authority is claimed for them, if the sample displaces the sampled, they are dangerous". Micheal Walzer, *Deliberation, And What Else?* In Stephen Macedo ed., *Deliberative Politics Essays on Democracy and Disagreement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) pg. 69.
32. Mona G. Mehta, From Gandhi to Gurus: The Rise of the 'Guru-Sphere', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 40, 3 (May, 2017)
33. Vijayendra Rao and Paromita Sanyal, *Oral Democracy: Deliberation in Indian Village Assemblies* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2019) Pg 45
34. John S. Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond: Liberals, Critics and Beyond* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).
35. Vijayendra Rao and Paromita Sanyal, *Oral Democracy: Deliberation in Indian Village Assemblies* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2019)
36. Ibid. pg. 39-40
37. Ibid. Pg 59
The author argues that passiveness of people declines in a democracy through participation.
38. M. P. Mathur, Rumi Aijaz and Satpal Singh, *Decentralised Urban Governance in Delhi* in Parth J shah & Makarand Bakore ed., *Ward power: Decentralised Urban Governance*, (Centre for civil society, 2006) Pg 31

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