

Lessons in democratic decision making – the Gandhian way

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[Shri. Ratan Lal Joshi](#), a dear friend of my father and a former editor of Hindustan, told me a fascinating story about Gandhi ji's decision making.

Any time a decision had to be made Gandhi ji would discuss with all the members of congress working committee (CWC) to reach at a consensus.

Once [Dr. Rajendra Prasad](#) loudly complained in CWC “Bapu why do you carry out this drama of taking everybody's view point when we all know that the final decision will be what you want”! A huge and loud laughter ensued both from Gandhi ji and the CWC members.

Gandhi ji being a very secure human being because of his wisdom and the brain of a very high order, never felt threatened by other's points of view. The nearest threat to his supremacy was mounted by Subhash Chandra Bose in late 1930s. Yet Gandhi ji was neither bitter about it nor attacked Bose personally. The dialogue with Bose was always on principles and what direction the freedom struggle should take.

As Shri [Atal Behari Vajpayee](#), former Prime Minister once told his colleague [General B. C. Khanduri](#) that the foremost quality of a great leader is a big heart and ability to forgive; Gandhi ji had these qualities in abundance.

Why have we lost this art of dialogue and the ability of taking all the people together?

During the freedom struggle there was a diversity of opinions and paths on how to get independence. There were militant elements lead by B. G. Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, and Lajpat Rai etc.; then there were the divisions created by the

British between Hindus and Muslims; together with this were fringe elements of RSS and finally there was the direct attack by S. C. Bose.

Yet Gandhi ji never gave up the path of dialogue and always explained in great details the reasons for taking a particular path and his actions. He gave a spiritual tone to the freedom struggle and generally kept the dialogue with different factions at a high moral level.

Gandhi ji gave Indians a confidence in themselves; that they were equal to the British and showed that we can defeat the greatest power of the world through peaceful means.

The economic situation during the freedom struggle was really grim. Yet Gandhi ji's higher calling brought people together and gave them a sense of doing something wonderful with their lives and achieving the impossible.

Today the situation is different. We are economically well off and increased exposure through mass media and internet has resulted in raising the aspirations of our population manifold.

With problems of not achieving the aspirations of the huge population, there are daily struggles in their lives which bring in frustrations. When conditions are created by political parties to instigate them and appeal to their baser instincts, as that happens daily, then it provides a spark to make any situation explosive and the general strife that we see and read about daily is the result of these frustrations.

In a pluralistic society like India with 26 different languages, many cultures and religions, and huge population, divergent issues exist in every walk of life. It is all the more necessary that the political leadership should diffuse these issues and inspire and unite us to fight poverty, blind faith and general ignorance rather than each other.

It has been shown world over that human beings react very positively to call for higher purpose in life and with proper dialogue they are capable of making sincere and honest decisions. This is how Gandhi ji inspired the freedom movement. However such a thing is missing in the present political scene.

What is therefore needed at this juncture is that a good political leadership provide balm to the frayed nerves by showing the path where every section of the society can take part in nation building.

However when the whole purpose of present political parties is to win the next election and remain in power rather than taking the nation on the path of general development and well-being of its population then it is difficult for them to provide leadership.

Thus we cannot depend upon them to provide the Gandhian balm. The way they have come up into the role of leadership leaves much to be desired. So like Gandhian way what we need is that each of us become the agents of change. We can do it by working to our best capability and in doing our work honestly. This single thing can throw up good leaders and help in creating a great and prosperous country.

All of us are part of this great country. We are born and raised in India and may have different points of view or religions or ways of life but all of us want to live in a holistic, emotionally satisfying and economically viable India.

That was the dream of Gandhi ji. So at the start of his 150th birth anniversary let us all remember him and try to follow his path of democratic style of functioning; taking everybody together and his appeal to higher emotions in all of us so that we show love and peace for our fellow countrymen.

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