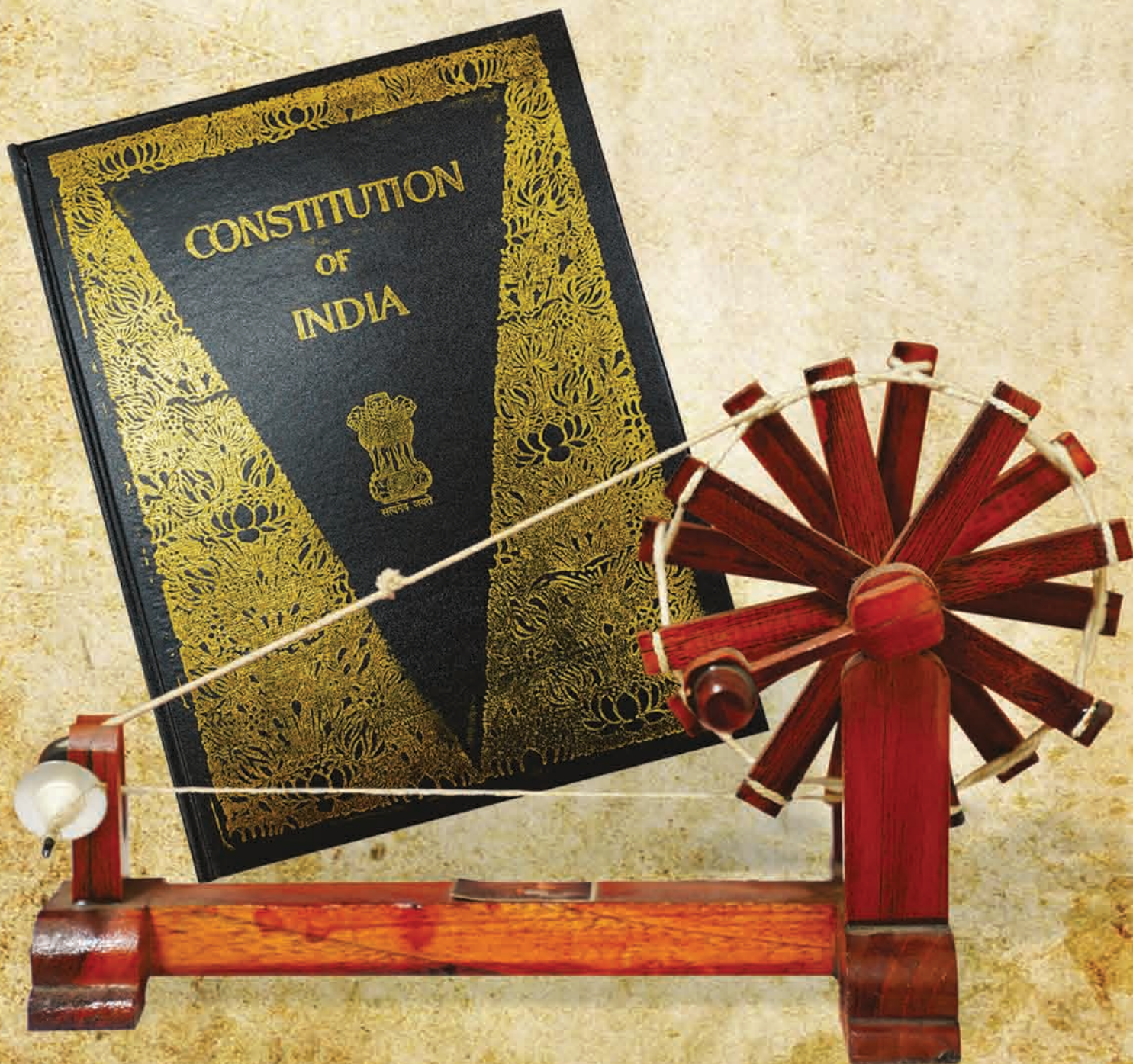


Year: 43, Issue: 1
Jan-Mar 2022

Rs. 200/-
ISSN 2582-449X

Manthan

Journal of Social & Academic Activism



Gram Swarajya Special



75
Azadi Ka
Amrit Mahotsav



TRIPURA

"A LAND OF DIVERSE CULTURE AMIDST IN NATURE
OFFERS A LOT TO THE AVID TRAVELLER"

SHRI BIPLAB KUMAR DEB
CHIEF MINISTER, TRIPURA

- » 16 nos. Log hut have been constructed in different tourist spots for tourist attraction. And more 33 Nos. Log huts are underconstruction at Narikelkuja, Chabimura and Jampui Hills.
- » 2 Nos. Water Scooter / Zet Ski has been introduced at Dumbor Lake to provide better service to the visiting tourists. Apart from this 2 Nos. Zet Ski at Jagannath Dighi, Udaipur and 1 No. Zet Ski at Jagannath Dighi at Agartala to be operates very shortly. Floating Jetty has been commissioned at Rudrasagar (Neermahal), Gomati River (Chabimura), Dumbor Lake and Kalapania Lake under Melaghar as a part of Modernization of the tourist locations.
- » Battery Operated vehicles (BOV) are introduced at different tourist destinations (Ujjayanta Palace, Akhura Check Post, Sepahijala Wild Life Sanctuary, Tepania Eco -Park, New Secretariat complex) of the state for providing better tourist facility.
- » External Aid Projects in Tourism department: The Department has sent a proposal to Asian Development Bank through State Government, for an amount of Rs.500 Cr, to develop the tourism infrastructure in the State. This has been considered and project readiness finance has been approved and necessary work under progress.
- » Paryatan Sahayak Prakalpa, an interest subvention scheme to promote entrepreneurship in tourism sector has been introduced. The applicant can avail a loan up to Rs. 5.00 lakh for any tourism related projects from banks. The interest on the loan up to 8%, will be borne by the State Government. So far 211 nos. applications have been recommended for sanction of loan.
- » To promote the religious Destination of Tripura, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India has sanctioned Rs.37.80 Cr. under Prasad scheme. In this connection, this work has already started in Mata Tripurseswari Temple Premises.
- » Recently on 11th November, 2021 new Dumboor Helipad has inaugurated by the Hon'ble Chief Minister for the interest of the tourists to visit Narikelkunj, Dumboor. Helicopter package will be launched very shortly.

75
Azadi Ka
Amrit Mahotsav



Tripura marching towards All round Development

Inauguration of

New Integrated Terminal Building of Maharaja Bir Bikram Airport, Agartala

- Comfortable movement for over 15 Lakh Passengers per annum
- 4 Aerobridges for seamless passenger movement
- Tripura to become Gateway of North East
- Facilitating air transport of local produce and products
- Growth of trade, tourism and economy
- Eco-friendly Airport
- Terminal Building of 30,000 sq. metres
- Peak Hour capacity of 1200 Passengers
- Investment of Rs. 450 Crore

and Launch of

Mission 100 -Vidyajyoti Schools

- Holistic and creative education to 1.2 Lakh children
- ICT Labs and Vocational education for igniting Minds
- 100 Vidyajyoti Schools to be "Centres of Excellence"
- Modern Infrastructure for all round development of Children
- Investment of Rs. 500 Crore

and

Mukhyamantri Tripura Gram Samridhhi Yojana

- Holistic development of Villages
- 100 % coverage of Household drinking water tap connections and domestic electricity connections
- 100% coverage of Ayushman Bharat, Ujjwala Yojana, Immunization, Kisan Credit Card and Crop Insurance
- All weather roads within villages
- Incentive of Rs. 6 Lakh for Gram Panchayats and Village Committees on saturation

by

Narendra Modi

Prime Minister

in the august presence of

Satyadeo Narain Arya

Governor, Tripura

Biplab Kumar Deb

Chief Minister, Tripura

Jishnu Dev Varma

Deputy Chief Minister, Tripura

Jyotiraditya M. Scindia

Union Civil Aviation Minister

Km. Pratima Bhoumik

Union MoS for Social Justice and Empowerment

at 2 P.M. on Tuesday, 4th January, 2022 ■ Swami Vivekananda Maidan, Agartala, Tripura

Join the event live at : DD NEWS Biplab Kumar Deb ICA Tripura

Guest Editor
Dr. Chandrashekhar Pran

Manthan

Journal of Social and Academic Activism

Year: 43, Issue: 1

Jan-Mar 2022

Editorial Board

Sh. Ram Bahadur Rai
Sh. Achyutanand Mishra
Sh. Balbir Punj
Sh. Atul Jain
Dr. Bharat Dahiya
Sh. Isht Deo Sankrityaayan

Gram Swarajya Special

Editor

Dr. Mahesh Chandra Sharma



Managing Editor

Sh. Arvind Singh
+91-9868550000
me.arvindsingh@manthandigital.com

Design

Sh. Nitin Panwar
nitin_panwar@yahoo.in

Printer

Kumar Offset Printers
381, Patparganj Industrial Area,
Delhi-110092

Publisher

Research and Development Foundation For Integral Humanism

Ekatm Bhawan, 37, Deendayal Upadhyaya Marg, New Delhi-110002

Phone: 011-23210074; E-mail: info@manthandigital.com

Website: www.manthandigital.com

Contents

1. Contributors' profile		03
2. Editorial Appeal		04
3. Editorial Article: Feasibility of a Gram Swarajya-based Fundamental Constitution	Dr. Mahesh Chandra Shamra	06
4. Panchayat Government After 73rd Constitutional Amendment	Dr. Chandrashekhar Pran	09
5. The Constituent Assembly and Gram Panchayat	Ram Bahadur Rai	26
6. Draft Constitution ignores Villages		37
7. Rajiv Gandhi, Indian Polity and the Panchayatiraj Amendment	S.S.Meenakshisundaram	42
8. Gramsabha: The Foundation of Participative Democracy	Bhimrao Raskar	48
9. Samaras Panchayats of Gujarat	Bharat Pandya	54
10. Suggestions of Various Committees for a Strong Panchayat System	Avnesh Kalik	59
11. Further Strengthen Panchayats but Make them More Accountable	Manoj Rai	62
12. India's Polity in Sri Aurobindo's Worldview	Ram Bahadur Rai	69
13. The Swaraj of Gandhi's Dreams	Dr. Rajeev Ranjan Giri	79
14. Dharampal on Panchayat Raj and Decentralised Polity	Dr. Jitendra K Bajaj	90
15. Panchayati Raj in View of Shri Guruji and Pt. Deendayal Upadhyaya	Dr. Shiv Shakti Bakshi	97
16. The 'Chaukhamba Raj' of Lohia: The Socialist Way of Participatory Nation-Building	Anand Kumar	101
17. People, Tradition and JP's suggestions for Decentralised Structure of Democracy	Prem Prakash	118
18. Nehruvian Vision of Decentralisation	Dr. Yogesh Kumar	122

Supplementary Articles

1. Cooperatives for Self-reliant Villages		23
2. Supplementary Proceedings Required for 73rd Constitutional Amendment		25
3. Complete democracy means the establishment of Panchayati Raj—Dr. Lohia		116
4. Government based on Dhamma		126

Contributors' profile

Dr. Chandrashekar Pran is author of eighteen research-based books on the Panchayati Raj system. From the very beginning, he was interested in social work. Worked in various positions in Nehru Yuva Kendra from Regional Coordinator to National Director for 25 years. Lead Panchparameshwar Yatra to five states — UP, MP, Rajasthan, Haryana and Punjab — by cycling for 72 consecutive days at the end of 1999 to study and assess the status of the new Panchayati Raj. Took study leave from government service in 2002 for a comparative research work of five states from Allahabad University on the topic *Role of Village Panchayats in Development and Change in Attitude and Behavior of Youth*. Contact: cspran854@gmail.com

Ram Bahadur Rai is the Group Editor of Hindustan Samachar and president of Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA). He was awarded Padma Shri in 2015. In his early days, he was closely associated with Jaiprakash Narayan and actively participated in anti-Emergency movement. Contact: rbrai118@gmail.com

S. S. Meenakshisundaram is a Post Graduate in Mathematics and Ph.D. in Development Economics. During his career in the Karnataka cadre of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) he had held a number of assignments including Deputy Commissioner of Tumkur and Bangalore districts, Director of Sericulture and Principal Secretary, Rural Development and Panchayatiraj department. He was a Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, United Kingdom for one year. Currently he is the Chairman of MYRADA, a voluntary organisation and a Visiting Professor at Institute of Social and Economic Change (ISEC), Gandhigram Rural University and National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bangalore. Contact: meenakshi54@hotmail.com

Bhimrao Raskar director of the Resource and Support Center for Development, is one of the key members of the Teesree Sarkar Andolan. Apart from this, active association with many organisations related to social work in Maharashtra. Contact: bhim.rscd@gmail.com

Bharat Pandya Former MLA, former state spokesperson and state general secretary of Gujarat BJP. Shri Bharat Pandya has performed many responsibilities in the state ranging from organisation, media, training class, travels, election related campaigning, management, election manifesto etc. Contact: bharatpandyabjp@gmail.com

Avnesh Kalik Working for last 20 years on the issue of development in various states Avnesh Kalik has created reference material for Uttar Pradesh Panchayati Raj Code and three tier Panchayati raj representatives, reference literature for the trainers, 16 manuals for Panchayati Raj in Jharkhand and 5 manuals for Panchayati Raj in Bihar. Continuously writing in newspapers and magazines on Panchayati Raj. Presently working as Assistant General Manager and in-charge in a deemed government company AFC India Limited and also working as in-charge of Panchayati Raj system in provinces other than Uttar Pradesh. Contact: avnesh1971@rediffmail.com

Manoj Rai has worked very closely with the Panchayats and the Municipalities in almost all states of India. As the Director of PRIA (1996-2018), he led various interventions and researches for strengthening Panchayats in the country. Mr. Rai also provided technical supports to Union and state governments and other institutions on issues related to Panchayats. Later, he worked with Aga Khan Foundation as its Regional Advisor for Central and South Asia. Contact: manojrai3011@gmail.com

Dr. Rajeev Ranjan Giri Born 19 December 1978, Bhada, East Champaran (Bihar). Education : M.A. (Hindi), Ph.D. Books : *Paraspar: Bhasha – Sahitya Andolan, Ath- Sahitya: Path aur Prasang, Samvidhan Sabha aur Bhasha Vimarsha, Stree Mukti: Yathartha aur Utopia, Gandhivad Rahe na Rahe* published. Associated with the editing of *Samveda*. Presently: Teaching at Rajdhani College, University of Delhi. Contact : rajeev.ranjan.giri@gmail.com

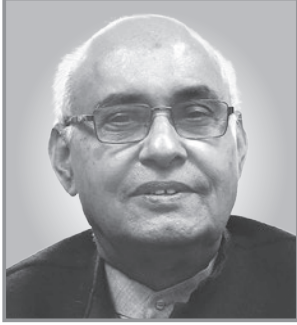
Dr. Jitendra K Baja Experience of research in reputed universities. Have been Resident Editor of Jansatta. Wrote a number of books on contemporary topics. Director of the Centre for Policy Studies (Chennai and Delhi). Contact: policy.cpsindia@gmail.com

Dr. Shiv Shakti Bakshi an activist of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, received a Ph.D. in Modern History from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Book Pt. Deendayal Upadhyaya: Life of an Ideological Politician' published. Presently working as National In-charge of BJP Publications Department and Editor of BJP mouthpiece Kamal Sandesh. Contact: shivshaktibjp@gmail.com

Anand Kumar Retired from the post of Professor in Jawaharlal Nehru University. Taught in many universities in India and abroad. Contact: anandkumar1@hotmail.com

Prem Prakash Poet, writer and journalist Prem Prakash's first collection of poems *Khilauna Ya Aina* published when he was a graduate student. Recently published criticism book 'Poetry in Emergency'. Hindi translation of Japanese author Mariko Shinzo's book 'Motainai Grandma' published by National Book Trust. Along with this another book 'Shiksha Pariksha Aur Pradhanmantri' was also published. Vishnu Prabhakar Journalism Award (2017), Indian Plan Award (2016), YS Research Foundation's Excellence Award (2016), Prabhakar Joshi Memorial Journalism Award (2020) Currently Assistant Editor at Jansatta. Contact: ppgulshan@gmail.com

Dr. Yogesh Kumar completed his Ph.D. from the Giri Institute of Development Studies, Lucknow as an ICSSR Doctoral Fellow in Development Economics in 1990. Founder member and Executive Director of a leading NGO working in MP and Chattisgarh - "Samarthan – Centre for Development Support". He has an experience of more than 25 years in the development sector and is a professional of international repute on the issue of participatory governance and development. Contact: yogesh@samarthan.org



Dr. Mahesh Chandra Sharma

Editorial Appeal

This is the first edition of ‘Manthan’ in 2022. It is the first edition for “Azadi Ki Amrit Mahotsav” (Platinum Jubilee of the Independence) too. The drafting of the Constitution was certainly the most important and ingenious activity in independent India. It was the logical end of the process of evolution of a constitution initiated by the British Empire after 1857. They formed the Constituent Assembly and provided a base for its drafting before leaving.

Now, this is our Constitution, adopted by our own people. This is the outcome of our Independence. There are a few constitutional issues for us to understand on this occasion. For this, *Manthan* has decided to take up four topics this year. The first one in this series is British parliamentary system versus Indian concept of Gram Swarajya (Village Self-Governance). Hence, this first edition is a ‘Gram Swarajya Special’. The second topic is, ‘we the people of India’ are constitutionally divided along the minority-majority lines. We need to review this division also. So, the second edition will be a ‘Minority Special’. The Fundamental Rights in the Constitution is a much talked about issue. But it has also recorded some ‘Directive Principles of the Policies’ of the Indian State, which is not discussed at all. So, we will have the third edition as ‘Directive Principles of State Policy Special’. The fourth topic is: the Princely States, which were not a part of ‘British India’, had a deal with the British Crown. Those ‘Princely States’ could not get proper place in the Constituent Assembly whereas 40% of India’s population used to reside in these States. This topic too remains a much less discussed one. So, the fourth edition will be the ‘Princely States Special’. Brought out in our tradition of research-based constitutional studies, we hope that this research-oriented edition of *Manthan* will prove a treasure trove of knowledge for the present as well as the future generations. Your cooperation is of course always expected.

I am grateful for your response to the ‘Sangh Vision Special’. The ‘Gram Swarajya Special’ is in your hand. We have an eminent scholar like Dr. Chandrashekhar Pran as the Guest Editor of this edition. Under his guidance, we have also roped in many reputed and experienced authors for this edition. Shri Ram Bahadur Rai has written a matchless investigative article on the establishment of our Constitution. Exhaustive efforts have been made in this

edition to discuss the situation that emerged after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. How much heart-broken the Constituent Assembly was over negligence of Gram Swarajya cannot be gauged until and unless we properly study the debates in the Assembly. *Manthan* has tried its best to take the contextual parts of these debates to the readers.

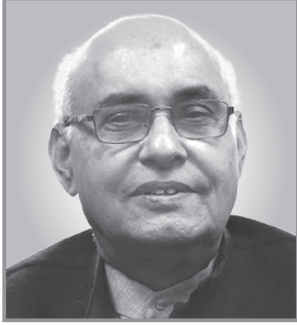
The modern educated Indians might not be knowing much about the Indian political system but we must know and understand India's fundamental political system based on Panchayati Raj. Keeping this in mind, efforts have been made to include the related thoughts of Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Guruji (M.S. Golwalkar), Pt. Deendayal Upadhyaya, Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia and Jayaprakash Narayan in this edition. The ideology of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, who was the controller of our system at that time, became the agent of change in it. An analysis of Shri Rajiv Gandhi's efforts in this regard has also been made by erudite authors in this edition. I gratefully express my gratitude to all and expect you all too to give proper response this time too.

Best wishes,



mahesh.chandra.sharma@live.com

Editorial Article



Dr. Mahesh Chandra Sharma

Feasibility of a Gram Swarajya-based Fundamental Constitution

Which is the foundation of India's Constitution – the Indian concept of 'Gram Swarajya' (village self-government) or the Western parliamentary/presidential form of political system? The issue was being debated even during the time of freedom struggle. 'Swadeshi' (made in India) and 'Bande Mataram' (hail the motherland) were the slogans of the national movement against the division of Bengal. Sri Aurobindo had said that independent India will be a 'Vedantic' state. Lokmanya Tilak used to say '*Punaśca Hari Om*' (Lord Vishnu will prevail again) while Mahatma Gandhi talked about 'Ramrajya' (a state where peace and justice prevail) and 'Gram Swarajya'. This was the concept of India-centric self-government.

Then there was another stream of thinking, led by Dadabhai Naoroji, who wanted Western-style parliamentary form of government. All the leaders belonging to the 'moderate group' within the Congress subscribed to this opinion. The British government too had initiated a process of constitutional reforms.¹ After around 1920, leaders involved in the freedom struggle, except the revolutionaries, veered around these constitutional reforms only. But the people's thought in general was inherently India-centric and this thought was echoing in Gandhiji's messages. Though 'Bande Mataram' and 'Swarajya' were the slogans of the mass movement, the colonial tactics lured the contemporary leaders towards constitutional reforms. As a result, the Acts of 1909, 1919 and 1935 came into being and the Indian leadership remained under its clasp. Some people saw the path to freedom in these laws while some others were power-hankering. The consequence was that freedom came later, but our leaders gained power beforehand.

The Constituent Assembly was itself a product of this process. The Cabinet Mission Plan and the Act of 1935 paved the way for drafting the Constitution. Could a Constituent Assembly born out of this background have prepared laws that are India-centric? Could the Constituent Assembly be founded at all, if we would have rejected the enactments of the British parliament? Do we have the answers to these questions? No. But such an atmosphere was created at that time that with the formation of the Constituent Assembly, we got the opportunity to control our own fate. That is why, most of its members reacted

sharply when Dr Ambedkar presented the draft constitution. This edition of *Manthan* contains the article written by Shri Ram Bahadur Rai as well as the ones mentioning the outpourings of the members in the Constituent Assembly, which would bring clarity about these facts.

Our Constitution is totally borrowed from other countries and represents the Western urban civilization and individualism. It disregards all the social and cultural institutions of India. The members were hurt and annoyed over this fact. Though Dr. Ambedkar had delivered a research-based, scholarly and impactful speech explaining the legal process thought provokingly, he had to face the wrath of the members. It was perhaps unexpected for Dr. Ambedkar. He had done his job with all sincerity. He was wondering whether or not the members were aware that they were tied to the 1935 Act while preparing the Constitution. The parliamentary and federal system that we have adopted has stemmed from this Act only. The minority-majority division too is a gift from this Act alone. “The Legislative Council had also instructed the (Draft) Committee to follow the provisions of Government of India Act of 1935 only, on certain issues.”² Dr. Ambedkar too had said in his speech at the outset itself, “The Draft Committee has followed all your instructions honestly.”³

The Draft Committee had already had with it the draft prepared by B.N. Rau. That apart, many other committees had been formed. The draft was supposed to be prepared on the basis of the reports of these committees like Federal Rights Committee, Federal Powers Committee and the Advisory Committee for issues related to fundamental rights, minorities and tribal areas. Hence, when Dr Ambedkar was being criticised, Shrimati Dakshayani Velayudhan said, “The deserving and eloquent president of the Draft Committee has appreciably performed his duty in preparing the Constitution of the new Indian democracy. I think even if he wanted, he could not have gone beyond the main principles on the basis of which the power transfer has taken place. Hence, in my understanding, whatever criticism was made against him in this regard is downright indecent and inappropriate.”⁴

In fact, the limitations within which the Draft Committee was working, it was not proper to expect any fundamental constitutional formulation from it. But most of the members were seriously not aware of this truth, which gave way to venting their ire. Dr. Ambedkar, however, stayed away from the debate. So, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had to take control of the situation. Not only the Congress had a brute majority in the Constituent Assembly, the members were rather mesmerised by the brilliance and charismatic personality of Jawaharlal Nehru. He assuaged the high tempers over negligence of Gram Swaraj. He paid a patient hearing to the debates for four days. When he rose to speak on the fourth day, there was obviously applause all around.

He delivered a long, emotional and poetic speech which was the mark of his literary prowess. He did not make any mention of negligence of Gram Swaraj in his entire speech. He did not even reply to the arguments given in criticisms. But the Assembly started flowing along the stream of his poetry. All the logic he offered was this much:

“We certainly want to make our Constitution at most concrete and permanent, but statutes are never stable. They should have elasticity. If you make anything solid and perpetual in it, you will end up creating impediments in the growth of the nation and in the development of a race. That is why, we should keep the laws elastic... We all, who have congregated here, are certainly the representatives of the people of India. But after the elections are held through adult franchise under this Constitution, the House that would come into being – whatever the name it will have – will be the real representative House... This type of elected House must have the opportunity to change the statutes as per their will, and it will be given that right under this Constitution.”⁵

This assurance that the elected House would be given the rights to amend as expected was dead earnest. But did the elected Parliament of India ever have had these rights? Did ever a proposal come before the Parliament to review the Constitution in the light of the deliberations in the Constituent Assembly? No. The Constitution was turned into a mere tool of management of power. It was never taken up as a topic of discussion in the Parliament or outside. The party in power and the entire political leadership is responsible for it.

But the debate had a telling effect on a sensitive Dr. Ambedkar. He had totally separated himself from it. Question was raised in the Assembly too over his absence. Generally, the person who presents

the proposal, he only puts forth the replies to the debates on that proposal. But it did not happen in this case. The voice of resentment had subdued after Jawaharlal Nehru's intervention. Shri Syed Muhammed Saadullah, a member of the Draft Committee, had given a very brief answer. He too had no mention of Gram Swarajya or Panchayati Raj in his reply. He had said in his clarification, "Shriman, I came to know from the report of the proceedings that the Committee had been told to prepare the draft keeping itself restricted to the Objective Resolution alone. Therefore, the kind of criticism it attracted was natural. At that time also, the wise people had anticipated that this kind of criticism would come. Hence, the scholarly Prime Minister of Bombay Shri Khare had suggested an amendment to the proposal of the government, in which we had been given some instructions. I will quote here a part of his speech. He had suggested an amendment to the original proposal with regard to the formation of the Draft Committee and he had said in it that 'It is the duty of the Draft Committee to give due place to all the points included in the statutes prepared by the Constitutional Advisor⁶ and present the draft so prepared before everyone for discussion.'⁷

The draft proposal was passed in the Assembly after this reply and Article-wise debate was initiated. But none of the Articles had any provision for Gram Swarajya, so it was natural not to have a discussion on it. However, during the Article-wise discussions on the Directive Principles of State Policy, Shri Ananthasayanam Ayyangar and Shri K. Santhanam suggested an amendment:

"Article 31A be added to Article 31. The State shall take steps to form Village Panchayats and provide them necessary power and authority so as to enable them to function as part of the local self-government." Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar surprised the whole Constituent Assembly by adopting a flexible stance at that time. Nobody had even dreamt of him accepting any amendment. The moment K. Santhanam finished the last sentence of his speech and took his seat, Dr. Ambedkar stood up and said, "I accept the amendment." This created a sense of satisfaction in the House. There was a wave of gaiety. Members after members then expressed their pleasure. T. Prakasham, Surendra Mohan Ghosh, Seth Govind Das, Dr. Subramaniam and L. Krishnaswami Bharathi were among them. The new Article added at that time became a part of the Directive Principles of the Constitution. But it could not bring any fundamental change in the Constitution. The colonial continuum of the Constitution remained unabated. As a mother puts a black spot on the forehead of her child to protect her kid from evil eyes, the Constituent Assembly likewise put just an amulet by making room for Village Panchayats in the Directive Principles. The constitutional framework prepared by Benegal Narsing Rau remained in situ.⁸

A long story follows after that. This edition has all the stories in this context.

Best wishes.



mahesh.chandra.sharma@live.com

References:

1. *Bharat Ka Samvidhan: Ek Parichay*, Braj Kishore Sharma, Prentice Hall of India, New Delhi, 2002, Chapter - 1, pp. 1-27
2. *Samvidhan Sabha Ke Vad-Vivad*, Chapter-7A, Part-III, 4th November 1948, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, p. 60
3. *Ibid*, 4th November 1948, p. 60
4. *Ibid*, 8th November 1948, Shrimati Dakshayani Velayudhan, p. 289
5. *Ibid*, 8th November 1948, Pt Jawaharlal Nehru, p. 314
6. *Samvidhan Ke Pradhan Nirmata Benegal Narsing Rau, Bharatiya Samvidhan Ki Ankahi Kahani*, Shri Ram Bahadur Rai, p. 412
7. *Samvidhan Sabha Ke Vad-Vivad*, Chapter-7A, Part-III, 9th November 1948, Shri Syed Muhammed Saadullah, pp. 436-37
8. *Ambedkar Se Sambidhan Sabha Chakit, Bharatiya Samvidhan Ki Ankahi Kahani*, Shri Ram Bahadur Rai, p. 267



Dr. Chandrashekhar Pran
Guest Editor

Panchayat Government After 73rd Constitutional Amendment

Though sufficient provisions were made for a 'third government' through Constitutional Amendments and the process too was started to implement it on the ground level, it has still miles to go before turning into reality. An objective study

The villages of India are basically cultural units comprising the families and their neighbourhoods. The format into which it evolved from its initial shape is known as 'village society'. The system developed spontaneously by the general public for smooth functioning of this village society is called 'Panchayat'. For centuries, these Panchayats have protected and enriched the village societies and, ultimately, the culture of India. From the very beginning, the village societies have been using the Panchayats as the foundation of their self-governance and self-reliance.

After Independence, when it was decided to prepare the Constitution, Mahatma Gandhi had since been talking about adopting Panchayats as its foundation to make freedom and democracy a useful part of the common man at the ground level. In the words of Shriman Narayan Agarwal, the author of the Gandhian constitution based on the provisions of a Panchayat government beginning right from the Gram Sabhas to Blocks to Districts till the all-India level, "Gandhiji has a definite opinion that the future constitution of India should be based on his positive and direct democracy, strongly built on the non-violent cottage economy

and harmonious human relationship, and organisation of coordinated village communities."¹ But it did not happen due to some reasons. After a long drawn debate on this issue in the Constituent Assembly, it was left to the future generations after including it in the Directive Principles of State Policies and putting it under the authority of the provincial governments (which have all types of powers). Giving the Panchayats a new identity, the Constituent Assembly marked it as Self-government."²

In the Constitution of India that came into effect on 26th January 1950, there were provisions for two types of governments – Union government in Chapter-5 and State government in Chapter-6. These two governments have been running the administration of the country for a long time now.³ In 1992, provisions were made for another type of government through 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments. Provisions were made for Self-government in the shape of 'Panchayat' in Chapter-9 and for 'Municipality' in Chapter-9(A). Almost the same concept, which was included in Article 40 of Directive Principles of State Policy and left for the future, was finally given a

real shape due to the demand of time and situation as well as the public pressure. It is true that self-government has not been defined in the Indian Constitution but it meant that after the Central and State governments, giving the right to take decisions on matters of its own interest to the villages at the local level in the shape of its own government under the Indian administrative system. The clear mention of this can be found in the statements and deliberations of right from Gandhiji to Nehru, JP, Vinoba, Lohia, Deendayal Upadhyaya and Rajiv Gandhi. This was the desire of the national heroes that was materialised through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment.

The salient features of the “own (self) government”, the form of the Panchayat that came to the fore after this amendment, are as follows:

1. To bring structural uniformity in the whole country, a three-tier system (village, middle zone and district) was implemented. It was ensured that at all the three levels (village, zone & district), the Panchayat members are elected directly by the people. The constituencies were declared on the basis of population in the equal ratio. The definite age for the candidates willing to fight elections at any of the levels
2. The tenure of the Panchayats was fixed at 5 years. Fresh elections will have to be held within six months of completion of the tenure. Provision to constitute a separate State Election Commission for the purpose.
3. Seats have been reserved for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities at all levels as per the proportion of their population in that zone. One-third of the seats have been reserved for women at all levels. This arrangement applies also to the posts of president of these local bodies. The issue of quota for backward classes has been left to the state governments.
4. State Finance Commissions have been constituted for the proper arrangement of resources and proper arrangement has been made for auditing also. Likewise, provisions have been made through the 73rd Amendment for constitution of District Planning Committees for public participation from Gram Panchayat to district level. Through the 11th Schedule, 29 subjects have been handed over to the Panchayats.
5. It has been made mandatory to constitute Gram Sabhas

at the village level. This body is formed with the persons registered in the village related electoral list. There is a direction in the 73rd Amendment for the State legislatures to enact law to give powers to the Gram Shabhas. Keeping this in view, the Panchayats have been given the responsibility of mainly preparing plans for the area under their jurisdiction. Economic development and social justice have been stipulated as the main objective of this system.

In the 29 subjects, whose responsibility the Constitution has handed over to the Panchayats through the 11th Schedule, include not only the basic subjects related to the village life like Agriculture, Water, Forests and Livestock but also subjects related to material development and eradication of poverty have been added to it like Education, Health and Industries. On the other hand, responsibilities have also been given to them for construction and flourishing of resources related to material structures like buildings, roads, bridges, community halls, power supply along with the responsibility of development of women and children, social welfare and that of the scheduled classes and weaker sections of the society. This way, all those elements and subjects have been attached with the Panchayats which are related to the regulation and development of rural life and are necessary for the prosperity of the villages.

In this series of discussions on the provisions of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment in

In the 29 subjects, whose responsibility the Constitution has handed over to the Panchayats through the 11th Schedule, include not only the basic subjects related to the village life like Agriculture, Water, Forests and Livestock but also subjects related to material development and eradication of poverty have been added to it like Education, Health and Industries

1996, it is also necessary to deliberate on the Panchayats Extension to the Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act enacted by the Indian Parliament.

In Part IV(B) of Article 243(E) of 73rd Constitutional Amendment, the Parliament was given the responsibility of enacting separate law for the scheduled areas.⁴ Under it, the Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act was presented in the Upper House (Rajya Sabha) of the Indian Parliament on 12th December 1996. It came into effect on 24th December 1996 after being passed in both the Houses of Parliament and signed by the President. In June 1994, a committee was formed under the chairmanship of Dilip Singh Bhuria to draft this legislation, on the basis of which the Act was prepared.

The speciality of this extension law is that it has directed the State legislatures to enact laws keeping in mind the traditional rules of the tribal communities, their social and religious customs as well as their traditional style of managing the communal resources. Moreover, it counts their traditional villages as basic units and fully empowers them to settle the disputes thereof while protecting their customs, communal resources and cultural identities. That apart, it has also given them powers to take the opinion of the Gram Sabha in the cases of land acquisition and issuing licence for minor mining activities. Provisions have been made to empower them to ban sale of intoxicants, stop transfer of land ownership, regulate the process of funds borrowing and control public employees too.⁵

The PESA Act enacted for scheduled areas is important for the Panchayati Raj system in many ways. What is the most significant is to accept the prominence of the community. Panchayats have been the critical base for the protection and development of community-based societies in India. But the slavery of villages under British Raj and the electoral system based on majority opinion in independent India have hurt this communal feelings in the villages the most

The PESA Act enacted for scheduled areas is important for the Panchayati Raj system in many ways. What is the most significant is to accept the prominence of the community. Panchayats have been the critical base for the protection and development of community-based societies in India. But the slavery of villages under British Raj and the electoral system based on majority opinion in independent India have hurt this communal feelings in the villages the most. Citizens have been identified as only voters in the provisions of Panchayat system for general areas under the 73rd Constitutional Amendment where as the communities have been given importance and considered as the fundamentals of local self-government in the provisions of Panchayat system for scheduled areas under the PESA Act. The rights of ownership and control over mines, water, forests and land have handed over to the communities.

In this way, there is a third government after the Centre and the States under 73rd Amendment. Though there are still some inadequacies in the rights of a Panchayat as a government, it is a third government at the concept and initiation level in which the

people can participate directly. It can take decisions on the basis of its requirements and also can implement them within its jurisdiction.

But at the practical level, the impact of the efforts made for 'self-government' in the last 27 years is not up to the expectations. No doubt, a uniformity in the structural form of the Panchayat system has been brought about at the national level by this amendment, but the responsibility of fixing its duties and rights was handed over to the State legislatures. In that case, the commitment and activeness of the State governments have become very crucial.

Such provisions have been made in Article 243(G) of the Constitution that "the Legislature of a State may, by law, endow the Panchayats with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-governance."⁶ Accordingly, time to time right from the beginning till today, State governments have been making efforts to hand over powers, authority and responsibilities to the Panchayats by constituting committees, inviting suggestions from them and more or less implementing their recommendations.

Manthan

During the beginning of 1995, elections to the Panchayats were held in most of the States but the process of transfer of power went on at a snail's pace in the subsequent years and it is going on even today. Due to this, transfer of power in its real sense has not happened in most of the States.

The onerous responsibility of decentralisation of power assigned to the State Legislatures through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment still lies unfinished. After mapping of the 29 subjects in the 11th Schedule, the State governments should have transferred the power in its real sense to the Panchayats and distributed it among the bodies at three levels (village, block and district). But this work remains

incomplete in most of the States till today. In many states, even the mapping of the works and activities has not been done yet while in the states where the mapping has already been done, the transfer of power has not been done. There are three main points when we talk about transfer or decentralisation of power. The first point is the transfer of all the works related to the demarcated subjects, the second one is transfer of all the employees working in the concerned departments and thirdly, transfer of all kinds of budgets determined for the related works. From this point of view, a huge gap can be observed between the provisions made through enactment by the State Legislatures and the rules and regulations formulated and

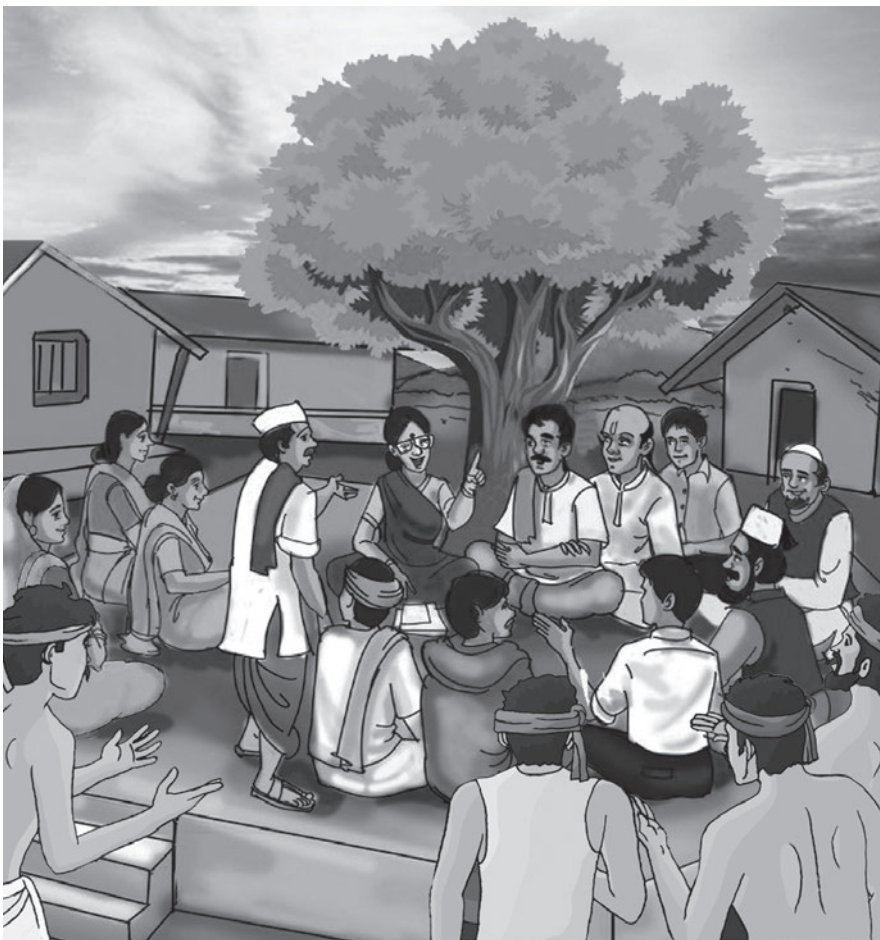
the government orders issued to effectively implement those provisions. Due to this, the Panchayats in most of the States have not been able to get the authority they deserve in the form of 'self-governments'.

The Panchayati Raj system is working comparatively more effectively only in States like Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and West Bengal where mapping of activities has been done in a systematic manner as well as the works, employees and the funds have been handed over. In the States like Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Bihar, Tamil Nadu and Odisha where it has been neglected, much less distance has been covered in the direction of decentralisation of power. In most of these States, instead of mapping of the activities, the work has been left at just mentioning the 29 subjects in the 11th Schedule under the Act.

Of the States where better efforts have been made for decentralisation of power, we can examine Kerala, Karnataka and West Bengal as examples.

Kerala

After the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, only mapping of the first tier Panchayats were initially done in Kerala in 1995 on the basis of the recommendations of the S.B. Sen Committee constituted for decentralisation immediately after formation of the Panchayats. Thereafter, while giving the Gram Sabhas special powers under the Act, the details of the functional responsibilities of each level were clearly mentioned and, accordingly, the job of subject-wise transfer of the



works, employees and the funds was begun. On one hand, the employees and the budgets of the related departments of the State government were transferred to the Panchayats under the move while on the other hand, the other agencies engaged in rural development work like District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) were also made a part of the Panchayat government. A separate cadre was created for the Panchayats and it was activated under them only. A separate mechanism was created in the State Budget for the Panchayat areas and from the initial period itself, around 35% of the State outlay was fixed for it. Moreover, the recommendations of the State Finance Commission were taken very positively and efforts were made in the subsequent years to implement them. This helped the Panchayats in improving their activities and impact potential constantly.⁷

A widespread mass movement was also started aiming at an active and strong public participation so as to render the role of the Panchayats effective in the shape of village governments. It was mobilised intensively at the village level continuously for three years. That apart, 'Kutumb Shree neighbourhood groups' were formed and managed quite skilfully and successfully in order to make the permanent committees of the Panchayats active and effective as well as to develop and strengthen the community halls. Not only that, qualitative training programs were organised for enhancement of the awareness level and capability of the elected representatives of the Panchayats as well as voluntary organisations

It is notable here that Karnataka is the State where Panchayati Raj system had already begun working very effectively even before the 73rd Constitutional Amendment came into effect in 1992. A historic law was passed by the State government in 1983 bringing in a two-tier Panchayat system based on districts and zones with a provision of 25% reservation for women. Accordingly, elections were held for the District Panchayats and Zonal Panchayats in 1987

like 'Local Government Unions' were also encouraged for their empowerment and consistent improvement.⁸

Karnataka

Karnataka adorns the front line in decentralisation of powers of the Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs) and it is among those few States where these institutions worked effectively. It is notable here that Karnataka is the State where Panchayati Raj system had already begun working very effectively even before the 73rd Constitutional Amendment came into effect in 1992. A historic law was passed by the State government in 1983 bringing in a two-tier Panchayat system based on districts and zones with a provision of 25% reservation for women. Accordingly, elections were held for the District Panchayats and Zonal Panchayats in 1987. Under this law only, the State Finance Commission was constituted while at the fiscal level, provision was made for the District sector in the State Budget as per the accountability of the Panchayats. Officers senior to Deputy District Commissioners in the Zilla Parishads (district councils) were appointed as Chief Secretaries. As per the approval of the Government of India, the

DRDA was merged with Zilla Parishads while the presidents of District Panchayats were given the rights to write the annual confidential reports of the Chief Secretaries of Zilla Parishads. As a result of this arrangement, unprecedented and fundamental changes were observed in the power structure between the politicians and the bureaucrats. Most of the provisions of the 1987 Act were retained in the law that was enacted in Karnataka to establish Panchayati Raj in 1993 immediately after the Constitutional Amendments.⁹

To make the new Panchayati Raj system more effective, a working group was formed under the chairmanship of the Development Commissioner in June 2001. Efforts were made to further strengthen Panchayati Raj in the future by bringing amendments in the law in 2003 on the basis of the recommendations of the working group, which included mapping of the activities and transfer of the works, employees and funds.

Extensive legislative work has been done regarding the Gram Panchayats in the related laws in Karnataka. The provisions on powers of the Panchayats have been prepared in great details and mostly civil works have

been included in the sections of the law.

However, despite all these, the Panchayats in the State are not working as effectively as was expected in view of their historical background owing to the elections not being held regularly and timely, unnecessary political interference and some gaps in the law as per the time and necessity.

West Bengal

Like Kerala and Karnataka, the pattern of Panchayati Raj system in West Bengal is quite effective. During the British Raj itself, the work of maintenance of law and order had begun to be done through “Chaukidari Panchayats” in West Bengal (1870). Thus, for the first time in India, ‘Bengal Local Self-Government Act’ was enacted in 1885 wherein local government had been established by constituting ‘District Boards’ at the district levels, ‘Local Boards’ at the sub-divisional levels and ‘Sangh Samitis’ (union committees) at the level of groups of villages. On the basis of the recommendations of the Royal Decentralisation Commission (1909), ‘Bengal Village Self-Government Act’ was enacted for the first time in 1919 and all the earlier committees and unions were merged into it. After Independence, though ‘Zilla Parishad Act’ was passed in 1963 as per the recommendations of the Balwant Roy Committee but in real sense, an initiative was taken to enact a concrete law with the passing of ‘West Bengal Panchayati Raj Act’ in 1973 wherein, along with the three-tier Panchayati Raj system, the supremacy of Gram Sabha and one-third reservation for

After the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, changes were made in 1994 Act and from the beginning, most of the works under the 29 subjects were handed over to the Panchayats at all the three levels. For this, transfer of the works was made clearer by mapping the activities. Constant efforts were made for this and government orders were also issued from time to time as per requirements

women and Scheduled Castes were included.¹⁰

After the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, changes were made in 1994 Act and from the beginning, most of the works under the 29 subjects were handed over to the Panchayats at all the three levels. For this, transfer of the works was made clearer by mapping the activities. Constant efforts were made for this and government orders were also issued from time to time as per requirements.

After handing over the works, the job of transferring the concerned employees was also taken up on priority. For this, the provision of ‘Panchayat cadre’ was made by amending the law again in 2006. In this manner, all the employees engaged in the work of the Panchayats at the district, block and village levels were brought under purview of the Panchayat government.¹¹

Arrangement of sufficient funds was ensured taking the recommendations of the State Finance Commission regarding the transfer of funds seriously.

The provision of ‘parliament’ has been made at all levels (village, block and district) to ensure active and effective public participation in the Panchayati Raj system wherein ample opportunities are there for inclusion of public opinion.

‘Village Parliaments’ are formed in every ward at the village level and all the voters belonging to the ward are included in it, which has the powers right from drawing plans to monitoring them. Similarly, provisions are there for ‘parliaments’ at the block and district levels too. The provision of ‘Village Development Committee’ is also there at the ward level under the Gram Panchayat. It has been given the responsibility of implementation of all the works of the Gram Panchayat at the ward level.¹²

Thus, the Panchayats in West Bengal have been given most of the powers from the decentralisation point of view. It has created its own identity in the shape of a social and financial movement. The role of the Panchayat system in the state in the field of land reforms is well-known.

On one hand, when the States like Kerala, Karnataka and West Bengal present the best examples of Panchayat system, on the other hand, the system has not been able to even stand on its own feet properly in many other States like Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan. Instead of village government, even today its identity is more that of an executing agency of the State government.

Uttar Pradesh

In a way, the history of Uttar Pradesh is also noteworthy from the Panchayat system point of view. Before Independence, the Panchayat system played an active role and contributed at both the government and social levels in the development of the rural societies. After Independence, formation and function of the Panchayats had started under the State law from 1947 itself. However, the qualitative improvement that should have occurred in the structure and functioning of the Panchayats in the shape of self-government after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, is not seen till today. This is true that after the Constitutional Amendment, changes were made in the State law in 1994 and elections were also held as per the new provisions of Panchayati Raj in 1995. But not even the mapping of the activities under the 29 subjects have been done in the State so far. In such a situation, the state of transfer of works is quite poor.

The Bajaj Commission was constituted in 1994 with an objective of bringing administrative reforms and decentralisation, and to implement its recommendations, the Bholanath Tiwari High Level Committee had even suggested

transfer of 32 subjects instead of 22, but this has not been translated into action so far.¹³

When the Panchayats, constituted in 1995 after the Constitutional Amendment, were about to complete their five year tenure, 16 works under 12 subjects were transferred to them for the first time in 1999. The employees working in these department had also been put under the Panchayat government through a government order issued at that time and along with it, appropriate amount of fund was also arranged for it.¹⁴ But the arrangement did not work for a longer period. The attempt however almost failed due to resistance by the employees of the related departments and a regime change in the state. After that, no such attempt to transfer power has been made so far, which has compelled the Panchayats to work as executing agencies only.

The State Finance Commission has since submitted five reports wherein recommendation has been made for transfer of power (all three – work, employees and funds) in strong and clear terms. But most of the important recommendations are lying in the cold storage. Some fresh efforts have been made in the recent times to make the Gram Panchayats effective again but they have not succeeded so far. To

sum up, the state of Panchayats in Uttar Pradesh is quite weak as per the intent of the Constitutional Amendment.

Haryana

As Haryana was a part of Punjab before 1966, the Panchayats in the State were working as per Punjab Gram Panchayat Act of 1952 before the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. Haryana Gram Panchayat Act was enacted in 1994 after the 73rd Amendment. Later, the new Panchayat system was implemented there after adding different rules and regulations. It is noteworthy that the Panchayat elections were held in 1994 itself. The elections are since being held regularly there.

Though the 29 subjects were included in the 11th Schedule of the Panchayat Act of the State but the mapping was done for some works under 10 subjects only and the works of those 10 subjects were only distributed. Moreover, the interference of the bureaucracy in the works of these departments is very high. Neither there is any participation of the Panchayat members in it nor is there any tradition of formally seeking their suggestions and recommendations. As per the evaluation conducted by the Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj, the expected role of the Gram Panchayats in the works given to them is almost nil. They even do not have proper knowledge about it. Most of the government employees of the departments handed over to them are still under the total control of the State government. Though the details of the officers transferred have been given in a chart, but it is limited to paper works only.¹⁵

The State Finance Commission has since submitted five reports wherein recommendation has been made for transfer of power (all three – work, employees and funds) in strong and clear terms. But most of the important recommendations are lying in the cold storage. Some fresh efforts have been made in the recent times to make the Gram Panchayats effective again but they have not succeeded so far

Manthan

To execute its developmental plans, the State government had issued an order in July 2006 asking to enhance the fiscal rights of the Panchayats through an enactment. But that too has not been put to practice at the ground level.¹⁶

A parallel body was formed by constituting Village Development Committees at the village level in Haryana, after which the Panchayats became secondary. Though they were later scrapped, but many parallel government agencies involved in rural development are working even today. DRDA is of course there. This has affected the sphere of influence of the Panchayats to a great extent. Not only that, even a 'Rural Development Authority' has been constituted in Haryana. The Panchayats have been kept totally away from its activities where most of its functions are similar to the 29 subjects which have included in the 11th Schedule.

In this manner, the growth of Panchayats has been sidelined from the mainstream in Haryana and whatever little work they have with them, it only makes them executing agencies.

Rajasthan

Panchayati Raj in its current form in Rajasthan came into existence in 1956. The princely states were more influential here before Independence, which were later merged into India between 1947 and 1950. The first principal law of the State was Rajasthan Panchayat Act of 1953 which was based on a Panchayat system which was managed by these princely states. The 1956 Act was prepared with this as the background. As it is well-known, the Panchayati Raj, which was built up and managed at the initiative of the first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, was launched on 2nd October 1959 from Nagaur in Rajasthan and even a better form of Panchayat system had developed in the State. However, it gradually dissipated in the successive years.

After the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, Rajasthan's Panchayati Raj Act was passed in 1994 and it even came into effect from 23rd April 1994. Officially, it was mentioned in it to transfer all the 29 subjects under 11th Schedule to the Panchayats. But after analysis it comes to light that actually it was not handed

over at that time. Later, a cabinet subcommittee was constituted with regard to works, employees and funds, and on the basis of its recommendations, the Chief Secretary of the State issued an order on 19th June 2003 to transfer the works. The control of the related officers and employees was also handed over. But it did not work for long. The transferred works of Education, Public Works, Food Supplies and Public Health departments that were taken back. Though, DRDA has been put under the Zilla Parishad, but in a way, that is under the control of the bureaucracy only. That apart, the village level functions of Education, Forests, Health, Water and Sanitation departments are being done by many parallel agencies on which the Panchayats have no control. Due to all these, the status of the Gram Panchayats is no better than the executive agencies of the State government.¹⁷

Human and social developments have mainly been included in the 29 subjects that have been handed over to the Panchayati Raj institutions under 11th Schedule. The works of structural development have also been given to them but it is of second grade. It is another matter that the Panchayats are fully engaged in infrastructural works only and the issues related to human and social development have become secondary for them. In fact, instead of itself working as a government, the Panchayats have, as of today, remained as mere agencies of the first (Union) and second (State) governments despite the Constitutional Amendment. The biggest reason behind it is, though the Panchayats were given constitutional status

Panchayati Raj in its current form in Rajasthan came into existence in 1956. The princely states were more influential here before Independence, which were later merged into India between 1947 and 1950. The first principal law of the State was Rajasthan Panchayat Act of 1953 which was based on a Panchayat system which was managed by these princely states. The 1956 Act was prepared with this as the background. As it is well-known, the Panchayati Raj, which was built up and managed at the initiative of the first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, was launched on 2nd October 1959 from Nagaur in Rajasthan

through the Amendment but the constitutional rights they should have been given to function as a government were left to the mercy of the State legislatures. As a result, though a few States like Kerala and West Bengal transferred sufficient rights, but most of others fell too short of it.

The situation came to this pass because during drafting of the Constitution after Independence, a major portion of the Government of India Act of 1935 was incorporated in situ. The provisions for distribution of subjects between the Centre and the State were included in it, which we know today as 7th Schedule of the Constitution. In this 7th Schedule, the subjects have been distributed between the Centre and the State. Local government has been included as a subject in the State List whereas in Article 40, the onus of handing over the responsibilities of the Panchayats as a self-government has been given to the State. The 'State' has been defined in Article 12 of the Constitution as "the Union and the State governments, the Parliament and State legislatures, and all local or other authorities within the territory of India or under the control of the Indian government."¹⁸ But in the 7th Schedule of the Constitution, this subject was included in the State List instead of the Concurrent List. Due to this, though the 64th Constitutional Amendment Bill for the new Panchayati Raj system was passed in the Lok Sabha in 1989, it could not be passed in the Rajya Sabha. Because clear provisions were made in it for transfer of the rights to the Panchayats but the States opposed it vehemently and did not allow it to be passed in the

As of today, the Panchayats are doing the job of an agency only whereas it was established as a government to prepare plans with public participation at the local level as per the ground realities and necessities as well as implement them at that level itself. This is also the first condition for an inclusive and sustainable growth. But in its journey of three decades, the Panchayats in most of the States are standing miles away from this duty

Rajya Sabha. It could be passed in 1992 only when this right was totally left to the will of the State legislatures.

One more fact worth mentioning here is that in 73rd Constitutional Amendment, two works have been given to the Panchayats under Article 243(G) – first, they have to prepare plans for economic development and social justice and the second one is they have to implement the schemes of the Union and State governments which are related to its 29 subjects. The first one is a function that it should do as a government in its real sense. The second job is that of an agency for the second government.¹⁹

As of today, the Panchayats are doing the job of an agency only whereas it was established as a government to prepare plans with public participation at the local level as per the ground realities and necessities as well as implement them at that level itself. This is also the first condition for an inclusive and sustainable growth. But in its journey of three decades, the Panchayats in most of the States are standing miles away from this duty. Neither they were made worthy of it nor they were given ample opportunities and sufficient resources.

In 1992, the 74th Constitutional Amendment too was passed in the

Parliament in order to establish the municipalities as self-governments. In Section ZD of Article 243 in this Constitutional Amendment, provisions have been made for 'District Planning Committee'. According to it, "At the district level in every State, a District Planning Committee will be constituted in order to consolidate the plans prepared by the Panchayats and the municipalities in that district as well as to prepare an outlay of the development plan for the whole district." The State legislatures had been given the responsibility of determining their structure, works and methodology.²⁰

Provisions have been made for forming District Planning Committees in the Panchayati Raj laws of almost all the States. Provisions have been made for the posts of chairman, secretary and members there. The States in their own ways have determined the process of their selection. In some States, the president of the Zilla Panchayat has been made the chairman of this committee while in some other States, the minister of the State government in charge of the district has been assigned this post. In most of the States, provisions are there to nominate the District Collector or the Deputy Commissioner as the secretary of the committee. Provisions have been made

for the members to be duly elected. But in some States, the Gram Panchayats have not been given representation in it and it has been restricted to the level of Zilla Panchayats and municipalities only.

This committee has been given the responsibility of preparing the district plan. The procedure adopted in general for preparing the plan is that plans will first be prepared at the Gram Panchayat level, a Block Panchayat plan will then be prepared after consolidating them and a District Panchayat plan will later be prepared after consolidating the Block Panchayat plans. Similarly, in the sector of municipalities, plans will first be prepared at the ward level and then the outlay for the municipality level plan will be prepared after consolidating the ward level plans. Finally, the district level plan will be prepared after consolidating the District Panchayat level plans and municipality level plans.

The issues the Constitution has directed to specially focus on, while preparing the plans, include the subjects of common benefits of the Panchayats and the municipalities like local planning, distribution of share

in water and other natural and material resources, integrated development of infrastructures and protection of environment.

The status of the major responsibility of preparing plan layouts that has been given to the Panchayat governments is also similar to what has been described above with regard to transfer of power. It means, this job too is based on the guidelines of the bureaucracy and the State government. The Gram Panchayats have almost no participation in it. Keeping this in mind, the 14th Finance Commission had granted the Gram Panchayats an untied budget of Rs 2 lakh crore to prepare plans at the local level. The Gram Panchayats had been directed to prepare a five-year 'Gram Panchayat Development Plan' (GPDP) under it. It has been clearly mentioned in the guidelines issued by the Union government in this regard that till this time, emphasis was not being given on preparing an annual work plan by converging the participatory planning of the Gram Panchayats and different other plans, and separate departmental targets were being fulfilled through the programs

run by the associate departments for the development of Gram Panchayats. However, due to lack of mutual coordination at the Panchayat level, the integral development of the Panchayats was not materialising.²¹

Hence, five-year and annual Gram Panchayats Development Plans will be prepared keeping in view the long term development of the Gram Panchayats through these plans, which will be based on convergence of participatory planning and different financial resources.

This procedure of preparing plans has been continued in the 15th Finance Commission of India. Moreover, budget and guidelines have been issued to prepare similar development plans at the level of Block and District Panchayats.

A worthwhile effort has thus been initiated now in the direction of realising the intent of the Constitution to give the responsibility of preparing plans at the local level to the Panchayats in the form of a government. But this too is at a very early stage. The experience in the last few years is not very encouraging. In the States where mass awareness and capacity building was done seriously on a broad scale in this regard, the results are satisfactory but in most of the States, there was a massive lack of public participation in this work. There is now a necessity of very intense and serious efforts in this direction.

Consistent efforts have been made at the Union government level to establish the Panchayats a third government in real sense. But the State government have been apathetic to it to a large extent. The letter written by the

Consistent efforts have been made at the Union government level to establish the Panchayats a third government in real sense. But the State government have been apathetic to it to a large extent. The letter written by the then Union Rural Development Minister Baba Gowda Patil to all the Chief Ministers of the country on 17th March 1999 is particularly noteworthy. At the outset itself, he had written in the letter that "Despite the direction in Article 40 of the Constitution to evolve the Gram Panchayats in the form of units of self-governance, the progress so far is not sufficient

then Union Rural Development Minister Baba Gowda Patil to all the Chief Ministers of the country on 17th March 1999 is particularly noteworthy. At the outset itself, he had written in the letter that “Despite the direction in Article 40 of the Constitution to evolve the Gram Panchayats in the form of units of self-governance, the progress so far is not sufficient. The slogan of so-called development has compelled these institutions to mainly work as hangers-on of the powerful system of the State governments.” For the Panchayats to work as governments in real sense, he had written in the letter that “the scope of the works and powers of the Panchayats should be wide enough. No doubt, the developmental programs are important, but they cannot be the quintessence of self-governance. Until and unless the rights of managing land and other resources as well as of settling the disputes are not given to the Gram Sabhas, the self-governance cannot materialise in true sense.”²²

Commissions and task forces have been constituted at the Union government level from time to time to establish the Panchayati Raj system as the third level of government as per the intent of the Constitution. In this series, the ‘Second Administrative Reforms Commission’ and the recommendations and suggestions of the task force formed in 2011 under the chairmanship of V. Ramchandran in this context are very important.

In its report submitted to the Government of India, the Second Administrative Reforms Commission has suggested in clear terms that Article 243

As is well-known, the District Collectors very often suspend the elected representatives of the Panchayat governments.

Because of this fear, the representatives are forced to accept all the decisions of the higher authorities, right or wrong. Taking cognisance of this fact, the Reforms Commission had suggested appointment of a Lokpal

(G) of the Constitution, which is related to the authority and duties of the Panchayats, be amended again. It has also attached with it the new format which is as follows: “As per the provisions of the Constitution, the State legislatures will hand over, through enactment, the rights and authority as necessary to Panchayats of appropriate level so that they can work as self-governance institutions and accomplish all the related works that can be done at the local level, which include those related to the subjects listed in 11th Schedule.”²³

Not only that, it also suggested that all the related laws of the Union and the States be reviewed immediately and amend them accordingly. Giving the reference of Article 252 of the Constitution which empowers the Parliament to enact law for two or more States, it has suggested to prescribe the principles in details about transfer of the rights, responsibilities and works of the local governments and communities. Principle of complementarity, democratic decentralisation, transfer of power in real sense and citizen-centric system has specially been included in it.

In view of the manner in which the recommendations of the State Finance Commissions are being ignored in many States, it has suggested the

necessity of establishing such a system which constantly reviews the implementation of the recommendations of the Finance Commissions.

As is well-known, the District Collectors very often suspend the elected representatives of the Panchayat governments. Because of this fear, the representatives are forced to accept all the decisions of the higher authorities, right or wrong. Taking cognisance of this fact, the Reforms Commission had suggested appointment of a Lokpal (ombudsman). On the basis of it, a few States like Jammu and Kashmir made provisions for appointment of such ombudsmen, which however has not been fully put into practice. It had also been suggested that the State governments should not be given the power to adjourn or reject a resolution passed by any Panchayati Raj institution, to take action against the elected representatives for abuse of office, corruption etc and to supersede or dissolve the Panchayats. In such cases, the power of investigating the matter and suggesting action should lie with the local Lokpal, who will send his report to the Governor through the Lokayukta.²⁴

Almost similar suggestions have been given by the task force headed by V. Ramchandran keeping development of a strong local government system, at the centre. Raising its concern that

Manthan

Panchayats are nowhere to be seen as 'local governments', the task force has clearly mentioned the reasons behind it in the second chapter of its report. It includes the rights not being transferred, bring up other institutions parallel to the Panchayats by the Union and State governments, bureaucratic control over them, giving funds only for Central and State schemes and not giving enough powers to the Gram Sabhas in the State laws. The group had also suggested ways out of these problems. It had even prepared a roadmap for it for next 6 years (2011 to 2017). It has given many important suggestions in it to make the Panchayats strong, capable and accountable as self-governments as per the Constitution as well as to make the Gram Sabhas strong, empowered and answerable to the Panchayats. That apart, it had suggested to create a separate cadre of employees for the Panchayats, merge the parallel institutions into the Panchayati Raj system and hand over all the works, employees and funds under the 29 subjects. Moreover, it has stressed on giving priority to local planning, empowering and skilling of elected representatives and raising awareness level of the voters (members of the Gram Sabha).²⁵

In fact, there are many flaws in the 73rd Constitutional Amendment which have become major hurdles in the path of making the self-governments effective in its real sense. Without removing them, it is not possible to realise Gandhiji's dream of 'Gram Swaraj'. The Administrative Reforms Commission has given meaningful suggestions regarding the rights of the

Panchayats, which have been discussed above. But there are some important additional points in it.

As we know, a major chunk of the population of the country are Hindi speakers. The Constitution was originally written in English and subsequently translated to Hindi. In Article 40 of the Constitution, it has been directed to replace the Panchayats with the form of self-government, which was later fulfilled by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. In the Hindi version of the Constitution, this self-government has been described as '*swāyatta śāsana*'.²⁶ This is clearly a wrong translation. The Hindi equivalent for 'government' is '*sarkāra*', not '*śāsana*'. This is even more confusing at the level of bureaucracy when it is addressed as '*sthānīya swāśāsana*' whereas the appropriate and popularly accepted word for it is '*swa-sarakāra*', or it can be '*apnī sarkāra*'. Had the Panchayati Raj system been addressed as '*apnī sarkāra*' (people's own government) as and when the Constitution came into effect, people's inclination and attachment could certainly be seen on a large scale. But it is addressed as '*sthānīya swāśāsana*' even today. Another important point here is, the word 'self-government' has nowhere been defined in the Constitution, due to which its status is still not clear.

The points in the Constitution, which need to be amended afresh at this time, include these issues: to make clear provisions to transfer the rights and duties to the Panchayats, to make the subjects of the Panchayats a part of the 7th Schedule, to

make the recommendations of the State Finance Commission effective, to constitute Lokpal to investigate the allegations against elected representatives, to create a separate cadre for Panchayats, to do away with the parallel institutions, to make provisions for constituting Nyaya Panchayats (Panchayat courts) in order to make justice accessible and cheap at the local level and to establish the Gram Sabhas as legislature of the villagers' own government. The Parliament can even enact laws on some of these issues, mainly restoration of Nyaya Panchayats and manifestation of Gram Sabhas as legislatures. This makes it feel that without the interference of the Parliament, it is no more possible to develop the Panchayats into a third government, i.e. people's 'own government', in the real sense of it, in the whole country.

The issue of 'Nyaya Panchayat' and 'Gram Sabha' is quite important as they are supplementary and complimentary to each other. The national heroes who felt that Panchayati Raj system is an essential element for the golden future of India, they kept the utility of both these institutions on the top. Gandhiji even considered the Panchayats as the foundation of Gram Swarajya and had assigned them settling of disputes in the village there itself, as their first responsibility. He used to mark the Panchayats in the form of Gram Sabhas for the virtues like cooperation, self-reliance and righteousness (satyagrah).²⁷ Lok Nayak Jayaprakash also considered the Gram Sabhas as the base of 'participatory democracy' and assigned them the main role in

protection and growth of the community society of India. He used to see the judicial courts established during the British rule as the biggest impediment in the growth of communality and considered the Panchayat system, which works on the basis of consensus, as the solution to this problem.²⁸ Rajiv Gandhi too, in his speech on the Panchayati Raj Bill, had talked about handing over the local judicial system to the Panchayats.²⁹ It is worth mentioning here that the Panchayats were earlier known chiefly as judicial institutions only. In the laws enacted in different provinces in 1920 to give the Panchayat system a legal form, provisions were made there for both Gram Panchayat and Nyaya Panchayat. After Independence, the Nyaya Panchayats were gradually removed from the laws. Even today, the provision of Nyaya Panchayat is still there in the laws of 8 States. But on the ground level, it is only in Bihar where the Panchayati judicial system is working in the form of Gram Kachehri (village court) highly effectively. The State Election Commission there organises the election for the posts of Panch (member) and Sarpanch (chairperson) of Gram Kachehri along with the Gram Panchayat polls. Under Section 40 of the Indian Penal Code, the Gram Kachehri have been given powers to settle disputes thereof.³⁰ The findings of many studies shows that in the villages of Bihar, most of the disputes falling under this law are settled with mutual understanding at the level of Gram Kachehri itself.³¹

But the problem here is that the common man has been considered as 'most

On one side, the people sitting in the government and administration have taken it for granted that the Panchayat and its representatives are worthless, that they lack understanding, information, skills and capability to discharge their responsibilities. On the other side, the Panchayat representatives are not putting enough efforts to prove their abilities. To a large extent, the Panchayat representatives do lack in understanding, information and skills. Due to this, neither they are able to generate a sense of belonging in them towards the Panchayati system nor are they able to manage it skilfully

untrustworthy' in the system that has been evolved so far for the government policies and their implementation. Instead of the public opinion, the suggestion of a simple government employee is considered as more important and acceptable. In such a situation, it is natural for the Panchayats to lose their importance. The issue of lack of trust is there from both the sides. On one side, the people sitting in the government and administration have taken it for granted that the Panchayat and its representatives are worthless, that they lack understanding, information, skills and capability to discharge their responsibilities. On the other side, the Panchayat representatives are not putting enough efforts to prove their abilities. To a large extent, the Panchayat representatives do lack in understanding, information and skills. Due to this, neither they are able to generate a sense of belonging in them towards the Panchayati system nor are they able to manage it skilfully. In fact, not effectively operating the training programs for the Panchayat

representatives is the biggest reason behind this. Though an agency like National Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Institute was established by the Central government, but training is basically a part of the responsibilities of the State governments, and most of the States are not serious about it. Due to this, the Panchayat representatives are badly lacking in information and skills. It is true that under the 'National Gram Swarajya Campaign' these days, emphasis has been given on training and capacity building of Panchayat representatives and a major portion of its budget has been allotted for this purpose, but the training programs organised by the State governments remain a formality only.

Hence, it is necessary to give Gram Sabhas the highest importance in this system. At the Government of India level, Gram Sabhas have been accorded a lot of importance. It has given the Gram Sabhas the power of decision-making in general in its laws and programs for rural development and governance. For example,

the decision-making is totally left to the Gram Sabhas in the case of 'Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act' (MGNREGA) and 'Gram Panchayat Development Scheme'. It has been the intent of the Government of India from the very beginning that under Panchayati Raj system, the Gram Sabhas be given the same role and rights as the State legislatures have been given in the provincial system in the country. However,

the level of awareness among the people about the Gram Sabhas is very poor. They even do not understand the difference between a Gram Sabha and a Gram Panchayat. In some State, the Gram Panchayat is not bound to accept the suggestions of the Gram Sabha. That is why, the attendance in the meetings of the Gram Sabhas is pittance. In the States where the Panchayats are working effectively, special emphasis has been given on the

Gram Sabhas there. Apart from that, in view of the expansive area and more than necessary number of members the Gram Sabhas have, provision has been made to form Ward Sabhas in the constituencies (wards) under the jurisdiction of the Gram Panchayats, and they are being encouraged to blend public participation with communality. The results are very encouraging wherever such honest attempts are made. ●

References:

1. *Gandhian Constitution of Free India*, Shriman Narayan Agarwal, 1946, p. 15
2. *Bharat ka samvidhan*, Central Law Publication, Prayagraj, 10th edition, 2013, Part-IV (Directive Principles of State Policies), p. 34
3. *Ibid*, Part-V (Union) and Part-VI (States), p. 37 and 83
4. *Ibid*, Part-IX (Panchayat), p. 134
5. *Panchayat Upabandh (Anusoochit Kshetron par vistar) Adhinyam 1996*, PESA Kanoon, Popular Education & Action Centre, Astha Sansthan – 2020
6. *Bharat ka samvidhan*, Central Law Publication, Prayagraj, 10th edition, 2013, Part-IX, p. 131
7. *Panchayaton ki Sthiti (2007-08): Ek Swatantra Moolyankan (Part-II)* (Kerala), Panchayati Raj Ministry, Government of India, p. 240
8. *Ibid*, (Kerala), pp. 258-259
9. *Ibid*, (Karnataka), p. 206
10. *Ibid*, (West Bengal), pp. 485-486
11. *Ibid*, (West Bengal), p. 496
12. *Ibid*, (West Bengal), p. 514
13. *Bharat Sarkar 2006, State Profile, Uttar Pradesh*, Panchayati Raj Ministry, Government of India
14. *Satta ke Vikendreekaran se Sambandhit Shasanadeshon ka Sankalan*, Part-1, Panchayati Raj Department, Government of Uttar Pradesh (August 1999), Page No. 47
15. *Panchayaton ki Sthiti (2007-08): Ek Swatantra Moolyankan*, Panchayati Raj Ministry, Government of India– (Haryana), p. 123
16. *Ibid*, p. 122
17. *Ibid*, (Rajasthan), p. 382
18. *Bharat ka samvidhan*, Central Law Publication, Prayagraj, 10th edition, 2013, Part-III (Fundamental Rights), p. 5
19. *Ibid*, Part-IX (Panchayat), p. 131
20. *Ibid*, Part-IX-A (Municipalities), p. 142
21. *Gram Panchayat Vikas Yojana Sambandhi Bharat Sarkar ki Guideline– 2015*, National Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Institute, Hyderabad – 2015
22. Part of the letter written by Union Rural Development Minister Baba GowdaPatil to all the Chief Ministers on 17th March 1999
23. *Panchayaton ki Sthiti: 2007-08 (Part-III: Supplementary)*, Annexure-II, Second Administrative Reforms Commission recommendations on Local Governance – Panchayati Raj Ministry, Government of India, New Delhi, p. 182
24. *Ibid*, p. 187
25. *Report of V. Ramchandran Task Force 2009*
26. *Bharat ka samvidhan*, Central Law Publication, Prayagraj, 10th edition, 2013, Part-IV (Directive Principles of State Policies), p. 34
27. *Gram Swarajya*, Mahatma Gandhi, Navjeevan Prakashan Mandir, Ahmedabad, 7th edition, 2015, p. 75
28. *Samudayik Samaj: Roop aur Chintan*, Jai Prakash Narayan, Sarv Seva Sangh Prakashan, Varanasi, p. 32
29. *Panchayati Raj: Sankalp aur Sambhavnaen*, Editor – Jagdish Piyush, Rajiv Gandhi's address in Lok Sabha (7th August 1989), Reference – 65th Constitutional Amendment Bill, p. 52
30. *Bihar Panchayati Raj Act - 1993, Chapter-6, Gram Kachehri*, Article 103, Criminal Jurisdiction, p. 65
31. *Bihar mein Gram Kutchehri: Ek Adhyayan Report*, Koshish Charitable Trust, 2015, p. 105

Cooperatives for Self-reliant Villages

Since ancient times in India, the cooperatives and cooperation-centric activities have formally been a part of its traditions. This was a characteristic uniqueness of the communitarian society here. These cooperatives and cooperation-centric activities were known by different names at different places in different times. 'Wanaraya', 'Kuri', 'Bhishi', 'Phad' were prominent among them. The Madras Residency had started organising these traditional credit unions under the name 'Nidhi'. To regulate the common village land in Punjab, a 'society' was initiated on the lines of the cooperatives in 1891.

The Indian Akal Commission had encouraged formally establishing 'cooperative committees' in 1901. The first Cooperative Credit Committee Act was implemented in India in 1904. Later, it was changed to Cooperative Committee Act after an amendment in 1912.

As is well known, subjects were duly divided between the Centre and the State governments in the Government of India Act, 1919. Cooperatives became a State subject under the law, following which different State governments passed their own legislations related to it.

After that, when the Congress came to power in some States in 1937, it showed a lot of interest in taking this cooperative movement forward. On the other side, Mahatma Gandhi too was always trying to encourage cooperatives. Years before, Bapu had established 'Phoenix Ashram' in South Africa as a cooperative only. Every member of it used to be given 3 acres of

land for cultivation. 'Tolstoy Farm' too was developed as a cooperative colony to rehabilitate the families affected by the African freedom struggle. On the basis of these experiences and in view of the situation in India, Bapu used to emphasise on making cooperatives the base of economic activities.

During the review of the flaws in 'Community Development Program' in 1956, the then Prime Minister JawaharLal Nehru had once more stressed on organising the cooperatives afresh and encouraging them along with the Panchayats. In that series, the National Development Council had announced a 'national policy' for the cooperative committees in 1958. The National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) was established under the NCDC Act enacted in 1962. Later on, cooperative committees kept on being formed and developed in large scale in all the States of the country. They played their role quite successfully at some places whereas they fell prey to large scale irregularities at some other places where many cases of irresponsibility and non-accountability came to light. But in States like Gujarat, Maharashtra and Punjab, their history has been glorious and encouraging.

2012 was the most important period in the field of cooperative movement. At the beginning of the year itself, the cooperative committees were given constitutional recognition through 97th Constitutional Amendment on 12th January to bring them into the mainstream of national development in an effective manner.

Provisions for the related definitions, its incorporation, election of the board members, board management, audit of accounts, composition of its general body, multi-State cooperative committees and their jurisdiction, etc have been made in the 13 Sections from ZH to ZT of Article 243 in Part-IX(B) of the Constitution. Though guidelines have been given for all these provisions in the Constitution, the State legislatures have been authorised to decide about its structure, authority, etc. According to Article 243-ZI, "Subject to the provisions of this Part, the Legislature of a State may, by law, make provisions with respect to the incorporation, regulation and winding up of co-operative societies based on the principles of voluntary formation, democratic member-control, member-economic participation and autonomous functioning."

As we know, cooperative societies are basically a State subject. Corporations and universities as well as commercial, literary, religious committees and other such bodies are included in serial number 32 of the 7th Schedule under Article 246. That is why they are generally managed only at the State government level. But a fresh initiative was taken to steer the economic growth of the country ahead by bringing them into the mainstream of the Constitution through the 97th Amendment. It is a different matter that no special attention was given to it for 9 long years. But now the subject has occupied the top slot as a new ministry has been formed for the cooperatives in the executive of the Indian government.

The new initiative will certainly be helpful for the Panchayats and municipalities in the form of self-governments to successfully implement

The new initiative will certainly be helpful for the Panchayats and municipalities in the form of self-governments to successfully implement the heavy responsibilities of economic growth and social justice that the Constitution has entrusted to them, at the ground level in the rural and urban areas respectively

the heavy responsibilities of economic growth and social justice that the Constitution has entrusted to them, at the ground level in the rural and urban areas respectively. It will also help realize Gandhiji's fundamental principles of Gram Swarajya, Swadeshi, self-reliance, cooperation, trusteeship and decentralisation.

The serious concern that was expressed by many learned members of the Constituent Assembly over decentralisation of power on the basis of Gandhiji's principles in both political and economic context, had Panchayats and cooperatives as their largest bases respectively. It has always been considered as the only way to achieve self-governance and self-reliance in the villages. This issue has now become more contextual at a time when the Panchayats and cooperatives have together been incorporated in Part-IX of the Constitution. In the coming days, these two constitutional institutions will prove to be the most effective and successful catalysts in establishing self-governments and bringing prosperity in the villages.

Supplementary Proceedings Required for 73rd Constitutional Amendment

1. The responsibilities and authority of a Panchayat as a self-government have been mentioned in Articles 40 and 243(G) of the Constitution, but its term has not been specified there. So, it should be clearly defined in the Constitution.
2. The State legislatures have been given the right to assign the Panchayats their duties and powers and the issue has totally been left to their will. "Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, the Legislature of a State may, by law, endow the Panchayats with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-government and such law may contain provisions for the devolution of powers and responsibilities upon Panchayats at the appropriate level, subject to such conditions as may be specified therein, with respect to (a) the preparation of plans for economic development and social justice; (b) the implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice as may be entrusted to them including those in relation to the matters listed in the 11th Schedule."

So, it should be amended as per the suggestions of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission as follows:

1. The 11th Schedule, which has the list of the subjects given to the Panchayats, should be brought under the 7th Schedule of the Constitution as a 4th list, mentioning it as a self-government there.
2. Through an amendment to the Constitution, the State Election Commission should be handed over the responsibility of delimitation of the Panchayat constituencies and reservation of seats.
3. The appointment of the State Election Commissioner should be done by the Governor on the advice of a collegium comprising the Chief Minister, the Speaker and the Leader of the Opposition.
4. Regarding the recommendations of

the State Finance Commission, provisions should be made in the Constitution to create a system so as to review the implementation of the recommendations, and efforts should be made to open a channel of communication and coordination between the Commission and the Panchayats.

5. Provisions should be made in the Constitution so that the State governments do not have the right to adjourn or reject a resolution passed by any Panchayati Raj institution, to take action against the elected representatives for abuse of office, corruption etc and to supersede or dissolve the Panchayats. In such cases, the power of investigating the matter and suggesting action should lie with the local Lokpal, who will send his report to the Governor through the Lokayukta.
6. Clear provisions should be made in the Constitution regarding the rights, responsibilities and modus operandi of the Gram Sabhas, wherein the adult citizens of the village get the right of decision making in the real sense of it.
7. On the lines of the commissions constituted to review the relationship between the Centre and State governments, a national commission should be established to review the relationship between the State governments and self-governments (Apni Sarkar) too.
8. Like the provisions made in the Constitution for separate cadres for the Centre and State government employees, provisions should be made there for a Panchayat cadre too.
9. Article 39(A) of the Constitution directs the States to provide simple and accessible justice to the citizens. Panchayats were basically judicial institutions. Keeping this in mind, guidelines should be incorporated in the Constitution to make provisions for 'Nyay Panchayats'.



Ram Bahadur Rai

The Constituent Assembly and Gram Panchayat

This is a universally accepted fact that Indian culture and economy are village-centric. But it is surprising that there is no mention of it in the main draft of the Constitution of India. An account of the discussions held in the Constituent Assembly in this regard

Whenever the sun smiled on India's fortunes, its rays hit the villages first. This is not a figment of imagination but a stark reality and it was very much evident during the freedom struggle. Sri Aurobindo, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai and the most prominent name in this series is Mahatma Gandhi – none of them in their wildest of imagination could have thought that the draft constitution being prepared for the independent India would not have even a mention of the villages in it. But this joke of the destiny occurred in nowhere other than the Constituent Assembly itself. In the main draft, there is simply no reference of the villages as the main constituents in the provincial system. Even after 72 years, it remains as much important and surprising as it did at that time.

American journalist Louis Fischer spent a week with Mahatma Gandhi in 1942 (from 4th to 10th June). He contemplated a picture of future India after talking to the Mahatma. He had also met Jawaharlal Nehru during the course of his stay. Later, Fischer wrote a book 'A Week With Gandhi', which was much talked-about then and is also still sought-after. There is a 'Kindle' edition of it available now. He has quoted Gandhiji in the book saying,

"As of now, the power is centred in Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai, means mega cities. I would like to distribute it among the 7 lakh villages of India."¹ The members of the Constituent Assembly remembered what Gandhiji said and what Fischer wrote. But, did Pandit Nehru forget it? Actually, Pt. Nehru, Sardar Patel and Dr. Rajendra Prasad were leading the Constituent Assembly. It is only an irony of the history that despite their leadership, the villages were given no role in the provincial system while preparing the main draft of the Constitution.

In August 1947, the Constituent Assembly had determined the principles on the basis of which the Constitution was to be prepared. The first draft prepared by Benegal Narsing Rau with the help of the secretariat of the Constituent Assembly was mainly based on the Government of India Act, 1935. He was an expert on that Act.

The Constituent Assembly had formed its Draft Committee on 29th August 1947 with Alladi Krishnaswami Iyer, N. Gopalaswami Ayyangar, Bhimrao Ambedkar, K.M. Munshi, Muhammed Saadulah, B.L. Mitter and D.P. Khaitan as the members. When B.L. Mitter resigned after some days, N. Madhav Rao replaced him. D.P. Khaitan

passed away in 1948 and T.T. Krishnamachari took his place. The Constituent Assembly was adjourned on 30th August 1947.

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar handed over the draft constitution to the Constituent Assembly chairman Dr Rajendra Prasad on 21st February 1948 which was consequently sent to all the ministries of the Government of India, State governments, State Assemblies, the Supreme Court and the High Courts inviting suggestions.

But the leadership was in a hurry. Hence, it decided that the same draft, prepared by the Draft Committee in February 1948, be presented before the Constituent Assembly.

An interesting incident happened during that period. If the leadership of the Constituent Assembly would have given the importance it deserved, the course of history of the Constitution would have taken a different turn. So it is pertinent that we should know about that incident. There was a letter in the papers of Dr. Rajendra Prasad. After going through the letter, it becomes evident that it was the second one. K.S. Venkatramani was a constitutional expert and a great lawyer. He was famous for

his writings on the rural life of people in southern India. This much introduction about him is not enough. Drawing inspiration from Rabindranath Tagore, he used to bring out a Tamil weekly. The writer of "A Search in Secret India" Paul Brunton has also mentioned about his meeting with Venkatramani in his book.

Venkatramani had written that letter to Dr. Rajendra Prasad. But it got lost in the mess of Rajendra Babu's papers. When Venkatramani did not get any reply to his letter, he wrote another one on 9th March 1948. Dr. Rajendra Prasad sent a reply to this letter on 22nd March 1948. From the reply, it can be inferred that Venkatramani had sent some suggestions on the draft constitution along with a newspaper clipping of his article on it. Dr. Rajendra Prasad had written to Venkatramani that the Draft Committee has prepared a draft constitution which is more or less based on the constitution of another country. "I cannot claim that it is based on the thoughts and teachings of Gandhiji. It is very difficult to go against the present political current and it is even tougher to go against the incumbent establishments," he had written in the letter from

Wardha as he was staying there those days.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad had also written a long letter to Benegal Narsing Rau on 10th May 1948. He had attached the clipping of Venkatramani's article with it. He wrote: "Many points in the article are interesting. I too agree with some of them like provisions should be made in the Constitution in a manner that power begins flowing from the villages and culminates at the Centre. The provisions in Government of India Act-1935 are just the opposite. Under it, power flows from the Centre towards the states and the villages have been left to the mercy of the states. The same provisions are there in the draft constitution. This Article suggests that it be overturned. As far as I think, if we have to make room for this in our Constitution, many clauses will have to be rewritten and their sequence will have to be redone. That apart, another suggestion is there that the election to the Gram Panchayats should be held on the basis of adult franchise. For the election to the State Assemblies and the Lok Sabha, the elected representatives of the Gram Panchayats should be considered as the electorate." He has also written that he considers this to be perfectly reasonable and it commensurates with the constitution of the Congress too. He has explained it in his letter. He has also written about his thoughts on the minimum qualification of MLAs and MPs in details. He was a proponent of fixing minimum qualification.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad was the chairman of the Constituent Assembly. He could have sent the letter to the chairman of the Draft Committee Dr. Ambedkar, but he

An interesting incident happened during that period. If the leadership of the Constituent Assembly would have given the importance it deserved, the course of history of the Constitution would have taken a different turn. So it is pertinent that we should know about that incident. There was a letter in the papers of Dr. Rajendra Prasad. After going through the letter, it becomes evident that it was the second one. K.S. Venkatramani was a constitutional expert and a great lawyer. He was famous for his writings on the rural life of people in southern India

sent it to constitutional advisor for deliberation. One has to read between the lines in the case of such historic letters. It means, his letter clarifies two things: The first one is that the whole Constitution was envisioned by Benegal Narsing Rau, and the second one is that only he was empowered to make changes in the draft. Only he could have set the pyramid of the state system right as Gandhiji wanted to be. Benegal Narsing Rau did not delay in replying Dr. Rajendra Prasad. He wrote: "Incorporating the idea of Panchayats in the draft constitution will not be that simple at this time. As per the decision of the Constituent Assembly, provisions have been made for direct election to the State Assemblies and the Lok Sabha. If provisions have to be made for indirect election as per the requirement of the Panchayat system, changes will have to be made in the draft constitution first. I do not know how much practical it would be. In all the countries in the world, direct election is being conducted for the Lower House. In the United States of America, the 'Senate' was being elected indirectly earlier. But that election too is being held directly since 1939." At the end of his long letter to the chairman of the Constituent Assembly, the constitutional advisor termed the Panchayat related idea as 'impractical'. He described it as contrary to the concept prevailing in the world and cited examples of foreign constitutions to prove his point.⁷

This was an extraordinary incident. The issue of villages overwhelmed the general discussions but could not find even a mention in the draft constitution. This taint is indelible in the

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar presented the main draft of the Constitution and the suggestions thereof before the Constituent Assembly on 4th November 1948. However, debates on it were going on for months as the draft had been made public to know the reactions. Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar presented before the Constituent Assembly on that day only for formal discussion. It was but natural that he deliberated on the salient features of the draft before the discussions

history of our Constitution that the leadership of the Constituent Assembly ignored Gandhiji's advice regarding the Panchayats.

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar presented the main draft of the Constitution and the suggestions thereof before the Constituent Assembly on 4th November 1948. However, debates on it were going on for months as the draft had been made public to know the reactions. Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar presented before the Constituent Assembly on that day only for formal discussion. It was but natural that he deliberated on the salient features of the draft before the discussions. The speech he delivered was impeccable. During the general discussion on the draft, the members admitted that the speech was scholarly but vehemently criticised his statements on villages. In the manner the members expressed their pain, it can be sensed while reading it that they were feeling betrayed. The day-to-day proceedings of the Constituent Assembly of that time testify it.

The main criticism during the churning that went on in the country over the draft for eight months, was it lacked originality. Obviously, Dr Ambedkar replied to the criticisms after clarifying about the vision of the government behind the draft and the framework

of the Constitution. He said, "It is said that there is nothing new in the draft constitution, that half of it was there in the Government of India Act-1935 itself and they have only copied and pasted here while the rest have been borrowed from the constitutions of different countries. It has least originality in it."³

"Regarding the criticism that the draft has borrowed heavily from the Government of India Act-1935, I do not have to be apologetic about it. Whatever may have been lifted from wherever, there is no reason to be apologetic. This is not plagiarism of literature."⁴... "Another criticism of the draft is that the ancient political science has not been given any place in it. It is said that the new constitution should have been prepared on the basis of ancient Hindu traditions of governance, the political principles of the West should not have been incorporated in it and it should have been prepared with Village Panchayat and district as its foundation. Some people have extreme thoughts and they have gone too far. They do not want any central or provincial governments and there should only be village-level governments. Though the love of the intelligent Indians for their village-society is not compassionate but it is surely endless. (laughs) The main reason

behind this mindset is they are impressed by Metcalf eulogising village-society.”⁵

About the Village Panchayat, Dr. Ambedkar said, “This might be true that it is alive despite tremendous upheavals. But what is the value of simply being alive? The real question is: at what level it remained alive. Certainly, it managed to sustain itself at a very low and selfishness level. I am of the opinion that the Village Panchayats are the cause of India’s ruin. That is why it surprises me that those who condemn provincialism and communalism, they only are praising the villages so much. What are our villages? They are gargoyles of narrow-mindedness; dark cells of ignorance, parochialism and communalism. I am rather glad that the issue of village has been thrown out of the draft constitution and individuals have been considered as the basic units of the nation.”⁶

The valedictory part of his speech was: “No constitution can be completely perfect. But this draft is very good to start with. This is quite elastic but also so strong that it can keep the country binding in one thread at the time of both war and peace. I can vouch that if any trouble creeps into the new the Constitution, it won’t mean that our Constitution was faulty but the man in power was inferior

and lowly. Respected chairman, with these words, I propose that the draft be approved.”⁷

Prof. Shibban Lal Saxena advised that the Constituent Assembly should carefully ponder over the issue of Village Panchayat and it is necessary to make room for it in the draft by making due changes in it.

The official report on the debates in the Constituent Assembly describes it as general discussion but it was actually an extraordinary debate. The members were so enraged that the leadership too had to bear brunt and even the bigwigs were singled. If one listens to those speeches made within that week even today, he can feel that the members were expressing their accumulated agony through their words of tear. The issue of village and Village Panchayat in the provincial system was breeding in the dream of independence. Initiating the debate on it, H.V. Kamath said, “I heard his (Ambedkar’s) speech with pleasure but nothing came out of it. I was expecting him to tell us what has been written in it from our political history and from the remarkable political and spiritual talent of Indian people. But there was not a single word about it in his speech. Maybe this is the style these days. Speaking in the United Nations General Assembly that day, Vijay Laxmi

Pandit was speaking proudly that ‘we in India have taken the slogans of independence, equality and brotherhood from France; we have taken this from the UK and that from the US.’ But she did not speak as to what we have taken from our past, from our political and historic past or from our long, colourful history, which we are proud of.”⁸ It can be said that in the pretext of Vijay Laxmi Pandit, he raised the question of the root flaw in the perspective of the Nehru family.

H.V. Kamath could not get a copy of Dr. Ambedkar’s speech. So he based his speech on the newspaper reports he had read. Referring to Dr. Ambedkar’s statement on the issue of villages, he said, “Dr. Ambedkar has given the credit of our compassionate trust on the rural people to some gentlemen called Metcalf. I would say that the credit goes not to Metcalf but to a person who is much greater than him and who brought independence to us recently. The love that is swaying in our hearts for the villages has been generated due to our guide and father of the nation. Due to him only, our trust has increased in the village based democracy and in the rural people; and we have nurtured it with our heart out. It is because of Mahatma Gandhi only, we have started loving our rural brothers. With all respect to Dr. Ambedkar, I beg to differ from him in this regard. His yesterday’s style was that like a talented city resident; and if he harbours such attitude towards the ruralites, all I can say is ‘Only God can save us’.”⁹

He also said, “I felt sad after hearing this kind of speech – unwilling, if not hateful – of Dr. Ambedkar about our villages.

The official report on the debates in the Constituent Assembly describes it as general discussion but it was actually an extraordinary debate. The members were so enraged that the leadership too had to bear brunt and even the bigwigs were singled. If one listens to those speeches made within that week even today, he can feel that the members were expressing their accumulated agony through their words of tear

Maybe, we erred in constituting the Draft Committee. There is no member in the committee except K.M. Munshi who has prominently participated in the freedom struggle. None of them has the ability to understand the inspiring zeal in our struggle.”¹⁰

He further said, “They cannot understand by heart (I am not talking about the brain, i.e. intellect. It is easy to understand something by brain) the rebirth of our nation after long years of birth pangs. That is why Dr. Ambedkar uttered such harsh words about our dirt poor, backward and marginalised class people. Our historians and researchers also have given valuable information regarding this. I do not know whether he has read the book *Hindu Polity* written by Dr. Kashi Prasad Jaiswal. I also do not know whether he has read the book *The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity* written by another great man Shri Aurobindo. We get to know from these books as to how our state machinery was built upon based on the autonomous and self-reliant village agglomerates and how our culture sustained for centuries due to this. We cannot see anything if we divert our attention from the basic energy.”¹¹

He said, “We get a glimpse of the highly appreciable polity we had during the golden era of the Indian civilisation and peak of its prosperity wherein there was infinite ability to run the governance. Also, the villages and its citizens were self-governed while there was complete political stability and good governance. The state used to perform its administrative, judicial, financial and defence duties with such skill that it never interfered in the people’s or their respective

When T.T. Krishnamachari stood up to speak, there was curiosity all around in the Constitution Assembly. He was also a member of the Draft Committee. His statements meant encountering the truth. Hence, whoever criticised the draft constitution, he would certainly give the reference of the statements of T.T. Krishnamachari. At the outset, he said, “I believe that the Draft Committee did not give as much attention to this draft constitution as required

departmental work – not even partly. The court in the capital and other courts were the highest seat of justice which used to harmonise the judicial administration across the country.”¹²

He asked the main question regarding the constitution and replied, “What is the state meant for? The utility of the state can be contemplated from the fact that how the common man is affected by its functioning. In fact, the dispute we have in hand to resolve is ‘whether the state is meant for the citizens or the citizens are meant for the state’. In his life time, Mahatma Gandhi tried to fix the dilemma by finding a middle path between the two and this is how he found the Panchayati Raj system.”¹³ H.V. Kamath has explained this context with the help of other examples too. He raised a debate on the principles which did not have even a mention in the draft. When he said that “The impact of the Western dazzle is deep on our minds. The truth is that the impact of the dazzle has seeped into our nerves”¹⁴, he was serving a warning that it is time India gets attached to and assimilate its unbeaten consciousness into it, and not to ape someone else. His comment on Dr. Ambedkar’s speech was that “Dr. Ambedkar’s speech had a lot of thunder of the clouds but it too had the glare of

the lightning. But it did not have the energising, invigorating and life-giving eternal light.”¹⁵

When T.T. Krishnamachari stood up to speak, there was curiosity all around in the Constitution Assembly. He was also a member of the Draft Committee. His statements meant encountering the truth. Hence, whoever criticised the draft constitution, he would certainly give the reference of the statements of T.T. Krishnamachari. At the outset, he said, “I believe that the Draft Committee did not give as much attention to this draft constitution as required.”¹⁶ He backed his statements with the fact in these words: “The Constitution Assembly was well aware that there were only seven members in the Draft Committee. One of them resigned and another replaced him. But when one of them passed away, none took his place. Another of them used to stay in the US, so it remained vacant in effect. Whereas one member remained engaged in official duty while one or two more stayed away from Delhi. Probably due to illness, they could not attend the meetings of the Draft Committee.”¹⁷ What he said after that was a reality. He said, “The responsibility of preparing the draft constitution ultimately fell on the shoulders of Dr. Ambedkar.”¹⁸

Appreciating Dr. Ambedkar,

he underlined the fact that “the Draft Committee did not give that much attention to the job as much it demanded. Sometime in April, the office of the Constitution Assembly informed me and other members that you had decided to the members of the Federal Rights Committee, Federal Constitution Committee and Provincial Constitution Committee as well as some other elected representatives will meet to deliberate upon the amendments suggested by the Constituent Assembly members and the general public. A meeting was held for two days towards the end of April and I believe that some good work was carried out. I also observed that Dr. Ambedkar accepted some of the recommendations of the committee but nothing was heard about this committee after that.”¹⁹ Reiterating his inference, he added, “Attention has not been given to our draft constitution with that much concentration as much it demanded. Had Gopalswamy Iyengar or K.M. Munshi or some other members like them attended all the meetings, attention could have been given to it.”²⁰

Vishwanath Das from Odisha had grievance even against the chairman of the Constituent Assembly. He complained that the Draft Committee offered much less time to the members to give suggestions. “I believe to the extent that majority of the

members of the Draft Committee have not even expressed their united view. It leaves the decision of the Draft Committee to be that of a few honourable members only. They might be quite proficient in their work but we wanted more discussions on this issue. I claim that whatever happened was not enough. One full year elapsed but not much work was done whereas much more work could have been done within this period. Had it happened, there would not have been any complaint today about the Constituent Assembly members not being able to present their views before the Draft Committee.”²¹ He added a new angle to this statement: “Had the Constituent Assembly held its session in May 1948, that too for a week-long discussion, then this issue had been handed over to a committee which would have replaced the Select Committee. After deliberating on the views of different bodies, this committee would already have reviewed various Sections by now. I feel the members of the Draft Committee have not reviewed the things in a proper manner. Moreover, neither this committee has devoted enough time required to deliberate on the whole question nor it has given ample opportunity to its members to present their views in totality and properly before the Select Committee or this Assembly. I would like to reiterate and state

in clear terms that though a joint meeting of the four committees – Draft Committee, Federal Rights Committee, Federal Powers Committee and Provincial Constitution Committee – was held at one place on 9th or 10th April, the decisions taken there were not accepted by the Draft Committee. Can I ask whether this is just a Draft Committee or it is the Select Committee or the all-powerful Constituent Assembly? In the given situation, I am not at all happy with this kind of work.”²²

Loknath Mishra was another member from Odisha. He commented at the outset of his speech itself that the objective resolution of the Constitution was a beautiful outcome of our hard work, but the draft of the Constitution was its opposite. He said that “Whatever Dr. Ambedkar said and whatever would have been his plans to give rights to people like himself who hate our villages, I would say that this Constitution does not give any right to the individuals, families, villages, districts or the provinces at all. Dr. Ambedkar has instead bestowed all the powers to the Centre alone.”²³ He said at the end, “I would have taken more time to do finer scrutiny of Dr. Ambedkar’s speech. Though I bow before his knowledge, appreciate the clarity in his speech and respect his courage, I am surprised to observe that such a great scholar and glorious son of India has so little knowledge about India! He is the soul of the draft constitution but he himself has said such things in the draft which are ‘un-Indian’. What I meant by un-Indian is that how much he might refute, but this is actually slavish aping of the West. More than that, it is rather

I would have taken more time to do finer scrutiny of Dr. Ambedkar’s speech. Though I bow before his knowledge, appreciate the clarity in his speech and respect his courage, I am surprised to observe that such a great scholar and glorious son of India has so little knowledge about India! He is the soul of the draft constitution but he himself has said such things in the draft which are ‘un-Indian’

slave-like surrender in front of the West.”²⁴

The anguish of Ram Narayan Singh was giving an expression to the feelings of a political worker when he said that “we as political workers always used the word ‘swarajya’ (self-governance) and used to dream that the power will straight go to the villages from the hands of the British, but I think this Constitution will not give them (the villages) this power.”²⁵

P.S. Deshmukh described the draft in this manner: “This has been prepared with the objective that the administrative system the Britishers have left behind here fits well into it. That is reason why this does not contain anything new, impactful or encouraging in it.” He clearly declared that “I do not agree with the thought that our past or ancient civilisation is not suited to be used for the construction of the future of our nation.”²⁶ He gave suggestions to do away with the shortcomings in the draft constitution and hoped that they would be accepted. He said that “though Dr. Ambedkar could not prepare such a Constitution which would have been closer to the culture of Indian people, but hope that he will keep a favourable attitude towards such amendments.”²⁷

The discussions continued the next day too. What Arun Chandra Guha said was actually a complaint: “I am of the impression that the Draft Committee has gone beyond its mandate. I think the whole Constitution is beyond the principal principles which were laid down by the Constituent Assembly. In whole of the draft, the perspective of the Congress and the Gandhian social and political outlook is missing. Nowhere in his long and scholarly

I am of the impression that the Draft Committee has gone beyond its mandate. I think the whole Constitution is beyond the principal principles which were laid down by the Constituent Assembly. In whole of the draft, the perspective of the Congress and the Gandhian social and political outlook is missing. Nowhere in his long and scholarly speech has Dr. Ambedkar mentioned about Gandhiji or the Congress

speech has Dr. Ambedkar mentioned about Gandhiji or the Congress. This is not surprising because I think in whole of the Constitution, the ideals and the ideology of the Congress have been neglected. We are not preparing this Constitution only to build a political and administrative structure but it rather proves to be the social and financial base for the nation’s future.”²⁸ After this prelude, he said that “Dr. Ambedkar said something about the villages. I was in Congress for years. We have learnt to envisage the Village Panchayats as the foundation of the future political set-up. The standpoint of Gandhiji and the Congress was that the shape of the future constitution be that of a pyramid and be based on Village Panchayats. As per the statement of Dr. Ambedkar, the villages were behind the ruination of India and they are lying in the darkness of ignorance. If it is true, we urbanites are only to blame who kept shining in the glare of the foreign government and bureaucracy. Our villagers were left die of hunger. The foreign rulers willingly strangulated our villages and the urbanites acted as their puppets in carrying out this sinful act. In my opinion, reconstruction of our villages should be the primary job to be taken up in independent India.”²⁹

T. Prakasham also said in

clear words that “Drafting of the constitution has taken a wrong direction. It is very much necessary to amend it.”³⁰ While replying to Dr Ambedkar’s speech and giving his suggestions, he said, “Undoubtedly, we came to this pass because the Village Panchayats turned motionless after suffering oppression from many foreign rulers. But they managed to remain alive despite undergoing repressing in many ways. Metcalf wants to tell this only to the world and us, who are neglecting it. That is why the Village Panchayats cannot be blamed on this basis. Even for a moment today, I cannot support that the Village Panchayats should have the same status which Metcalf has described as per the condition during his time. The Village Panchayats should be contextual to the time and they should have the potential to power up the villagers and ability to rule over them, collect revenue and spend it properly. I would like to know: what kind of government is going to be formed under this draft constitution and who is going to benefit from it?”³¹

K. Santhanam said that “I regret that Dr. Ambedkar got carried away while speaking about the Village Panchayats and he is wrong in saying that they are not useful in providing a fitting background for a modern

constitution.”³² R.K. Sindhwa had to say that “This Constitution has been prepared to establish democracy in the country. But by neglecting the villages and Panchayats, Dr. Ambedkar has left democracy in the middle of nowhere. Hence, this Constitution does not deserve to be contemplated.”³³ But Balkrishna Sharma was of the opinion that “the Constitution does not have any hurdle for the development the Village Panchayats.”³⁴ Pandit Thakurdas Bhargav was of the opinion that “this Constitution is not the symbol of India’s soul. (Looking at a copy of the Constitution) The self-governance of the villages is not reflected in this camera and this does not draw the real picture which many people want to see. The wisdom of the members of Draft Committee is not the same as that of Gandhiji or those people who think that it must reflect upon the innumerable people of India.”³⁵

Shibban Lal Saxena was a well-known leader of Uttar Pradesh. He said, “Dr. Ambedkar condemned the customs related to Village Panchayats that was once prevailing in India and which was regarded by our elders as ideal for our Constitution.”³⁶ He also said that “I was just recently reading the speech delivered by Gandhiji at the Roundtable Conference in London in 1931. He had said that for electoral process, the

villages should be considered as the basic units. In fact, he had given fundamental importance to the Village Panchayats only. He had said that the soul of India actually resides in the villages.”³⁷ He challenged Dr. Ambedkar’s statement on the basis of his own experience. He said that “I have worked in the villages and I have the experience of the last 25 years about the working style of the Village Panchayats. Hence, I can say that whatever picture he has drawn about this issue, that is completely imaginary.”³⁸

H.V. Kamath observed that Dr. Ambedkar was not present during the discussions. He raised a major question over propriety. During the discussions on 8th November 1948, Begam Ezaz Rasul expressed her agreement with Dr. Ambedkar’s views and said that the citizens have been given importance in the draft, and rightly so. V.I. Muniswamy Pillai said that “The first and foremost duty of any Constituent Assembly is it should make provisions to give the villages their due place in the administrative set-up.”³⁹ Gokulbhai Bhatt expressed his hurt feelings in his speech. He said that “this Constitution should have Village Panchayati system. Its foundation is missing in this. So, I say that this can never be the constitution of India. We have forgotten the Village Panchayati traditions which have raised us

to this level and kept us alive (as a society) till date.”⁴⁰ He had a great regret that this omission was not admitted with apology. So, he commented jocularly that “It is being claimed with great courage that we have rejected it (the villages) willingly.”⁴¹ On this, he said, “I register my opposition.”⁴²

Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru intervened on the fourth day of the discussions. Obviously, there was cheers in the Assembly as he stood up to speak. But questions must have also arose in the minds of the members as to what he would say. In his long speech, Jawaharlal Nehru explained the definition of constitution. He started it with a question: “After all, what is a constitution?”⁴³ He continued, “It is a type of statute, as per which the administration is run and on the basis of which the life cycle of the country runs.”⁴⁴ After that, he spoke on the concerns of the members but his dilemma could be seen clearly. He could not have criticised the heat prevailing in the Constituent Assembly. But he also did not want to accord that much importance to it as much the members were assigning. His words were: “I do not mean that the issues over which so much heat was generated here are insignificant.”⁴⁵ He reminded the members about the objective resolution and read out a part of it. Then he said, “I do not think that this issue is so important that it is necessary to decide on this now and here... a lot of heat is generated here due to this. We should not take a decision in haste on this amid this tension at this moment. A final decision can be taken on this at an appropriate time.”⁴⁶ This statement of Jawaharlal Nehru makes it clear that he was well aware of the contents of the draft constitution

I was just recently reading the speech delivered by Gandhiji at the Roundtable Conference in London in 1931. He had said that for electoral process, the villages should be considered as the basic units. In fact, he had given fundamental importance to the Village Panchayats only. He had said that the soul of India actually resides in the villages

and the churning going on over it. The villages and the Panchayats had been sidelined under his plan only, but he had not anticipated that the Constituent Assembly would reach a boiling point over the issue. This was that dilemma which was reflected in his speech. The whole episode has become an indivisible part of the documents of the Constituent Assembly, which can be studied even today.

Alladi Krishnaswami expressed his disagreement with Dr. Ambedkar on two counts. His differences were of immense importance as he was also a member of the Draft Committee. The first one was on the issue of villages and the society while the second one was over “democracy in India is only a facade”.⁴⁷ He said, “From ancient times in Indian history, democratic principles can be seen assimilated in different institutions. The people here have since then adopted those principles. The modern form of democracy is relatively new in the history of Europe. It is a very recent phenomenon.”⁴⁸ He divided the discussions on the draft constitution into five parts and said five types of discussions were held on the draft – first one is, this is a copy of foreign constitutions. Secondly, its provisions only weaken the provinces. Third, the Concurrent List is too long. Fourth, the Village Panchayats have not been accorded any importance. Fifth, there are too many restrictions on the fundamental rights.

That was the last day of general discussions. The date was 9th November 1948. Prof N.G. Ranga expressed his agony with these words: “I am very sad to hear whatever Dr. Ambedkar said about the Village Panchayats. He

I am very sad to hear whatever Dr. Ambedkar said about the Village Panchayats. He did not pay any attention towards the democratic traditions of our country. Had he been aware of the growth the Village Panchayats have registered in South India in the last more than a thousand years, he would not have said so. Had he read the history of India with as much attention as he read the history of other countries, he would have never uttered such things

did not pay any attention towards the democratic traditions of our country. Had he been aware of the growth the Village Panchayats have registered in South India in the last more than a thousand years, he would not have said so. Had he read the history of India with as much attention as he read the history of other countries, he would have never uttered such things. I would like to draw the attention of this Assembly towards the matter that more and more political institutions be included in this Constitution so that our rural people get more and more acquainted with democratic institutions. How will then, in the absence of these Village Panchayats, it be possible for our general public to rightfully participate in the democratic system?”⁴⁹

M. Ananthasayanam Ayyangar had to say that “I admit the fact that there is no reflection of our ancient culture and traditions in this Constitution. This is true that parts borrowed from ancient constitutions of the West have been incorporated here in a mismatch manner, to the extent that even some of their new constitutions have been ignored. At the same time, the Government of India Act of 1935 has been copied as it is. So, it is a truth that parts borrowed from all these sources have been amalgamated here. However, Dr.

Ambedkar is not responsible for this. Rather we all are answerable for drafting such a constitution.”⁵⁰ After expressing his opinion, he said, “This Constitution should have been based on Village Panchayat”⁵¹... “We should pay attention to the fact that villages should be the basic units of the social system we are going to establish. In the villages also, I want that the families should be considered as the basic units though individuals should be made the basic units for whatever work we do for the entire India and the individuals only should exercise their franchise. The villages should be reconstructed on this basis only, otherwise they will just remain as a group of individuals only and they will be left with no public purpose. In such a situation, they will seldom meet and they will not get the opportunity to manage their political and financial matters reasonably.”⁵² There was truth and vision for the future in his statement: “In the present situation, is it possible to change our Constitution immediately to base it on Village Panchayats? I admit that it should our goal. But where are these Village Panchayats? We have to establish them first. In the given situation, we cannot prepare a better constitution than the one before us which is based on Western constitutions. Hence,

I am of the opinion that we should add a chapter to our Directive Principles emphasising that the future governments should develop Village Panchayats and give them political autonomy and financial independence so that they can solve their issues on their own. A time will come when can prepare a constitution on the basis of those Village Panchayats.”⁵³

Mahavir Tyagi said, “I am disappointed to see this Constitution. I cannot find even a glimpse of Gandhian thoughts in it.”⁵⁴ ... “We kept in mind the need of that hour when we decided the principles for this Constitution. We also kept in mind the possible reactions our decisions will create in Pakistan.”⁵⁵ ... “Now, only those Muslims, Shikhs and other people have stayed back with us who want to see India. Hence, our constitution should be as per the prevailing situation.”⁵⁶ On the main issues under discussion, he expressed his feelings in these words: “I cannot show my face to the people of my village till the time I have not raised my voice against what Dr. Ambedkar said about the villages. Dr. Ambedkar does not know how much sacrifices the villages have made in the freedom struggle. I request that the villagers be given due role in running the administration of the country.”⁵⁷ There was applause in the Constituent Assembly over his statement.

L. Krishnaswami Bharathi said, “Dr. Ambedkar is worthy of thanks for his scholarly and vigorous presentation of the draft constitution in this Assembly. But he cannot be thanked for the provisions in the draft because he has not written them.”⁵⁸ He reminded the Constituent Assembly that “Most of the

chapters of the draft constitution were discussed here in this Assembly and these decisions were only taken regarding them. Only compilation work on a few issues were left to the Draft Committee. However, he is worthy of thanks of this Assembly for giving a systematic shape to all those things.”⁵⁹ He further said, “I regret that Dr. Ambedkar took the liberty of saying things which do not commensurate with the feelings of this Assembly... Many members did raise the question of the villages. I would like to add a few more things to it. He (Dr. Ambedkar) says that individuals have been adopted as the basic units by pushing the villages to the sidelines. I am happy at that. But I want to ask him: Where are these individuals other than the villages? When he says that importance has been given to individuals neglecting the villages, he simply forgets that individuals only constitute the villages. 90 per cent of the population comes from the villages and they only are the voters.”⁶⁰

Kishori Mohan Tripathy said that the bona fide sensitivity of the Constituent Assembly is behind the criticism of Dr. Ambedkar’s narration of the villages. He said, “We want the villages to play an important role in national reconstruction.” Vishwambar Dayal Tripathy said that “India is the mother of democracy. The statements of Dr. Ambedkar are not based on historical facts.” Motru Satyanarayan said that the draft should include the views of the villagers. Suresh Chandra Majumdar said that villages have the ability to become the main source of the power for the provinces if provisions are made in

the Constitution to resuscitate the village-societies. N. Madhavrao, who was a member of the Draft Committee, said, “There is no such thing in the draft constitution which impedes the provincial governments in developing the Village Panchayats rapidly and to the maximum possible extent. The issue in hand is whether the Panchayats should made the foundation of the electoral process or not. If the House decides so, two Articles in the draft constitution will have to be amended.”⁶¹ It is clear from his statement that the Draft Committee had deliberately marginalised the villages and Panchayats in the provincial system.

The Village Panchayat-centred discussion went on for five days. Still, many members could not get a chance to speak on the subject. On the last day, Syed Muhammed Saadullah replied to the discussions. He was a member of the Draft Committee. At the time when the question of Dr. Ambedkar’s absence had come up, it was hinted that the Muslim League leader and former Chief Minister of Assam will sum up the discussion. He admitted that the Constituent Assembly had asked the Draft Committee to prepare the draft within the limits of the objective resolution. But when the members criticised the Draft Committee for going beyond its mandate, Saadullah described it as natural criticism. That apart, he justified the draft in his speech. Article-wise discussion on the draft constitution could start only after that.

When the time for discussion on the Directive Principles of State Policy came in that series, once again the issue of Village Panchayat took centre stage in the

Manthan

discussions. It was 22nd November 1948. Two members – M. Ananthasayanam Ayyangar and K. Santhanam – had sent proposals for amendments. M. Ananthasayanam Ayyangar felt that the language of K. Santhanam's proposal was better than his own. Hence, on Ayyangar's suggestion, the vice-chairperson gave the chance to K. Santhanam to present his proposal. Santhanam's proposal was "to add Article 31(A) to the main Article 31".⁶² "The state shall take steps to organise the Village Panchayats and provide them necessary power and authority so as to enable them to function as part of the

local self-government."⁶³ Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar surprised the whole Constituent Assembly by adopting a flexible stance at that time. Nobody had even dreamt of him accepting any amendment. The moment K. Santhanam finished the last sentence of his speech and took his seat, Dr. Ambedkar stood up and said, "I accept the amendment."⁶⁴ This created a sense of satisfaction in the House. There was a wave of gaiety. Members after members then expressed their pleasure. T. Prakasham, Surendra Mohan Ghosh, Seth Govind Das, Dr. Subramaniam and L.

Krishnaswami Bharathi were among them. The new Article added at that time became a part of the Directive Principles of the Constitution. But it could not bring any fundamental change in the Constitution. The colonial continuum of the Constitution remained unabated. As a mother puts a black spot on the forehead of her child to protect the kid from evil eyes, the Constituent Assembly likewise put an amulet by making room for Village Panchayats in the Directive Principles. The constitutional framework prepared by Benegal Narsing Rau remained in situ. ●

References:

1. *A Week With Gandhi*, Louis Fischer, 4-10th June 1942, Excerpt 7th June, Kindle edition, p. 82
2. *Panchayat Raj Evam Bharatiya Rajniti Tantra*, Dharmapal, p. 85
3. *Bharatiya Samvidhana Sabha Ke Vada-Vivada Ki Sarakari Report* (Hindi edition), Chapter 7, Serial No. 1, 4th November 1948, p. 73
4. *Ibid*, p. 74
5. *Ibid*, p. 76
6. *Ibid*, p. 77
7. *Ibid*, p. 88
8. *Bharatiya Samvidhana Sabha Ke Vada-Vivada Ki Sarakari Report* (Hindi edition), Chapter 7, Serial No. 2, 5th November 1948, pp. 116-117
9. *Ibid*, p. 117
10. *Ibid*, p. 118
11. *Ibid*, p. 118
12. *Ibid*, p. 118
13. *Ibid*, p. 122
14. *Ibid*, p. 122
15. *Ibid*, p. 119
16. *Ibid*, p. 139
17. *Ibid*, p. 139
18. *Ibid*, p. 139
19. *Ibid*, p. 139-140
20. *Ibid*, p. 140
21. *Ibid*, pp. 150-151
22. *Ibid*, pp. 151-152
23. *Ibid*, p. 157
24. *Ibid*, p. 159
25. *Ibid*, p. 177
26. *Ibid*, p. 179
27. *Ibid*, p. 180
28. *Bharatiya Samvidhana Sabha Ke Vada-Vivada Ki Sarakari Report* (Hindi edition), Chapter 7, Serial No. 2, 6th November 1948, pp. 185-186
29. *Ibid*, p. 187
30. *Ibid*, p. 192
31. *Ibid*, p. 190
32. *Ibid*, p. 201
33. *Ibid*, p. 203
34. *Ibid*, p. 221
35. *Ibid*, p. 222
36. *Ibid*, p. 239
37. *Ibid*, p. 239
38. *Ibid*, p. 240
39. *Bharatiya Samvidhana Sabha Ke Vada-Vivada Ki Sarakari Report* (Hindi edition), Chapter 7, Serial No. 4, 8th November 1948, p. 288
40. *Ibid*, p. 300
41. *Ibid*, p. 300
42. *Ibid*, p. 300
43. *Ibid*, p. 303
44. *Ibid*, p. 303
45. *Ibid*, p. 304
46. *Ibid*, p. 310
47. *Ibid*, p. 337
48. *Ibid*, p. 338
49. *Bharatiya Samvidhana Sabha Ke Vada-Vivada Ki Sarakari Report* (Hindi edition), Chapter 7, Serial No. 5, 9th November 1948, p. 366
50. *Ibid*, p. 370
51. *Ibid*, p. 370
52. *Ibid*, p. 371
53. *Ibid*, p. 371
54. *Ibid*, p. 385
55. *Ibid*, p. 385
56. *Ibid*, p. 385
57. *Ibid*, p. 388
58. *Ibid*, p. 393
59. *Ibid*, p. 393
60. *Ibid*, p. 394
61. *Ibid*, p. 433
62. *Bharatiya Samvidhana Sabha Ke Vada-Vivada Ki Sarakari Report* (Hindi edition), Chapter 7, Serial No. 10, 22nd November 1948, p. 695
63. *Ibid*, p. 695
64. *Ibid*, p. 696

Draft Constitution ignores Villages

On November 4, 1948, Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, the chairman of the drafting committee, presented a 'proposal on the draft of the Constitution' in the Constituent Assembly. His speech in support of this proposal was an example of wonderful scholarship and unique oratory. Therefore, everyone praised him very much, but this part of his statement about village panchayats:

It is said that the new Constitution should have been drafted on the ancient Hindu model of a State and that instead of incorporating Western theories the new Constitution should have been raised and built upon village Panchayats and District Panchayats.No doubt the village communities have lasted where nothing else lasts. But those who take pride in the village communities do not care to consider what little part they have played in the affairs and the destiny of the country; and why? Their part in the destiny of the country has been

well described by Metcalfe himself. I hold that these village republics have been the ruination of India. I am therefore surprised that those who condemn Provincialism and Communalism should come forward as champions of the village. What is the village but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism? I am glad that the Draft Constitution has discarded the village and adopted the individual as its unit.

*The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar,
4th Nov. 1948; pp. 38-39*

There was a strong reaction to this. The members of the Constituent Assembly expressed their dissent, here are selected quotes from it:-

Besides, we have seven lakh villages in our country and the village is its smallest unit. Thanks to Mahatma Gandhi, our struggle of freedom reached the villages and it was because of the villages and because of their might that India became free. Whether there is any mention of villages and any place for them in the structure of this great Constitution. No, nowhere. Today after India has attained freedom it is not necessary for me to tell you that the world is looking up to India. It expects something new from India. At such a time as the present one it was necessary that we should have placed before the world a Draft Constitution, a Constitution, which could have been taken as

an ideal. Instead we have copied the constitutions of other countries and incorporated some of their part and in this way prepared a Constitution. As I have said, from the structure of the Constitution it appears that it stands on its head and not on its legs. Thousands and lakhs of villages of India neither had any hand nor any voice in its framing. I have no hesitation in saying that if lakhs of villages of India had been given their share on the basis of adult franchise in drafting this Constitution its shape would have been altogether different.

*Shri Damodar Swarup Seth,
5th Nov. 1948; pp. 212-213*

Mahatma Gandhi's own Constitution, of which an outline was given by Shri S.N. Aggarwal, was also based on village republics or village panchayats, and I think we shall have to discuss this point carefully when we come to that aspect of the Constitution. I was pained to hear from Dr. Ambedkar that he rather despised the system in which villages had a paramount voice. I think we will have to amend that portion properly. I do think that Sethji is alone in the views he expressed. We must not dismiss these things with the lightness with which my predecessor has dismissed them.

***Prof. Shibban Lal Saksena,
5th Nov. 1948; p. 216***

Perhaps the fault lies with the composition of the Drafting Committee, among the members of which no one, with the sole exception of Sriyut Munshi, has taken any active part in the struggle for our country's freedom. ... I do not know if he has read a book called Indian Polity by Dr. Jayaswal; I do not know if he has read another book by a greater man, The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity by Sree Aurobindo. From these books we learn how our polity in ancient times was securely built on village communities which were autonomous and self-contained; and that is why our civilisation has survived through all these ages. If we lose sight of the strength of our polity we lose sight of everything. I believe the day is not far distant when not merely India but the whole world, if it wants peace and securely and prosperity and happiness, will have to decentralise and establish village republics and town republics, and on the basis of this they will have to build their State, otherwise the world is in for hard times. ... The ultimate conflict that has to be resolved is this: whether the individual is for the State or the State for the individual. Mahatma Gandhi tried in his lifetime to strike a happy balance, to reconcile this dwandwa (conflict) and arrived at the conception of the Panchayat Raj... Because we have a great spiritual and political heritage. If we do not do this, our attempt today in this Assembly would not truly reflect the political genius of the Indian people.

***Shri H. V. Kamath,
5th Nov. 1948; pp. 219-221***

I concur with my friend Srijut Kamath that more Congress-minded men should have been in the Drafting Committee so that they will represent the principles and the thoughts of the people who have brought this Constituent Assembly to fruition and whose desire could have been reflected in the draft.

***Shri B. Das
5th Nov. 1948; p. 240***

Whatever Dr. Ambedkar might have said or might have been thinking of about giving power to the individual with all his disdain for our villages, I must say, this Constitution does give nothing to the individual, nothing to the family, nothing to the villages, nothing to the districts, and nothing to the provinces. Dr. Ambedkar has taken everything to the Centre.... I am quite sure that if you can build on the solid foundation of India's past, which is nothing more and nothing less than the spirit or the inward vision of India or the inwardising temperament of India, if you can think and speak in terms of the spirit and not of your external objectives, I am quite sure you can build an India quite united, quite strong and at the same time an example to the world. I would have taken some more time to X-ray the speech of Dr. Ambedkar. I bow down to his knowledge. I bow down to his clarity of speech. I bow down to his courage. But I am surprised to see that so learned a man, so great a son of India knows so little of India. He is doubtless the very soul of the Draft Constitution and he has given in his draft something which is absolutely un-Indian. A slavish surrender to the West.

***Shri Loknath Misra,
5th Nov. 1948; pp. 241-242***

As political workers we always talked of Swaraj which means that power will go from the British direct to the people in the villages. But I do not think this proposed constitution will give that power to them. As before, once in five or seven years they will give their votes and their power will end there; later on, they will be governed as in British days.

***Shri Ramnarayan Singh,
5th Nov. 1948; p. 249***

I hope the Honourable Doctor, although he has not been able to frame a Constitution more akin to the genius of the Indian people, will be accommodation in the matter of the amendments intended to make the ordinary citizen feel more enthusiasm and the peasant and the labourer feel that his Raj and his kingdom is going to dawn. That was the Ashirvad that Mahatma Gandhi gave him.

Shri P.S. Deshmukh
6th Nov. 1948; p. 252

Then, Sir, Dr. Ambedkar has passed some remarks about the village units. We have been in the Congress for years. We have been taught to think of the village panchayats as the future basis of administrative machinery. The Gandhian and the Congress outlook has been that the future constitution of India would be a pyramidal structure and its basis would be the village panchayats. According to Dr. Ambedkar, the villages have been the ruination of India, the villages have been the den of ignorance. If that has been the case now, that is due to us who have been living in the towns, who have been shining under the foreign bureaucracy and foreign rule. Our villages have been starved; our villages have been strangled deliberately by the foreign Government; and the towns-people have played a willing tool in this ignoble task. Resuscitating of the villages, I think, should be the first task of the future free India. I have told you, sir, that who have been taught according to the Gandhian outlook and the Congress outlook that the future constitution of India would be a pyramidal structure based on the village panchayats. If we can build the whole structure on the village panchayats, on the willing co-operation of the people, then I feel the Centre would automatically become strong. I yet request the House that it may incorporate some clauses so that village panchayats may be allowed to play some effective part in the future administration of the country. The village should be the real basis of the machinery. The individual is the soul of the whole constitution; but we the village should be made the basis of the machinery of its administration.

Shri Arun Chandra Guha,
6th Nov. 1948; p. 256

With all respect to the Honourable Dr. Ambedkar, I must say that he has not been able to put himself in the position of those who had been fighting for the freedom of this country for thirty long years. In one stroke he condemned the village panchayat system. .. It is not a matter which should have been treated by Dr. Ambedkar in that manner. That was a condition to which we had been reduced, after the village panchayats had been exhausted on account of the oppression of the various foreign rulers who had come over to this country. Still in spite of all that had been done for their suppression, they had survived.... Village panchayat should be one which is up-to-date, which gives real power to rule and to get money and expend it, in the hands of the villagers. I would like to know what is this Government that is being constituted under this Draft Constitution.

Shri T. Prakasham, 6th Nov 1948; pp. 257-258

Sir, I am sorry that Dr. Ambedkar went out of his way to speak about village panchayats and say that they did not provide the proper background for a modern constitution. I wish that some statutory provision had been inserted regarding village autonomy within proper limits. Their existence may have to be recognised in the Constitution, for in the long run local autonomy for each village must constitute the basic framework for the future freedom of this country.

Shri K. Santhanam, 6th Nov. 1948; p. 264

This is a Constitution prepared for democracy in this country and Dr. Ambedkar has negated the very idea of democracy by ignoring the local authorities and villages. Sir, local authorities are the pivots of the social and economic life of the country and if there is no place for local authorities in this Constitution, let me tell you that the Constitution is not worth considering.

Shri R. K. Sidhwa, 6th Nov. 1948; p. 265

The real soul of India is not represented by this Constitution, and the autonomy of the villages is not fully delineated here and this camera (holding out the Draft Constitution) cannot give a true picture of what many people would like India to be. I am glad to express my sense of gratitude to Dr. Ambedkar for having added the word 'fraternity' to the Preamble. I have to make one other submission to the House and it is this. We have heard too much about the village panchayats. How these village panchayats will work I do not know. We have got a conception and that conception we try to put into practice.

Pandit Thakur Dass Bhargava, 6th Nov. 1948; p. 275

Sir, Dr. Ambedkar has criticised the system of village panchayats which prevailed in India and which was envisaged by our elders to be an ideal basis for our Constitution. I was just now reading Mahatma Gandhi's speech in the 1931 Round table Conference in London. He was speaking about the method of election to the Federal Legislature. There he recommended that the villages should be the electoral units. He in fact gave fundamental importance to the village republics. He said that it was in villages that the real soul of India lived. I was really sorry that Dr. Ambedkar should express such views about the village panchayats. I am certain that a very large majority of the House do not agree with this view of village republics. As one who has done work in villages and has experience of the working of Congress village panchayats for the last twenty-five years, I can say that this picture is purely imaginary. I think that the Constitution should provide for the establishment of village republics. I personally feel that unless we give the villages more responsibility, we cannot really solve their problems.

Prof. Shibban Lal Saxena,
6th Nov. 1948; p. 285

I am rather surprised that a respected member of this House and also a Minister of the National Government should have such an idea about our villages. I must say here, that with the spread of western education in our schools and colleges we had lost contact with the villages, and it was our leader, Mahatma Gandhi, who advised the intelligentsia to go back to the villages, and that was some thirty years ago. For the last thirty years we have been going into the villages and making ourselves one with the villagers; and in reply to Dr. Ambedkar's accusation, I would say that there is no localism in the villages. As far as knowledge of nature and wisdom gathered from Shastras and Puranas are concerned. I would say that there is more wisdom and more knowledge in the villages than in our modern cities. appeal to Dr. Ambedkar to reconsider this matter and to give the villagers their due because the villages in the near future will come into their own as they used to be.

Shri Sarangdhar Das,
6th Nov. 1948; pp. 286-287

I think that in building the country the villagers should get their due share and villagers should have their influence in every sphere.

Chaudhary Ranbir Singh,
6th Nov. 1948; p. 289

A lot of criticism has been made about Dr. Ambedkar's remark regarding village polity. Sir, I entirely agree with Dr. Ambedkar's. Modern tendency is towards the right of the citizen as against any corporate body and village panchayats can be very autocratic.

Begum Aizaz Rasul,
8th Nov. 1948; p. 305

I do not find any provision has been made in the Draft Constitution to consider the village as a unit. Of course, due to exploitation and other things, the villages are in rack and ruin. It is the highest duty of any constitution making body to see that the village is set right. I feel that the village unit must be taken into account.

Shri V. I. Muniswami Pillai,
8th Nov. 1948; pp. 309-310

I feel that even if he wanted he could not have gone beyond the broad principles under which transfer of power took place and I therefore think that any criticism that is levelled against him is totally uncharitable and undeserved. with a great culture behind it and the great principles and teachings of the greatest man of the world on the surface, we were only able to produce a constitution that is totally foreign to us.

Shrimati Dakshayani Velayudhan,
8th Nov. 1948; pp. 310-311

From the day I began to examine it I have felt that there is nothing in it which may be said to be proper and right. I admit that it is quite proper to borrow, in a written constitution, such provisions from constitutions of other countries as may be considered obviously very good and useful. I concede that good provisions of the constitutions of other countries may be included in our Constitution. But I feel pained today, as I did even before, that in our eagerness to borrow from other countries we have totally neglected those ancient principles and institutions of our country which are there even today and which we have inherited in our blood. It is a Draft of the Constitution but neither its guiding principles nor its body are vitalised by the heart of India. The truth is that it does not give us the sense of being our own. In this constitution there is no provision for establishing Panchayat Raj, the village Panchayati system in India. When there is no such provision, it can never be the constitution of India. To forget or spurn the system of village Panchayats, which has lifted us up and which has sustained us so far and to declare boldly that it has been deliberately spurned - well in all humility. If the villages are to be discarded, someone can also boldly demand that this constitution be discarded. This much I would like to submit to Doctor Sahib. He is a great scholar, and as such he should treat this country also as a land of wisdom. It is my appeal to him that he should give a place to the soul of India in this constitution.

Shri Gokulbhai Daulatram Bhatt,
8th Nov. 1948; pp. 315-317

I owe it to myself to say that I do not share the views of my honourable Friend in his general condemnation of village communities in India. I must also express my emphatic dissent from his observation that Democracy in India is only a top-dressing on Indian soil. The democratic principle was recognised in the various indigenous institutions of the country going back to the earliest period in her history. Criticism 4. The constitution does not give sufficient importance to village communities which are an essential feature of India's social and political life. With the large powers vested in the provincial or state legislatures in regard to local self-government and other matters, there is nothing to prevent the provincial legislatures, from constituting the villages as administrative units for the discharge of various functions vested in the State governments.

Shri Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar,
8th Nov. 1948; pp. 334-336

Then, Sir, a word about the villages. Dr. Ambedkar said that he was happy that the "Drafting Committee has not accommodated the village". He characterised it as "a sink of localism and a den of communalism". It is these sinks of slavery that were facing all sorts of repression in the freedom struggle. When these sinks of slavery that were being charred, burnt and tortured in Chimoor, the pyramids of freedom were applying grease on the back of the Britishers. Unless I raise my voice against the remarks which Dr. Ambedkar has made against villages, I cannot face my village people. Dr. Ambedkar does not know what amount of sacrifice the villagers have undergone in the struggle for freedom. I submit, sir, that villagers should be given their due share in the governance of the country. If they are not given their due share, I submit that they are bound to react to this. I thank you, Sir.

Shri Mahavir Tyagi,
9th Nov. 1948; p. 362

I am sorry, Sir, that Dr. Ambedkar should have gone out of his way to make certain references and observations which are not in consonance with the wishes or the spirit of the House, in regard to his references to the villages, and his reference to the character of the majority and 'constitutional morality'. Honourable members have referred to the question of villages. I only wish to add this: He says: "I am glad that the Draft has discarded the village and adopted the individual as its unit." I would like to ask him where is the individual apart from the villages. When he says that the villages have been discarded and the individual has been taken into consideration, he has conveniently forgotten that the individuals constitute the village; and they number about ninety per cent of the population, who are the voters.

Shri L. Krishnaswami Bharathi,
9th Nov. 1948; p. 365

This debate on the draft lasted in the Constituent Assembly from 4 to 9 November 1948 i.e. for 6 days. These are excerpts from the Official Report of the Constituent Assembly Debates (Proceedings) Vol. VII.



S.S.Meenakshisundaram

Rajiv Gandhi, Indian Polity and the Panchayatiraj Amendment

India has a long tradition of 'democratic Panchayats'. Though it was badly affected during the reign of foreign rulers, it could not be totally ruined. Its status has now been revived through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. An overview on the new developments in this tradition

Panchayats have been in existence in India for over centuries. The *Rig Veda*, one of India's oldest sacred books mentions village communities across the sub-continent that were self-governing over millennia, serving as the main interface between the predominantly agrarian village economies and the higher authorities. Custom and tradition elevated these councils or assemblies called '*sabhas*' to a position of considerable authority. Slowly, they assumed the form of the '*panchayat*' (an assembly of five respected elders). These panchayats in north and south India became the pivot of administration, the focus of social solidarity and the principal forum for the dispensation of justice and resolution of local disputes. During the medieval and Mughal periods these characteristics of the village panchayats remained unchanged. Although under the Mughals their judicial powers were curtailed, local affairs remained unregulated from above and village officers and servants were answerable primarily to the panchayats. Sir Charles Metcalfe, a British Governor in India during the 19th century, called them "little republics having

nearly everything they want within themselves and almost independent of foreign relations. They seem to last where nothing else lasts".

Under the British rule in India, the autonomy of these panchayats gradually disappeared owing to the establishment of local civil and criminal courts, revenue and police organizations, the increase in communications, the growth of individualism and operation of the individual Ryotwari System. The British, however, attempted to establish an alternative system of local self-government in India. Lord Ripon took the initiative in 1882 of establishing popularly elected institutions at local levels, presided over by a non-official chairman to look after specified functions delegated to them by the provincial governments in their areas. These institutions however lacked in resources as well as autonomy.

It was Gandhiji who for the first time in the 20th Century wished to revive the panchayats with democratic bases of their own and invest them with adequate powers so that the villagers could have a real sense of "Swaraj" or self-rule. He wanted to build the entire polity on

the foundation of Village Swaraj. He wrote in the July 26, 1942 issue of the Harijan: “My idea of Village Swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants, and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity. Thus every village's first concern will be to grow its own food crops and cotton for its cloth..... The individual is the architect of his own government. The law of non-violence rules him and his government”.

Unfortunately, these views of the Father of the Nation had not been shared by many, most notably by Dr. Ambedkar who said “what is the village, but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism?” He believed that these village republics have been the ruination of India. The condition of the caste-ridden Indian village at that time was such that one can easily understand

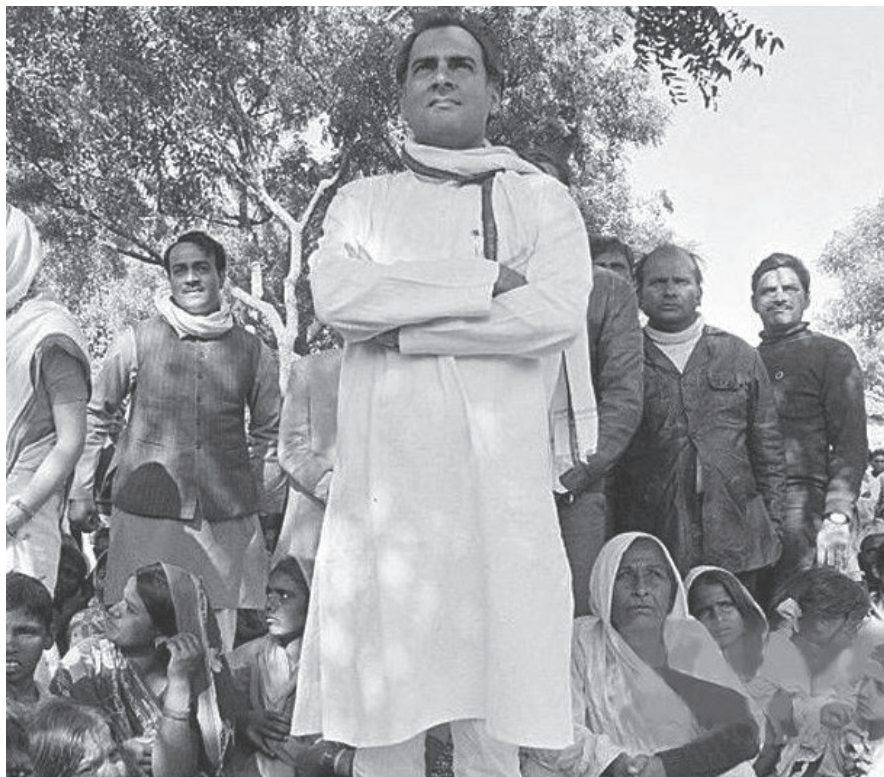
why Dr. Ambedkar thought this way. His strong opposition to the concept of village as the basic unit of administration had resulted in the Panchayats not even finding a mention in the first draft of independent India's Constitution.

Gandhiji opposed that move and after a lot of consultations, it was finally decided as a compromise to incorporate the Panchayats in the Directive Principles of the State Policy. Article 40 of the Constitution which was reluctantly agreed to by the Constituent Assembly merely states that “the State shall take steps to organize village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government”. This left little obligation to introduce any system of rural local governments in independent India. There was no legislation on this subject

until 1959. It came about only after the Balwantrai Mehta committee appointed to study the Community Projects and National Extension Services programme categorically recommended that it was impossible to execute development programmes without the instrument of people's participation. Following this recommendation, a three-tier Panchayatiraj system came into existence throughout the country in the early sixties. The phase of ascendancy in the history of Panchayatiraj in India continued till 1964, to be followed by a phase of stagnation (1965-69) and then a phase of decline (1969-1977) mostly owing to the weakening of democratic values in the ruling dispensations at that time.

The revival of interest in Panchayatiraj came about with a new Government (headed by Morarji Desai) taking charge at the national level in 1977. A committee headed by Ashok Mehta set up by that Government gave its report in 1978 recommending a two tier Panchayatiraj system for the country. That Government unfortunately went out of office before any action could be taken on that report. However the Government of Karnataka headed by Ramakrishna Hegde, adopting the recommendations of the Ashok Mehta Committee, passed a law in 1983 proposing the establishment of Mandal Panchayats for a population of around 20,000 and a Zilla Parishad in each district.

The two tier system that came to be established in Karnataka attracted the attention of several people including the then Prime Minister (PM) Rajiv Gandhi who



wanted the State Government officials to make a presentation before him. Though Hegde offered to make the presentation himself before the PM, it could not happen owing to political reasons. Rajiv Gandhi held a series of conferences with the District Collectors across the country and decided to extend the Panchayatiraj system throughout the country by bringing in a Constitutional Amendment as recommended by the L.M. Singhvi committee appointed by him in 1986. The Panchayatiraj initiative started by Rajiv Gandhi is therefore not just a resumption of the decentralisation process but an attempt to force the pace of change. On 15 May 1989, Rajiv introduced in the Lok Sabha the 64th Constitution Amendment Bill seeking to establish Panchayats at the village, intermediate and district levels comprising mainly of representatives elected from territorial constituencies. Within one month, a seminar of officials, three regional sammelans at Bangalore, Cuttack and New Delhi, a meeting of all the Chief Secretaries, a meeting of all State Ministers of local self-governments and a meeting of the Parliamentary Consultative Committee were organized, with Rajiv participating in most of them.

Rajiv acknowledged at these meetings that it was not going to be easy to garner political support needed to push through the bill. His own party apprehended that the proposed measures were far too wide, far too many and would not be acceptable to the then existing political formations. The opposition parties, notably the DMK, CPM and the Telugu

Some of the Amendments that Shahabuddin and a few others had suggested sought the substitution of the word 'governor' by the words 'state government', the vesting of various responsibilities under the proposed Amendment more clearly on State legislatures, and provision for representation of the MPs only in the district panchayat. Sultan Owaisi recalled the bitter experience of Hyderabad where elections were held after twenty-two years

Desam party declared that Rajiv was bypassing the spirit of the Constitution by seeking to legislate on subjects which were clearly within the domain of the State Governments. When the Parliament reconvened for the monsoon session, Rajiv introduced the Nagarpalika Bill, labeled as the 65th Amendment as a companion piece of Panchayat Bill providing for decentralisation in the urban areas as well.

Unfortunately within a few months, between May and August 1989, the make-up and mood of the House changed. Since general elections were expected early in the following year, the opposition parties were determined not to let the Congress gain any political advantage from the decentralisation initiative. The Bofors controversy escalated in the meantime and about hundred Opposition MPs resigned. Though the resignations were not formally accepted by the Speaker, these MPs stayed away from the House and only a few Opposition members like Syed Shahabuddin and Banatwala actually attended the Lok Sabha. Their own opposition to the Bill was muted and focused more in individual provisions. On 8 August 1989, both the 64th and

65th Amendment Bills were taken together for consideration. About eighty members participated, but in the absence of the Opposition stalwarts, the debate was mostly one sided. Speakers from the Congress benches, with few exceptions, followed the routine of eulogizing Rajiv Gandhi and heaping blame on the Opposition. On legislative competence and constitutionality, Shahabuddin pointed out that the very first Article of the Constitution described India as "a union of states" and not a "union of states, municipalities and Panchayats". Therefore the Amendments would alter this basic feature. He also argued that while there was no controversy in the country about making the local institutions effective and responsive, the Constitutional Amendment Bills had been conceived and delivered in a hurry.

Some of the Amendments that Shahabuddin and a few others had suggested sought the substitution of the word 'governor' by the words 'state government', the vesting of various responsibilities under the proposed Amendment more clearly on State legislatures, and provision for representation of the MPs only in the district panchayat.

Sultan Owaisi recalled the bitter experience of Hyderabad where elections were held after twenty-two years. After a reply by the Concerned Ministers--Bhajanlal and Mohsina Kidwai, the Lok Sabha rejected the amendments proposed by the non-Congress members and passed the Bills late in the evening of 10 August 1989 and referred them to the Rajya Sabha.

Next day, the scene shifted to the Rajya Sabha. The debate commenced on 14 August. Opening the attack, Gurupadaswamy asked where the government was all these forty years when local self-government had become a strong reality in States like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala. These States run by the Opposition parties had demonstrated that what was needed for decentralisation was not a Constitutional Amendment but political will and political leadership. Upendra wondered why the government was in such a hurry since the process of passing the Bills, ratification by the States and presidential assent would take the date to 1991 or beyond by which time the Rajiv Gandhi government would have ceased to exist. Some members also assailed the

ambivalence of the Congress government pointing out that when the Karnataka government sent a comprehensive law on Panchayati Raj in 1983 for obtaining the President's assent, the Central government had kept it pending till 1985. Nazeer Sab, the Karnataka Panchayat Minister had then threatened to go on a hunger strike and after much political pressure the President's assent was received.

Upendra continued his attack when the Rajya Sabha reconvened on 16 August, emphasizing the point that devolution to local bodies could not be in isolation but should be preceded or accompanied by devolution from the Centre to the States. He also pointed out that the PM himself was on record that Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal had done much in regard to panchayatiraj institutions. If so, he could not understand the distrust of the State governments which seemed to have promoted the Centre to bring up the Bills. L.K. Advani was another prominent Opposition leader who participated in the Rajya Sabha debate. He observed that those who supported the Bill hailed it as historic, while those who were opposed regarded it

as diabolical device to usurp the powers of the State. He attributed this controversy to inept handling by the government in preparing the Bill and bringing it to Parliament without mobilizing consensus on essential points. Advani felt that unanimity on some of the essential features of the Bill could have been achieved if the government had so desired. His own party had been urging a Constitutional status for panchayat bodies for a long time. He felt that the present Amendment Bill was an exercise to correct the declining image of the PM and was nothing more than an election gimmick.

The debate in the Rajya Sabha did not continue as the House was adjourned sine die on 18 August. When it reconvened on 11 October, the Rajya Sabha witnessed scenes of acrimony as the Opposition demanded the immediate resignation of the government on account of the Bofors controversy. Nevertheless, some parliamentary business continued and the debate on the Panchayat and Nagarpalika Bills was carried on. Murasoli Maran considered the two Bills to be a 'virtual war' on the States. The Bills were only the tip of an iceberg concealing a lot of hidden mischief, he felt and the States were expected to toe the line of the Centre in needless uniformity. Ram Jethmalani thundered that the whole attitude and the philosophy behind the measures was undesirable, the timing and motivation highly objectionable, and the manner in which the measure was being projected and presented to the people of India almost obscene. In his view, the Rajiv Gandhi government was a lame duck

Upendra continued his attack when the Rajya Sabha reconvened on 16 August, emphasizing the point that devolution to local bodies could not be in isolation but should be preceded or accompanied by devolution from the Centre to the States. He also pointed out that the PM himself was on record that Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka,

Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal had done much in regard to panchayatiraj institutions. If so, he could not understand the distrust of the State governments which seemed to have promoted the Centre to bring up the Bills

Manthan

and had no moral authority to tinker with the Constitution. Chitta Basu, the veteran Forward Block leader opposed the Bills in principle because they passed on all responsibility to the States but curtailed their rights. He accused the government of ignoring the Asoka Mehta and Sarkaria Committee recommendations. Chaturanan Mishra conceded that regular elections and reservations for SC/ST were good provisions but setting up State Finance Commissions without a provision of devolution from the Consolidated Fund of India was meaningless.

The debate in the Rajya Sabha had all the characteristics of a Greek tragedy. Since the two measures were Constitutional Bills, at every stage, starting from the motion to consider the Bills, it required a two-third majority of those present and voting. Rajiv Gandhi felt that he could somehow scrape through the process. The Opposition on the other hand was determined to block the Bills at every stage. Everyone knew that the term of the ninth Lok Sabha would come to a close by the end of the year. While the Opposition accused the government of resorting to gimmickry on the eve of the elections its own behavior also reflected a keen eye on the forthcoming elections. As the

debate moved on to October 13th, there was a general expectation that this would be the last item of business and thereafter the House would probably be adjourned sine die.

Nevertheless, Rajiv Gandhi decided to give all that he had in support of the Bills. As the Rajya Sabha decided to carry on with the debate till the late hours of the evening, Rajiv Gandhi's chance to reply came around 11 p.m. Unlike in the Lok Sabha where the Congress Party had a comfortable majority, Rajiv Gandhi had to be less combative in the Rajya Sabha. He had to marshal his arguments carefully and balance rhetoric with restraint. Recognizing that the debate had revealed general acceptance of maximum devolution, he proceeded to deal with the controversies on jurisdiction, competence, substance and political propriety. He asserted that the Bills did not impinge or abridge the jurisdiction of the States in any way and the State List was not being altered. He justified a uniform structure for panchayats and nagarpalikas on the ground that the pattern and degree of democracy should not differ from one part of the country to another.

On the question of propriety, in particular the complaint that

the PM had dared to interact directly with the District Magistrates, Rajiv Gandhi asked "what right has the PM to remain as PM, if he cannot feel at home and talk to anyone in any part of the Country?". Assailing the view that these initiatives were too close to the polls, Rajiv Gandhi reminded that "we were elected for five years and the programme for decentralisation had been a major plank of the government ever since it assumed office in 1985....The Panchayati Raj and Nagarpalika Bills, brought forward after extensive consultations, should be considered as measures for the most substantive, systemic transformation in the governance of the Indian polity since the Constitution". Reasserting that the proposed Amendments would vastly increase the number of elected representatives and thereby reduce the gap that now separates the voter from his representatives, Rajiv Gandhi declared that the "Bills are the warrant for ending the regime of the power brokers and intermediaries."

Drawing attention to the provisions for planning in the two Bills, Rajiv Gandhi said "surprisingly little had been said in the house about these provisions which were the heart of the Amendments. The Constitutional Amendments envisaged an entirely new era in planning. Decentralized planning has been talked about for long but the Amendments would make it mandatory. Social justice would be an integral element. District Planning and Metropolitan Planning would become crucial and India would be one of the first developing countries in the

Rajiv Gandhi decided to give all that he had in support of the Bills. As the Rajya Sabha decided to carry on with the debate till the late hours of the evening, Rajiv Gandhi's chance to reply came around 11 p.m. Unlike in the Lok Sabha where the Congress Party had a comfortable majority, Rajiv Gandhi had to be less combative in the Rajya Sabha. He had to marshal his arguments carefully and balance rhetoric with restraint

world to provide a platform for interaction between States and central authorities”. Concluding his speech Rajiv Gandhi said, “We are bringing to an end the Kafkaesque nightmare through which the people at the grassroots live. Their problems can now be solved at their doorsteps, answerability will be within the village and accountability will be nailed to the door of the Panchayat”.

As the House prepared to vote on the motion for considering the Bills, a new controversy arose. Referring to some Ministers who were present in the House though they were not members of the Rajya Sabha, Advani said that it would be desirable if they withdrew when voting took place. The Treasury benches took this as an affront. Shouting and discord again threatened to disrupt the House. Finally, the motion to consider the 64th and 65th Constitution Amendment Bills was put to vote. There were 83 Nos and 157 Ayes, three short of the requirement of the two-third majority of the total 240 members present and voting.

The motion was declared defeated at 31 minutes past midnight of 13 October 1989. The house then adjourned sine die bringing down the curtain on Rajiv Gandhi’s efforts to

What was called a hasty endeavour in 1989 came to be regarded as a major systemic change in the country’s structure of governance in 1993. May be, Rajiv Gandhi himself could have achieved this feat, if he had attempted to evolve a political consensus on essential points, as suggested by Advani. Despite his failed attempt, Rajiv Gandhi does deserve credit for elevating decentralisation from a mere administrative exercise to a significant element in India’s political agenda and governance

decentralize governance in India.

Undoubtedly Rajiv Gandhi had a clear vision for decentralisation. While introducing the Panchayat Bill in the Lok Sabha, he said that “A wide spectrum separated the largest body of the electorate from a small number of its elected representatives. This gap has been occupied by the power brokers, the middlemen and vested interests. For the minutest municipal function, people have had to runaround finding persons with the right connection..... With the passage of this Bill the Panchayats would emerge as a firm building block of administration and development.” His bill was defeated not because of its substance but because both the ruling party and the opposition had taken a political stand; neither was prepared to give any quarter to the other. Four years later, the same bill renumbered as the 73rd amendment to the Constitution

(moved by the Narasimha Rao Government) but substantially unchanged became law. What was called a hasty endeavour in 1989 came to be regarded as a major systemic change in the country’s structure of governance in 1993. May be, Rajiv Gandhi himself could have achieved this feat, if he had attempted to evolve a political consensus on essential points, as suggested by Advani. Despite his failed attempt, Rajiv Gandhi does deserve credit for elevating decentralisation from a mere administrative exercise to a significant element in India’s political agenda and governance.

Thirty years is not a long period in a country’s history. Rajiv Gandhi’s initiatives have already resulted in the Panchayatiraj system taking root in some States of the country. Let us hope that the rest of the country will also follow suit in the foreseeable future. ●

References:

1. Hari K. Nagarajan, Hans P. Binswanger-Mkhize and S.S. Meenakshisundaram ‘Decentralization and Empowerment for Rural Development’ Published by Foundation Books, Cambridge University Press, India, 2015.
2. K.C.Sivaramakrishnan, ‘Power to the People?’ Published by Konark Publishers Pvt Ltd, 2000.
3. S.S.Meenakshisundaram, ‘Decentralization in Developing Countries’ Published by Concept Publishing Company, 1994.
4. Government of India, ‘The Constitution of India’, 1950
5. Government of Karnataka, ‘The Karnataka Zilla Parishads, Taluk Panchayat Samitis, Mandal Panchayats and Nyaya Panchayats Act 1983’.
6. Lok Sabha Proceedings, May and August, 1989.
7. Rajya Sabha Debates, August and October, 1989.



Bhimrao Raskar

Gramsabha: The Foundation of Participative Democracy

The real meaning of Democracy is inherent in its descending to ground levels and playing an effective role from there. That ground level is the Village, and the fortune makers of the villages are the Gramsabhas. A realistic analysis of the reality of the Gramsabha

Underlining the need for the participation of the rural folks in the country's development, the Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi had said, "Real democracy cannot be run by twenty people sitting at the center. It should be run by the people of every village so that the centers of power which are currently in big cities like Delhi, Kolkata or Mumbai could be shared with the seven and a half lakh villages of India."¹

Gandhiji believed that, the more the participation of the people in the activities of the government would be, democracy will flourish more. This means an activity under which any person actively participates in the process of framing of the public policies and their implementation. This thus stresses on citizens' participation in the democratic process. Democratic participation demands interaction between the government and the citizens. It means that this is a bilateral activity where one side acts and the other side reacts or responds and the initiative for this can be from both the sides-the citizen or the government. The concept of Participative Democracy has been built upon this

background only.

The structure of the Gramsabha is an ideal form of Participative Democracy. Loknayak Jayaprakash had considered the Panchayat system in the form of the Gramsabha as the foundation of Participative Democracy.² In the present times, the shortcomings and limitations of Representational Democracy have emerged in a big way. So, now, it is being emphasized that Democracy can be made more successful by combining the Representational and Participative models. The 73rd constitution amendment is an extremely positive initiative in this direction.

The Structure of the Gramsabha

A Gramsabha is an institution formed by the inclusion of all adult citizens of a Panchayat area who are included in the voter list of the Panchayat. An active, progressive and intellectual Gramsabha is central to the success of Panchayati Raj. The persons whose names are included in the voters list of a village are collectively called a Gramsabha.

In section 243 of the constitution, for the first time, Gram Panchayat and

the Gramsabha have been defined separately giving a constitutional recognition to their independent existence. However, the rights of the Gramsabha are not described in the constitution and they have been left totally upon the state legislatures.³

In the Indian Democratic structure, in the Panchayati Raj System present as the third local form of government, the Gramsabha is a symbol of Direct Democracy under which it was expected that rural development will be undertaken with local people's participation. The relation between the Gram Panchayats and the Gramsabhas will be the same as that between the Council of Ministers and the Vidhan Sabha. The 73rd amendment gave the Gramsabha a strong and meaningful presence so that there can be people's participation in development plans especially in poverty elimination programs and the ultimate goal of rural development could be achieved.

If viewed correctly, we may call the Panchayats three tiered, but actually they are four tiered. The fourth level is that of the Gramsabha. The Gramsabha is not an elected body, rather it is a

permanent body of the voters of any village and constitutionally it is a body which controls and directs the Panchayats.

In the General category, where generally on the level of the Village Panchayat, there is a provision of the Gramsabha, whereas in the scheduled category, if the Gramsabha members wish so, more than one Gramsabhas could be formed in a village by a process which is defined. The area of all such Gramsabhas will comprise a cluster of houses or small hamlets or a cluster of hamlets/villages which consists of a community.⁴

The Condition of the Gramsabha in different states

As mentioned earlier, under the 73rd constitution amendment, in section 243A, a provision has been made that the Gramsabha on the village level, will be able to use such powers and do such acts which have been passed as laws by the legislative assembly of a state. Accordingly, the states have decided the powers and duties of the Gramsabha in their own ways. If we look at the provisions in the states, some powers and acts are same in all the

states such as passing a budget, identifying the beneficiaries, and provisions regarding income and expenditure. But, if we look at them in a comparative way, we find three types of states. In the first type are states which have restricted the Gramsabha to just suggestions and advice. In the second type are the states which have given the Gramsabha rights such as monitoring and social audit, but which are not in practice. The third type are states which have given the Gramsabhas rights for making important decisions for public good, monitoring and scrutiny of development projects in the real sense. In the first type are states like Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Karnataka, in the second type are states like Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Bihar and in the third type are states like Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand.

In the first type of states, the Gramsabha has become just like a formality, while in the second type under the act, powers for monitoring and scrutiny have been given but they are not much in practice. In both these types of states, one of the reasons is the lack of awareness in the people about the Gramsabha. Also in the absence of proper provisions, there are no special opportunities for the common voter as a stakeholder in decisions. Whatever little participation is there it is mainly as a beneficiary.

In the third type of states (Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand) there is an effort to establish the Gramsabha as a legislature. Not only has it been made mandatory for the Gram Panchayat to accept the decisions and suggestions of the Gramsabha, they have also

As mentioned earlier, under the 73rd constitution amendment, in section 243A, a provision has been made that the Gramsabha on the village level, will be able to use such powers and do such acts which have been passed as laws by the legislative assembly of a state. Accordingly, the states have decided the powers and duties of the Gramsabha in their own ways. If we look at the provisions in the states, some powers and acts are same in all the states such as passing a budget, identifying the beneficiaries, and provisions regarding income and expenditure

Manthan

been given the powers to control their activities. In these states, provisions has been made for permanent committees of the Gramsabha, thus increasing its intervention in the planning and execution of the development projects.⁵ But, when even these three are viewed comparatively, where on the one hand in a state like Kerala, efforts were made to create public awareness on a large scale to make the Gramsabha active and effective, on the other hand due to lack of any special initiative for awareness, a good provision has not been able to reach the ground level yet. In Madhya Pradesh, in the beginning of the twenty first century, efforts were made to create awareness, but it could not go far, and because of that the desired effect has not been achieved so far.

In the initial years of the new Panchayati Raj, even in Kerala, people's attitude towards the Gramsabha was not positive. Kerala's Gram Panchayats are

quite large in size due to which the constitutional provision of Gramsabhas on the level of the Panchayats became totally impractical there. Therefore, for the first time, a provision was made for Gramsabhas at the Ward level and then awareness programs were organized on a large scale through the medium of 'Janadhikar Kala Jattha'. A hundred groups of about one thousand artists toured the entire state and organized the awareness programs on a big scale which resulted in a special type of zeal and curiosity in the people, the effect of which could be seen in the meetings of the Gramsabha. Besides, organizing the Gramsabhas on holidays in the afternoons, having meetings in school campuses and spreading the information about the meetings through the Jatthas and many such tools were also undertaken. During the meetings, an opportunity was given to the membersto have meaningful discussions by

dividing them in small groups. This resulted in an increase in the number of people participating in the Gramsabhas and they started being held in an organized and effective way. Thus, the position of the Gramsabhas in Kerala state gradually developed into a form of a legislature for the Panchayat level of government.⁶

Formation of the Ward Sabha

In some states of the country, there is also a provision of Ward Sabhas along with the Gramsabha. A provision has been made for the formation of the Ward Sabha based upon the constituency of the members of the Gram Panchayat. The Ward Sabha is formed by the inclusion of all the voters of a ward. In states like Himachal and Rajasthan, such a provision was made in 1994 itself. But it has not been able to have any meaningful effect till today. The Ward Sabhas are known as the Up-Gramsabha in Himachal Pradesh.⁷ In West Bengal, there was a provision for the Ward Sabha even before the 73rd amendment. There, it is known as the 'Gram Sansad'.⁸ In the true sense, today this body plays all the roles of the Gram Sabha. The Gramsabha generally gives a constitutional validity to the decisions taken by it. The Gram Sansads have played an important role in the improvements in the Panchayat System in West Bengal. Similarly, Karnataka has also provisioned for the Ward Sabha to make its Gramsabhas effective. Not only has this resulted in a higher attendance in the Gramsabhas, the interest shown by the adult citizens of the villages towards the working of the Panchayat has



also increased.

In 2018, the rules were amended in Jammu-Kashmir⁹ and Bihar and a provision was made for the Ward Sabha. In both these states, a policy-based effort has been made to make the Ward Sabha adequately effective. It would be proper to evaluate their effects after a few years, but in both these states a good beginning has been made.

Thus, in several states, a meaningful effort has been made to increase people's participation in the Gramsabha through the Ward Sabhas and positive results are being seen in some states. Definitely, this experiment is very important. Through this experiment, a new possibility emerges of bringing the concepts of Gram Swarajya and Participative Democracy to the ground level. But, serious efforts and new initiatives are needed for this on the level of the state.

Right after the 73rd constitution amendment continuous efforts have been made on the level of the Indian Government to empower the Gramsabhas. A continuous effort has been there to give the Gramsabhas an important position by giving them decision making rights in various plans of the central government, thus giving due importance to people's participation. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, the Forest Rights Act, Social Audits, Pradhanmantri Awaas Yojana, the system to select the beneficiaries are important in this direction. Besides this, the goal of the 'Rajiv Gandhi Panchayat Sashaktikaran Abhiyan' previously and presently that of the 'Rashtriya Gram Swarajya Abhiyan' has

In the 73rd constitution amendment, the Indian Parliament has been given the rights regarding the SC and ST areas, that it can expand the sub-rules of this section and enact a new law for a Panchayat System for these areas. Under this proviso only, for the scheduled areas, the Panchayat Vistar Act was passed in 1996. In this act, the Gramsabha has been given a special status. Before bringing this bill, on 10 June 1994, a high level committee was formed under the chairmanship of Dilip Singh Bhuria which presented its report on 17 January, 1995

been centered on empowering the Gramsabhas and on increasing people's participation in them. The 'Gram Panchayat Vikas Yojana' (G.P.D.P.) planned under the untied budget being directly given to the Gram Panchayats by India's 14th Finance Commission, is an immensely important step towards this direction.

Things have changed a bit due to these efforts, but the situation cannot be deemed satisfactory as yet. Even now, the Gramsabhas are not being convened properly. It has become a formality. There are more and more instances of postponed sittings. People's participation is very less. Dr. Chandrashekhar Pran, a researcher of the Panchayat system believes that the current power institutions fear losing their power the most by an expansion in people's participation.¹⁰

Gram Sabha in the Scheduled and Tribal Areas

In the 73rd constitution amendment, the Indian Parliament has been given the rights regarding the SC and ST areas, that it can expand the sub-rules of this section and enact a new law for a Panchayat System for these areas.¹¹ Under this

proviso only, for the scheduled areas, the Panchayat Vistar Act was passed in 1996. In this act, the Gramsabha has been given a special status. Before bringing this bill, on 10 June 1994, a high level committee was formed under the chairmanship of Dilip Singh Bhuria which presented its report on 17 January, 1995. In its report, this committee emphasized on the need to increase the political, economic and social strength of the relevant communities and recognized as important the conservation of their traditional rights on the natural resources. In its report the committee had suggested framing of laws for land use, management of the forests, use of water resources, property rights, cooperatives and social customs, rules of lending money and control and products policy. The committee suggested minimizing the role of the officers of the police and the forest department and advised recognizing the work of the traditional caste-based units and also advised non-interference in their jurisdiction. It had clearly recommended that powers should be given on par with the Zila Parishad as given in the sixth schedule. Whenever in any special circumstances

these Panchayats needed to be dissolved, it should be done under an order of the Governor only.¹² Here it must be mentioned that under the sixth schedule of the constitution in section 244(2) which provides special provisions for governance for the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram, it has been provisioned to equip the Panchayats with powers in all scheduled areas. Under this, there is a provision for a special form of the legislature and the council of ministers and according to the article 275 a provision has been made to receive grants from the federal government.¹³ The Bhuria Commission recommended the same privileges for the Panchayats of the scheduled areas. For all this, it recommended giving supreme powers to the Gramsabha.

As per the suggestions of the Bhuria Commission, the PESA act was passed by Parliament to provide special powers to the Gramsabha. It is special in the sense that in the 73rd amendment the Gramsabha of the general areas was left to the state legislatures but here very clear provisions were made for it in the act of the parliament. The state governments were directed to implement the act. The special rights given to the Panchayat system through the medium of the Gramsabha included Power to manage natural resources, power to properly organise the resources of the community, power to solve the disputes by traditional methods and power to control professions by giving loans, and the power to regularize and ban use and sale of narcotics.¹⁴

After more than twenty five years of the 73rd amendment

and the implementation of the PESA act, when we look at the implementation of its provisions on the ground level and its effectiveness, where on the one hand we feel disappointment at the fact that most of the state governments have not yet implemented it with honesty, on the other hand, there are several examples where one finds new hope in the efforts made in this direction. In this come the Medha-Lekha from the Gadchirauli district of Maharashtra and Hibde Bazar, Kutumbakam from Chennai district of Tamil Nadu, Bewal from Mahendragarh district in Haryana, the Gramsabhas from the Niyamagiri region of Odisha and the Gramsabha of the Bhajia Village in Madhya Pradesh which have on one hand set an example of self-government and happiness in the village and on the other hand have organised non-violent struggles against the decisions of the state governments or the big corporate houses and stopped them from unconstitutional activities.

Many studies have been done about the real state of the Gramsabha and its effective form by governmental and non-governmental organizations. In all these studies, this inference has come out generally that most of the Gramsabhas have become a formality. And, that the Gramsabhas convened without a quorum or with low attendance are declared valid and are passing proposals. This process has been going on for such a long time that it has been accepted as normal in the village life. People have started taking it in a normal way. It is true that in various regions of the country

several social organizations have been conducting awareness programs for the empowerment of the Gramsabha and to resurrect its pride. In this effort, the Third Government Campaign (Rashtriya Lok Abhiyan), the Mahila Raj Satta Andolan-Maharashtra, the Manthan Yuwa Sangathan-Jharkhand are active on the ground level. But still the achievement of the desired goal seems far-fetched.

Experiences have been gained from various studies and people's efforts about the ineffective form of the Gramsabhas. Out of these the main point which sticks out is the lack of awareness about the constitutional provisions of the Gramsabha. Besides, the deliberate neglectful behaviour of the state government employees and officers, the village level officers of the Panchayat system (especially the Sarpanchs and the Pradhans) and the misuse of the provisions of relevant laws for vested interest is also an important issue. Dr Chandrashekhar Pran, who has been a leading researcher in the field of Panchayat Raj System gives five main reasons behind the low attendance in meetings of the Gramsabha. First, many people do not even know that they are members of the Gramsabha. They were never made aware about the Gramsabha. Second- the notice for the meeting is not properly circulated. Third- The place decided for the Gramsabha is not suitable for everyone. Fourth- The process of the meeting is not organised properly. Fifth- The adult citizens (especially women and weaker sections) are not given proper opportunity to put their points or raise questions.¹⁵

According to DrPran, "It can

said with all certainty from the experience gained that if the meetings of the Gramsabhas are organized regularly and properly and if there is active participation of all the people in them, then a big change will take place expeditiously in the rural society of India as per the expectations and will affect the entire nation. For the New Bharat which we are envisioning in this new century, it will be its strongest and the most meaningful effort. With the spread of democratic enlightenment and the desire developing in the common man, if a proper direction and path is not given to it then it would lead to a frightening situation. For this, the platform of the Gramsabha and an opportunity to express yourself through it can only save the Nation from this major crisis.¹⁶

There is a need to make efforts on all levels (Central Government, State Government,

Panchayat Government and Social Organizations) to make the Gramsabha active, powerful and effective. For this, on the level of the Central Government, it is expected to do a constitutional amendment to establish the supreme position of the Gramsabha of general areas just like that of scheduled areas and to clearly underline its responsibilities and rights. The state governments should take a lead from the states like Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Kerala and amend their acts to give the Gramsabha rights and responsibilities like a legislature of the village-government, to make it mandatory for the relevant officers to attend the meetings of the Gramsabha, to make a minimum level of attendance in the Gramsabha meetings mandatory, to give them powers to make decisions as per the local needs in the implementation of government

programs and to make proper provisions to give control over the Panchayat. The institutions of the Panchayati System (from all levels from the village to the district level) should accept the supremacy of the Gramsabha and recognize its decisions and proposals. They should also make initiatives to promote greater people's participation.

In this direction, the role of the NGOs is very important. According to Dr. Chandrashekhar Pran, it should be the priority of the NGOs to organize open discussions and debates on the goals of the Panchayati Raj like self-government, democratic decentralization, participative democracy and village-level-democracy among others. Besides, the task of creating people's awareness about the Gramsabha should be at the top of their agenda. According to him this cannot be left to the state governments alone.¹⁷

References:

1. *Gramswarajya*, Mahatma Gandhi, Navjivan Trust, 1963, p. 15
2. *Samudayik Samaj:Roop aur Chintan*, Sarv Sewa Sangh, Varanasi, 1986, p. 32
3. *Indian Constitution*, section 243(b,d), Central Law Publication, Allahabad, 2013, p. 128
4. *Panchayat Upabandh (Anusoochit Kshetron par Vistaar) Adhiniyam*, 1996, Notification of the Government of India
5. *Jharkhand Panchayat Raj Adhiniyam 2001*, Article 10 (b), Crown Publication, Ranchi 2012, p. 8
6. *Panchayati Raj: Haashiye se Hukoomat Tak*, Editor-Sudhir Pal/Ramendra, Adhaar Prakashan, Haryana 2003, p. 129
7. *Panchayatonki Sthiti:2007-08*, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, page 168
8. *Pashchim Bengal Panchayat Adhiniyam 1973 (Sanshodhit)*, Article 16(A), West Bengal Government, p. 23
9. *Jammu Kashmir Panchayati Raj Adhiniyam (October 2018 tak Sanshodhit) Article 3 (A)*, Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Jammu-Kashmir 2019, p. 5
10. *Teesri Sarkar*, Dr. Chandrashekhar Pran, Panchpameshwar Prakashan, Allahabad, 4th edition, page 30
11. *Constitution of India*, section 243 d(b), p. 133
12. *Bhuria Commission Report*, 2005-Gazette Notification, Government of India
13. *Constitution of India*, pp. 150 and 163
14. *Panchayat Upabandh (Anusoochit Kshetron par Vistaar) Adhiniyam*, 1976,ibid
15. *Gramsabha: Dasha aur Disha*, Dr. Chandrashekhar Pran, PanchpameshwarPrakashan-p. 122
16. *Ibid*, p. 26
17. *Panchayat aur Gaon Samaj: Punarjagran ki Raah*, Dr. Chandrashekhar Pran, Panchpameshwar Prakashan 2001, p. 335



Bharat Pandya

Samaras Panchayats of Gujarat

All those flaws, owing to which people are becoming disenchanted with the electoral system, have now seeped into the Panchayat elections. The experiment of 'Samaras Panchayats' in Gujarat may prove to be an ideal guide in such a situation

India is no stranger to 'democracy' and its pillar 'election'. Villages, the smallest units of government, were being managed through Panchayats in our society and formations of these Panchayats were being done in a very democratic manner even during the horrific period of foreign subjugation. Even while the society was passing through the most difficult times, no reference of any bickering over the election of the village chief or Sarpanch is found anywhere. There is also no mention of any election turmoil, discord or favouritism available anywhere. On the contrary, our history and literature are replete with references of instances of sacrificing personal proximity and vengeful attitude while dispensing justice sagaciously and giving everyone his rightful share in distribution of resources. Though the princelings kept fighting for supremacy over each other in the medieval age, the villages and their system of self-governance however remained internally unaffected even at that time.

A substantive analysis of these facts will lead us to the conclusion that the main reason behind this was the consensual election of the Sarpanch and the members of

the Panchayat in the villages. Though formalities like filing of nominations, allotment of election symbols and use of ballot boxes were not in practice then, everyone's opinion was taken in the open meetings. This was feasible because it was the smallest and most accessible democratic unit of the village. Can that system not be adopted again? This question perhaps came into the mind of our incumbent Prime Minister Narendra Modi when he was the Chief Minister of Gujarat and experimented the concept of "harmonious Gram Panchayats" there.

Objectives of Samaras Gram Panchayats

'Harmonious' here means a system wherein the election of the Sarpanch and the members of the Panchayat in a village is done through consensus on the basis of merits and demerits, without any infighting or a contest. In other words, the real intent behind being harmonious is "formation of a Panchayat and election of its chief done through consensus among the villagers". Under this system, the Sarpanch and the members of a Panchayat are chosen by the people of that village on the basis of everyone's effort,

consent and trust. This way, the necessity of holding an election in that village does not arise and the State Election Commission later declares it as a 'harmonious Gram Panchayat'.

Thus, an atmosphere of unity, peace and growth prevails in a harmonious Gram Panchayat. With the electoral contest not being held, the village remains free from the feelings of jealousy and animosity borne out of victory and defeat of candidates. Due to this, all the villagers work unitedly for the development of the village. In such a situation, 'sabka saath, sabka vikas' (everyone's support, everyone's development) no more remains just a hollow populist slogan. 'Sabka vishwas, sabka prayas' (everyone's trust, everyone's efforts) adds up to materialise this into reality. Political factionalism, antagonism and electoral fights do not occur in the village. The Sarpanch and his team do not belong to any one faction or caste, rather they become the representatives of the whole village and hence, they

consider it their duty to behave properly with everyone and treat them equally as well as work for the development of the whole village.

Origin of 'Panchayat'

'Five elements' are of immense importance in Indian culture. The body mass of human beings is made of 'Pancamahābhūtas' (five major elements), i.e. earth, sky, water, air and fire. The universe is also made of the same elements. We also perform the 'Pancāyatana pūjā' of the God. The mention of the word 'Panchayat' can be found in Atharva Veda and Rig Veda. It is believed that King Pruthu had initiated the Panchayat system while residing on the banks of Ganga and Yamuna rivers. People also believe with reverence the mythological maxim "Panch se Parameshwar" (taking the arbitrator as representing god). Five people used to dispense justice after hearing every side, and they only were responsible for development of everyone in the society. This traditional

system of dispensing justice was prevalent in our villages as well as diverse societies. It was also mentioned in the report of the Royal Commission on Decentralisation, constituted in 1907 during the British rule, that the villages earlier had sufficient powers of autonomy.

Gandhiji had written with regard to Gram Swarajya that freedom should start from the foundation level itself. Every village in India should have 'republican Panchayats' empowered with all the rights to run a government. Every village should stand on its own strength and be able to run all the affairs of its own governance as well as should have the capability to fend itself from the whole world, if the need be. The intent behind Gram Swarajya is having a democratic set-up to fulfil greatest desires of its own people, with the cooperation of all around but independent of the neighbours.

Innovative Experiment

Panchayati Raj plays a vital



Samaras Gram Pradhan Panchayat Sammelan of southern Gujarat on 6th of April 2012 at Mahatma Mandir in Gandhinagar

role in the social and economic development in the villages. Apart from carrying out the responsibility of development, it also builds up an ideal society through public relations. Everyone had thought thus far only. But Shri Narendrabhai Modi thought beyond it. If the Panchayat is harmonious, there will be no bickering and discrimination amongst the villagers. The Sarpanch and his team, chosen through consensus, will treat everyone equally and affectionately. Under 'sabka saath, sabka vikas', they will make efforts towards bringing all-round development of the village. In an atmosphere of goodwill, service and cooperation, the harmonious village will soon turn into one filled with all comforts while achieving self-reliance too.

The initiative launched in Gujarat by Shri Modi in 2001 has not only remained intact till date, this tradition of harmonious village is rather showing a creditable way ahead to the whole country too. Recently in 2021, elections were held to 14,292 Gram Panchayats in Gujarat. In the first phase, 8,686 Gram Panchayats went to polls on 19th December and the results were declared two days later. Of them, the Sarpanch and the Panchayat members in 1,165 villages were elected uncontested, i.e. without polling of votes. The people of these villages together chose Sarpanchs for themselves through consensus, and this is how they were declared 'Samaras Gram Panchayats'. While in other villages, the victorious candidates took out

The opponents said, "This is against democracy. This is an attempt to murder democracy." Modiji had then said, "When the election for the highest post of the country, the President, is done through consensus, it is described as a 'victory of democracy'. When we talk about holding the election for the smallest unit in the political system of the country, i.e. village, through consensus, then how did it become 'murder of democracy'? How can the Gram Panchayat becoming Samaras be murder of democracy

victory rallies and rhetorics were thrown at each other while situation turned even confrontational at many places, whereas in *Samaras* villages, neither anything like that happened before the elections nor there was any apprehension of any such thing happening after the results were out.

On the other side, in the villages where electoral contests are held, the seed of factionalism are sown even before the elections are conducted. After counting, these contests become the cause of deep discord and sharp friction. It later develops into discriminatory action and turns into vicious plots to willingly neglect a part of the village in developmental works and deprive them of the benefits. Reports of hostility and violent clashes between the candidates and their supporters keep trickling in very often. The way factionalism takes shape due to elections, it draws sharp lines between villagers on the basis of caste, group, street and sometimes even family; and finally, these lines turn into vengefulness. As a result, factionalism, clashes and violence keep happening all the time in the village. Elections get

over but the feeling of hatred and vengeance lasts long. Thus, the basic intent behind having the Panchayat system is defeated, rendering it useless.

When Shri Narendrabhai Modi made an appeal to all the political parties to help form harmonious Panchayats for the first time, they created a huge ruckus and bitterly criticised him. The opponents said, "This is against democracy. This is an attempt to murder democracy." Modiji had then said, "When the election for the highest post of the country, the President, is done through consensus, it is described as a 'victory of democracy'. When we talk about holding the election for the smallest unit in the political system of the country, i.e. village, through consensus, then how did it become 'murder of democracy'? How can the Gram Panchayat becoming *Samaras* be murder of democracy?" When the opponents could not find an answer to this, they started terming it 'impossible'. However, this 'impossible idea' has been adopted in not only one or two villages but in as many as 1,165 villages and has proved to be a successful and affable method now. ●

References:

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| 1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lok_Sabha | Rajya_Sabha | stateprogress.html?OWASP_CSRFTOKEN=JSRN-YEHM-HP88-2TGN-X6HD-QFHW-4CYX-XUFT |
| 2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_current_members_of_the_ | 3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Member_of_the_Legislative_Assembly_(India) | 6. https://panchayat.gujarat.gov.in/gu/samras-gram-yojna |
| | 4. https://lgdirectory.gov.in/ | |
| | 5. https://gdpd.nic.in/ | |

Table 1: Details of ‘Samaras’ Gram Panchayats in Gujarat

Election		Totally Samaras Gram Panchayats		Partially Samaras Gram Panchayats	
Gram Panchayat (Sarpanch)	Ward/ Member	Gram Panchayat (Sarpanch)	Ward/ Member	Gram Panchayat (Sarpanch)	Ward/ Member
10,284	89,702	1,165	9,613	473	27,479

Table 2: Incentives given to Gram Panchayats after turning ‘Samaras’

Phases of Gram Panchayats turning Samaras	Population of Gram Panchayats	Incentives in case of common (male) Samaras	Incentives in case of female Samaras
First	Up to 5,000	Rs 3 lakh & provision for education till Class-VIII	Rs 4.5 lakh & provision for education till Class-VIII
	5,001 to 25,000	Rs 4.5 lakh & provision for education till Class-VIII	Rs 7.5 lakh & provision for education till Class-VIII
Second	Up to 5,000	Rs 3.75 lakh & additional Rs 2 lakh for CC road	Rs 5.75 lakh & additional Rs 2 lakh for CC road
	5,001 to 25,000	Rs 5.75 lakh & additional Rs 2 lakh for CC road	Rs 9.5 lakh & additional Rs 2 lakh for CC road
Third	Up to 5,000	Rs 4.75 lakh & additional Rs 3 lakh for developmental projects	Rs 7 lakh & additional Rs 3 lakh for developmental projects
	5,001 to 25,000	Rs 7 lakh & additional Rs 3 lakh for developmental projects	Rs 11.75 lakh & additional Rs 3 lakh for developmental projects
Fourth	Up to 5,000	Rs 5.25 lakh & additional Rs 3 lakh for developmental projects	Rs 7.5 lakh & additional Rs 3 lakh for developmental projects
	5,001 to 25,000	Rs 7.5 lakh & additional Rs 3 lakh for developmental projects	Rs 12 lakh & additional Rs 3 lakh for developmental projects
Fifth	Up to 5,000	Rs 5.5 lakh & additional Rs 3 lakh for developmental projects	Rs 8 lakh & additional Rs 3 lakh for developmental projects
	5,001 to 25,000	Rs 8 lakh & additional Rs 3 lakh for developmental projects	Rs 13 lakh & additional Rs 3 lakh for developmental projects

Table 3: Incentives given by government to Samaras Gram Panchayats

Financial Year	No. of Gram Panchayats going to polls	Samaras Gram Panchayats	Woman Sarpanch	Total Grant Amount (in Rs in lakhs)
2001-02	10,467	2,857	10	1,735.5
2002-03	1,680	621	0	3,806
2003-04	1,586	423	0	2,566
2004-05	68	14	0	8.4
2006-07	10,355	2,864	13	3,266.82
2007-08	2,004	714	5	641.87
2008-09	1,429	432	4	239.25
2009-10	702	199	2	228.81
2010-11	0	124	0	128.12
2011-12	10,405	2,123	250	5,562.25
2012-13	1,728	422	71	1,098.75
2013-14	1,427	322	39	1,283.19
2016-17	10,279	1,384	163	765.75
2017-18	3,364	735	74	7,529.88
2018-19	312	110	7	995.5
Total	55,806	13,344	645	24,121.29

Form IV**Statement about ownership and other particulars about 'Manthan'**

Place of publication : New Delhi
 Periodicity of its publication : Quarterly
 Printer's Name : Print Craft India
 Nationality : Indian
 Address : Shahdara, Delhi
 Publisher's and owner's Name : Dr. Mahesh Chandra Sharma and Research and Development Foundation
 For Integral Humanism
 Nationality : Indian
 Address : Ekam Bhawan, 37, Deendayal Upadhyaya Marg, NewDelhi-110002
 Editor's NameEditor : Dr. Mahesh Chandra Sharma
 Nationality : Indian
 Address : Ekam Bhawan, 37, Deendayal Upadhyaya Marg, NewDelhi-110002

I, Dr. Mahesh Chandra Sharma, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

1 Mar, 2022

Dr. Mahesh Chandra Sharma
 Publisher



Avnesh Kalik

Suggestions of Various Committees for a Strong Panchayat System

Many committees were formed after independence to improve the Panchayati Raj system. These committees also presented their well thought out suggestions after intensive study. A brief description of the committees and their suggestions

After attaining independence, the first priority of the government has been to free the people of the country of poverty, hunger, unemployment, illiteracy and socio-economic evils. That is the reason that Union government began many development-oriented programmes. A community development plan was implemented under the early Five Year Plans, although this programme could not succeed in achieving its objectives to the extent expected. The main reason for this was that the people could not participate in these programmes. These schemes were run completely by the government departments, due to which the panchayats became totally inactive and the distance between the people and the government departments kept growing.

Therefore, in the Second Five Year Plan, it emerged that for the success of these development programmes, it was necessary to involve rural society, especially the poor sections, through democratic institutions in the districts and below. From time to time, the government constituted study committees and on the basis of their recommendations also made necessary amendments to the Constitution.

Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1957)

Upon not obtaining the expected results of the development programme, the Central government constituted Balwant Rai Mehta Committee. The main objective of the formation of this committee was to ascertain why people were less enthusiastic about panchayats and what methods ought to be adopted to solve this problem. The Mehta Committee made the following recommendations:

- ▶▶ To make common people participants in rural development plans, it was necessary that there should be decentralisation of power.
- ▶▶ A decentralised administrative structure should be in the hands of elected bodies.
- ▶▶ A Panchayati Raj system was recommended at all the three levels of Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad.
- ▶▶ Institutions should acquire legal status and their rights and duties should be clearly defined.
- ▶▶ It was essential for these bodies to obtain proper financial means to carry out their work.

Manthan

The National Development Council accepted the report of the Balwant Rai Committee. Following that, all states adopted a three-tier Panchayati Raj system. Rajasthan was the first state in which Panchayati Raj in the country was inaugurated on October 2, 1959, at Nagaur.

In keeping with the suggestions from the Centre, a committee of legislators was formed in at the state level as well, which presented its report concerning essential amendments to the Act. In accordance with these suggestions, amendments were effected to the United Provinces Panchayati Raj Act, 1947. These amendments bore long-term consequences.

- ▶ The jurisdiction of the Gaon (Village) Sabha and the Village Division (*gaon sambhag*) was combined.
- ▶ Gaon Sabhas were formed in every village with a population of 250 or more.
- ▶ The name of Panchayat Courts was changed to Nyaya Panchayat.
- ▶ Agriculture committees and sub-committees on agricultural production and welfare were formed.

The year 1961 was a milestone in the history of the panchayats of Uttar Pradesh. In that year the Uttar Pradesh Kshetra Samiti and Zilla Parishad Act, 1961, was passed and implemented.

Ashok Mehta Committee (1977)

Due to the methodical implementation of the Panchayati Raj system, the country obtained many benefits. First, the seeds of a democratic system were

planted throughout the country, and to some extent the gap between the bureaucracy and people was reduced. But overall, this Panchayati Raj system too could not fulfill the aspirations of the people. After this, the government formed the Ashok Mehta Committee in 1977, which submitted its evaluation report a year later in 1978. The committee divided the development of Panchayats into three phases.

- ▶ Surge (1959-1964)
- ▶ Deadlock (1965-1969)
- ▶ Decline (1969-1977)

The Committee accepted that except in a few states, the panchayats were not given the right to plan and implement in most of the states. Referring to the role

of bureaucracy, the Committee observed that the officials felt that they were primarily responsible for delivering results concerning financial priorities, and could not easily commit themselves to work under the supervision of elected representatives. The committee also expressed its view on the lack of political will and ambiguity about the objectives of the panchayats.

The Committee made the following recommendations to strengthen the panchayats:

- ▶▶ Panchayats should be constituted at two levels, district and block. Villages should be included in the Mandal Panchayat through village committees.



Ashok Mehta, Chairman of Ashok Mehta Committee working Indian Panchayati Raj, addressing press conference in New Delhi on March 23, 1977. (Source: The Times Of India Group)

- ▶▶ In panchayats, the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes should get representation on the basis of their population.
- ▶▶ The tenure of panchayats should be of four years.
- ▶▶ Gram Sabhas should be formed and should consist of two assemblies.
- ▶▶ Political parties should participate in Panchayati Raj elections.
- ▶▶ State governments should decentralise adequate functions and powers at the respective local levels and financial resources should be made available in the same proportion.
- ▶▶ Eligible committees should be formed on the Zilla Parishad for making plans for districts according to their requirements.
- ▶▶ Officials should be deputed to Panchayats.
- ▶▶ Panchayats should have the right to levy cess to gather resources.
- ▶▶ There should be training programmes for government employees/ elected representatives, and voluntary organisations should be encouraged to garner public support.
- ▶▶ There should be association and coordination between panchayat institutions and other institutions.

On the basis of the recommendations of the Committee, an amendment was made in the principal Act in Uttar Pradesh in the first half of 1980, according to which the minimum age of voters was reduced from 21 years to 18 years and 30 percent of the posts of panchayat members were reserved for women.

The Rajiv Gandhi government introduced the 64th Amendment Bill in 1989. The same bill was reintroduced in 1990 by V.P. Singh's government in Parliament, but could not get it passed. In 1991 P.V. Narasimha Rao's government, based on the recommendation of a group of ministers, introduced the bill as the 73rd Amendment, which was passed by Parliament on December 22, 1992

The GKV Rao Committee Report (1985)

The Committee, while highlighting the economic condition of panchayats, their elections and activities, said that the state governments have been indifferent towards the process of democratic decentralisation.

The Committee's main recommendation was that powers of planning should be delegated to the panchayats at the district level; women should get more representation; all offices at the district level should be clearly under the Zilla Parishad and funds should be allocated by the Finance Commission.

In another amendment in the 1980s, the Uttar Pradesh government reserved 30 percent of panchayati posts for women to increase women's representation in these institutions. From 1987, the Jawahar Rojgar Yojana was handed over to panchayats.

Singhvi Committee (1986)

In 1986, the Ministry of Rural Development, in order to prepare a consent paper on Panchayati Raj, constituted a committee under the chairmanship of L.M. Singhvi. This committee recommended giving constitutional status to panchayats to make them institutions with life in them.

Thereafter, from December 1987 to 1988, five workshops were organised with District Collectors

on the subject of Responsive Administration. These were personally addressed by the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. The fact emerged from these workshops that it is necessary to establish democratic institutions for accountable administration at the local level. Demands for constitutional amendments in this regard came forth from many states. Finally, in 1988, a sub-committee of Parliament was constituted, which recommended the granting of constitutional status to panchayats.

The Rajiv Gandhi government introduced the 64th Amendment Bill in 1989. The same bill was reintroduced in 1990 by V.P. Singh's government in Parliament, but could not get it passed. In 1991 P.V. Narasimha Rao's government, based on the recommendation of a group of ministers, introduced the bill as the 73rd Amendment, which was passed by Parliament on December 22, 1992. After the President's signature on August 24, 1992, it acquired a decisive structure in the form of the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act 1992. On the basis of this, within a year, all states amended their respective Panchayati Raj Acts.

It was decided to enact a law in Uttar Pradesh after the expiry of the period of one year and on April 22, 1994 the bill was passed within half a minute. ●



Manoj Rai

Further Strengthen Panchayats but Make them More Accountable

Strengthening Panchayats is very important in India for decentralisation of governance as well as the development of democracy in its real terms. On the other hand, it is equally important to make the Panchayats accountable. A realistic analysis

India has long tradition of village level Panchayats and Sabhas since ancient times. Different periods of history saw different forms of the local governments. Depending on the interests of rulers of the day, local governments experienced rise and fall. During freedom struggles, Mahatma Gandhi advocated for Gram Swaraj- that is, village self-governance. He visualized every village as a republic or Panchayat, capable of managing its own affairs. But despite Mahatma Gandhi's strong supports, Panchayats could not get constitutional legitimacies in independent India. As consolation to the supporters of Panchayati Raj, Article 40 of Directive Principle of State Policy made a mention of Panchayats. Independent India took several initiatives and formed a number of committees, including Mehta Committee, which made recommendations for establishing three-tiers of Panchayats in every state. These committees suggested clear-cut roles, responsibilities, and authorities for Panchayats. But due to lack of enough political supports, Panchayats could not emerge as nationally accepted local

self-government system. Panchayat system however evolved differently in different states, depending upon the political choices of the leaders of the State Governments.

It was enactment of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in 1993, which provided constitutional legitimacies and legal framework to Panchayats at national level. It may be noted that there were no public demands as such for enactment of the Constitutional Amendment Acts to strengthen the Panchayati Raj Institutions. India was however facing financial constraints. During early nineties, India and many countries in the world were pursuing the economic restructuring. Additionally, India was experiencing social tensions due to *Mandal* (reservation) and *Kamandal* (Ayodhya) issues. Under these circumstances, 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts sowed the seeds of paradigm shifts in sociology and politics of India. This epoch-making Amendment came silently to decisively change the face of village-politics. It seems neither political leadership nor bureaucracy realized the potential of 73rd Constitutional

Amendment Act. That is why nobody raised alarm over opening of hitherto closed public spaces for women and transfer of political and economic powers to local governments. Parliament passed the Amendment Act without usual clamor, which one witnesses in Parliament during discussions on reservation of seats for women.

The mandatory provisions of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act ensured that Panchayats everywhere had: (i) Gram Sabhas, (iii) three tiers- Village Panchayats, Intermediate Panchayats and District Panchayats (states having population less than 2 million were given choice to not have the intermediate level. (iii) Reservation of seats for SCs, STs (in proportion to their population) and Women (one -third of seats at all levels-different states later provided 50% reservation to women) (iv) Compulsory election after completion of 5 years term. Six rounds of Panchayat Elections so far completed by the State Election Commission in every state. (v) State Finance Commissions working in every state to review the state finances and recommend appropriate devolution from state to Panchayats and Municipalities. This Act along with the 74th

Amendment Act, directed states to constitute District Planning Committees in every district to prepare development plans. The Act also provided an indicative list of functions, which should be transferred by respective states to the Panchayats. This indicative list of twenty-nine functions is part of the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution.

Local Governments (Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies) are third sphere of the governments in India. The other two being Union and State governments. Panchayats are part of the State List in the Constitution of India. So, state governments are primarily responsible for the strengthening of the Panchayati Raj Institution by providing appropriate functions, funds, and functionaries to their Panchayats. Union government through its Ministry of Panchayati Raj does play guiding roles but states have significant say in providing enabling environment to Panchayats to grow and work for people. State governments decide on actual devolution of powers and authorities to the Panchayats. That is why Panchayati Raj Institutions in different states have evolved differently despite having a uniform framework nationally.

Current Status of Panchayats Across Different States

As per data from the Ministry of Panchayati Raj¹, there are 31.9 lakh elected Panchayat representatives in 662 District Panchayats, 6672 Intermediate Panchayats and 255361 Village Panchayats². Out of these elected representatives, 14.5 lakhs are women. These figures reflect the spread and deepening of democratisation in India. The total number of elected Panchayat representatives are more than total population (for year 2021) of ninety-eight countries³ in the world.

Every State has followed all the mandatory provisions of 73rd Amendment Act. Accordingly, most of the states have completed five rounds of Panchayat elections. Many states recently completed 6th round of Panchayat elections. So far 5 State Finance Commissions have submitted their reports in majority of states. Governments of Haryana, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, and others have already constituted 6th State Finance Commission in their respective states. It seems District Planning Committees are functional in every district. Devolution Reports prepared by Tata Institute of Social Sciences⁴ found in 2015-16 that majority of states have devolved more than twenty functions (out of 29 functions mentioned in eleventh schedule) to Panchayats. Central Finance Commission as well as State Finance Commission recommended for devolution of Funds to the Panchayats. Fifteenth Finance Commission, for example, has recommended 44901 Crores of tied and untied

Local Governments (Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies) are third sphere of the governments in India.

The other two being Union and State governments.

Panchayats are part of the State List in the Constitution of India. So, state governments are primarily responsible for the strengthening of the Panchayati Raj Institution by providing appropriate functions, funds, and functionaries to their Panchayats

grants to Village Panchayats for 2021-22. Various Studies suggest that Panchayats utilize more than 80% of MGNREGS funds. As per Union Budget, total allocation for MGNEGS for 2021-22 is 73,000 Crores. Depending on financial capacities of the states, the respective State Finance Commissions recommend for thousands of crores of rupees every year for village Panchayats. Accordingly, thorough calculations suggest that together with NREGA, Fifteenth Finance Commission Grants and State Finance Commission Grants, Village Panchayats in India are supposed to receive more than 100,000 Crores rupees every year to spend for local development. These are approximate estimates of total funds available to Panchayats for the year 2021-22. If one divides 100,000 crores equally among about 2.6 lakh Village Panchayats, it will come out more than 38 lakh rupees per village Panchayat. These crude estimates therefore suggest that on an average, at least 20 to 40 lakh rupees are available for village panchayat to spend on local development.

From available reports and records, average population of a village Panchayat in India could be approximated to 3000. However, there are wide variations in actual data. For example, most of Village Panchayats in Haryana have population below three thousand. But size of an average village Panchayat in Kerala could be 25000 or more. Just to provide an idea about devolution to village Panchayats, it could be safely said that on an average, a village Panchayat in India takes decision

From available reports and records, average population of a village Panchayat in India could be approximated to 3000. However, there are wide variations in actual data.

For example, most of Village Panchayats in Haryana have population below three thousand. But size of an average village Panchayat in Kerala could be 25000 or more. Just to provide an idea about devolution to village Panchayats, it could be safely said that on an average, a village Panchayat in India takes decision on 20 development functions and spends more than Rs. 20 Lakh per annum to implement the development activities

on 20 development functions and spends more than Rs. 20 Lakh per annum to implement the development activities. In doing so, elected representatives of village Panchayats receive supports from 3 to 5 village functionaries, appointed by the government to specially support panchayats.

Village Panchayats across the states seem to be receiving sufficient resources to undertake development works locally. But the same may not be true for other two tiers namely, Block and District Panchayats. A Block Panchayat is supposed to play coordination and convergence roles among village Panchayats under the said block. It links development administration at block level with the elected panchayats. The district Panchayat is supposed to host the district development planning processes. District Panchayat must also act as an effective link between State and Local governments of the district. It seems that roles and relevance of intermediate (block) and district Panchayats are not very clear. Now is the time to review and revise the roles of these two important tiers. Efforts must

be made to re-energize these two tiers and re-integrate them with the three-tier system of Panchayati Raj.

Performance of Panchayats

Rajiv Gandhi's famous quote was that 'out of one rupee sent from Delhi for a village, only 15 paise used to reach to that village. That was the time when India did not have constitutional village Panchayats. Local government officials including Village Development Officers, Block Development Officers, District Development Officers and District Collectors were custodian of village developments. So, funds meant for village development were 'managed' by these officials. Some villages received development, but many did not.

The above scenario has completely changed now. Today, every village Panchayat receives funds from Central and State governments through direct transfers in bank account of the village Panchayat. As mentioned above, an average of 20 to 40 lakh rupees are allocated for development works in every village Panchayat. Accordingly,

every village experience different levels of development works. It is another matter whether these funds are utilized appropriately and efficiently or not. But unlike pre-Panchayat era, varieties of development works have happened in every village. Ever increasing voting percentages in keenly contested Panchayat elections also imply that villagers have greater hopes from their Panchayats.

Panchayats are most proximate governments. So, they know what is needed for whom. It takes huge amount of administrative expenses by Union and State governments to deliver services at local levels. But Panchayats do deliver same levels and same qualities of the services with negligible administrative expenses. Experts⁵, for example, say that Panchayats in Kerala deliver same (if not better) level of local services in lesser than usual costs of deliveries of such services. Panchayat's roles in implementing various development schemes (PMAY, PMGSY, MGNREGS, Swachh Bharat, etc) have been more effective than earlier bureaucratic efforts in implementation of Centrally Sponsored Schemes.

Very recently, the Prime Minister and other dignitaries lauded the roles of Panchayats in awareness generation and management of COVID protocols. Credit should go to Panchayats that they were able to reduce spread of COVID infections by awareness generation and by creating and managing the containment zones. People may remember how various Panchayats used their schools and other infrastructures to isolate village residents coming from cities.

It must however be clarified that these discussions do not imply that Panchayats are excellent performers. They may be better than others but there are big scopes for further improving the roles of Panchayats in deliveries of local entitlements and services. Panchayats need to be more open and more sensitive towards the needs of poor and vulnerable in the villages.

Panchayati Raj Versus Sarpanch Raj

The word Panchayat means assembly (ayat) of five (panch) and raj means rule⁶. That is, a village Panchayat means a group of representatives comprising

the elected Sarpanch and elected Ward members. Gram Sabha is also part of the Village Panchayat. The Constitution visualises direct democracy at village level through participation of villagers in Gram Sabha meetings. The group of elected executives (Panchayat Representatives) together should manage the affairs of village government. But it seems this structure has been disturbingly demeaned. Unfortunately, a Village Panchayat has become synonymous with Sarpanch or Pradhan or Mukhiya. Gram Sabhas have become Paper Sabhas only, where attendances in Gram Sabhas are recorded on papers and rest of formalities are deemed to be completed with the recoding of signatures and thumb impressions.

Union and State governments are often referred as PM's and CM's government. For example, Modi Government at Centre and Gehlot Government in Rajasthan. However, it is expected that cabinets of ministers collectively take most of governmental decisions in both governments. Perhaps same analogy was expected at Village Panchayat level. But something went wrong. Perhaps, it all started with formal communications and invites from Union and State governments, which were in the name of Sarpanches. Later local bureaucrats, NGO members and local media started dealing exclusively with Sarpanches. Nobody ever bothered to include other elected representatives in such interfaces. As a result, other elected representatives got excluded from governance processes. Sarpanches started taking decisions without

Union and State governments are often referred as PM's and CM's government. For example, Modi Government at Centre and Gehlot Government in Rajasthan. However, it is expected that cabinets of ministers collectively take most of governmental decisions in both governments.

Perhaps same analogy was expected at Village Panchayat level. But something went wrong. Perhaps, it all started with formal communications and invites from Union and State governments, which were in the name of Sarpanches. Later local bureaucrats, NGO members and local media started dealing exclusively with Sarpanches

consulting other elected representatives and/or Gram Sabhas. During last 3 decades, Sarpanches have become sole representative of governments at the village levels. As happens, individual Sarpanches quite often don't feel accountable to legislated governance processes at panchayat levels. This is a dangerous development for future of Panchayati Raj. Governments and Civil Society must stop its habit of associating with Sarpanches only. If not discouraged decisively now, Sarpanch Raj could become anti-thesis of Panchayati Raj. Sarpanch should not be sole representative of village panchayat. S/he may be more among equals but not above every other elected panchayat representative. Governments must therefore take corrective measures to strengthen roles and capacities of other elected representatives. Designated local NGOs should facilitate and support Gram Sabha to act as watchdog to supervise the collective functioning of groups of elected panchayat representatives.

Role of Different Actors in Strengthening Panchayats

Narsimha Rao Government at Centre took initiatives to provide constitutional sanction to Panchayati Raj Institutions. Indian Parliament accordingly enacted the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (73rd CAA). As per the Act, State Legislature were asked to pass the respective State Panchayat Acts to conform with provisions of 73rd CAA. Thus, both Union and State Governments are responsible

However, there were sporadic activities to strengthen Panchayats. State like Kerala moved faster to strengthen Panchayats. But Union government was not much active in demanding states to strengthen the Panchayats. It was with creation of Ministry of Panchayati Raj in 2004 that Union Government started taking proactive steps for strengthening of Panchayati Raj Institutions

for parenting the well-being of Panchayats.

However, there were sporadic activities to strengthen Panchayats. State like Kerala moved faster to strengthen Panchayats. But Union government was not much active in demanding states to strengthen the Panchayats. It was with creation of Ministry of Panchayati Raj in 2004 that Union Government started taking proactive steps for strengthening of Panchayati Raj Institutions. During July-December 2004, Union Government organised a series of seven round table conferences with the State Governments to discuss and decide the ways for strengthening Panchayats. Around 150 roundtable resolutions became basis for joint actions by the Union and State Governments. MGNREGA and other devolution initiatives provided much needed financial, and staff supports to Panchayats. With series of actions and incentives, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj catalyzed rejuvenating supports to Panchayats. But now drastically reduced budget of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj has curtailed its active roles in guiding and supporting Panchayati Raj Institutions nationally.

Constitutional Panchayats in India are about 3 decades old. During these years, Panchayats

have evolved differently in different states- depending upon state's initiatives in devolving powers and authorities and supporting capacity building. Ministry of Panchayati Raj in 2015 – 16 commissioned a comprehensive report on understanding state of devolution across different states in India. This report⁷, prepared by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, found that Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Gujarat were topmost states in devolving the Functions, Funds and Functionaries to Panchayats. Kerala, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Haryana were leading states in enabling their Panchayats by providing appropriate capacities timely.

It is interesting to note that Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Gujarat are traditionally pro-Panchayat states. But emergence of Kerala as top state in decentralisation is worth analysing. The state has history of social reforms and a very vibrant civil society. When 73rd CAA came into being and respective states passed their Conformity Panchayat Acts, Kerala undertook People's Campaign to make Keralites aware and engaged with Panchayat level planning and activities. While People's campaign catalysed public supports for new Panchayat system, it also

provided much needed capacity building for newly elected Panchayat Representatives. As a result, Kerala Panchayats moved faster than Panchayats in rest of the states. Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu also undertook various initiatives to strengthen Panchayat system. These levels of pro-Panchayat initiatives were lacking in other states. Later on, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Sikkim, Rajasthan, Assam, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh et al made good efforts to strengthen their Panchayats. Studies and experiences suggest that role of state governments is most important for growth of Panchayats in the state.

Since Panchayats were responsible for the local development, majority of NGOs were indifferent to Panchayats, treating them as competitor in area of local development. But there were few organisations who took initiatives to strengthen the system of Panchayats by capacity building, development planning and advocacy. PRIA, The Hunger Project and Institute of Social Sciences, are some of leading national NGOs who did pioneering works for strengthening the PRIs in India. As a result, substantial

number of NGOs are working with local Panchayats. Most of these NGOs at local levels are involved with capacity building and development planning. State and national level NGOs undertake advocacies for further strengthening of the system.

Both national media and political parties have been opportunistic in engaging with Panchayati Raj Institutions. Political parties were earlier indifferent to Panchayat processes. But most of political parties have realised importance of Panchayats in mobilising local votes and local support bases. So, every political party is trying to invest at panchayat levels to influence future voting. In case of media, the national media pay attention to bigger panchayat events, but vernacular media regularly report about Panchayats. However, as per current media trends, most of such stories are unfortunately sensational in nature. Such stories do not portray good images of Panchayats. Balance reporting may bring out both good and bad parts of Panchayats. There are more good stories than bad experiences with Panchayats to report.

Ways Forward

India is such a big and diverse

country that it can't be governed by Union and State Governments only. Local governments are necessary to manage people's needs and aspirations at local levels. Fortunately, India has a constitutional system of local governments. Over a period of last 3 decades, these local governments have matured to be more effective. Both Union and State governments have played their parts in strengthening the Panchayats. But more needs to be done.

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj at Centre seems to have slowed down. It should actively act as friend, philosopher, and guide for panchayats across the states. It must incentivise and cajole the states to provide appropriate supports to Panchayats. The ministry should undertake a rigorous review of experiences of Panchayats so far. Based on such reviews, appropriate corrective measures must be taken sooner. The Ministry should also promote peer learning among states to generate practical knowledge for further strengthening of the Panchayati Raj.

India has 3 spheres of governments which should continuously interact with each other to evolve best practices for governance. Union government and State governments keep meeting regularly. But regular meetings with lakhs of local governments may be very difficult. So, who should represent the local governments in such meetings? Obviously, there should be some representative body to talk on behalf of Panchayats. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj should therefore facilitate a process through

Both national media and political parties have been opportunistic in engaging with Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Political parties were earlier indifferent to Panchayat processes. But most of political parties have realised importance of Panchayats in mobilising local votes and local support bases. So, every political party is trying to invest at panchayat levels to influence future voting. In case of media, the national media pay attention to bigger panchayat events, but vernacular media regularly report about Panchayats

which Panchayats across all states could form various levels of their associations. These associations should act as bridge among Union, State and Local Governments.

Panchayats must become more participatory. To do that, roles, and responsibilities of Sarpanch and each of elected representatives must be delineated unambiguously. The chart of roles and responsibilities of each elected representative should be made public by pasting it on the dashboard of Panchayat and WhatsApp sharing with the villagers. Sarpanch should be made accountable to ensure that decisions at Panchayat level must be taken collectively. Other elected representatives should take initiatives to engage with decision-making processes.

Gram Sabhas are expected to meet regularly to keep a watch on functioning of the Village Panchayats. Gram Sabha means all adult villagers. That is, a group of hundreds of men and women in the village. Expecting hundreds of men and women to regularly come together for a Gram Sabha meeting may be very difficult. Even if hundreds of villagers come together for

a meeting, the meeting may not be meaningful. In such circumstances, alternative methods should be found to ensure that meaningful Gram Sabha meetings could take place regularly. Independent agencies at local levels should facilitate such methods for effective Gram Sabha meetings.

Panchayats are receiving good amount of funds for undertaking local development activities. To ensure financial transparencies and accountabilities, annual external audit of the income and expenditure of Panchayats are necessary. There are such provisions in various State Panchayati Raj Acts. But audit processes are not followed sincerely. It is now necessary that Union and State Governments must jointly create exclusive structures to undertake independent financial and performance audits of Panchayats. Financial and performance audits are must for panchayats.

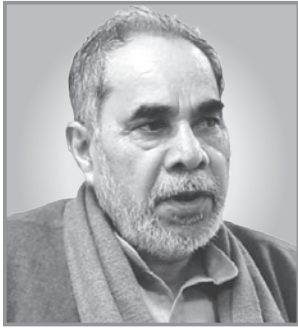
Village Panchayats are highly contested political terrain. Sarpanch and other elected representatives spend their precious time in doing their roles as representatives of local governments. They

entertain varieties of visitors and stakeholders. All these require costs. But if we compare the pays and perks of MPs and MLAs, Panchayat representatives are highly underpaid. This aspect requires urgent redressal. Lack of pay and perks, it may be noted, is often cited one of important reasons for corruptions at Panchayat levels.

Lockdowns and hospitalizations during COVID-19 have shown how vulnerable people become when services are not available at local level. Scientists and experts are warning about future calamities due to the climatic changes. In such circumstances, India needs more of local facilities and more capable local governments. The author would therefore like to emphasize that Panchayats need more capacities and resources to provide best possible services at local level. In past GO-NGO partnerships have been very effective in building capacities and evolving innovative ways of local governance. Those levels of GO-NGO partnerships are required again to make Panchayats more Resourced, More Capable and More Accountable. ●

References:

1. <https://panchayat.gov.in/documents/448457/0/State-UT+wise+ERs+and+EWRs.docx/885f3f06-4075-7db4-2d0a-000f6cf722ab?t=1633331196747>
2. https://lgdirectory.gov.in/rptConsolidateforRuralLB.do?OWASP_CSRFTOKEN=ZMWK-W825-5PNM-1THR-LFC0-YXL4-AHOR-9LAR
3. <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/population-by-country/>
4. <https://panchayat.gov.in/documents/448457/0/29+Subject+Devolution+Study+report.docx/89ebee93-510a-10f8-2ec1-c9d77edb1a56?t=1633330422950>
5. One of such expert Shri S. M. Vijayanand (former Chief Secretary of Kerala and former
6. Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India) made this statement in one of meetings attended by the Author
7. https://pria.org/panchayathub/panchayat_text_view.php
7. <https://www.panchayat.gov.in/documents/448457/0/Devolution+Report+2015-16.pdf/338f86ed-a6da-13ca-719b-2d41b467da93?t=1633331634500>



Ram Bahadur Rai

India's Polity in Sri Aurobindo's Worldview

Maharshi Sri Aurobindo is the only great man who imbibed the life-vision, culture, civilisation and polity of both Europe and India in a comparative way and presented them before the countrymen. A look at the relevant writings of Sri Aurobindo

For Sri Aurobindo, India is an eternal journey of truth. In his opinion, India and spirituality are synonymous. This comes out on every step of Sri Aurobindo's life and philosophy. In the initial days of his life, the bugle which he sounded of India's independence has no parallel. He did three things at that point of time. First- he connected the stream of the freedom struggle with Nationalism. Second- He not only dispelled the mist of confusion which covered the West's understanding of India's ancient culture, civilisation and polity with his evidence-based writings, but he silenced the Western scholars totally. He proved that the western scholars were prejudiced. Where the actual analytical facts given in Sri Aurobindo's writings on this subject gave an intellectual foundation to the world to rethink; it also gave every Indian the strength of self-pride. Third- The basic clarity with which he put India's ancient history in the context of its polity can only be regarded as a time-transcending work. In modern India, this was done for the first time by any Indian. Sri Aurobindo's field of view about political activity is different due to these very things and is present in its best form.

This article is an attempt to

put Sri Aurobindo's thoughts as a revolutionary, authentic thinker and a scholar of the Upanishads, in a perspective of times then and now. Besides, it has also been examined that his thoughts, comments and his messages given from time to time, which were relevant then are shining like a diamond even today. They are like a discovery by a jeweler, who can polish and reform the diamond that is Indian polity. We need a *Mahanayak* for this. India is waiting for the incarnation of that *Mahanayak*. It is also possible that that *Mahanayak* may have already landed, but who is yet to be recognised. One who erects the Indian nation on its basic elements, and one who recreates India's polity accordingly. From the very first day of his political life Sri Aurobindo thought about India's future and its polity on a big platform, a level which could not have even been imagined then. He not only thought about that but he put them down in words. His writings are a witness to this. The best example of his political activism could be seen in the developments at the Surat Congress. To know about this, any inquisitive reader must read a few chapters (from chapter 32 to 40) of 'Sri Aurobindo, Life and Times of the

Mahayogi (The pre-Pondicherry phase)¹. The reference is about the Surat Congress. Before writing something about that it is pertinent to say that the book mentioned above has been written by Manoj Das after extensive research. He is still alive at the Pondicherry Ashram of Sri Aurobindo and is a follower of the *Mahayogi's* path. He is 87 years old. He has been awarded the Padma Bhushan by the Government of India. He came to Pondicherry in 1963, which means that he spent time with Shri Maa for at least ten years. Many anecdotes about that are there in this book which leads the people to know about the hidden aspects of Sri Aurobindo's life 125 years ago in a useful and authentic way. This book contains the full story of the Surat congress which is not available anywhere else in any other book. The essence of the story is that it was Sri Aurobindo who led the nationalists in the Surat Congress.

In Congress's history, the place of the Surat Congress is like the highest mountain, which ignited a deep desire in the Indian mind for Independence. People know that there was a split in the Surat Congress. Two groups were formed- the Garam Dal and the Naram Dal. This nomenclature is not correct. Let us not go into whatever is correct and concentrate on what is more important. The *Mahanayak* of the Surat Congress was Sri Aurobindo. The person who was not ready to accept silently the insult of Lokmanya Tilak, and who took a straight and clear revolutionary line, and behind whom most of the nationalist leaders of the Congress stood,

Sri Aurobindo put out an advice. He said that the Congress should not make the mistake of trying to look for its future in the ruins of the West. Anyone who wants to comment on this would be required to take a rotation of Sri Aurobindo's writings not once but many times.

It would be like a pilgrimage, just like the one which is done at Kashi, Ayodhya, Mathura, Ujjain and other such holy places with belief in the traditions. There are written evidences available about it. If we look carefully at some of these incidents even today, we find a common thread in the vision of Tilak and Sri Aurobindo

was Sri Aurobindo. There is a rare picture of that congress in the pages of history. It is of the session which was presided by Sri Aurobindo. If we look at the photo, we can see that there is a small table, which is placed in front of a young man who is sitting on a chair. There is a small group of people. Two people are standing at both the sides of that young man. It is a unique moment of history. Just thinking about it awakens every pore of the body by a strong call of nationalism. Standing on the left side of that young man is Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak and to his right is Ganesh Srikrishn Khaparde, a leading personality from the nationalists. If anyone could search deeply he would certainly find Subramaniam Bharti too in that group. It is more relevant here to recall that the biggest issue in the reasons behind Partition was a deep difference over polity. Mahatma Gandhi had not entered Indian politics till that time. The country had to wait another decade for that. A large group of the Congress became leaderless with the untimely demise of Lokmanya Tilak. Many renowned persons of that group came to Pondicherry

and requested Sri Aurobindo to assume their leadership.

Sri Aurobindo put out an advice. He said that the Congress should not make the mistake of trying to look for its future in the ruins of the West. Anyone who wants to comment on this would be required to take a rotation of Sri Aurobindo's writings not once but many times. It would be like a pilgrimage, just like the one which is done at Kashi, Ayodhya, Mathura, Ujjain and other such holy places with belief in the traditions. There are written evidences available about it. If we look carefully at some of these incidents even today, we find a common thread in the vision of Tilak and Sri Aurobindo. A series can be made out of those incidents in which it is possible to envision the entire scenario of India's future. What are these incidents? Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak comes to India after being released from the Mandalay prison, and finds that the surge of nationalism in India's masses has evaporated which he had ignited in the public mind had no trace now. He reaches Nasik and delivers a historic speech. To evoke self confidence in the minds of the

people of India, he announces in his memorable speeches on behalf of the entire country that "Swaraj is my birthright, and I will take it".² This was in 1917. And just after a few months, in 1918, Sri Aurobindo starts writing a series of articles.

The First World War had ended. The country was waiting for its independence on the basis that the British might give this gift in return of the contribution of Indians in the War. But, Sri Aurobindo knew this was not going to be. In his vision he felt it important to give to the imperialist intellectuals a factual cultural perspective about India. It can be said that he continued his series of essays with this purpose only. This series continued up to 1921. The first article which he wrote in this series was titled- 'The Renaissance in India' and it was later published in the book 'The Renaissance in India and other Essays on Indian Culture.' It is important to remember here that Sri Aurobindo was the first great leader of India who had given 'Swarajya' a definition in as early as 1908. There is an essay of his in 'Vande Mataram'

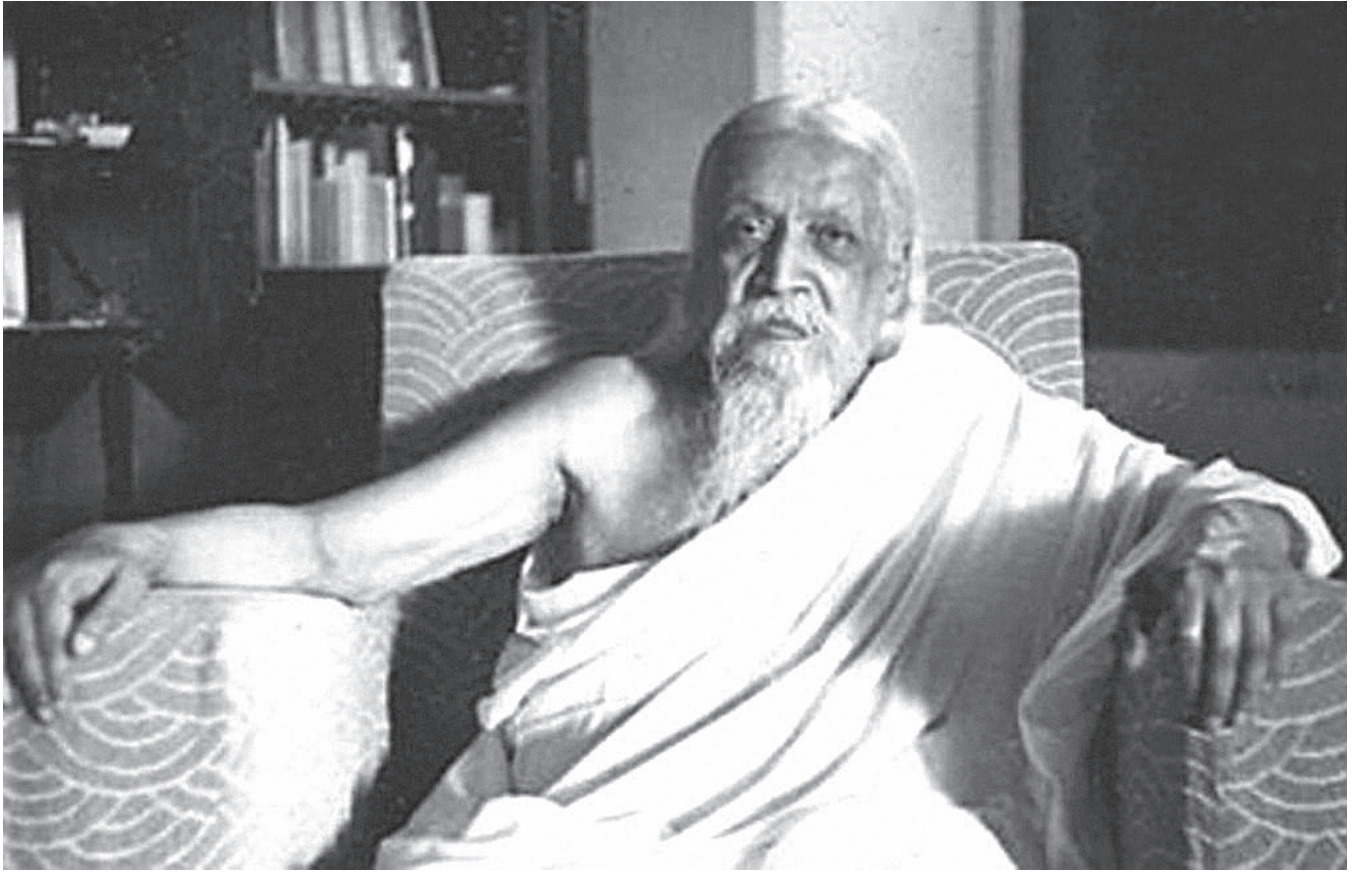
in which he says that "Swarajya does not only mean political independence. Its meaning is much bigger and inclusive. Swarajya includes individual independence, independence of families, castes and country, and all types of independence like social, political and spiritual independence. The ancient sages had given us the message of spiritual independence. In the messages of the Budhha, Chaitanya, Nanak and Kabir there was emphasis on social independence. Political independence is at the third place in all these."³ In the concept of social independence, the ancient democratic polity is inherent which was present in India centuries ago. Sri Aurobindo was the one who marked it first.

There is an incident which looks simple but was actually extraordinary because Tilak was alive then. One of his colleagues Joseph Baptista had requested Sri Aurobindo to accept the post of Editor of a national English newspaper. The proposal was to start it from Mumbai. The answer which Sri Aurobindo gave him is a milestone on politics, polity

and the future of India and which should be read again and again. He writes, "I do not look down upon politics or political work and do not consider myself above that. I have always insisted upon a spiritual life and now I put all my emphasis on it only. But, my concept of spiritualism does not have anything to do with *Sanyas* or *Vairagya* or looking down upon and hating worldly things. Nothing is physical for me, the entire human activity is for me something to be included in a total spiritual life, and in today's time politics is very important. But, my direction and objective of my political activity will be very different from what is prevailing today in this field. I entered politics and ran it from 1903 to 1910 with one objective only- to create a sustained resolve in the minds of the people for the need to start a struggle for independence and replacing the useless and slow ways of the Congress to gain it. It has been achieved now and it has also been confirmed by the Amritsar congress. The question is that what the country is going to do about its self-resolve, how will the country utilise its independence, and in which direction will it decide its future?"⁴

He writes in the same letter, "You say that your party is going to be a social democratic party. Now, I also believe in such a thing which can be called Social Democracy, but not in the forms which are prevailing today. I also do not at all like the European variety of Democracy however reformed it may be compared to its earlier forms. My belief is that India, which has its own consciousness and which has an appropriate tendency to govern

It is important to remember here that Sri Aurobindo was the first great leader of India who had given 'Swarajya' a definition in as early as 1908. There is an essay of his in 'Vande Mataram' in which he says that "Swarajya does not only mean political independence. Its meaning is much bigger and inclusive. Swarajya includes individual independence, independence of families, castes and country, and all types of independence like social, political and spiritual independence. The ancient sages had given us the message of spiritual independence. In the messages of the Budhha, Chaitanya, Nanak and Kabir there was emphasis on social independence. Political independence is at the third place in all these



according to its culture, should mark its own authentic path in politics, just like other things. It should not roam around stumbling in the bylanes of Europe. But, if it has to move forward in the current chaotic and ill prepared mindset, it would be forced to do that only. Definitely people talk about India developing its own directions but no one seems to have any clear or adequate idea about what these directions are.” He ends his letter by saying, “I have decided my ideals on this subject and also some definite beliefs too, upon which in the current times, very few people are expected to follow me- because these are different from the traditional, non-compromising and are driven by spiritual idealism, and many people would not understand them and would become a reason

to cause anger in many people and would be like a hurdle.”⁵

The essays which Sri Aurobindo wrote between 1918 to 1921 were published in the monthly ‘Arya’. In these essays, his thoughts, which he had written briefly in the weekly *Vande Mataram* during 1907 and 1908, have been described in detail. The questions which he raises, and gives solutions to, need to be recalled again. A debate arose in the West on the comment ‘Is India civilised?’ This question had been raised by William Archer in an exaggerated way in a satire. He was replied to by a scholar from the West only- Sir John Woodroffe. How could it happen that Sri Aurobindo would have just watched it silently? He wrote an essay on this very subject that ‘Whether India had any civility or not or does it have

it now?’ This question is not disputable any more. Because people whose opinions matter all agree that a great and special culture is present here which was incomparable in its form.’⁶ This essay is important because it becomes easier by it to understand that Sri Aurobindo was in favor of seeing and showing any question in its reality. One of his sentences tells us this only, “If we want to see this great question in its real form, we will have to give it a global and larger meaning.”⁷ In another of his articles on the same subject he writes, “The main question is that whether the future hopes of humanity is inherent in a logical and intelligent but mechanical civilisation and culture, or in a spiritual, intellect-based and religious civilisation and culture.”⁸ By this question he

gives a basic challenge to the Western philosophy of life and its polity and thus sends a ray of superiority in India's mind.

Isn't it a wonderful coincidence that at the time when the series of essays by Sri Aurobindo was concluding, just after that the world came to know with surprise that India had a prominent place in the ancient civilisations of the world! The evidences on which the Western world believes (although they can't be considered as final proofs) emerged at that time when in 1922 the Sindhu Valley civilisation was discovered. That discovery erased all doubts. It can be said that whatever doubts were there were blown away and shattered. Not a sign of them can be found now. The world by that discovery came to accept that, "Similar to Sumer, Akkad, Babylon, Egypt and Assyria, India's past was also great because of important achievements in various fields. As it was encircled by natural boundaries, Indian ideology has had its own specialties. The ancient Indians had paid due attention to all fields like social, religious, economic, educational, political, arts and literature."⁹

But, a scholar like Max Mueller was also confused. He has written that, "I was not acquainted with the spirit

of Indian Nationalism. It had the independence of working in a single field only which is the field of *Dharma* and Philosophy. India is a country of Philosophers. In history, there is no any other example other than Hindus where people gave such an effective place to *Dharma* and Philosophy."¹⁰ Max Mueller is not alone. Several names can be taken belonging to his stature. The thoughts of these Western scholars of the 19th century were actually confused. Why was it so? Because they were not acquainted with India's exalted journey. Scholars with a conservative life-vision can only see that much in the dusty storm of history which is very near to them. To justify themselves, such scholars just toss up this accusation that India never had an understanding and vision of History. To the contrary, India had both. India's understanding and vision of History is ancient. This is beyond the understanding of the West. It is not that the confusion in Western philosophers about India ended in the 20th century. In the beginning of the 20th century, Dr. Radhakrishnan was asked in London that what deliberations have taken place on India's polity in the past? In his reply Dr. Radhakrishnan said that the West should learn about ancient India. It is clear

that the confusion was not dispelled. Lord Curzon's hatred-filled decision has become a big memory of the freedom struggle. Who does not remember that year! It is 1905. The first decade of the 20th century was half way through. In the same year another historical incident took place which is not remembered that much. But it was actually a rare incident. It changed the flow of history, and changed the basis of thinking. It filled the historians with a new thrill. It gave India a new energy to tread on its eternal path. What was that incident? Let us know about that. In the same year Kautilya's Economics was authentically published. It was published by R. Shamashashtri. A new debate started. The world came to know that it was "the work of a Brahmin."¹¹ The debate was on the name. But the darkness was dispelled when a hand-written copy of the book was found. Before that, a few Indian scholars had written essays about it. But, with the publication of that book, this came out with proof that In India a micro-level deliberation had taken place on every aspect of polity. And it had been used in governance. The list of topics which have been covered in Kautilya's economics proves this. "This is the first book in which political topics have been described minutely."¹² The list is like this- "The Objectives of Knowledge related to State in Economics, Its Relation to Other Knowledge, Birth of a King, His Duties, Need of a Ruler to avoid Anarchy, Forms of The State, Arms of the State, Activities of the State and their Types, Council of Ministers, Fiscal System, Military System, Judicial system,

I was not acquainted with the spirit of Indian Nationalism. It had the independence of working in a single field only which is the field of *Dharma* and Philosophy. India is a country of Philosophers. In history, there is no any other example other than Hindus where people gave such an effective place to *Dharma* and Philosophy." Max Mueller is not alone. Several names can be taken belonging to his stature

Inter-State Relations, Different Types of Wars, Ambassadors and Spies etc.”¹³ It is clear from this that the ancient Political System in India has been described in its totality. With this it also became clear that, “Ancient Indian philosophers did not only take interest in Spiritual Knowledge but also in other subjects.”¹⁴ The other subjects include Polity.

This work awakened Indian scholars and gave them self-confidence. What then! A stream which had been entangled in the locks of history descended on earth and started flowing. As a result, in 1907, A.C. Das wrote an essay in *Modern Review*. He propounded that there had been a tradition of Democracy in India from ancient times, whose pyramid stood on the axis of Local Government. S.K. Aiyangar studied the Chola system of governance and put light on the system of Gram Panchayats. The essays which Kashi Prasad Jayaswal wrote from 1912 to 1915 were published in 1924 in the book '*Hindu Polity*'. Historians searched and found that Kautilya was Chanakya only. The Chanakya had established an empire after Alexander's invasion which continued till the 8th century. Later its continuity got disrupted. Now, evidence has emerged that the Polity present in India was the best in all polities in the world. The Indian empire was proved more capable than other ancient empires.

This sequence of studies on the ancient Indian polity continued. P.A. Bannerjee, K.B. Rangaswamy Aiyangar, R.C. Majumdar, Narendra Nath, B.K. Sarkar, U. Ghoshal, S.B. Vishwanath, D.R.

The foundation which Sri Aurobindo gave to the mutuality of life and the world, no one could have imagined then. That is why perhaps he retired from this field. But, retirement as we imagine it in traditional ways, he transformed it in a selfless act. He did not turn away from politics. He persevered to show politics a new path. He underlined that the beginning of the creation of something new based on the ancient Indian system should be the mantra of the freedom struggle. He knew this, and it was true, that it was necessary to dispel the deep clouds of confusion in the skies of Indian politics which were covering the sun of Indianness

Bhandarkar, B.R.R. Dikshitar, Narayanchandra Bandopadhyay are some of the leading historians, who, through their writings and their books till the third decade of the 20th century had demolished this impression that India did not have any Nationalism and Democratic System of Governance. The chain which had started in the third decade is continuing even today. In fact it is ever increasing. Sri Aurobindo added new dimensions to it with his writing. He gave it completeness. In his worldview there is a unique unification of culture, civilisations, spiritualism and polity. This is the basic element of the Indian life. Sri Aurobindo gave it a unified thread whereas the West has been in the habit of showing it in parts. The foundation which Sri Aurobindo gave to the mutuality of life and the world, no one could have imagined then. That is why perhaps he retired from this field. But, retirement as we imagine it in traditional ways, he transformed it in a selfless act. He did not turn away from politics. He persevered to show politics a new path. He underlined that

the beginning of the creation of something new based on the ancient Indian system should be the mantra of the freedom struggle. He knew this, and it was true, that it was necessary to dispel the deep clouds of confusion in the skies of Indian politics which were covering the sun of Indianness. That is why he dispels this confusion too that those who accept India's achievement in the fields of the heart and the soul also say that India's culture failed to organise life, a view of which Europe puts before us. He has replied to this with the words, “The ideals which drove the life of Indian society were of a very high level. The basis of India's social system was strong. The strong life-force existing inside Indian society created an extra-ordinary energy, prosperity and comforts. The life which it had organised was wonderful in its grandeur, diversity, beauty, productivity and continuity.”¹⁵

Sri Aurobindo was of a clear opinion that, “The story of India's political disability had become common due to viewing its historical stream of development in a wrong way and

due to the ignorance of its ancient past. It is true that India never developed the rivalry-infested and exploitative professionalism, or the hypocritical democratic parliamentary organisation which are specialties of the bourgeois era of the development cycle of the European civilisation. But, now these days are past when it was a fashion to praise these things without any basis by regarding them as an ideal system of social and political progress. Now, their shortcomings have been bared and there is no need to measure the greatness of an Eastern civilisation on the Western parameters of progress.¹⁶

Whatever he wrote in his series of essays on the polity of ancient India, he had already written briefly a decade ago in *Vande Mataram*. He presents a larger view of the same in these essays. What he wrote in 1908, was like this, “The theory behind a popular rule is that the reins of the government should be in the hands of the people; but this does not mean that the actual governance should be in the hands of the masses. When the people can accept or reject the work of the government,

when the people believe that their acceptance or rejection will cause an effect totally, then it can be said that it is a democracy, even if would not have taken a proper shape. In India’s past there was a feeling of such a democracy. Just like other *Arya* races, initially India’s society too had three divisions: the Ruler, the Lords and the common people. Many governance-systems of the modern world have emerged from these only.”¹⁷

What was the difference between other systems and that of India? This writing contains its answer, “It is true that India never developed the rivalry-infested and exploitative professionalism, or the hypocritical democratic parliamentary organisation which are specialties of the bourgeois era of the development cycle of the European civilisation. But, now these days are past when it was a fashion to praise these things without any basis by regarding them as an ideal system of social and political progress. Now, their shortcomings have been bared and there is no need to measure the greatness of an Eastern civilisation on the Western parameters of progress.”¹⁸

But what to say of the common people, even our historians are ignorant about it. This is what Sri Aurobindo underlines here that, “It is unfortunate that we know very little about the details of the constitutions of these Indian Republics and do not know anything about their inner history. But, clear proof is available of the fact that their political organisation was famous for its superiority and their military organisation was known for its unassailable work-efficiency all over India. There is an interesting saying by Buddha, “Till the time democratic institutions will be kept secure in their pure and powerful forms, till then even a small state like this will be unconquerable by the arms of a powerful and ambitious kingdom like Magadh. The political writers have also supported this opinion extensively.”¹⁹ Sri Aurobindo explained all these things in detail and it is available in the book *Foundations of Indian Culture*.

The governance-system which Sri Aurobindo wanted to present before the leadership much before India’s freedom has in its centre the rural *Panchayats*. Once someone asked Sri Aurobindo that whether it was possible to bring back old systems in modern times? He replied that, “It is not needed to bring back the old systems, but that spirit could be maintained. The spirit itself will create its new form. This has been a special quality of India.” Is the parliamentary system suitable for India? To this question Sri Aurobindo says, “Nowadays people want a modern type of Democracy, a parliamentary form of government. The parliamentary system is cursed.

Once someone asked Sri Aurobindo that whether it was possible to bring back old systems in modern times? He replied that, “It is not needed to bring back the old systems, but that spirit could be maintained. The spirit itself will create its new form. This has been a special quality of India.” Is the parliamentary system suitable for India? To this question Sri Aurobindo says, “Nowadays people want a modern type of Democracy, a parliamentary form of government. The parliamentary system is cursed. It has only brought Europe to this pathetic situation

It has only brought Europe to this pathetic situation. In India a beginning should be made by the ancient *Panchayat* system.”

In India, *Panchayats* have existed since long. The rural life was governed by them only. Every village was an autonomous state which is called a unit now. Explaining the difference between the democracy of India and Europe Sri Aurobindo had said, “The ancient Indian system had developed out of real life, it had space for everything and catered to every interest.”²⁰ In every era of history be it Vedic, Ramayan era, Mahabharat era, Maurya or Gupta era, the first unit of government had been the *Panchayat* system. This system prevailed continuously till the 17th century. This was the reason why till then i.e. till the 17th century, India’s share in world economy was 23 per cent. This has been accepted and written about by the British economic historian Angus Madison. But, actually India’s share at that time was 27 per cent. That is why India was the golden bird then. The British destroyed it. When India got its freedom its share in world economy had fallen to just three per cent. This was not the only devastating effect of the 200 years of plunder. The biggest worst result was that during the British rule even India’s villages were affected by foreign rule. The British turned the villages into channels of revenue only. They recreated the *Panchayat* system for this purpose only. The divide created in the rural society due to this is existing even today. Its worst effect was on the prosperity of the villages and their self-dependence. The villages became dependent

After Mahatma Gandhi and J.C. Kumarappa, JP (Loknayak Jayaprakash Narayan), Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya and Dr. Lohia also considered Gram Swaraj as basic. They campaigned for it. Five points emerge from the ideas of these great men. First- The ancient Village system of India should be re-established in a modern way. Second- Village should be made the basic unit of governance. Third- There shall be a gradual and sustained but unified development of the village, district, state and center. Fourth- Villages should be autonomous. Fifth- The control should be in the hands of the center

gradually. J. C. Kumarappa, a co-fighter with Mahatma Gandhi in the freedom struggle wrote a book- *Village Revolution, why?* He was an authentic thinker. This book of his is useful even today. Sri Aurobindo’s thinking and his suggestions regarding polity also gets support from this book.

After Mahatma Gandhi and J.C. Kumarappa, JP (Loknayak Jayaprakash Narayan), Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya and Dr. Lohia also considered *Gram Swaraj* as basic. They campaigned for it. Five points emerge from the ideas of these great men. First- The ancient Village system of India should be re-established in a modern way. Second- Village should be made the basic unit of governance. Third- There shall be a gradual and sustained but unified development of the village, district, state and center. Fourth- Villages should be autonomous. Fifth- The control should be in the hands of the center. When JP saw that state governments were showing disinterest towards *Panchayati Raj*, he convened a National Convention on *Gram Swaraj*, in which many Chief Ministers and big leaders participated. He wrote an article titled “*Restructuring of Indian Polity- A Suggestion*”.

JP suggested two things in his essay. First that independence and democracy are inherent in the soul of the constitution. But it stands on a reversed pyramid. The second thing which he said was it would be appropriate that we should analyse our democratic experience of ten years. This was in 1959.

Here, we can see similarities in the thoughts of Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi, J.C. Kumarappa, JP and Manvendra Nath Rai. This has been called ‘*Decentralisation of Power*’. The term- *Decentralisation of Power*- has become the most abused term in India’s politics just like what *Socialism* was once. No one explains clearly what they mean by *Decentralisation of Power*. There is a difference between meaning and intent. While intent is always clear meaning has scope of analysis. You have to search for meaning in intent. Decentralisation is also an intent. Many dimensions can be added to it. The deliberation on Decentralisation of Power will remain impractical and superficial as long as Parliamentary Democracy is not based on a foundation based on Indian thoughts. This is the meaning

which Sri Aurobindo clarifies that, “Parliamentary Government is not suitable for India.”²¹ He goes on to say that, “We always pick up what the West throws away.”²² Sri Aurobindo finds two defects in Europe’s Parliamentary Democracy. He says about it that it is cursed by the Gods. So, what is its basic element in his vision? He says, “A scientific mind crushes the inner life-based and spiritual knowledge under the baggage of its mechanical system. This is its mistake. This is Europe’s weakness and it has disappointed its desires and has stopped it from truly achieving its higher ideals.”²³

As different from Europe, in India’s ancient system, “It was believed that such customs and institutions should be allowed to develop gradually which safeguard the principle behind a well- established system, social system, politics and the structure in practice. On the contrary, Indian system of governance never established any unbeneficial mechanical system in place of a natural system based on people’s life. This has been the disease ailing the European system and the

ultimate result of which can be seen today in the giant artificial organisation consisting of the bureaucracy and the system of a commercialised state.”²⁴

How was the system of governance in ancient India? Sri Aurobindo describes it like, “Indian system of governance was a complex community based independent and self-decision based system. There was a natural existence of units of every class of society which organised their personal lives and activities; which were separated from other units due to the natural boundaries of their area; but due to well tested relations they were connected to society as a whole; every unit was a partner in the rights and duties of society; they implemented their own roles and laws; and managed their governance within their boundaries, cooperated with others on subjects which were mutual or universally beneficial and represented themselves in any form according to their importance, in the meetings of the State or the Empire.”²⁵ In his words, “The principle behind the Indian system of governance, its basic codes and actual

constitution were this- they were a complex mix of community based independence and self-decision, above which a supreme harmony-building power, a ruler and institution was there which had executive powers, office and status but which was bound within the limits of its special powers and duties; it controlled everything but was itself controlled by them.”²⁶

Sri Aurobindo has analysed the decline of Indian polity in the words, “It is not clear when these great institutions vanished, before the invasions of the Muslims or as a result of the victory of the foreigners. If suddenly this system somehow collapsed from the top causing a gap between the polity and the different arms of the socio-political organisation, and due to this the ruler might have become more autocratic and have taken more activities in his control; all the arms of the socio-political organisation might have been running their activities- the condition of the *Gram-Samaj* remained like this till the end- but these units would not have had a live connection with higher issues of the state, then such a situation would have been a great cause of weakness in the complex community based independence which needed a mutual harmony. Anyway, the attacks from Central Asia did bring with it a tradition of autocratic rule which was ignorant about these restrictions. Therefore it was natural that it would have eliminated any such institutions or their traces which were still present and this was what happened in the entire Northern India.”²⁷

He tells us that, “Indian

As different from Europe, in India’s ancient system, “It was believed that such customs and institutions should be allowed to develop gradually which safeguard the principle behind a well- established system, social system, politics and the structure in practice. On the contrary, Indian system of governance never established any unbeneficial mechanical system in place of a natural system based on people’s life. This has been the disease ailing the European system and the ultimate result of which can be seen today in the giant artificial organisation consisting of the bureaucracy and the system of a commercialised state

civilisation had developed a high quality political system which had been built solidly with a permanent strength; also in its efforts towards a mayoral system the human mind inclined towards monarchy, democracy or other polities, all these were unified by the Indian civilisation with great skill, but yet it was free from the excess of that mechanical tendency which is a defect of the modern European state.²⁸ He has explained the difference between India and Europe with the words, "The scenario which has been shown in India or Europe is not at all complete, and the situation in both were not at all similar. Europe's communities are quite different from each other in their communal-personalities and their unity or belief in Christianity or even their cultural unity in the universal European culture was never real and complete as much as the spiritual and cultural unity of ancient India."²⁹

It is clear that Sri Aurobindo

It is clear that Sri Aurobindo was a supporter of Democracy but he considered copying Western democracy detrimental. On this basis we can say that he was not satisfied with the prevailing system of democracy and polity in India. He wanted to see Decentralisation of power and the reestablishing of the autonomy of the villages in governance. Once he was asked that what type of governance did he want in India? Then he said, "My opinion is the same which Tagore once articulated. There should be a head of government who has sufficient rights so that he/she may implement the policies continuously

was a supporter of Democracy but he considered copying Western democracy detrimental. On this basis we can say that he was not satisfied with the prevailing system of democracy and polity in India. He wanted to see Decentralisation of power and the reestablishing of the autonomy of the villages in governance. Once he was asked that what type of governance did he want in India? Then he said, "My opinion is the same which Tagore once

articulated. There should be a head of government who has sufficient rights so that he/she may implement the policies continuously. There should be a house of representatives elected by the people. The states should contribute to the Union. All this should be concentrated in the upper most power, but down the line the people and the local units should have adequate autonomy so that they might frame rules considering their local problems."³⁰

References:

1. *Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi* (The pre-Pondicherry Phase)- Manoj Das, Sri Aurobindo International Center of Education
2. Sentence from Bal Gangadhar's speech at Nasik in May, 1917
3. *Vande Mataram*, 18 February, 1908
4. *Bharat Ka Punarjanm*, Sri Aurobindo, from the letter written to Joseph Baptista, 5 January, 1920, p. 158
5. *Ibid*, p. 159
6. *Bhartiya Sanskriti ke Adhaar*, Sri Aurobindo, p. 1
7. *Ibid*, p. 11
8. *Ibid*, p. 16
9. *Pracheen Bharat me Rajya aur Shaashan Vyavastha*, Manorama Johari, p. 1
10. *Ibid*, p. 3
11. *Ibid*, p. 5
12. *Ibid*, p. 6
13. *Ibid*, p. 6
14. *Ibid*, p. 6
15. *Bhartiya Sanskriti ke Adhaar*, Sri Aurobindo, p. 360
16. *Ibid*, p. 361
17. *Samay ki Awashyakta (Sri Aurobindo ke Bharat-sambandhi kuchh lekh)*, Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry, *Pracheen Bharat ki Rajya Vyavastha*, (*Vande Mataram*, 20 March, 1908), p. 21
18. *Bhartiya Sanskriti ke Adhaar*, Sri Aurobindo, p. 361
19. *Ibid*, p. 365
20. *Bharat Ka Punarjanm*, Sri Aurobindo, p. 224
21. *Ibid*, p. 225
22. *Ibid*, p. 225
23. *Sanskriti ke Adhaar*, p. 377
24. *Ibid*, p. 380
25. *Ibid*, p. 383
26. *Ibid*, p. 384
27. *Ibid*, p. 395
28. *Ibid*, p. 403
29. *Ibid*, p. 406
30. *Reminiscences and Anecdotes of Sri Aurobindo*, p. 40



Dr. Rajeev Ranjan Giri

The Swaraj of Gandhi's Dreams

The political system that Gandhi had in mind for an independent India was not that of a parliamentary form of Swaraj or self-governance. A brief analysis of the kind of Swaraj the concept of its constitution Gandhi had in mind

The leaders involved in India's freedom struggle had their own dreams of nation-building. These dreams would be in consonance with each other in some aspects, and in some cases, also run counter to each other. In the process of mutual partnering and debate, the vision of post-independent India was gaining momentum and shape. These concepts were formed and shaped by the ideological perceptions, education, learning and concerns of those forebears. It was during the progress of the national movement, as a result of the provisions introduced by the British rulers from time to time and changing policies in order to cope with conflicting groups, that the journey of the formation of the Constituent Assembly for the framing of the country's constitution reached its culmination. With this, the system of parliamentary democracy was decided upon, as the future form of governance in India.

This system of governance was not suitable for the India of Mahatma Gandhi's dreams. He perceived the solution to communalism and other problems of his time in the constitution of the Constituent Assembly and parliamentary system of representative democracy. Along with this, there was another aspect as

well. Most of Gandhi's companions liked this very system of governance. In an article written in 1921 about *Hind Swaraj*—the basis and pinnacle of his thought—Mahatma Gandhi recorded that “They (readers) should not assume that I am making efforts today to establish that very Swaraj whose picture I have drawn in this book. I know that India is not ready for this yet. There may be a sense of presumptuousness in saying this, but I am sure that in this (*Hind Swaraj*), my personal endeavour is definitely on to obtain the Swaraj whose picture I have drawn. But there is no doubt that today my collective (objective born of general nature) is to achieve a parliamentary form of Swaraj in accordance with the wishes of the people of India”¹.

A picture of *Swarajya* was drawn by Gandhi through *Hind Swaraj*. He remained steadfast on it throughout his life. That was the *Swaraj* of his dreams. It is clear from his above statement that his personal endeavour was on to achieve this *Swaraj*, but the coterie that was involved in the struggle he was leading did not share Gandhi's idea of *Swaraj*. He sensed this and felt that India was not ready for this. What did it mean when Gandhi said that India was not ready for this? Was Gandhi's

Swaraj criticised by common Indians? Did the average Indian disagree with his idea of '*Hind Swaraj*'? The answer would be, no. Those who disagreed with Gandhi's vision of *Swaraj* were the English-educated and trained folk, all those who were part of the national movement and also with Mahatma Gandhi. People who had a 'modern psyche' along with the British were not only convinced of this kind of system for governance; the irony was that there were many such people among Gandhi's companions as well.²

It can also be clearly said that there was a concept of *Swarajya* distinct from the parliamentary form of *Swaraj*. Gandhi's preferred idea was not that of a parliamentary form of *Swaraj*.

Was Gandhi's idea of *Swaraj* incorporated in the Constitution of India? What happened to Gandhi's concept of *Swaraj* other than the parliamentary form? What was the basis of this system other than parliamentary democracy?

In response to a question in the fourth chapter of *Hind Swaraj*, "What is *Swaraj*?" the editor (Gandhi) wrote, "This means that we want an English state, but we do not want an English ruler. You want the nature of a tiger but you don't want a tiger. This means that you want to make India British and when India becomes British, it will not be called Hindustan but will truly be called England. This is not the freedom of my imagination."³ In the light of this statement of Gandhi, it can be said that we adopted the British polity, even we though removed the British. The people of our country—our own people—took the place of the ruling whites,

The question of the nature of *suraj* was asked by Devidin Khatik to the leaders of his era in *Gaban*. It had many forms. Our Constitution too expresses a similar characteristic. During the period the Constituent Assembly was working to frame the Constitution of India, Srimannarayan, an interpreter of Gandhi's ideas, came forth with his constructive intervention called *Gandhian Constitution for Free India*

but the system of governance remained the same. It was this that Gandhi perceived as India becoming England; it was thus not the *Swaraj* of his imagination. Such were the concerns of many people during the days of the independence movement. Legendary novelist Premchand makes the heroine of his story "*Ahuti*" say, "Will people bow to those very evils to eradicate which we have today staked our lives, simply because they are indigenous, not foreign? For me at least, *Swarajya* does not mean that Govind should occupy the seat in place of John."⁴

Devidin, a character in Premchand's novel *Gaban*, asked the leaders of the national movement, "When you invoke the name of *suraj* (good governance), what form of it appears in your eyes? Will you too summon people to stand before (in supplication)? Will you too live in palaces like the British do? Will you enjoy the (cool) air of the mountains? Will you too go about in the style of the British? What welfare of the country can be brought about through such a *suraj*?"⁵ Whether it is Gandhi or litterateurs like Premchand, their query was about the structure and system was built by the British imperial rulers to strengthen their colony and exploit Indians. Why is it necessary to continue with

those systems and practices in *Swaraj*?

The question of the nature of *suraj* was asked by Devidin Khatik to the leaders of his era in *Gaban*. It had many forms. Our Constitution too expresses a similar characteristic. During the period the Constituent Assembly was working to frame the Constitution of India, Srimannarayan, an interpreter of Gandhi's ideas, came forth with his constructive intervention called *Gandhian Constitution for Free India*.⁶ Journalist Ram Bahadur Rai in his recently published book *Bharateeya Samvidhan: Ankahee Kahani*, referring to such alternative constitutions, writes: "It is common knowledge that many alternative constitutions were framed during the days of the Constituent Assembly. The memory of one of them endures to this day. There is also a belief regarding this particular draft that it had the blessings of Mahatma Gandhi. But how many know that the course of crafting an alternative constitution at the individual and collective levels in accordance with each one's thinking has not stopped, but still continues? Some such (alternative) constitutions can be mentioned here. The first of these is the "Constitution of India" that was drafted by

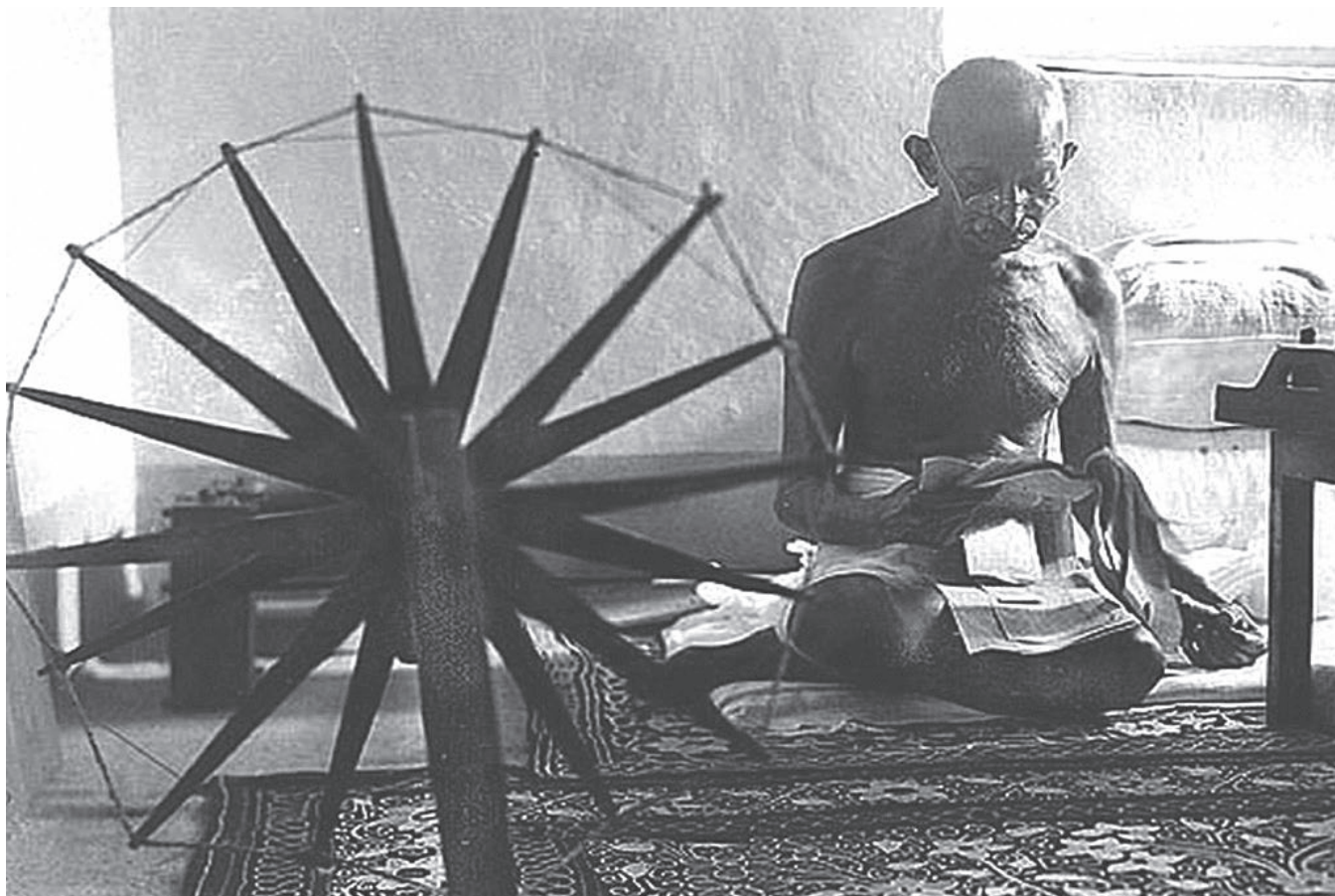
Gyan Yagya Ashram in 1987. It too contains 395 Articles. The second is the “*Non-Bharateeya Indian Constitution*” of Swami Muktananda Saraswati, which was published and circulated in 2005. The third is the “*Map of Building a New India*”, printed in 2015. A fourth is the “*Prayag Manifesto*”, published by the Adhivakta Parishad in 2000. The fifth such draft is “*Jeevan Vidya-based Constitution*”. A sixth one is “*Draft of the New Constitution of India*”, published in Hindi and English by the Jeevan Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad of Madhya Pradesh on the Golden Jubilee of India’s independence”⁷.

Srimannarayan Agarwal was the principal of Seksaria College of Commerce, Wardha. He was also the son-in-law of Jamnalal Bajaj. He sent the manuscript of

his book to Gandhi for perusal and also implored him to pen his opinion. Gandhi wrote his thoughts on this manuscript in a train on his way to Calcutta on November 30, 1945, which are published in the form of the preface of this book⁸.

Considering the title of this book as inappropriate, Gandhi wrote, “Perhaps *Gandhian Constitution* is not the proper title for Principal Agrawal’s book. It might be accepted as a convenient and coherent subtitle.”⁹ In the first line itself, Gandhi mentioned the inappropriateness of the title so that the meaning conveyed by this title and the confusion arising from it should be dispelled. At the same time, he gave his consent to this by saying that he would accept it just for the sake of convenience. Gandhi further

wrote that “Its framework is actually prepared by Principal Agrawal, and it is based on his study of my writings. He has been interpreting them for many years and since he is very concerned that he does not misinterpret my articles in any way, he does not publish anything without showing me. There are both advantages and disadvantages in this. The benefit is clear. The disadvantage is that reader may misunderstand the particular article as my point of view.”¹⁰ Gandhi wants to make it clear to the readers that the structure of the book is the product of the author’s mind, not his. He acknowledges that the author of this book has been the interpreter of his thoughts and is concerned that Gandhi’s writings should not be misinterpreted in any way. Gandhi warns that the



reader should not take a particular article as his point of view in all respects. Despite this, it can also be said that Gandhi does not disagree with Srimannarayan's interpretation of his views. He agrees with Srimannarayan's interpretation and understanding. Gandhi considers it necessary to remind, "If I have to own up to every word written on these pages, why should I not write them myself?"¹¹ In the sense that the views of the articles contained in it should not be taken as Gandhi's point of view—word-to-word—he warns readers not to make such mistake in clear words, "I warn them not to make any such mistake."¹² The importance he attached to this book, in spite of all his diligence, can be seen from this sentence of his, "I have tried to read this constitution twice with as much care as I could, while I was doing other things, yet I have not been able to check every thought and every word in this."¹³ Here, the question may be raised: if he has carefully read it twice, what is the difficulty in examining every thought and word? How can such an alert individual like Gandhi say something like this? Actually, this is stated out of courtesy. He has also admitted, "My sense of chivalry and personal freedom does not allow me to even commit such audacity."¹⁴ This book written by Sriman Narayan is in line with Gandhian thought. Gandhi acknowledges as much, saying, "All I can say is that there is abundant evidence in this booklet that the author has taken great care to present it as accurately as possible. There is nothing in this booklet that I find inconsistent with the things I would like to represent."¹⁵ It

The word Constitution should not mislead the reader into thinking that the author has claimed to have presented the entire Constitution. He has made it very clear in the opening pages of the booklet that only the outline of what would be the constitution of my imagination has been presented here." It is clear that Sriman Narayan has drawn the outline of the Constitution as envisioned by Gandhi

has therefore to be stated that the ideas of the book are consistent with Gandhi's thought. Sriman Narayan has propagated what Gandhi was propounding. Gandhi has also said "The author has considerably carried out all the amendments I find essential."¹⁶ In spite of these amendments, Gandhi considers it necessary to remind that "The word Constitution should not mislead the reader into thinking that the author has claimed to have presented the entire Constitution. He has made it very clear in the opening pages of the booklet that only the outline of what would be the constitution of my (i.e., Gandhi's) imagination has been presented here."¹⁷ It is clear that Sriman Narayan has drawn the outline of the Constitution as envisioned by Gandhi. The latter stamps his assent on this conceived outline, saying, "The beauty of his effort is that he has done what I could not do due to paucity of time."¹⁸ The significance of this 'Constitution' lies in another sense. Gandhi has stated about its importance saying, "In the many efforts that have been made to present a constitution for India, I believe, this work of Principal Agrawal is a thoughtful contribution to them."¹⁹ This statement of Gandhi not only underlines the importance of Sriman Narayan's

constitution, but also reveals that there were many attempts to present a constitution for the future India during that period. Sriman Narayan's 'Constitution' is a thoughtful contribution to all these efforts. Both the base and superstructure of this contribution are centered on Gandhian philosophy. This book of Sriman Narayan, which has the approval of Mahatma Gandhi, is divided into 22 chapters. Barring the preface and the epilogue, in the remaining 20 chapters, the author has presented the essential outline of the constitution of his imagination. In the preface, he has raised a few questions. "The question naturally: 'What kind of constitution shall free India have?' shall we imitate some of the Western Constitutions, like those of Switzerland, the United States or Russia? Or shall we try to evolve a *swadeshi* constitution based on our national genius, culture and traditions?"²⁰ According to Sriman Narayan, this is the most important question for the making of a constitution of an ancient country like India. He has written "To my mind, this question is of supreme importance; it must be answered here and now instead of being postponed to a future date when political power actually devolves on us."²¹ Referring to the governance system that existed

in different periods of India, he has said that he was not opposed to learning from the experience of other countries, under the fig leaf of a narrow nationalism. Describing India as an ancient laboratory of constitutional development due to the presence of various systems of governance, he wrote, "To manufacture for her a mix of Western constitutions which are yet in the melting pot will be not only a great insult to India but will also betray gross ignorance of sociological science, for constitutions are always in the nature of organic growth. It is most unscientific to foster on a country a system of administration foreign to its own genius."²² Sriman Narayan wished for a future constitution of India in the background of Indian traditions and also believed it was highly unfortunate that the study of the institutions of ancient India was not considered as necessary. He wrote in this context, "It is a desirable however, to frame a constitution with the background of Indian traditions. Unfortunately most of our leaders have not cared to study the ancient Indian institutions. Gandhi ji alone has been laying stress on this aspect of national reconstruction."²³ Explaining the reason for naming his book the *Gandhian Constitution*, he wrote, "I,

therefore, consulted him (Gandhi ji) regarding the advisability of drawing us a *Swadeshi* Constitution for Swaraj. He fully appreciated the need for such a constitution and kindly agreed to give me the necessary guidance. I decided to call the Constitution the 'Gandhian Constitution' because Gandhi ji, more than anybody understood culture and tradition."²⁴ In keeping with Gandhi - philosophy, Sriman Narayan has considered the seed of the idea of a future constitution to be one of 'decentralisation'.

The author has called it not just utopian but practical and possible, "The brochure does not pretend to be an exhaustive constitution which could be introduced in our country all at once. It only lays down the fundamental aims and ideals which ought to be incorporated in the future of independent India. The idea of decentralised democracy, I must emphasise, is not at all Utopian; it is essentially practical and feasible."²⁵ Describing the utility and significance of this work, he has written, "After the general elections, the Constitution Assembly will be confronted with the difficult problem of drawing up a suitable constitution. If, at this juncture, their treatise succeeded in provoking thought among our leaders and people

regarding the head for farming a constitution based on indigenous tradition, my labour will have been amply rewarded."²⁶

It is needless to state how much the Constituent Assembly of India cared for the wishes of Sriman Narayan. But there are some countries in the world who took full cognisance of their antiquity, traditions and cultures in the making of their respective constitutions.²⁷ It is necessary to say here that the insistence of people like Sriman Narayan is on the nobler side of their traditions and culture. They were focused only on those criteria that are suited to their lands and times.

To explain the kind of governance he wished for, Sriman Narayan wrote, "The first point which needs to be clearly understood is that there is nothing like 'the best constitution' for all countries and for all time. Forms of government must be shaped according to past traditions and present circumstances."²⁸ He rejected considering any constitution as the best for all countries and forever, and recommended considering the system of government built on the basis of past traditions and present circumstances as the best. Before proposing the best system of governance for India, he has broadly divided thinkers into two categories in terms of the functioning of the power of the state, in the framework of European and Indian political theories. He has kept those people in a particular category who accord more importance to the power of the state. This category of people glorifies the power of the state at the cost of individual entity and rights. In the name of disciplining and controlling the

It is needless to state how much the Constituent Assembly of India cared for the wishes of Sriman Narayan. But there are some countries in the world who took full cognisance of their antiquity, traditions and cultures in the making of their respective constitutions. It is necessary to say here that the insistence of people like Sriman Narayan is on the nobler side of their traditions and culture. They were focused only on those criteria that are suited to their lands and times

citizens, state power ultimately results in reducing the individual to a mere cog of the political machinery. This political concept evolves in the form of dictatorship, autocracy or totalitarianism. The other category of political thinker treats the individual as the criterion of all things. For such people, the freedom and progress of the individual is supreme. The function of the state is only to protect the rights of the individual. Such thinkers consider the individual as the end, and not a means. Sriman Narayan believes that a good system is created by the combination of these two. Both these methods are one-sided and also inappropriate.

After describing the dangers of a dictatorial, despotic or authoritarian system, Sriman Narayan has expressed his disagreement with the system of governance of 'Russian democracy' (i.e. a disguised autocracy). After demonstrating the example of the above system of governance in the world, democracy has been stated as the only option for the world. This system of governance, along with delivering legitimate rights to the people, aspires to discharge certain duties towards society and the state as well. The superiority of democracy is also proved because any form of centralised governance ultimately becomes subordinate to the elite class. Democracy is the only system of governance that proves capable of harmonising the interests of the individual and the state.

The question now arises that if the democratic system is the best form of governance, what is the problem? Why does Gandhi not consider parliamentary democracy his ideal? It is

After describing the dangers of a dictatorial, despotic or authoritarian system, Sriman Narayan has expressed his disagreement with the system of governance of 'Russian democracy'. After demonstrating the example of the above system of governance in the world, democracy has been stated as the only option for the world. This system of governance, along with delivering legitimate rights to the people, aspires to discharge certain duties towards society and the state as well. The superiority of democracy is also proved because any form of centralised governance ultimately becomes subordinate to the elite class

clear that there are many types of democracy. Parliamentary democracy is one of them. It is not the only form of government in a democracy. What is the abode of democracy Gandhi aspired for? Where do these two methods differ? In what way should democracy move so that it is in line with Gandhi's philosophy? Sriman Narayana has said, "It has to follow the path of non-violence and decentralisation."²⁹ Invoking Gandhi, he further writes that according to the Mahatma, "Democracy can only be saved through non-violence because democracy, so long as it is sustained by violence cannot provide for or protect the weak."³⁰ Gandhi's intent is clear. According to him, if there is room for violence in a democracy, it will not be able to protect the weak. Not only this, democracy will also not be able to protect itself. But what did Gandhi mean by democracy? "My notion of democracy is that under it the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest. That can never happen through violence."³¹ The importance and meaningfulness of democracy for Gandhi is that in this, the interests

of the weak should be protected and the weak should also get the same opportunity as the strongest. In order to properly articulate the equality of opportunity, the vulnerable must also be given additional opportunities. Is this not what Gandhi meant? Can democracy and the objectives it achieves not be protected by the number of representatives? To this, Gandhi says, "I consider it a completely erroneous notion that more number of representatives leads to better conduct of business or that it protects the principle of democracy. In any case, fifteen hundred such representatives who are alert to the interests of the people, are open minded and honest, can better defend democracy as compared to 6,000 elected ones (who might be oblivious to people's welfare). Gandhi did not consider the proportional representation of democracy to be a better system. He has said that "The essence of democracy is that everyone should represent all the interests of the nation. It is true that it does not and should not prohibit special representation for special interests, but this representation is not its criterion. It is a sign

of imperfection.”³² This is more likely in a parliamentary democracy. It limits the individual to certain interests. During his time, Gandhi had seen parliamentary democracy in Western countries. Its state of affairs and direction worried him. Sriman Narayan wrote, “Western democracy as it functions today is diluted Nazism or fascism. At best it is merely a cloak to hide the Nazi-fascist tendencies of imperialism. Democracy and violence can ill go together. The states that are today nominally democratic have either to become frankly totalitarian or if they are to become democratic, they must become courageously non-violent.”³³ Gandhi saw the culmination of Western democracy in Nazism or Fascism. Be it Hitler or Mussolini, both had been outcomes of democracy. Therefore, Gandhi could perceive the establishment of democracy in the true sense only in the indistinguishable relationship of democracy with non-violence.

Gandhi considered decentralisation with non-violence necessary to democratise not only the architecture of the mansion of democracy, but also its content. Without decentralisation, non-violence too would prove to be

incomplete for the establishment of democracy. Sriman Narayan considers economic equality to be an essential element for this. He has written, “The capitalist society is exploitation personified and the essence of all kinds of exploitation is violence. In order to root out exploitation, therefore, a non-violent society or state has to be established. Such a society, of necessity, must be based on economic freedom and equality because without economic equity there can exist no real political democracy.”³⁴

Economic equality is also necessary for a true political democracy. The author has asked how to establish economic equality and freedom. One way is through Soviet communism. But this route is laden with violence, and is therefore not suitable. “One way is Soviet communism which, in practice means ‘the dictatorship of the proletariat’ or the violent and ruthless suppression of the ‘rentier’ class. Even the life of the proletariat is regulated rigidly to such an extent that freedom and democracy are, more or less nullified. The remedy, in other words becomes worse than the disease itself.”³⁵

As to the path Soviet communists took the author considered the

treatment to be worse than the disease. The question arose in such a situation, “What will be the way for non-violent democracy? Sriman Narayan advocated decentralisation without any hesitation.”³⁶ He has written clearly, “Violence logically leads to centralisation; the essence of non-violence is decentralisation. Gandhiji has always been advocating such decentralisation of economic and political power in the form of, more or less, self sufficient and self governing village communities. He regards such communities as the models of non-violent organization.”³⁷ Describing the true democracy of his ideas, Gandhi wrote, “In the true democracy of India, the village will be considered as a unit... True democracy cannot be run by twenty people sitting at the centre. It will be operated by the people of every village from below.”³⁸ The village was the basis of the democracy of Gandhi’s dreams. The structure of the democratic system was to be built upon this. Did Gandhi want to implement the village republic of ancient India in its exact way? The answer is— not at all. Sriman Narayan has written, “Gandhi ji, of course, does not mean that the ancient Indian village republics should be revived exactly in the old form; that is neither possible nor desirable. Necessary change will have to be introduced in view of modern changed circumstances and needs. Moreover, the old rural communities were not free from all shortcomings. It, must however, be conceded that these village communes contained within them the germs of an ideal economic and political maximum organisation in the form of

The capitalist society is exploitation personified and the essence of all kinds of exploitation is violence. In order to root out exploitation, therefore, a non-violent society or state has to be established. Such a society, of necessity, must be based on economic freedom and equality because without economic equity there can exist no real political democracy.” Economic equality is also necessary for a true political democracy. The author has asked how to establish economic equality and freedom. One way is through Soviet communism

decentralised economy and local self-government. Gandhi ji, therefore, is of the definite view that the future constitution of India should be essentially based on the organisation of well-knit and co-ordinated village communities with their positive and direct democracy, non-violence, cottage economy and human contact.”³⁹. Gandhi’s vision of village-centered non-violent democracy also contained the objective of economic equality. The democracy of his dreams would be created by the fusion of these two.

Gandhi’s idea of village-swaraj, at one level, is connected with the tradition and ancient polity of India, and on the other, with the essential values acquired with the development of human civilisation. It should not be considered as revivalist thinking, but as an idea of renaissance. In this, there is a renewable treasure for the journey of progress of Indian civilisation and culture.⁴⁰ The village-centric ‘dream of future India’ was not acceptable to modern India. In a letter to his political successor Jawaharlal Nehru on October 5, 1945, he wrote, “I stand by the system of polity I have written about in *Hind Swaraj*. This is not just a matter of statement, but what I had written in 1909 is what I have experienced till date. In the end, even if I were to be the only one who believes in it, it would not hurt me the slightest. Because I become a witness to whatever truth I perceive.”⁴¹ Needless to say, the village and society are central to the system of polity discussed by Gandhi in his letter. In this letter, he has spoken about his concept of villages saying that the village of his imagination has

Gandhi’s idea of village-swaraj, at one level, is connected with the tradition and ancient polity of India, and on the other, with the essential values acquired with the development of human civilisation. It should not be considered as revivalist thinking, but as an idea of renaissance. In this, there is a renewable treasure for the journey of progress of Indian civilisation and culture. The village-centric ‘dream of future India’ was not acceptable to modern India

to be created on earth. “While respecting modern scriptures, when I look at old things from the point of view of modern scriptures, I find old things very benign in this new cloak. If you think that I am talking about today’s countryside, you will not understand my point. My countryside is in my imagination today. After all, every human being lives in the world of his imagination. In this imaginary countryside the villager will not be an inert being; but will be an entity of pure consciousness. He will not live the life of an animal in the dirt, in a dark room. Both man and woman will live freely and be prepared to compete with the entire world. There will be no cholera, plague or smallpox. No one can live in laziness, nor will anyone live in luxuries. Everyone has to do physical work. There being so many things, I can think of many that will be made on a large scale. Perhaps there would be railways, post offices and telegrams too.”⁴² Gandhi’s village was rejected by the modernity-minded leaders, who ignored the fact that he was talking about an imaginary village and not a real one. There were debates on this issue in the Constituent Assembly of India but the village did not receive its importance. Journalist

Ram Bahadur Rai has narrated an interesting story of this sad episode.⁴³ What indeed were the reasons for this? Ashish Nandy writes in this regard, “The inner aspects of the seemingly straight forward and simple methods of opposition to colonial influence on Indian soil were laced with intricacies. During that period, it was still easier to struggle with the customary inertia and colonial clutches that existed in Indian society, as opposed to the colonial values, which, during the course of this very struggle, like a quiet unseen flow, were entering our being and ingraining themselves in us.”⁴⁴ Nandi’s analysis covers Congress leaders who were active in the Constituent Assembly and followers of Gandhi, not people like Dr. Ambedkar and Benegal Narasimha Rao, who believed colonial rule was the harbinger of India’s deliverance from perceived inertia and misery.

Gandhi considered India to be a country of seven lakh villages. In pursuit of the village of his dreams, he wanted to make it both the basis and superstructure of Swaraj in the real sense. He considered parliamentary democracy to be merely a form of democracy. This approach was not his ideal. Udayan Vajpayee in his article “Parliamentary

Democracy on Deathbed” urged, “We know that there are other ways of democracy after Gandhi. They should not be called alternatives, because real democracy is what Gandhi had pointed out.”⁴⁵ Gandhi had begun to see the limitations of parliamentary democracy during its heyday itself. The problems inherent in parliamentary democracy become clear when one reads the article of sociologist Anand Kumar, in the light of the views of Udayan Vajpayee. Kumar has analysed this in the contradictions of “Swaraj and the multi-party electoral system.”⁴⁶ The question now arises as to why, holding parliamentary democracy as a basis, Gandhi considered village - based democracy as real democracy of which he personally strived in his lifetime. In a parliamentary democracy, Gandhi used to lay immense stress on the perils of the potency of capital, markets and power. He considered it to be a pyramidal system, in which power is ultimately concentrated at the top of the pyramid which has the lowest number of people, even though it might be called a parliament. Instead, he considered the Ocean Circle to be more democratic, in which

alone the rights of the weak would be protected. This idea of an ocean circle or maritime ring can be understood from this example. When a pebble is thrown into the still water of a pond, a circle is formed in it; in turn is forming a bigger circle. As long as this process continues, a circle keeps getting formed. Each circle is subordinate to its next circle, but also independent and autonomous. In other words, the energy of the smaller circle creates its next bigger circle. Gandhi believed that the people of the village assembly should choose their representatives. Those representatives choose the representative for the taluka, who would choose the district representatives, who would then choose representatives for the state. In turn, state representatives would choose candidates to represent the country. In this process, the center of power would be at the lowest level, i.e., the village, not near the topmost ring, i.e., Parliament. This way, power would not be concentrated but would be decentralised in seven lakh villages. The village would have the right to make decisions for itself and retain its resources. Gandhi wrote, “Freedom must start from the

bottom. Each village would be ruled by the Jamhuri sultanate or Panchayati Raj. It will have all the authority and power. This means that each village would have to stand on its own feet—provide for its own needs so that it can run its own business and even defend itself against the whole world. It has to be trained and prepared to such an extent that it is prepared to perish while defending itself in the face of external attack. In this way, eventually, our foundation would be based on the individual. This does not mean that one should not trust neighbours or the world; or that no help should be availed of them. The idea is that everyone will reach out to one another and will be able to exert their influence on each other... Such a society would be made up of innumerable villages. It will not spread in the form of one overlapping the other, but follow one after the other, like waves. Life will not be in the form of a tower, where the narrow top of the tower has to stand on the broad legs underneath. There, life will be deep, like the waves of the sea, in the form of one after another; the individual will always be ready to die for the sake of his village. The village will be ready to sacrifice itself for the villages around it. In this way, the entire society will eventually be made of such people, who never attack anyone, but are always humble and feel in themselves the glory of the ocean of which they are an essential part.”⁴⁷ Parliamentary democracy is in the form of a tower. The tower-shaped system is both the cause of centralisation and also its result. In centralisation, power rests with a handful of people. Centralisation also gives rise to

Freedom must start from the bottom. Each village would be ruled by the Jamhuri sultanate or Panchayati Raj. It will have all the authority and power. This means that each village would have to stand on its own feet—provide for its own needs so that it can run its own business and even defend itself against the whole world. It has to be trained and prepared to such an extent that it is prepared to perish while defending itself in the face of external attack. In this way, eventually, our foundation would be based on the individual

violence. A system of governance that recommended centralisation of power and violence could not be acceptable to Gandhi. Along with connecting the system based on Panchayati Raj with decentralisation and parliamentary democracy with centralisation, Gandhi also believed that the concept of centralisation and decentralisation of development was related to it. He saw the organic and interconnectedness among all the dimensions of religion, politics, models of development etc. He also perceived nature, environment and ecology to be associated with it. Parliamentary democracy prepares a fertile ground for the centralisation of power and development, the possibility of this being negligible in the oceanic ring model. At the same time, in this centralised parliamentary democracy, the village was to be doomed to become an internal colony of the cities and towns of its own country. Local culture, tradition and folk wisdom would also be neglected. That is why Gandhi disagreed with parliamentary democracy.

The village-centered system as envisioned by Gandhi moves from bottom to the top. What did Gandhi expect from this system? He has said, "When Panchayat Raj is established, it will also accomplish many such things, which violence never can. The existing power of landlords, capitalists and kings can last only as long as the common people do not realise their power. If people stop cooperating with the evils of zamindari and capitalism, both will perish of lack of nourishment. In a Panchayat Raj, only the commands of the

The village-centered system as envisioned by Gandhi moves from bottom to the top. What did Gandhi expect from this system? He has said, "When Panchayat Raj is established, it will also accomplish many such things, which violence never can. The existing power of landlords, capitalists and kings can last only as long as the common people do not realise their power. If people stop cooperating with the evils of zamindari and capitalism, both will perish of lack of nourishment. In a Panchayat Raj, only the commands of the panchayat would be obeyed. And the Panchayat will discharge its tasks only under the laws made by itself

panchayat would be obeyed. And the Panchayat will discharge its tasks only under the laws made by itself."⁴⁸

What is the difference between Panchayati Raj as envisioned by Gandhi and the present Panchayati Raj? It must be said that today's Panchayati Raj is different from Gandhi's imagination in both form and content. In the present Panchayati Raj, decisions are made by Parliament and the villages have but to adhere to them. The existing Panchayati Raj does not have authority; it is forced to implement policies coming from above.

On the basis of this Swaraj of his imagination, Gandhi was dreaming of a new civilisation. Often, he has also addressed it as 'Ram Rajya'. Describing its merits, he wrote, "It can be religiously translated as Kingdom of God on earth. Politically translated, it is perfect democracy in which inequalities based on creed or sex vanish. In it, land and state belong to the people, justice is prompt, perfect and cheap and therefore, there is freedom of worship, and of speech and the press—all this because of the reign of the self-imposed law

of moral restraint. Such a state must consist of prosperous, happy and self-contained villages and village communities."⁴⁹ Many people considered this idea of Gandhi to be a figment of his imagination. About such people, Sriman Narayan has written, "To my mind the Gandhian idea of constitutional government is not a utopia but a practical and lasting solution to internal economic conflicts as well as international wars. Those who deride such ideas as chimera and visionary are not aware of the horrors of Total War. If we are really eager that such total wars should not recur in future under any circumstances, we must be prepared to overhaul our economic and political organisations from top to bottom."⁵⁰ It is necessary to see this example to explain the importance of Gandhi's dream, the alternative to utopia. "The choice is no longer between utopia and the world with which we are familiar. The choice is between utopia and hell. Shall we choose Hell or the Gandhian Utopia?"⁵¹ This statement of Sriman Narayan is a very acute one. Can this prompt us to rethink about parliamentary democracy? ●

References:

1. This article of Gandhi was published in *Young India* on 26-2-1921. It also appeared as a foreword to the fourth edition of *Hind Swaraj* published in the same year (1921) by Ganesh & Company, Madras. *Hind Swaraj*; Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Navjeevan, Ahmedabad, October 2019 p. 18
2. Ashish Nandy in his book *The Intimate Enemy* has presented a study of the Indian psyche of that period. See: *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*; Ashish Nandy, Translation by Abhay Kumar Dubey, Vani Publications, first edition – 2019
3. *Hind Swaraj*, p. 36
4. *Aakhri Tohfa* (Stories related to the freedom movement) – Premchand – New Kitab Publications, Delhi, 1st ed., 2004, p. 179, for an analysis of the developments in Premchand's expression of such concerns see - 'Atha: Sahitya Paath aur Prasang' Rajeev Ranjan Giri, Anugya Books Delhi, Edition 2014, Chapter 90-97 titled *Swaadheenta Andolan ki Kahaniyan*
5. *Gaban*: See Premchand – hindisamay.com
6. *Gandhian Constitution for Free India*, S.N. Aggarwal, Kitabistan, Allahabad, 1946
7. *Bharateeya Samvidhan: Ankahee Kahani*; Ram Bahadur Rai; Prabhat Paperbacks, New Delhi, First Edition-2021, pp. 13-14
8. The Hindi translation of Gandhi's opinion, published as a foreword to *Gandhian Constitution for Free India*, has been used in this article; *Sampoorna Gandhi Vangmay*, Volume 82, p. 144, Publications Division Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India November 1991
9. *Ibid*; p. 144
10. *Ibid*; p. 144
11. *Ibid*; p. 144
12. *Ibid*; p. 144
13. *Ibid*; p. 144
14. *Ibid*; p. 144
15. *Ibid*; p. 144
16. *Ibid*; p. 144
17. *Ibid*; p. 144
18. *Ibid*; p. 144
19. *Ibid*; p. 144
20. *Gandhian Constitution for Free India*, p. 10
21. *Ibid*; p.10
22. *Ibid*; p. 11
23. *Ibid*; p. 13
24. *Ibid*; p. 13
25. *Ibid*; p. 14
26. *Ibid*; p. 14
27. Dr. J.K. Bajaj In his research paper *Colonial Background of the Constitution and Some Reform Measures*, Carol Gluck's study *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period*, and on China's Constitution *The Constitution of the People's Republic of China* have revealed how the ancient culture, tradition of their countries has been included in their constitutions. See: *Manthan* Indian Constitution Special Issue-2, April-June 2019, Editor-in-Chief – Dr. Mahesh Chandra Sharma, Ekatma Manavdarshan Anusandhan Evam Vikas Pratishthan, New Delhi, pp. 13–21
28. *Gandhian Constitution for Free India*, p. 15
29. *Ibid*; p. 36
30. *Ibid*; pp. 36-37
31. *Mahatma Gandhi ke Vichar* – R.K. Prabhu, U.R. Rao. National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1994, p.327
32. *Ibid*; p. 327
33. *Gandhian Constitution for Free India*, p. 37
34. *Ibid*; p. 37
35. *Ibid*; p. 37
36. *Ibid*; p. 38
37. *Ibid*; pp. 38-39
38. *Mahatma Gandhi ke Vichar*; p. 327
39. *Gandhian Constitution for Free India*, p. 39
40. Journalist Banwari has presented a thought provoking analysis of this in Chapter 2 (*Hind Swarajya*) of *Bharat ka Swayatt aur Mahatma Gandhi*; Rajkamal Publications, New Delhi, 2018
41. *Sampoorna Gandhi Vangmay*, Vol. 81, p. 344
42. *Ibid*; p.; Sudhir Chandra, Rajkamal Publications, New Delhi, 2016
43. See chapter "Masude se gaanv gayab" of *Bharateeya Samvidhan: Ankahee Kahani*; pp. 246-255
44. *Gandhivaad Rahe Na Rahe*; Editor – Rajiv Ranjan Giri, Ananya Prakashan, Delhi, 2016, quoted from p. 114.
45. *Gandhi Vichar Samagam* (2-3 October-150th Gandhi Anniversary) Patna. Published by Education Department, Government of Bihar and ITM University, Gwalior; pp. 74-78
46. *Ibid*; pp. 87-90
47. *Mere Sapnon ka Bharat – Gandhi*; collated by R.K. Prabhu, Navajivan Prakashan Mandir, Ahmedabad, June 2015, pp. 105-106
48. *Ibid*; p. 107
49. *Gandhian Constitution for Free India*, p. 72
50. *Ibid*; pp. 72-73
51. *Ibid*; pp. 72-73



Dr. Jitendra K Bajaj

Dharampal on Panchayat Raj and Decentralised Polity

Indian system has always been decentralised. Even writings of the British officers confirm this fact. One can get its comprehensive and in-depth analysis in the works of historian Dharampalji. An overview

Dharampal (19 February 1922–24 October 2006), whose birth centenary we shall be celebrating soon, was an unusual historian of India. He wrote several books that sought to present different aspects of the Indian society and polity from an Indian perspective. These rigorously documented books disrupted the scholarly consensus about the backwardness and dysfunctionality of the pre-British India and offered detailed descriptions of an Indian society that was highly sophisticated and advanced in its political ideas and arrangements and in its sciences, technologies and educational systems. The corpus of his work and his personal interactions during the nineteen eighties and nineties with a large number of young students, especially in the elite educational institutions of India, have infused many in the new generation with a deeply grounded sense of pride in India of the times before the British.

Gandhiji's Polity of Oceanic Circles

Dharampal and his work were inspired by Gandhiji. It is not therefore surprising that his work is full of descriptions of the

decentralised ways of India of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For Gandhiji, decentralisation was not merely a system of political organisation, it was the way of being of the Indian society or, for that matter, of any human society anchored in Dharma. Gandhiji, like all Indian savants, recognised that everyone has within him an *ansha*, a part, of the divine, and that divinity, inherent in all beings, has to be not only respected but also granted sovereignty. In a society constituted of individuals who each partake of a share in the divinity, there cannot be a unitary State exercising absolute sovereignty over them. Sovereignty in such a society is shared widely. Everyone, with the family and locality, participates in the running of the affairs of his locality and the community and also in constituting the larger regional, provincial and national polities.

This Indian concept of every individual being a sharer in divinity and therefore in sovereignty was at the foundation of what Gandhiji graphically articulated on the eve of Independence as the polity of an "*oceanic circle* whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to

perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance, but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.”¹ The simile of individual human life as a momentary eruption in the vast undifferentiated ocean of divine creation is often invoked in the religious literature of India in many languages. Gandhiji apparently had that in mind, while proposing his polity of the “oceanic circle”.

The idea of shared divinity and shared sovereignty was also at the core of the great weapon of Satyagraha that Gandhiji fashioned early in his public career, in 1906, when he decided to lead the Indians in South Africa into an intense campaign for the preservation of their dignity in the face of the discriminatory laws that were being crafted then to reduce them to a less than human status. The argument Gandhiji gave was that a law that does not recognize the equal dignity of all human persons is an insult to the divinity inherent in every man and disobeying such a law is therefore not merely a political but a religious duty. Gandhiji’s Satyagraha, refusal to

obey unjust laws, while accepting the consequences of such disobedience, thus was a way of recognising and paying obeisance to that inherent divinity.

Satyagraha and decentralization are interlinked. Both arise from the same basic understanding of man and his place in the universe. And, as Gandhiji repeatedly said, there can be no Swaraj, self-rule, without Satyagraha, without there being people brave and confident enough to refuse to obey unjust laws, and to stand up for their divine dignity and the sovereign right to conduct their public affairs on their own, according to their customs and rules, according to *dharma* as established in their family, community and locality.²

In Dharampal’s corpus, which presents a graphic picture of the earlier Indian society and polity, based largely on the eighteenth and nineteenth century British records, both Satyagraha and decentralised functioning or *Panchayat* Raj are discussed in some detail. Three of his books deal specifically with these topics. But, the Indian preference for a decentralised polity appears even in his books dealing with aspects that are not

directly related to political or social organisation. In this essay, we describe the way the issue of decentralisation appears in the whole of his corpus.

Technology in a decentralised Polity

One such book describes “Indian Sciences and Technology in the Eighteenth Century” based on the contemporary accounts of the European observers in India.³ That book, published in 1971, was the first introduction for many Indians, including students and senior scientists in high S&T institutions of India, to the maturity and sophistication of the pre-British Indian sciences and technologies in diverse fields. Going through the accounts of these, compiled by Dharampal, is an educative and fulfilling experience that invokes respect and awe for the Indian achievements. And what is most impressive about these highly sophisticated and efficient technologies is the way they seem specially designed for the decentralised Indian way of functioning. Referring to this attribute of the pre-British Indian technologies, Dharampal in his Introduction, says:

“...The seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century European view of society, and thus of science, technology, politics, etc., was diametrically at variance to the views about them held by non-European societies... Consequently, the sciences and technologies of the non-European world also had different seekings and developments to those of Europe. Further, in countries like India, their organisation was in tune with their more decentralist politics and there was no seeking



to make their tools and work places unnecessarily gigantic and grandiose. Smallness and simplicity of construction, as of the iron and steel furnaces or of the drill-ploughs, was in fact due to social and political maturity as well as arising from understanding of the principles and processes involved. Instead of being crude the processes and tools of eighteenth-century India appear to have developed from a great deal of sophistication in theory and an acute sense of the aesthetic.”

One of the articles in this book describes the highly energy efficient and sophisticated but small furnaces of the Indian steel makers.⁴ These produced, among other products, the much-vaunted *wootz* steel that was in demand in many parts of the world, including for the physics experiments of Faraday in Cambridge. Dharampal, in his Introduction, estimates that the number of such furnaces functioning throughout India in late eighteenth century was in the region of 10,000 and each of these produced around 20 tons of steel annually. The cumulative production of India was thus around 2 lakh tons. That level of production would have been difficult to imagine until the latter part of the nineteenth century when iron and steel began to be produced in the newly industrializing European countries in the modern centralised ways.

Another article in this book describes the inoculation against small-pox that prevailed in India.⁵ It documents how the whole population was inoculated through an autonomous system. Group of inoculators visited, season after

In another widely read book, Dharampal describes education in India before the British. It is based largely on a survey of indigenous education ordered by Thomas Munro, Governor of Madras, in 1822. The details of indigenous schools and institutions of higher learning sent by the Collectors of 21 districts of the then extensive Madras Presidency—which extended over all of Tamil Nadu and parts of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala of today—offer a fascinating picture of the extent, inclusiveness and sophistication of the then prevailing system of education in India

season, the area designated for them in long established custom and were remunerated for their labours by the host families and localities. The inoculators themselves collected, prepared and preserved the inoculation material. The system thus ensured complete coverage without the need of any centralized production, budgeting, planning, supervision or control.

Education in a decentralised Polity

In another widely read book, Dharampal describes education in India before the British.⁶ It is based largely on a survey of indigenous education ordered by Thomas Munro, Governor of Madras, in 1822. The details of indigenous schools and institutions of higher learning sent by the Collectors of 21 districts of the then extensive Madras Presidency—which extended over all of Tamil Nadu and parts of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala of today—offer a fascinating picture of the extent, inclusiveness and sophistication of the then prevailing system of education in India. The book also includes extracts from the reports of W. Adam (1835-38) and G. W.

Leitner (1882) about indigenous education in Bengal and Punjab, respectively.

A striking part of this extensive system of school and higher education—that covered all of the country and reached an impressively large percentage of the school going population of all castes and communities—was that it was arranged and provided for entirely by the localities and communities without help or supervision from any central or provincial authorities. When the British started supplanting the indigenous system of education with their modern system, they began by first setting up a “department of public instruction” to prescribe the curricula, to recruit and manage the cadres of teachers, dispense budgetary support, and to exercise central supervision and control at all levels. The indigenous system was naturally decentralised: The British was naturally centralised. The only way they knew how to organise something was to set up a central department and its extensions up to the district and lower levels. Dharampal’s work shows these contrasting ways of India and of the British in diverse dimensions.

Civil Disobedience: Assertions of decentralised power

Another book of Dharampal describes a civil disobedience struggle that raged in Benaras and several cities of Bihar for nearly two years between 1810 and 1811 against the imposition of a new house tax by the alien British administration.⁷ Indians found the tax to be an innovation that violated long standing tradition of treating the householder as sovereign within his house and therefore obnoxious. The book establishes that the Satyagraha, or Passive Resistance or Civil Disobedience, of Gandhiji was not a discovery but a revival of an established practice of Indian polity. Gandhiji was aware that the practice was deeply rooted in Indian tradition. In *Hind Swaraj*, which Gandhiji wrote as early as in 1909, Gandhiji writes: “The fact is that, in India the nation at large has generally used passive resistance in all departments of life. We cease to cooperate with our rulers when they displease us.”⁸

This book of Dharampal offers insights into several aspects of Indian polity. One of the more

important aspect that it brings out is the way the principle of decentralised functioning operated even in the matter of organising satyagraha. The Acting Magistrate of Benares in his communication to the Government describing the Civil Disobedience movement taking place in the city writes that it would have been easy for the cavalry to disperse them because “amongst them they do not appear to have any head or leader” who might have organised them to evade the onslaught of the horses. But the lack of any head or leader also made it difficult for the British authorities to deal with the situation. According to the Acting Magistrate, the movement involved thousands of “Lohars, Koonbees and Korees” as well as those from other castes and classes joining together spontaneously. Each of those castes and classes organised affairs within themselves with the “religious orders” exerting their influence to ensure coordination and unanimity. The supplies for the multitudes assembled to protest the new tax were organised in the same decentralised manner making the

Acting Magistrate lament that the satyagrahis were “abundantly supplied with firewood, oil and provisions, while nothing in the city except grain was procurable.” For the British, facing this decentralised, and seemingly spontaneous, movement was a new experience that they did not know how to deal with. Later, the Civil Disobedience movements of Gandhiji had kept the British similarly befuddled for several years. Even General Smuts found it difficult to deal with the Satyagraha of Gandhiji in South Africa and ultimately admitted in the Parliament that the Asiatics “belonged to an ancient civilisation” who could not be treated like “barbarians”.⁹ Decentralised functioning and organisation, it seems, is one of the major attributes of that ancient civilisation.

Panchayat Raj in Indian Constitutional Polity

The three books that we have described above are not about Panchayat Raj, not specifically about decentralised organisation of polity. These are about different aspects of Indian polity, each of which seems designed to function in a decentralised manner. These three, as we have mentioned, are based on the observations and experiences of European observers and British officers. Dharampal spent nearly a decade, from the mid-sixties onwards, in the British Archives to collect the material that could provide insights into the functioning of Indian society and polity as the British saw it. For a couple of decades before he cloistered himself in the British archives, Dharampal had been engaged in public activity, which

The three books that we have described above are not about Panchayat Raj, not specifically about decentralised organisation of polity. These are about different aspects of Indian polity, each of which seems designed to function in a decentralised manner. These three, as we have mentioned, are based on the observations and experiences of European observers and British officers. Dharampal spent nearly a decade, from the mid-sixties onwards, in the British Archives to collect the material that could provide insights into the functioning of Indian society and polity as the British saw it. For a couple of decades before he cloistered himself in the British archives

involved the study, understanding and nurturing of rural institutions and organisations. In this period, he wrote two major books which dealt directly with Panchayat Raj in India.

The first of these, *Panchayat Raj as the Basis of Indian Polity*,¹⁰ is a compilation of the debates that took place in the Constituent Assembly on the place of Panchayat Raj in the constitutional polity of Independent India. In the making of the Constitution of India, individual and not the Grama was taken as the primary unit of the polity. This was contrary to the classical Indian polity which was based on the Grama. It also went against the grain of the independence struggle that the nation fought under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Many of the founding fathers, perhaps a majority of them, were unhappy with what they perceived as a betrayal of the Gandhian ideals. They gave passionate expression to their sense of betrayal. Their most serious complaint was that those who drafted the Constitution had searched and studied the constitutions of the whole world, but had no time to look within India or to study the classical Indian polity.

The debate was closed on the pretence that it was by then too late to rewrite the Constitution with Grama as the unit of the polity. The only concession made to the protagonists of the decentralised polity based on the Grama was to make a mention of 'Panchayat Raj' in the non-enforceable Directive Principles part of the Constitution. This ultimately became Article 40 of the Constitution which reads: "The State shall take steps to

The first of these, *Panchayat Raj as the Basis of Indian Polity*, is a compilation of the debates that took place in the Constituent Assembly on the place of Panchayat Raj in the constitutional polity of Independent India. In the making of the Constitution of India, individual and not the Grama was taken as the primary unit of the polity. This was contrary to the classical Indian polity which was based on the Grama. It also went against the grain of the independence struggle that the nation fought under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi

organise village *panchayats* and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government." More than forty years later, the constitutional status of the local institutions of self-government was made somewhat more formal with the addition of Part IX and IXA to the Constitution through the 73rd and 74th amendments, respectively. But, the founding fathers—while asking for Grama or *Panchayat* to be made the basic unit of polity in India in the passionate debate that Dharampal has documented in this book—were not looking forward to merely the addition of a third layer of governance below the Centre and the States.

In his second book on Panchayat Raj, *The Madras Panchayat System*,¹¹ Dharampal explores the functioning of the *Panchayats* in the government system. The book presents a survey that he undertook of the *Panchayats* in Tamil Nadu in the sixties. In his Introduction to the survey, Dharampal presents an overview of the history of the institutions of local self-government in Madras Presidency from their inception through the enactment of 1884 which

followed the Ripon Resolution of 1882. This first effort of transferring some of the absolute power of the British Government to non-official bodies at the lower levels was not very successful. The later enactment of 1920, however, did expand the powers of the local bodies and these seem to have functioned fairly effectively for about a decade. From 1930 onwards, however, the naturally centralising tendencies of the system established by the British in India began to assert themselves. The financial and operational autonomy of the local bodies was whittled away through a series of rules and regulations. Dharampal describes the process in graphic detail. The whittling away continued throughout the British period. And by the time the British left, they had created an elaborate procedural and regulatory structure that completely tied the hands of the local bodies and left little possibility of any initiative at their level. This happened not only in Madras but also in other parts of India, which followed a similar historical trajectory in the matter of local bodies of self-government.

In Independent India, there has been much interest in

strengthening the *panchayat* bodies. Different states enacted new laws to establish and empower such bodies. The 73rd and 74th amendments gave constitutional status and protection to these. But all the powers that have been bestowed upon them are circumscribed by the procedural and regulatory framework that the British created and left behind for us. Dharampal records in this book the obstacles that these rules and regulations placed in the effective functioning of the *panchayats* of Tamil Nadu that he noticed during his survey. He used to narrate several anecdotes about how the rules and regulations inherited from the colonial British administration could make the local bodies completely dysfunctional. Let us relate one such anecdote from one of his published series of lectures. In this anecdote, he describes how a British era regulation of prohibiting any official work on Sunday, the day of Sabbath, made it impossible for many of the *Panchayats* in Tamil Nadu to meet at all. Talking about his experience, he says¹²:

“During the early stage of a study of *panchayats* in Tamil Nadu in 1964 and 1965, I found

that a large number of village *panchayats* were actually unable to meet because of the lack of a *panchayat* building, and instead the statutorily laid down meeting was considered as having taken place by circulation of the resolution. Realising that because of factionalism, etc., the members were reluctant to meet at the place of any one member or that of the *panchayat* president, I asked why did they not meet in the village school. Most villages in Tamil Nadu, even in 1964, had a school of some sort and also a large or small school building. They said they could not meet in the school building while the school was on, which was from Monday to Saturday. I suggested that they could meet on Sundays. They then told me that no *panchayat* business could be transacted on a Sunday according to the rules and regulations of government. A year or two later I was to learn that this rule of not transacting any ‘Public’ business on a Sunday dated to around 1800, and that this rule was enacted here in India within a few years of the enactment of an Act in Great Britain pertaining to “A Stricter Observance of the Sabbath Day” and which prohibited most public activity in

Britain on a Sunday. Incidentally, this enactment in many matters, like the prohibition of stage plays, opening of most shops etc., or even privately washing clothes and putting them in the back garden to dry on Sundays, more or less continued in Britain even till recently. And many here know the observance of the Sabbath, on a Saturday, is even more strictly observed in the modern state of Israel.”

It is little wonder that the people could hardly feel a sense of belongingness with such *Panchayats* and considered these to be extension arms of the centralised government. For conducting the public business that really mattered to them, they fell back upon their older traditional *panchayats*. Dharampal describes this tragicomic situation in another favourite anecdote of his:¹³

“One of the early incidents which gave me a different understanding of our village life happened during a study which we had undertaken of the Rajasthan *panchayats* in 1961. In one particular village, perhaps this was in the district of Sawai Madhopur, we learnt that the village had some irrigation tanks. As I did not find any reference to these tanks in the proceedings of the *panchayat* I asked the *panchayat* members present, if anything ever happened to these tanks. They replied that they were indeed occasionally repaired, etc. On my asking as to who repaired them, they said ‘we’ repaired them. I then asked did the ‘we’ mean the *panchayat*. They said it did not mean the *panchayat*, but it meant those whose fields were irrigated by these tanks. They further described how labour,

One of the early incidents which gave me a different understanding of our village life happened during a study which we had undertaken of the Rajasthan *panchayats* in 1961. In one particular village, perhaps this was in the district of Sawai Madhopur, we learnt that the village had some irrigation tanks. As I did not find any reference to these tanks in the proceedings of the *panchayat* I asked the *panchayat* members present, if anything ever happened to these tanks. They replied that they were indeed occasionally repaired, etc

cash, etc., was collected for the purpose of repair. When I asked why the *panchayat* did not repair the tanks, they said that this was not the *panchayat's* work. On my asking them what was the *panchayat's* work then, they replied that the *panchayat's* work was 'development' and according to them 'development' was that which the government wanted them to do. As they understood it, repair of the irrigation tanks did not come in any development category. So, they regarded it as something that they had to do themselves, as had been done for centuries."

Dharampal's work thus provides a compelling overview of the principle and systems of decentralised functioning that underpin the classical Indian polity and have manifested in every aspect of Indian public life from the beginning of times. It also narrates how that organic

Dharampal's work thus provides a compelling overview of the principle and systems of decentralised functioning that underpin the classical Indian polity and have manifested in every aspect of Indian public life from the beginning of times. It also narrates how that organic and comprehensive decentralised system was broken by the British and the technologies and structures associated with it were destroyed

and comprehensive decentralised system was broken by the British and the technologies and structures associated with it were destroyed. Since no centralised system can efficiently function up to the village, later the British did try to restore some level of self-governance at the local level. The local bodies created in that effort, however, were stifled by the rules and regulations that the centralising system kept creating and elaborating for them. That stifling structure of rules, regulations and procedures

has remained largely unaltered after Independence. It continues to stymie all our well-intentioned efforts to empower the local institutions of self-governance.

From the story as told in Dharampal's corpus of work, it seems that the Indian way of decentralised functioning and the colonial British way of centralised control and regulation of all activity represent two entirely different worlds. It is impossible to find a common ground between the two. ●

References:

1. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Volume 85, pp. 32-34. Also in, *Harijan*, 28-7-1946.
2. See J. K. Bajaj and M. D. Srinivas, *Making of a Hindu Patriot*, Har Anand, Delhi 2021, for detailed discussion on Gandhiji's anchoring of all political action in *dharma*.
3. Dharampal, *Indian Science and Technology in the Eighteenth Century: Some Contemporary European Accounts*, Dharampal Classics Edition, Rashtrrothhan Sahitya, Bengaluru 2021. First published, Biblia Impex, Delhi 1971.
4. Major General Franklin, *The Mode of Manufacturing Iron in Central India* (cir. 1829), in Dharampal, *Ibid.*, pp. 237-270.
5. J. Z. Holwell, *An Account of the Manner of Inoculating for the Small Pox in the East Indies* (AD 1767), in Dharampal, *Ibid.*, pp. 169-187.
6. Dharampal, *The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the Eighteenth Century*, Dharampal Classics Edition, Rashtrrothhan Sahitya, Bengaluru 2021. First published, Biblia Impex, Delhi 1983.
7. Dharampal, *Civil Disobedience and Indian Tradition with Some Early Nineteenth Century Documents*, Dharampal Classics Edition, Rashtrrothhan Sahitya, Bengaluru 2021. First published, Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, Varanasi 1971.
8. M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Centre for Policy Studies, Chennai 2011, Volume III, pp.83-84. First published Phoenix 1910.
9. J. K. Bajaj and M. D. Srinivas, *Ibid.*, pp. 122-124.
10. Dharampal, *Panchayat Raj as the Basis of Indian Polity: An Exploration into the Proceedings of the Constituent Assembly*, Dharampal Classics Edition, Rashtrrothhan Sahitya, Bengaluru 2021. First published, AVARD, New Delhi 1962.
11. Dharampal, *The Madras Panchayat System Vol II: A General Assessment*, Biblia Impex, New Delhi 1972.
12. Dharampal, *Some Aspects of Earlier Indian Society and Polity and their Relevance to the Present*, New Quest Publications, Pune 1987, pp.8-9.
13. Dharampal, *Ibid.*, p.7.



Dr. Shiv Shakti Bakshi

Panchayati Raj in View Of Shri Guruji and Pt. Deendayal Upadhyaya

The foundation stone of the socio-economic structure of India has always been the prevalent Panchayat system since time immemorial. Its relevance and expected form in the view of Shri Guruji and Deendayalji

As India gained independence, many new challenges came to the fore. Along with the crisis and questions emerging out of partition, there were debates on the path to be pursued by India as an independent nation. There were various opinions, even differing sharply from one another, on the issues of constitutional arrangements, governance models, administrative structure, and the economic system, making the debate even more intense. It is to be borne in mind that while India was engaged in its struggle for freedom from the colonial forces, the entire world was discussing new ways on the basis of various ideologies then dominating the intellectual landscape. The ideas of 'capitalism' and 'socialism', along with their internal debates, were becoming manifest in different ideologies. The extent, to which these ideas can be contextualised in the Indian context, as well as the consequences of their blind imitation, were then widely discussed and debated in the country. Attempts were even made to define 'Swaraj' in definitive terms and determine its various dimensions. Indigenous ideas and social, administrative,

and economic institutions that have existed since time immemorial have formed an inalienable dimension of these debates and discussions in the Indian context.

"As a result of these extensive debates, the discussions on the contours of local government began to be delineated around the concepts of 'Gram Swaraj' and 'Panchayati Raj'. The panchayats have played an important role in rural life since ancient times. They were an institution on which various aspects of rural life were construed, and they played an important role in the functioning and regulation of socio-economic and cultural life. According to 'Shri Guruji' Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, "Grama-panchayat system, prevalent since ancient times, has been the cornerstone of the economic-social structure of our country. The Panchayat is the formation of an 'Ashtapradhan Samiti' from the various emerging circles of society. This eight-member council of ministers is the advisor of the king. The responsibility of the Panchayat is professional."

He writes further, mentioning the arrangements of that time; "Actually, life in those days was not like it is

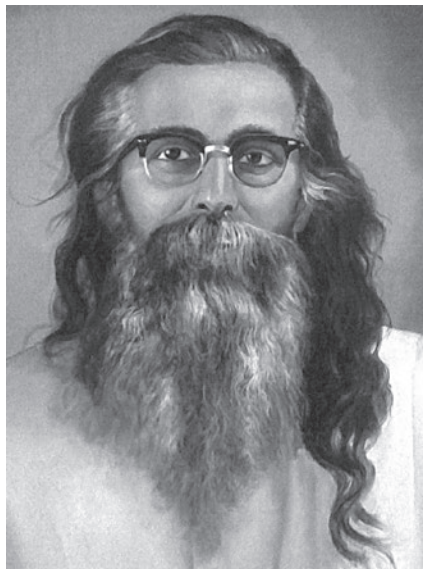
Manthan

today. At that time, there were mainly four business groups. The first group was those who were devoted to the study and teaching of the physical and spiritual sciences. In the second were those who were entrusted with the responsibility of running the administration. The third class was made up of merchants, and the fourth class consisted of people who were engaged in agriculture and related handicrafts. There was also a fifth group that lived in the forest and made their living from hunting and wild products. They were called 'Nishads'. These five classes were represented in the Panchayat in the interest of the entire society."

If seen in this way, then the Panchayat system was not only related to the local governance and judicial system, they also had the responsibility of organising and conducting the spiritual, social, economic life of the rural society as well. The most important thing is that these institutions, which accepted the basic principles of democracy, were representative and got the trust of every section of society. In social aspects, panchayats have presented a high ideal of 'Swaraj', political and economic decentralization, and a democratic system at the local level since ancient times, due to which the traditional systems of social life remained intact even after many invasions. Along with this, from time to time construction works were done at the local level through Panchayats, which are still present in the society as illustrious examples of their functioning and grandeur. In view of these high traditions, Gandhiji was a firm believer in 'Gram-Swaraj', but when the Indian Constitution was drafted, the

idea of 'Gram-Swaraj' could not find reflection in it. Jayaprakash Narayan has also mentioned this in his book *Vichar Yatra*.

"When the entire draft of the Constitution was drawn up, someone, either Sri Sansthanam or Sri T. Prakasam, pointed out that Gandhiji had considered the idea of '*Gram Swaraj*' as the foundation of the framework of Swaraj; but our constitution has become completely opposite to this. He spoke to the President of the Constituent Assembly, Dr. Rajendra Prasad. And Dr. Rajendra Prasad was shocked to learn of this fact. He immediately called Dr. Rao, the law representative of the Constituent Assembly, and placed this matter in front of him. Dr. Rao said that now if we sit on reforming this constitution by taking '*Gram Swaraj*' as its foundation, then its entire structure will change. The matter even reached the ears of Nehru and Sardar Patel. They also felt that now it would take a lot of time to reform the constitution. There were some heated discussions in this regard, but in the end, the only conclusion was

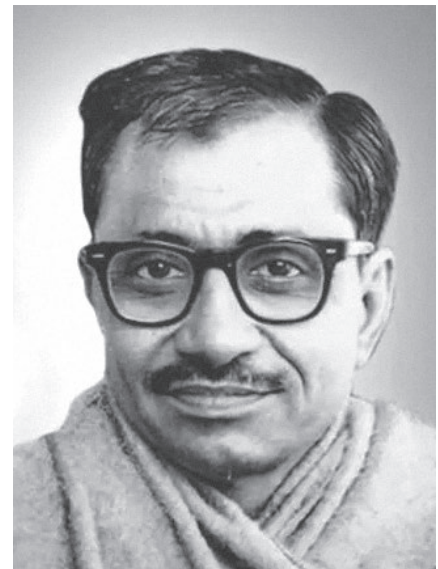


Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar 'Shri Guruji'

that a clause in the constitution was inserted in which the states were instructed to consider the 'gram panchayat' as a unit of self-government, keeping in mind the basic guiding principles of the constitution. This political idea of Gandhiji, which was at the centre of the national revolution, could find only this much place in our constitution. I believe this was the first important beginning in the reverse direction."

The concept of '*Gram Swaraj*' in the Constitution could not be given as much importance as Gandhiji used to give in his views. Based on the ideas of Shri Guruji, Pt. Deendayal Upadhyay put forward the concept of 'Akhand Mandalakar Panchvaliya Ekatmak Rajya' before the nation. Shri Guruji wrote in his book *Vichar Darshan*:

"Our scholars have considered the nature of the universe to be circular. Therefore, there should be development of governance from the centre outwards by creating a '*Vardhman Mandala*' and, accordingly, while maintaining the uniqueness of each Mandal and establishing its relationship with



Pt. Deendayal Upadhyaya

the next Mandal, the entire creation will work.

- Considering villages as centers, Mandals of villages should be formed around it. By developing these Mandals, within which a common definition of exchange has arisen because of the uniqueness created by geographic or commercial contact, such large Mandals should be created.
- In this type of development, there is no objection even if a linguistic province is formed or a province of more than one language is formed.
- The form of our government was Panchayati, and its basic unit was the village. We considered the representative, *Panchas*, who expressed the sentiments of the people in the form of God. The proverb of '*Panch Parmeshwar*' is proof of this.
- This method should be developed in the future also. It develops from the bottom and goes to the top. Representatives of similar *varnas* or similar industries should go to their respective fields, and this representative assembly should form a larger representative assembly around them. Thus, there should be a complete system of governance. That's the basic formula."

On the basis of the above ideas, Pt. Deendayal Upadhyaya propounded '*Ekatmak Shashan*' (Integral Governance), which can be gathered from his various articles and speeches. Dr. Mahesh Chandra Sharma in his book, *Deendyal Upadhyaya: Kartritva evam Vichaar* he has identified various dimensions of '*Ekatmak*

Considering villages as centers, Mandals of villages should be formed around it. By developing these Mandals, within which a common definition of exchange has arisen because of the uniqueness created by geographic or commercial contact, such large Mandals should be created

Shashan' based on his ideas, which are as follows:

1. The constitutional governance of India will not be a "Union of States" but an '*Ekatmak Rajya* – Integral State' on the concept of One Country, One Culture, and One Nation.
2. The '*Ekatmak Rajya*' shall not be a union of units, but the units shall be its constituents.
3. The various constituent units of the '*Ekatmak Rajya*' will have constitutional autonomy and administrative powers.
4. The panchayats and janapadas will have constitutional autonomy and will have elected representative assemblies.
5. The Central Parliament will have the power to make legislation for the whole country. The District and Panchayat Pratinidhi Sabhas will have the right to make regional bye-laws and submit proposals for specific legislation to the Parliament.
6. Administrative powers will remain with the development blocks and regions. The state will get power from the center and the development block from the district.
7. In this way, there will be three constitutional and two administrative-*panchavalayi* (five circle) systems.
8. The sources of power and resources will be regulated

in such a way that each can enjoy autonomy by being self-reliant."

In the '*Akhand Mandalakar Panchvalayee Ekatmak Rajya*' governance system as explained by Shri Guruji and Pt. Deendayal Upadhyaya, the villages were not only considered as the center, but the Panchayati Raj system was considered as an expression of Indian system and the village was considered as the basic unit for the development of other structures around them. Keeping the village panchayats at the core of political and economic decentralization, the idea of developing self-government, autonomy, self-reliance, governance in accordance to the indigenous and democratic values was embodied in this vision. It is not that the distortions brought about in Panchayati Raj were out of their sight. Shri Guruji had said;

"Nowadays, the proclamation of Panchayat Raj is often heard, but the whole system has become distorted. The place of professional planning has been taken by casteism and factionalism. Notorious goons are often selected in the panchayats. The cries of casteism, the lure of money, fear, and physical assaults have become deciding factors. Professional qualities have been blown away. Whatever it is, the distortions have to be rectified."

Even today, Panchayati Raj is

facing the brunt of these evils. But if we look in the context of the ideological debates of that period, due to the over-centralisation in the systems inspired by 'capitalism' and 'socialism', democratic values were being hit in many ways. Dictatorial tendencies dominated power in many countries, and their culmination can be seen in India as well, in the form of 'Emergency'. There is no doubt that political and economic centralisation hamper the freedom of the individual and establish the monopoly of a handful of people. Following independence, India adopted democracy, which had been vested in the hearts and minds of the Indian people since ancient times, whether it was the Rigvedic system of Sabha, Samiti, or Vidhata, or Ganasangh in later periods, the importance of democratic values can be seen in every system. Even in the monarchical system, the importance of democratic values cannot be denied due to the predominance of the concept of 'Dharma'. Also, due to the vibrant system of panchayats in millions of villages across the country, political and economic self-government, autonomy, self-reliance, and representative democratic governance were firmly established on a democratic basis. These panchayats not only had powers related to governance and administration, but they also had a major role in the judicial

There is no doubt that panchayats have played an important role in rural and national life since ancient times. What Shri Guruji and Pt. Deendayal Upadhyaya kept saying from the very beginning was accepted by the policy makers even in later days, and amendments were also made to strengthen the constitutional basis of the Panchayati Raj system

and economic spheres. They also played an important role in the preservation and promotion of cultural-social-spiritual values. For thousands of years, under the Panchayat system, Indians developed such a system of self-government that did not shake even in the face of the attacks by many invaders, and along with the cultural unity of the country, the social, economic, and political systems at the local level, as the basic unit, were kept intact. This is the reason that Sri Guruji and Pt. Deendayal Upadhyaya kept them at the core of the 'Ekatmak Rajya' system with required reforms, even after the entry of some evils into the Panchayats during the colonial rule.

There is no doubt that panchayats have played an important role in rural and national life since ancient times. What Shri Guruji and Pt. Deendayal Upadhyaya kept saying from the very beginning was accepted by the policy makers even in later days, and amendments were also made to strengthen the constitutional basis of the Panchayati Raj system. Today, a

wide-ranging form of Panchayati Raj is visible in the country. But some of the tendencies that are visible in the electoral system are also visible in the panchayats. Shri Guruji pointed this out in the very beginning and emphasised the need for unanimous or unopposed elections for the Panchayat. Today, a successful experiment of this can be seen in Gujarat in the form of the 'Samaras Panchayat', which was started by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi during his tenure as the Chief Minister of the state. Positive changes are necessary for the progress of any system, and the need for many more reforms is felt in panchayats. From this point of view, the basic idea of 'Ekatmak Rajya' of Shri Guruji and Pt. Deendayal Upadhyaya, in which political and economic decentralisation, as well as local self-government, responsible autonomy, swadeshi, and self-reliance are prominent, should be kept in mind. There is no doubt that if these principles are adopted, the system of Panchayati Raj in accordance with democratic values will be even stronger and more prosperous. ●

References:

1. Golwalkar, MS, *Vichar Navnit*, Gyan Ganga Prakashan, Jaipur, Rajasthan, Page 29 (Translated version)
2. Ibid, pp. 29-30
3. Sharma, Dr. Mahesh Chandra; *Deendyal Upadhyaya: Kartritva evam Vichaar*, Vasudha Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1994, pp. 214-215
4. Ibid; pp. 212-213
5. Ibid; pp. 211-212
6. Golwalkar, MS, *Vichar Navnit*, Gyan Ganga Prakashan, Jaipur, Rajasthan, Page 30 (Translated version)



Anand Kumar

The 'Chaukhamba Raj' of Lohia: The Socialist Way of Participatory Nation-Building

One of the major concepts of the indigenisation of the relations between the polity and society is Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia's construct of the Chaukhamba Raj. An objective analysis of 'Chaukhamba Raj'

The celebration of 75 years of independence for India is a unique opportunity to enhance confidence. It instills in all Indian men and women reverence for the valour and sacrifice of all the known and unknown freedom-fighters between 1857 and 1947. A sense of pride arises in the countrymen about their heritage. Simultaneously, this festive year reminds us of the need to review the progress of the journey of our independence so far.

What is our state of affairs and direction as a newly independent nation? If all is well, we have to keep moving as usual. But if we are lagging behind the rest of the democratic world in the essential improvement in the standard of living of the common man, we shall have to fulfil our duty of correcting our path by reviewing our progress. If there is dissatisfaction in any part of the country with regard to sharing in the gains of national independence, or resentment among some sections, communities or groups of the populace, the need for self-correction should be acknowledged. But if the direction is right the pace should then be stepped up. Today, if there are some major political, economic or socio-cultural problems regarding

the direction of nation-building, one should not hesitate to change direction. Alternative pathways should be considered. Otherwise, covering up the issues of the present with the mistakes of the past would be judged as irresponsible with regard to future generations. This is the essence of nationalism. This is the instruction of the dharma of our age.

This essay has been penned in the context of the discussion of decolonisation and democratisation of the relationships between Indian polity and society by Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia under the rubric '*Chaukhamba Raj*' (four pillared governance). It is about a socialist plan of participatory nation-building promoted by Dr. Lohia. The Socialists presented this five-point plan in the first decade of Independence to establish the newly emerged Indian democracy as an effective decentralized system of governance in the villages and towns. This alternative democratic route to participatory nation-building makes the participation of people's representatives a basic necessity at many levels.

Dr. Lohia provided a novel extension to the renowned definition

of democracy Abraham Lincoln, describing 'Chaukhamba Raj' as the public pathway of democratisation of India. According to Lincoln, democracy is the method of wielding power in a country of the people, by the people and for the people. However, this definition ignores the ambiguities inherent in the concept of 'people'. Making it clear and lucid, Lohia said that democracy is actually a system of governance created of the community, by the community, for the community on the one hand and of the whole of humanity, by humanity and for humanity on the other. At its foundation, the state government should be based on the four pillars of the village-panchayat government elected by adult franchise, the district panchayat in the middle, the state government, and the central government at the top. Basis the adequate development of democracy in the world, there should ultimately be a system of world-government at the summit of the comity of nations. With this structure, we will be able to deliver lasting freedom to two-thirds of the world (the group of newly independent nations) from hunger and the remaining

one-thirds (the group of formerly imperialist countries) from the threat of war.¹ The scheme of *Chaukhamba Raj* imparts a practical basis to both Marx and Gandhi's idea of the irrelevance of the state in an ideal society of human beings in the alternative idea of the establishment of a participatory polity. In fact, this contribution of Lohia in providing an Indian template to the discourse on state power and the form of democracy establishes him on par with Abraham Lincoln² and Harold Laski³ among the theorists and architects of democracy.

Now, five decades after the death of Lohia, owing to the increasing distance of the state from society, the *Chaukhamba Raj* plan of participatory nation-building is being remembered again. Here, public opinion has manifested in many forms across the country against the alliance of politicians, moneybags and the bureaucracy. Disgruntled voters have changed governments with the power of vote against corruption. There are waves in the form of a movement to convert *swaraj* (independence) into *suraj* (good governance). An all-round concern to save politics from

criminalisation is increasing. Under the parliamentary system, the entire democracy has been contaminated by the triad of money and muscle power and media propaganda. In this regard, the idea of *Chaukhamba Raj* propounded by Dr. Lohia as a better alternative is gaining new relevance for democratic nation-building.⁴

In this context, it is necessary to note that it is only by linking Lohia's plan of *Chaukhamba Raj* with Gandhi's dream of India and Jayaprakash Narayan's urge to rebuild the Indian polity, will the complete picture and importance of the possibilities inherent in participatory nation-building come to the fore.⁵ This article is organised into the following seven parts:

- 1) Prelude
- 2) Ten Contradictions of Nation Building
- 3) Exploring the Indigenous Form and Shape of Democracy
- 4) The Discourse of Gandhi, Lohia and JP on *Swaraj*
- 5) The Constitution and Participation
- 6) *Chaukhamba Raj* and Participatory Nation Building
- 7) Some Conclusions

Ten Contradictions of Nation Building

In any case, choosing the right path of democratic nation-building was the biggest challenge of the Indian national movement after the half-baked victory in 1947 following the August revolution (1942-1946) in the freedom struggle from foreign rule. This was because ten major contradictions were apparent in the context of the rebuilding of post-independent India: 1) Village versus City

five decades after the death of Lohia, owing to the increasing distance of the state from society, the *Chaukhamba Raj* plan of participatory nation-building is being remembered again. Here, public opinion has manifested in many forms across the country against the alliance of politicians, moneybags and the bureaucracy. Disgruntled voters have changed governments with the power of vote against corruption. There are waves in the form of a movement to convert *swaraj* (independence) into *suraj* (good governance). An all-round concern to save politics from criminalisation is increasing

2) Agriculture versus Industry
 3) Privileged Classes versus Deprived Classes
 4) Elite Groups versus the Entire Nation
 5) Educated versus Illiterate
 6) Swadeshi versus Westernisation
 7) Communalism versus Nationalism
 8) Convention versus Change
 9) Centralisation versus Decentralisation, and
 10) Multiparty Parliamentary Polity versus Participatory Democracy.

Over the last 75 years, some of these issues have been resolved, such as equitable support for disadvantaged castes or the reorganisation of states on linguistic lines. Many contradictions are being resolved; such as improving the quality of life in villages; the constitutional right to education; the eradication of illiteracy; dialogue between Swadeshi and Westernisation in a manner suited to national interests; a healthy balance between tradition and change through modernisation. But some contradictions still remain unanswered—such as the spread of harmony between all faiths; the progress of participatory democracy; centralisation versus decentralisation, etc.

It would be useful to mention two examples in this discussion for the relevance of this essay, because both are concerned with 1) Relations between the state and citizenry in a post-independence society, and 2) Bureaucracy and decentralisation in terms of power and society respectively. Jayaprakash Narayan (JP), based on the experience of the role of the masses in the early decades of Indian democracy, posed the important question: “Perhaps the most difficult issue before democracy is that when freedom exists, it is misused. And the



intervention of the state is required; when there occurs the interference of the state, freedom is curtailed. How then to protect freedom and also prevent its misuse?”

In response to this JP pointed out that there is no political solution to this dilemma; the only solution is a moral one, because the complementary aspect of freedom is responsibility or ‘obligation’. If individuals are not ready to take up social responsibility and use their freedom to promote only their selfish interests; if we neglect or harm the interests of others,

some form of state intervention or the preponderance of the state will become inevitable.

This is where the utility and wisdom of Gandhi’s doctrine of trusteeship manifests itself. That is why the only answer to statism and totalitarianism is trusteeship. But trusteeship cannot be put into practice without voluntarily limiting one’s needs. In other words, the rejection of materialism or the limitless freedom of pursuit of material comforts is essential for the creation and safeguarding of democracy. In a nation like India ravaged

by imperialist exploitation, the ruling and powerful cannot be allowed the leeway of corruption and indulgence in the name of 'freedom'. Otherwise, the benefit of even basic *swaraj* (self-governance) will never reach the people of the country⁶.

Let us now look at the context of decentralisation. In these 75 years of *swaraj*, has there been a fundamental reform in the centralised polity created for the convenience of the British during the two hundred years of British Raj or is the country still doomed to submit to the bureaucracy? How much has our *swaraj* been able to distance itself from the British era's 'Collector Raj' and how close has it been to the dream of "Our rule in our country?" It is imperative to ask this because it is the chief criterion for the progress of democracy for a vast nation like India, which has emerged out of a long period of slavery to foreign powers.

The Socialists, believing the 'Two-pillar government' (central and state governments) created by the British Raj to be a curse of colonialism, propagated the establishment of '*Chaukhamba Sarkar*' (a mutually complementary structure of central, state, district and village

governments). This suggestion was given the nomenclature of 'Four-Pillar Democracy' by Marxist ideologue E.M.S. Namboodiripad. Based on the recommendations of the Balwantrai Committee (1956), the campaign of 'Panchayati Raj and Community Development' promoted by Jawaharlal Nehru, who was the Prime Minister for the first seventeen years after Independence, between 1959 and 1964 with the support of S.K. Dey, can be considered a development parallel to this idea. But after Nehru's passing, his successor Mrs. Indira Gandhi abolished the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and Community Development in 1966 and created a new paradigm of centralisation of power in the form of the 'Prime Minister's Office'. During 1975-77, the most odious form of centralisation of power in the form of the Emergency was experienced by the people and in the 1977 elections, the Congress, which was proceeding apace on the path of totalitarianism, was punished by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's defeat and her ouster from power.

On the other hand, the Left Front government in West Bengal, the Telugu Desam government in

Andhra Pradesh and the Janata Party government in Karnataka re-prioritised the need to make village panchayats a participant in the process of power to make the Indian polity federal in the actual sense. By accepting Antyodaya and the Right to Information, the Bharatiya Janata Party government in Rajasthan germinated the possibility of holding the bureaucracy accountable through democracy at the local level. In 1984, when Rajiv Gandhi became the Prime Minister, decentralisation was once again encouraged to address the declining credibility of governance. For this, by the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution of India in 1992, fresh significance was given to the Zilla Parishads and Municipal bodies. A decade later, by enacting the Right to Information Act in 2005 and the Forest Property Rights Act in 2006, the scope for public participation in the governance system was expanded. The guarantee of 'right to work' to poor rural men and women through the Mahatma Gandhi Employment Guarantee Act implemented since 2005 has taken the country many steps forward in the direction of economic democracy.

Yet, when it comes to the decentralisation of power, researchers are of the opinion that our country is trapped in 'Collector Raj' despite the commitment to self-governance in its Constitution⁷. Dr. Lohia called it the triad of politicians, moneybags and bureaucrats. Squaring up against this reality, the tribals of Central India, in conjunction with the Bharat Jan Andolan, launched a campaign of 'Hamare Gaanv mein Hamara

On the other hand, the Left Front government in West Bengal, the Telugu Desam government in Andhra Pradesh and the Janata Party government in Karnataka re-prioritised the need to make village panchayats a participant in the process of power to make the Indian polity federal in the actual sense. By accepting Antyodaya and the Right to Information, the Bharatiya Janata Party government in Rajasthan germinated the possibility of holding the bureaucracy accountable through democracy at the local level

Raj' (Our rule in our villages). Echoes of this movement to eradicate this compulsion could be heard in the Aajaadi Bachao Andolan. Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh Samiti (Rajasthan), Narmada Bachao Andolan (Madhya Pradesh/Maharashtra) and Samaj Parivartan Samudaya (Karnataka), which have made the incompleteness of self-governance the issue of their campaigns.

Quest for the Indigenous Form and Shape of Democracy

The path of freedom from all these contradictions was called Swaraj during the struggle against British rule. That is why India's national movement made 'Purna Swaraj', or total self-rule, its highest goal since 1930. The Constituent Assembly accepted it as the national goal of the ideal of democracy, based on justice and equality. After contributing with their total dedication in the freedom struggle, the Socialists broke away from the Congress and launched a movement for democratic nation-building to realise Swaraj in the form of 'rule of the poor' and 'rule of farmers and labourers'. In this, there was pressure to prioritise the contribution of the village and the poor. The Socialists considered it dangerous to turn to modernization of consumption in the country without modernising production in agriculture and industries.

In order to create the spirit of democratic reconstruction in the nation, it was considered necessary to accord importance to all the states with an equitable share in power as well as national, unified, local community self-

It is important to remember that after the defeat of the Nawab of Bengal at the Battle of Buxar in India in 1764, the British East India Company gained economic control of Bengal. Since then, until the First War of Independence of 1857-60, the political sphere of this British Company's political influence in India expanded continuously. In this, it subjugated the native princely states on the one hand and defeated other European imperial contenders in India on the other

government, i.e., make village and district representatives important as compared to the bureaucracy. The solution to the twin problem of capital and labour was stated in the self-motivated participation of all men and women in nation-building ('*Ek Ghanta Desh ko!*' i.e., One hour for the country). The criterion of self-governance was the planned fulfillment of basic needs through a convergence of economic and political reforms⁸.

It is important to remember that after the defeat of the Nawab of Bengal at the Battle of Buxar in India in 1764, the British East India Company gained economic control of Bengal. Since then, until the First War of Independence of 1857-60, the political sphere of this British Company's political influence in India expanded continuously. In this, it subjugated the native princely states on the one hand and defeated other European imperial contenders in India on the other. In this regard, the defeat of Tipu Sultan, the Sultan of Mysore at the hands of the British East India Company in 1799 is considered to be of special significance.

In the history of the world in that particular period, the rule of the British East India Company over India is remembered

for famine, corruption⁹ and economic exploitation¹⁰. We present only a list of famines here. According to experts, there were five terrible famines in East India Company-ruled India between 1769 and 1861 and each famine killed millions of men, women, children and cattle—1769-70 in Bengal (20 lakh deaths); in the territories of North India in 1783-84 (1 crore 10 lakh persons died); in Madras Presidency in 1791-92 (1 crore people perished); in the Agra-Rajputana-Delhi region in 1837-38 (8 lakh people died); 1860-61 Agra-Delhi-Hisar (2 million deaths). In 1858, the reins of India were taken over from the East India Company by Queen Victoria of Britain. But even in the eight decades of rule by the British Crown, there were seven terrible famines—in Odisha-Bihar and Madras in 1865-67; 1868-70 in Rajputana; in Bihar in 1883-84; in areas of Bombay and Madras Presidencies in 1876-78; throughout British India in 1896-97; in Bombay and Punjab in 1899-1900; and in the Bengal Presidency in 1943-44. Millions of innocent people died in every famine.

Three particular things should be noted about the situation in India during British rule: One, during India's two centuries of slavery, the British Parliament

took on the shameful role of a policeman of imperialism. The Magna Carta was adopted in 1215 and the Bill of Rights in 1689. The British Parliament was established in 1707 and the Representation of the People Act was passed in 1918. But the waves of democratisation that occurred over the course of seven centuries did not bring about any improvement in the character of British rule in India.

Secondly, the British Empire from 1765 to 1947 was built on the basis of a) centralisation of political power, b) fragmentation of socio-cultural life, c) economic exploitation, and d) rendering the masses fearful and powerless. Therefore, Swaraj or self-governance in India means that the system of the country should be free from at least these four defects.

Thirdly, by adopting a colonial landownership policy, pedagogy and linguistics from 1835 onwards, to play the role of a midwife to British supremacy, the British regime created an indoctrinated group that was completely dependent on the regime and was an ardent supporter of the Westernisation of India. During the period of

foreign rule, the village was dominated by the city and both village and town were dominated by the native supporters of British rule (nawabs, kings, zamindars, government servants, persons serving in the British army, agents of British companies, lawyers, etc.). A luxury-enjoying class had emerged in the cities due to income from agriculture. Priority was given to foreign companies over indigenous cottage industries. There was more profit in the business of imported goods from the West.

While there was dominance of the ruling class, the marginalised segments had to suffer exclusion. The illiterate counted for nothing as against degree-holders of the Western education system. The processes of indigenous endeavour were powerless against the onslaught of Westernisation. The proclivities of casteism and communalism were encouraged by the policy of 'Divide and Rule' of the British Raj. Despite humongous paperwork, from the proposals of Lord Ripon in 1888 to the expansion of opportunities for self-government through the Government of India Act of 1935, the spirit of the British Raj resided in the unbridled centralisation

of power in the hands of the Viceroy and the British monarch. Thus, the end of the domination of this class over the country was impossible without the creation of a participatory democracy through decentralisation of state power.

Introspection was the biggest internal front encouraged by social reformers since the nineteenth century with respect to tradition and change in the context of women, untouchability, religious identity, cultural heritage and self-respect in Indian society. But foreign rule shackled our abilities and we fell behind the rest of the world in the process of self-development. As a result of foreign rule, India remained marginalised during the Industrial Revolution involving the power loom (1785) and the steam engine (1789). The country's industrialisation was blocked until the end of the First World War. India being a colony of Britain had lost the opportunity of democratic reforms starting with the French Revolution (1789). That is why, despite the growing light of knowledge and science in the world, India remained trapped in the darkness of foreign rule.

When the British left India in 1947, most men and women in the country were trapped between the twin of illiteracy and poverty. Of a total population of 350 million, 80 per cent men and women lived in villages and 60 million in cities. The estimated life span of an average Indian was only 32 years. From the point of view of religious identity, it was definitely a multi-religious society as the total population of the country was 84 per cent Hindu, 9.8 percent Muslim, 2.3

While there was dominance of the ruling class, the marginalised segments had to suffer exclusion. The illiterate counted for nothing as against degree-holders of the Western education system. The processes of indigenous endeavour were powerless against the onslaught of Westernisation. The proclivities of casteism and communalism were encouraged by the policy of 'Divide and Rule' of the British Raj. Despite humongous paperwork, from the proposals of Lord Ripon in 1888 to the expansion of opportunities for self-government through the Government of India Act of 1935

per cent Christian, 1.9 per cent Sikh, 0.7 per cent Buddhist, 0.46 per cent Jain and 0.43 percent nature worshippers, and men and women belonging to other faith groups. Yet the success of the Muslim League in carving out a separate nation of Pakistan for the Muslims had become a cause of communal mistrust and violence throughout the country.

On the other hand, even after two hundred years of British rule, 77 per cent men and 89 per cent women across the country suffered from illiteracy. Only 33 per cent of the total cultivable land (268 crore acres) was under cultivation and the country faced severe food shortage. Kashmir was attacked with Pakistan's help. Many large princely states and nawabs were in the endeavour of forging a separate existence with the help of imperial Britain instead of merging with the Union of India. In such an environment and milieu, there was no other way for the interests of the country other than democratic nation building with the maximum participation of the largest number of people.

The Discourse of Gandhi-Lohia-JP for Swaraj (Self-Governance)

The challenge of taking the luminance of self-governance to every village and every individual presented several likely solutions to the policymakers of the country. In this regards, the problem of priority between *azadi* (the various rights under freedom) and *roti* (hunger and unemployment) was at the top. The issue of centralisation versus decentralisation in policymaking, planning and management was also extremely complex. It was

The challenge of taking the luminance of self-governance to every village and every individual presented several likely solutions to the policymakers of the country. In this regards, the problem of priority between *azadi* (the various rights under freedom) and *roti* (hunger and unemployment) was at the top. The issue of centralisation versus decentralisation in policymaking, planning and management was also extremely complex. It was known to all that the capitalist way of "freedom first" had been adopted by the colonial countries of Europe

known to all that the capitalist way of "freedom first" had been adopted by the colonial countries of Europe. The policymakers of these countries did not face any dilemma in colonising other countries to promote the interests of their citizens. They had the fig leaf of 'nationalism'. After the Russian and Chinese revolutions, totalitarianism spread in the Third World from Cairo (Egypt) to Jakarta (Indonesia) in the name of the communist route of 'democratic centralisation'. These countries inspired by the immediate successes of Russia and China. Owing to the exigencies of the Cold War, the Soviet Union and Communist China also supported tendencies of civil war and authoritarian forces in those countries that had been the victims of Western colonialism. But both of these methods had the problem of incompleteness of independence. The issue of political versus economic rights had arisen now.

Unlike these two, socialists emphasised recognising the challenge of maintaining national independence and unity amidst the reality of low capital, cultural diversity and dense population in newly independent countries. Without bringing

about a combination of equality and prosperity, both goals would remain half-fulfilled. Then under the pretext of justice and order, the democratic rights of the common man would come under attack. It is the unity of the nation that would be threatened by the ruling classes, dominant communities and segments preponderant in Westernization and limited resources.

In other words, to impart meaning to self-governance, a constant dovetailing between 1) National unity 2) Inclusive democracy 3) Equitable non-violence 4) Dynamic decentralisation and 5) Equity to the extent possible was considered essential. In this context, Dr. Ramnohar Lohia put forward to the country between 1951 and 1962, an exposition of adopting a socialist direction based on "economic and political decentralisation for the planned eradication of poverty and slavery" through policy-statements and two election manifestos¹¹. The Socialists also published a Hindi weekly *Chowkhambha* in the 60s to lay emphasis on this plan of action. According to political analysts, the theory of the "Chowkhamba Governance System" is a unique

contribution of Dr. Lohia to modern political thought and democratic discourse¹².

Historically, the resolve of Swaraj or self-rule is linked to Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak because it was Tilak who first proclaimed in 1916, at the founding ceremony of the Home Rule League that “Swaraj is our birthright and we shall have it”. It is noteworthy that Acharya Narendra Dev, a pioneer of the Congress Socialist Party, was a follower of Lokmanya Tilak. In the course of this strain of thought and ideology, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das and Bharat Ratna Dr. Bhagwan Das too in 1923 provided the basis for a nationwide discourse by presenting an outline of Swaraj¹³. As a teacher in the Kashi Vidyapeeth (Varanasi), Acharya Narendra Dev was a close associate of Dr. Bhagwandas and the precincts of Kashi Vidyapeeth were the foundation of the Congress Socialist Party.

Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Bose founded the India Independence League in 1929 to make “*Purna Swaraj*” (total freedom) the goal of the Congress and Narendra Dev was

their associate. It was through the efforts of this forum that the resolution of ‘*Purna Swaraj*’ was accepted at the Lahore session of the Congress held in December 1929. Thanks to the efforts of Acharya Narendra Dev and Dr. Lohia, the Congress Socialist Party too declared ‘*Purna Swaraj*’ for India as its goal in its objectives adopted at Patna in 1934.

Gandhi wrote in *Young India* in 1931 saying, “Swaraj is a sacred word; it is a Vedic word meaning self-rule and self-restraint. The English word ‘independence’ often refers to unfettered freedom or freedom free of all limitations; such a meaning is not in the word Swaraj”.¹⁴ “In the Swaraj of our dreams, there can be no place for distinctions of race or religion. It will not be a monopoly of the educated or the rich—it will be for the welfare of all. Farmers of course are included among all, but so will be lame, blind and the lakhs and crores of toiling labourers who suffer from hunger and perish of starvation”.¹⁵ Gandhi also said, “By Swaraj, I mean the governing of India according to the consent of its people”.¹⁶

Gandhi warned, “Twenty people sitting at the centre cannot run a true democracy. It should be run from below by the people of each village”.¹⁷ ‘Gram Swaraj’ was the name Gandhi gave to this ideal.

The followers of the Gandhian path found guidance from Acharya Vinoba Bhave’s *Swarajya Shastra* in defining this ideal¹⁸. Vinoba had emphasised the need for a provincial, national and global order constructed on the basis of autonomous villages built with the cooperation of inhabitants of villages in the creation of a self-reliant nonviolent and faultless system of governance pertaining to humans. In 1949, *Gandhi Chintan* was published by Srimannarayana as an outline of the Gandhian constitution¹⁹.

Going along this path, Jayaprakash Narayan presented a plan of “reconstruction of the Indian polity” in the light of the bittersweet experiences of the first decade of the Indian Constitution drafted for the establishment of parliamentary democracy in 1959. J.P. pointed out that the Western polity is opposed to both the social nature of humankind and the scientific organisation of society. The most serious drawback of parliamentary democracy as established in the West is its natural tendency towards centralisation. A natural consequence of the centralisation of power and administration is the dependence on bureaucracy. It is difficult to resist the autocracy of this machinery of bureaucracy. At one end is the national state and at the other end is the individual voter, with nothing in the middle. The brick of which the polity of the current democracy is built is

Going along this path, Jayaprakash Narayan presented a plan of “reconstruction of the Indian polity” in the light of the bittersweet experiences of the first decade of the Indian Constitution drafted for the establishment of parliamentary democracy in 1959. J.P. pointed out that the Western polity is opposed to both the social nature of humankind and the scientific organisation of society. The most serious drawback of parliamentary democracy as established in the West is its natural tendency towards centralisation. A natural consequence of the centralisation of power and administration is the dependence on bureaucracy

the individual voter. The entire process of democracy is based on the arithmetic of votes and the individual voter votes as an atom of society. In this, the lonely voter becomes despondent and helpless. This is so, because power is wielded by the balance of clout between political parties, industrialists, bankers, powerful trade unions and other well-organised interest groups. No symbiosis is manifest in the institutions and processes of democracy; whereas, the relation of human beings to society is like that of living cells to a living body.

Jayaprakash Narayan believed that Gandhi had declared parliamentary democracy a failure long ago²⁰. The alternative plans indicated by him were far more relevant to the India's traditions, to the real nature of man and to human society. This is because community, self-development and self-regulation of community life were the distinctive features of ancient Indian polity. The search for the right form of polity is only a part of the larger problem of social reconstruction, as man is alone and cut off from others. The fundamental challenge is social integration and the rebuilding of human communities. The present Indian villages are not proper communities. They were such communities once upon a time but caste, class, lineage, religion and politics divide them. In a true community there is kinship born of interaction and in it there is cooperation and companionship. There is commonality of interests and a sense of unity in diversity. In the countries of the West, such communities can be difficult to form due to the intensity and

Jayaprakash Narayan believed that Gandhi had declared parliamentary democracy a failure long ago.

The alternative plans indicated by him were far more relevant to the India's traditions, to the real nature of man and to human society. This is because community, self-development and self-regulation of community life were the distinctive features of ancient Indian polity. The search for the right form of polity is only a part of the larger problem of social reconstruction, as man is alone and cut off from others

prevalence of industrialisation and urbanisation. But we, the people of India and many other countries of Asia are in a very favourable position to initiate such an undertaking. The society of our visualisation will not be divided into 'urban' and 'rural' but will be a community society. Due to the progress of science, the dividing line between town and village has become a false one. It is only a communitarian polity that can be the guarantee of participatory democracy, which is our ideal and should be the ideal of all democrats. Therefore, we should today find ways and means through which more and more people can have maximum self-government. Because it is the extent to which democracy becomes participatory in the true sense, that the flood of authoritarianism can be halted.

It must be borne in mind that in the analysis of Jayaprakash Narayan, there is a need to move towards partyless democracy as a solution to the increasing contamination of opportunistic leadership, character assassination of opponents and money power, etc., which have sprouted in the electoral apparatus due to power competition inherent in the multi-party system. The need

for this has been emphasised. This conclusion dovetails with Mahatma Gandhi's suggestion of the dissolution of the Congress to eschew the scramble for power that began after Independence, and the establishment of a Lok Sevak Sangh (people's welfare organisation) as a tool for character- and nation-building through constructive work and satyagraha, staying aloof from the tussle for power. This outcome was also influenced by M.N. Roy's perceived need to make the multi-party system unimportant through people's committees, following his disillusionment with Marxism. But in Dr. Lohia's thinking, in order to address the defects of multi-party system and democratic elections— 1) The establishment of a public interest party through the closeness of all nationally oriented progressive organisations 2) Programme-based joint front campaigns 3) Creation of several one-point forums, and 4) Incessant satyagraha was given priority for the eradication of injustices.

The Constitution of India and Participation

It is true that in this regard, the Congress as the broadest platform of the national movement on the axis of the principle of 'unity in

diversity' made a) multilingual and multi-religious nationalism, and b) the belief in fundamental civil rights as the basis of the decisive struggle for freedom. Along with this, to solve the economic, political, social and cultural questions of the country, 1) Freedom 2) Sovereignty 3) National unity and integrity, and 4) The modern nation-state built on the four pillars of parliamentary democracy was stated as the greatest need. This identified the dual need for nation-building on the basis of a) democracy and b) citizenship-building on the basis of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity.

Despite its partial and incomplete mandate²¹ and highly imbalanced structure²² this direction has been described in a very attractive way in clear words by the Constituent Assembly of India in 1949, in the first page of the Constitution itself, in the form of the 'Preamble' adopted by the Assembly:

"We the People of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic and to secure to all its citizens: Justice, social, economic and political; Liberty of thought, expression, belief

faith and worship; Equality of status and of opportunity and to promote among them all; Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation; give to ourselves this Constitution". This direction has been recognised as the Directive Principles of the Indian state.

But this Constitution has been lacking the necessary commitment to participatory democracy and people's participation. It has been hesitant to proceed from the central and state government down to the Zilla Parishad, municipality and village panchayat for the decentralisation of power. Despite the constitutional amendments made in this direction, there is no fragrance and energy of democracy in the power setup below the centre and states. Instead of a progression of men and women who are confidently engaged in nation-building, it is the helpless common people, who have to beg the unrestrained power-wielding satraps and bureaucracy, who are the ultimate truth of our democracy so far. This constitution has not given any other responsibility to the people of the country other than the right to vote as citizens. Democratic rights would be the right to

recall public representatives, the restraint of responsibility upon the parties with respect to their manifestos, the demand for transparency and accountability in the functioning of the individuals holding constitutional posts, etc. This is blamed on the lack of quality in education, health and livelihood. Therefore, despite the change of governments, the fact of continuity of neglect towards resource augmentation on these important fronts continues to expose the limited significance of our Swaraj. For Dr. Lohia, this did not mean that we should agitate for a new Constituent Assembly to make participatory democracy possible, while rejecting the existing Constitution. He was in favour of reforming the Constitution to realise the dreams of the national movement for the ideals of freedom, justice, equality, universalism, democracy and universal brotherhood.

The plan of Chaukhamba Raj means participatory nation-building

On the basis of this detailed background, it would be appropriate to state who Dr. Lohia was, who called for participatory nation building, spreading the light of Swaraj and democracy in Indian society and polity by creating a Chaukhamba Raj. Through this information it will be easy to understand the context, key points and relevance of Dr. Lohia's plan of Chaukhamba Raj.

Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, the proponent of the plan of Chaukhamba Raj, was the leading protagonist and theorist of the Indian socialist movement. Born in a middle-class business family, Dr. Lohia had the

We the People of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic and to secure to all its citizens: Justice, social, economic and political; Liberty of thought, expression, belief faith and worship; Equality of status and of opportunity and to promote among them all; Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation; give to ourselves this Constitution". This direction has been recognised as the Directive Principles of the Indian state

privilege of being educated in Faizabad, Bombay, Varanasi, Calcutta and Berlin. His mother Chandravati passed away in his childhood and father Hiralal quit his family business under Gandhi's influence from 1921 and joined the constructive side of the Non-Cooperation Movement. He also went to jail for the Salt Satyagraha of 1930. Hiralal used to take Ram Manohar to Congress sessions in his childhood. It was natural for Ram Manohar to jump into the national movement after completing his education by 1933. He displayed indomitable courage in the Quit India movement of 1942 and carried forward the freedom struggle through 'Congress Radio' from Bombay and Calcutta.

Dr. Lohia had earlier been arrested by the British regime in 1939 and 1940 as an activist of the freedom movement. After his release from British captivity in 1946, he undertook satyagraha twice in June and September 1946 as well to light the torch of Goa's independence from Portuguese rule. Lohia was imprisoned in Delhi a few months after India's independence for leading a demonstration in support of the movement for the abolition of the monarchy in Nepal. Between the years 1948 and 1966, he undertook satyagraha on the issues of farmers and youth and the people of Manipur and Nagaland. He was arrested in 1964 as well, for his opposition to apartheid in America. Dr. Lohia was the most vocal leader of the Opposition during Nehru's tenure, and was imprisoned many times even after independence.

Dr. Lohia's ideas can be summed up in the tri-confluence of a) the philosophy of duty amid

Dr. Lohia had earlier been arrested by the British regime in 1939 and 1940 as an activist of the freedom movement. After his release from British captivity in 1946, he undertook satyagraha twice in June and September 1946 as well to light the torch of Goa's independence from Portuguese rule. Lohia was imprisoned in Delhi a few months after India's independence for leading a demonstration in support of the movement for the abolition of the monarchy in Nepal

despair, b) the theory of the wheel of history, and c) the programmes of the seven revolutions. Lohia gave revolutionary programmes like limit on expenditure, fixed prices, breaking caste, equality between men and women, advocating removal of English, an Indo-Pak federation, save Himalayas, Saptakranti (the seven revolutions) and a world government. He held Draupadi to be the ideal Indian woman and Gandhi the guide for the path of the future of the world. Lohia termed Ghazni, Ghori and Babur as foreign raiders and looters and Razia, Raskhan, Jayasee and Sher Shah the ancestors of all countrymen. His prayer was "O Mother India! Grant us the dignity of Rama, the free spirit of Krishna and the mind of Shiva".

Dr. Lohia is remembered as a great leader of satyagrahi socialism as well as a successful originator of the politics of non-Congressism. Freedom, democracy, satyagraha, nationalism, universal brotherhood and socialism were his chief concerns. But he was against promises centered on individuals. That is why he stressed the need to stay away from camps like Marxist, anti-Marx, Gandhian or anti-Gandhi.

For an estimate of the breadth of his thinking, the mention of *Ram Manohar Lohia Rachnavali*

(The Works of Ram Manohar Lohia) available in 9 volumes and *Lok Sabha mein Lohia* published in 16 volumes would not be out of place. Among Lohia's works, *Marx, Gandhi and Socialism, Itihas Chakra, Jati Pratha, Bhasha, Interval During Politics, and Bharat, Cheen aur Uttari Seemaen* are considered classic works. Born on March 23, 1910 in Akbarpur (Faizabad), Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia passed away on October 12, 1967 in New Delhi at the age of 57.

The basic objective of Dr. Lohia's plan of Chaukhamba Raj was to pave the way for participatory nation-building in newly independent India. It was a combination of political power, economic capability, technological reform, local resources and the responsibility of the common man. It was also considered a way to make democracy inclusive and to involve every resident of the country in the process of building citizenry. In the period from 1951 to 1962, he repeatedly presented this idea to the country as an important part of socialist pamphlets (1951 and 1957) and two election manifestos of the Socialist Party (1957 and 1962). Studying all these together, it is clear that there were mainly seven dimensions of the Chaukhamba

Raj plan presented by Dr. Lohia:

1. One-fourth of the entire government revenue of the country should be given to the village, town and district panchayats and 1/4th of the expenditure related to the scheme should be effected through the village, town and district panchayats.
2. The police system should be operated under the supervision of their committees under the village, town and district panchayat.
3. By abolishing the post of Collector (District Magistrate) in the district, his responsibilities should be assigned to various committees of the district. It is also essential that as much emphasis as possible should be laid on increasing the practice of election in the administration and reducing that of nomination and arbitrary appointment.
4. The ownership of agriculture, industry and all other nationalized assets should be entrusted to the village, town and district panchayat to the extent possible.
5. The task of economic,

political and administrative decentralisation should be accomplished with the maximum use possible of smaller machines.

6. As a local unit of government, the village, town and district panchayat should be empowered to make laws and plan on subjects formally allotted to them.
7. The members of village, town and district panchayat must get the right to vote in the election to the President of the country.

In this plan, the basic elements of socialist polity suitable for India have been presented. It has been designed as completely distinct from the communist power setup of the (former) Soviet Union and the capitalist market system of the US. It is clear that the Chaukhamba Raj plan requires that the criteria of immediacy and participation be made the basis for the rapid transmission of the luminance of Swaraj and democracy from the Centre and the state to the district, town and village. A four-storeyed structure of state power should be created with a view to facilitate the mutually interconnected contribution of

public representatives elected through adult suffrage, from the national parliament to the village panchayat, for the smooth functioning of the country. This four-tier state has to handle the responsibility of production, ownership, administration, planning, education, etc. Its technical management would be operated with the technology of small machines.

The proposal of Chaukhamba Raj contains directions for democratisation of the economic, political and administrative spheres through political and economic decentralisation. Identifying the complicity of the political leadership, the masters of economic power, and administrative officials as the most potent enemy of democracy and national interest, it undertook to neutralise it through this proposed new polity structure. In this plan, pressure was to be built for the administrative system to become oriented towards public interest without any delay. There was an emphasis on the possibility of mutual cooperation and maximum equality between every Indian man and woman, rising above caste discrimination, class distinctions and religion. In other words, Dr. Lohia's Chaukhamba Raj plan offers a cohesive solution to the vexed issues of regionalism, separatism, authoritarianism, bureaucracy, and large machine-based industrialisation for a newly independent India.

There was a well thought out plan to develop village-oriented democracy in the proposal of Chaukhamba Raj. It suggested direct relationship between village panchayats and farmers, information on productivity

The proposal of Chaukhamba Raj contains directions for democratisation of the economic, political and administrative spheres through political and economic decentralisation. Identifying the complicity of the political leadership, the masters of economic power, and administrative officials as the most potent enemy of democracy and national interest, it undertook to neutralise it through this proposed new polity structure. In this plan, pressure was to be built for the administrative system to become oriented towards public interest without any delay

and resources, crop-wise farming plan, and coordination between village panchayats, the Planning Commission and Land Commission. The responsibility of collecting food grains and rent was also proposed to be assigned to the village panchayat. The panchayat had to take care of providing clean drinking water, village sanitation, and monitoring of road traffic. It was to take care of arranging for primary schools, dispensaries, natal delivery service centres and child welfare centres. The responsibility of promoting sports and cultural activities too was assigned at this level. Emphasis was laid on the active role of youth in village panchayats, especially in the implementation of rural welfare programmes. It was also suggested that the prevention of illiteracy, promotion of village industries and of cooperatives be handled over to the villages. A provision of 'Anna Sena' was envisioned for the improvement of farms and food production, and of a Bhoomi Sena for the expansion of cultivable land. The plan also had a solution to rural unemployment²³.

Even today the idea of Chaukhamba Raj is considered an important contribution to the discourse on democratic decentralisation. But Dr. Lohia believed that the establishment of Chaukhamba Raj would lead not only to decentralisation of power but also to many other beneficial results for our newly independent nation:

1. Unity in diversity will be strengthened. Each local community will ultimately contribute to the alleviation of the country's plight by implementing various small

The responsibility of promoting sports and cultural activities too was assigned at this level. Emphasis was laid on the active role of youth in village panchayats, especially in the implementation of rural welfare programmes. It was also suggested that the prevention of illiteracy, promotion of village industries and of cooperatives be handled over to the villages. A provision of 'Anna Sena' was envisioned for the improvement of farms and food production, and of a Bhoomi Sena for the expansion of cultivable land

- schemes to meet its needs.
2. The plan will be a constructive solution to the alienation, insecurity and tension inherent in the majority-minority divide on language, religion and other grounds.
3. In spite of the conflicts and conflicts inherent in the economic inequality created by land ownership, co-operative initiatives between classes will progress.
4. There will be indegnisation (decolonisation) of state power. The need to establish the control of democracy in a lawful manner over the bureaucracy that had imposed itself from the village to the district, the state and the centre during British rule would be fulfilled.
5. By giving 1/4th of the national income to the village government and 1/4th to the district government, there will be a new infusion in the economy through establishing mutual complementarity.
6. Chaukhamba Raj will bring about technological decentralisation through small machines and will also become the basis of democratic revolution.
7. The apathy of the village-

society will be dispelled; the laziness of the ruling castes will disappear and there will be an infusion of hope among the deprived castes.

8. It is also certain that the preservation of the diverse cultural identities of different local communities in the country stricken by the trauma of the Partition of India and the promotion of democratic national unity can come about through participatory processes.
9. This scheme will also fulfill the goal of eradicating anti-people tendencies and traditions in the polity of the country related to foreign rule, through representatives elected by the vote of the common man.

Some Conclusions

At the conclusion of this essay, the question would naturally arise as to why this unique plan of participatory nation-building was not accepted. Actually, there were many inconvenient facts tied to the plan of Chaukhamba Raj, which did not make it attractive for the country. One, it called for the total democratisation of the polity, which itself was an alarm bell for those individuals, classes

and castes entrenched since long in the country's prevailing power structure. Secondly, its proponent political segment, i.e., the socialist leaders and activists of India had abstained from the elections to the Constituent Assembly in 1946 and had stood against all the foremost Congress leaders on the issue of the proposal of the Partition of India. Most Socialists, including Dr. Lohia, confronted the Congress as a separate party in the general elections of 1952, 1957 and 1962. Due to this Lohia was treated like an untouchable by the ruling Congress party and his proposals, which were entirely in the country's interests, were openly ignored. Third, the entire scenario of the problems in the path of nation-building adopted by the Congress leadership came to the fore only in the period between the Chinese invasion of 1962 and the split of the Congress party in 1969, respectively. But by then the tendency of self-preservation instead of decentralisation of power in the interests of the nation and its polity had taken hold of the entire political community. Instead of nation-

building through participatory democracy, importance had shifted to the governmentalisation and the centrality of individual-centric narratives. Fourth, the 'Sampoorna Kranti Andolan' (total revolution movement) that had begun through the efforts of Jayaprakash Narayan in 1974 drew the country's attention towards 1) The problems of nation building 2) The harmful consequences of the all-round domination of 'tantra' (system) over 'lok' (people) 3) The deteriorating character of the country's polity and 4) The self-debilitating malaises of democracy²⁴. But after the dark rule of the Emergency between June 1975 and March, 1977, all positive possibilities of democratic innovation had evaporated.

In parallel to this course of political development, with the help of the theoretical view of social science and the recent history of fundamental political rebuilding, it should also be borne in mind that the tendency of centralisation has been predominant in the context of state power in the political changes that have taken

place without a revolution by the people. Throughout the Nehru era, the contrived 'crisis-ism' on the part of the ruling establishment was made the pretext of deferring any and all fundamental changes. These included the assassination of Gandhi, the parting of ways of the Congress Socialist Party from the Congress, the incomplete merger of the princely states, the refugee problem, the conflict in Kashmir, agitations on the issue of languages across the country, the thumping victory of the Congress in the general elections of 1952 and 1957 and realities like the rise of status quoist tendencies in the middle class acted as a deterrent²⁵. Progress in decentralisation requires a mass movement, a consensus among the political community and a strong will in the political leadership, and all three were clearly lacking in the period between 1947 and 1967. Further, in the rebuilding of a state afresh, there has to be support from a robust constitutional system and judiciary committed to the people's interest. But in the newly independent India, both these factors were not present at all. ●

References:

1. See Lohia, Ramnohar (1963) *Marx, Gandhi and Socialism* (Hyderabad, Navhind Publications)
2. See; Abraham Lincoln (1809–65); 16th President of the United States of America (1861–65). Lincoln was a proponent of democracy and a strong opponent of slavery.
3. Harold Laski (1893–1950) British thinker, Professor of the London School of Economics and President of the British Labor Party; author of *Grammar of Politics* (1925) and *Crisis in Democracy* (1933).
4. See Saumya Sengupta (2016) "Rammanohar Lohia: Agrarian Revolution through Village Upliftment of India", *Indian Journal of Society and Politics* 03 (02): 2016, 53-58; Ramesh Kumar (2018) "Dr. Lohia's Chauhamba Raj and Good Governance: Relevance in Present Day India" *The Discussant*, Vol. 6, Issue 4, October-December 2018; Amit Basole (2009) "The People's Movement Left and Rammanohar Lohia" *Samhati*, June 13, 2009; Mahesh Jaiswal (2021) "Kal Dhoondhenge Log Dr. Lohia Ko" *Sablog*, year 13, issue 3, March 2021, 17-19; Anand Kumar (2021) "Lohia ki Prasangikta" *Sablog*, year 13, issue 3, March 2021, pgs 23-26
5. See, Gandhiji (1960) *Mere Sapnon ka Bharat* (Ahmedabad, Bavjivan Prakashan) and Jayprakash Narayan (1959) *Bharatiya Rajya-Vyavastha ka Punarnirman* (Varanasi, Sarva Sewa Sangh).
6. See Jayprakash Narayan (1959)

- Bharatiya Rajya-Vyavastha ka Punarnirman* (Ajit Bhattacharya /Arvind Mohan, 2006); *JP ek Jeevani* (Bikaner, Vagdevi Prakashan) Pgs 243-244
7. Mathew, George (2013) "Panchayat Raj or Collector Raj?", *Times of India* April 15, 2013
 8. Lohia, Ram Manohar (1951) *We Build for Socialism* (Bombay, Socialist Party); Choudhary, Chitra (1993) *Ram Manohar Lohia and the Indian Socialist Thought* (New Delhi, Minerva Publications); Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya (2012) *Salient Ideas of Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia* (Delhi, Anamika Publications); K. Gopinathan Pillai (1994) *Political Philosophy of Ram Manohar Lohia* (New Delhi, Deep and Deep Publications); Suhail Javed (1996) *Socialism in India* (New Delhi, Radiant Publishers)
 9. In this context, the example of the trial in Britain regarding the tenure (1774–1785) of Warren Hastings (1732–1818), a governor general of the East India Company, is relevant.
 10. See; Naoroji, Dadabhai (1876) *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (New Delhi, Publications Division); Sunderlal (2018) *Bharat mein Angreji Raj* (New Delhi, Prabhat Prakashan).
 11. See; Mastram Kapoor (ed.) (2010) *Ram Manohar Lohia Rachnavali* 9 Volumes (Delhi, Anamika Publications)
 12. See V.R. Mehta (1992) *Foundations of Indian Political Thought* (New Delhi, Manohar); Rajaram Tolpadi (2010) "Context, Discourse and Vision of Lohia's Socialism", *Economic and Political Weekly*; October 2, Vol. XLV, Volume 40, pages 71-77; Sanjay Kumar (2011) *Lohia: Democracy*, M. P. Singh and Himanshu Roy (ed.) *Indian Political Thought—Themes and Thinkers* (New Delhi, Pearson) pages 240-260
 13. Das, C. R. and Dr. Bhagwandas (1923/1973) *An Outline Scheme of Swaraj* (Calcutta, Publications and Publicity Department, Government of West Bengal)
 14. *Young India*, 19.3.31
 15. *Young India*, 26.3.31
 16. *Navjivan*, 29.1.25
 17. *Harijan*, 18.1.48
 18. Vinoba (1942; 2000 Fifth Edition) *Swarajya Shastra* (Varanasi, Sarva Seva Sangh Publications) pages 23-46
 19. Srimannarayana (1946) *Gandhian Constitution for Free India* (Allahabad, Kitabistan)
 20. See Gandhi, M.K. The perspective presented by Gandhi on the problems of parliamentary democracy in his well known book *Hind Swaraj* (1909).
 21. The creation of the electoral college of the members of the Constituent Assembly of India was not based on adult suffrage. Due to the mandatory conditions for education and property, only 15 per cent of the total population, men and women, had the right to vote.
 22. The Constituent Assembly of India had a total of 389 members, of which 292 members were elected from the Legislative Assembly of the territories of British India and 93 members were nominated from the princely states of India. These Legislative Assemblies were elected by the electoral college made up of limited suffrage granted on the terms of property and higher education. With this, only 15 per cent of men and women of the adult population of the country were given the right to vote. In the elections to the Constituent Assembly, 208 candidates from the Congress and 73 from the Muslim League were elected. Members of the Muslim League boycotted the Constituent Assembly in favour of the demand for Pakistan. The Congress Socialist Party and some other groups distanced themselves from the election of the Constituent Assembly's members due to non-conduct of elections to the Assembly on adult suffrage. On August 14, '47, after the Partition of India, re-elections were held for the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan. The Constitution of India was made by 299 members elected from the territories that were part of India. It also included 5 members of the Scheduled Tribes, 28 Muslims and 15 women.
 23. These points have been identified in Ram Manohar Lohia's *We Build for Socialism* (1951), *Fragments of a World Mind* (1951) and *Bargad Ki Baat* (1957), etc. A compilation of relevant booklets and other publications in this regard is available in the Nehru Memorial Library (New Delhi).
 24. Narayan, Jayaprakash (1973) *Aamne-Saamne* (Varanasi, Sarva Seva Sangh)
 25. Lohia, Ram Manohar (1966) *Azad Hindustan ke Naye Rujhaan* (Hyderabad, Navhind Publications); *Revolution Arrested* (Mankind; July-August, 1966).

Complete democracy means the establishment of Panchayati Raj—Dr. Lohia



What are we fighting for? ...Basically, our aim is to create a new Goa, where every Goan is a worthy and happy citizen, ready to live and die for the dignity of complete democracy and a free and united India...

What is complete democracy? For Goa, this means that five lakh people should actually be five lakh. Each of you must be proactive and intelligently prepared for self-government. The whole of India is striving for such a democracy.

Education or wealth is not a qualification for a democracy. The true merit of an individual is the willingness to live and

die for democracy. Sometimes, poor and illiterate people are better for democracy because they see its need in their daily life and are ready to acquire it or die trying.

Democracy means the end of foreign rule. It means the creation of Panchayati Raj. But it means much more than that—the creation of a democratic state of mind in which everyone is the king. In this world of immense national power, no Brahmin or rich man can be king unless the farmer or fisherman is the same king at the same time. One has to work hard to become a king. It does not come to you as a gift from above.

We should not get confused between ability and learning ability under the full democracy we are trying to build in Goa. Every Goan, young or old, learned or illiterate, has the same potential for democracy as he has the capacity to act and suffer.

I have presented before your political workers two programmes of Satyagraha and Gram Panchayat.

The Satyagraha programme—

Mass resistance (two hundred blockades a week); Kisan Morcha (rural front for non-payment of tax and rent; groups from villages to march towards the city); Demonstrations in towns to abolish customs duties on rice and other food items; Women's demonstrations at liquor shops; boycott of scouts' parade by student groups and mass contact visits in villages; campaign against stamp revenue and lottery; cultural activities such as speeches, slogans, songs, one-act plays, etc., on rural problems and struggles in the villages by the publicity units. (Ed. — this is a summary of the original text).

Gram Panchayat—

The Panchayat will be constituted based on the declaration of the following resolution:

"We the villagers have independently decided that inspired by the principle of village raj, we shall form our own panchayat. We will settle our disputes amongst ourselves and will not go to court. We also decide not to use stamp paper. We will also refuse to pay rent and tax during the harvest season whenever we are advised by the National Congress, Goa. In the meantime

we pledge our support to the Satyagraha campaign and decide to participate in it. For these purposes, we decide to elect our Executive Board. We also decide to form a volunteer squad of all able-bodied men and invite women to join its women's wing. We will also work against alcoholism."

Care should be taken to include all castes and sections of the population in the election of the Executive. Satyagrahis should be recruited in batches of five from the village Seva Dal and should be sent to the Satyagraha campaign of Mahal (city).

Teams of five resolute men should be formed who would be willing to endure all the risks and implement all orders. The leader of such groups should be selected on the basis of their ability to lead the village in times of crisis.

Arrangements should be made in the Panchayats to immediately select two villages in each of the border towns of Pernem, Satari, Quepem, Sangam and Cancona for the non-profit sale of food items. Distribution should be done on the basis fixed and uniform ration.

With these programmes your political workers will help you organise various sections and unions, railway workers, motorists, farmers, students, fishermen and other groups. Since these unions cannot operate very openly, you have to build a broad unity. All of you should act fast, being tolerant of each other. If you carry out these various programmes in the next two to three months, a situation will arise that through the weapon of general strike you can force the Portuguese regime to accept your independence or leave Goa.

(Source: Goa Mein Kranti—Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia (Originally 1946; 2021)
(Gwalior, ITM Publications, ITM University) 19-36



Prem Prakash

People, Tradition and JP's suggestions for Decentralised Structure of Democracy

In the modern history of India, Loknayak Jayaprakash Narayan stands at an epoch-making crossroads. He is witness to the culmination of the real energy of Swaraj, which was achieved after a long struggle, and its descent upon public life. A view on his suggestions about decentralisation of power

It is desirable to clarify some points before discussing Jaiprakash Narayan's concerns about Indian polity and its decentralisation. This need for clarification does not take us far. This distance is very less or say it is non-existent. The understanding of *Gram-Swaraj* or decentralisation of the power-structure which was given by Gandhi, was carried forward with relevant and practical needs by others. JP's importance is greater because he was also associated with a point of time in Gandhi's experiment, where Vinoba stands with his experiments of *Bhoodan* and *Gramdaan*.

Anyway, let us talk about the clarity with which we can proceed with, and reach a solution providing destination using our conscience. The extent of discussion all over the world about the government and its ruling-order brings to the front a form of power where power and rights are centralized and highly effective. The era of colonization in world history has deepened the understanding of this model of governance. This depth has increased instead of getting shallower and is before us as a post-colonization structure. Ashish Nandy in his book 'The Intimate Enemy' talks about this with deep logical

understanding. It is important to understand here that even in the struggles against colonisation, the opposition to this centralized power structure was either weak or non-existing. One who overcomes this shortcoming is Mahatma Gandhi. In *Hind Swaraj* he puts light on the violence and callousness of centralised power and talks about '*Gram Swaraj*' thus putting before us the blueprint of the Bharat of his dreams. He never deviated from this thought till his last breath. His experiment of *Satyagrah* was never confused about society and the decentralised power-structure. It is another matter that this resoluteness of him is underlined today as an impossible possibility by Sudhir Chandra in his book *Gandhi: An impossible Possibility*. It is said that Gandhi wants to see the complete awakening and the non-violent character of society to such an extent, which has never been possible in human history or hoping for which is impractical. This is the reason why even those who considered Gandhi's experiments as something beautiful in public life also called him Utopian and considered his thinking impractical.

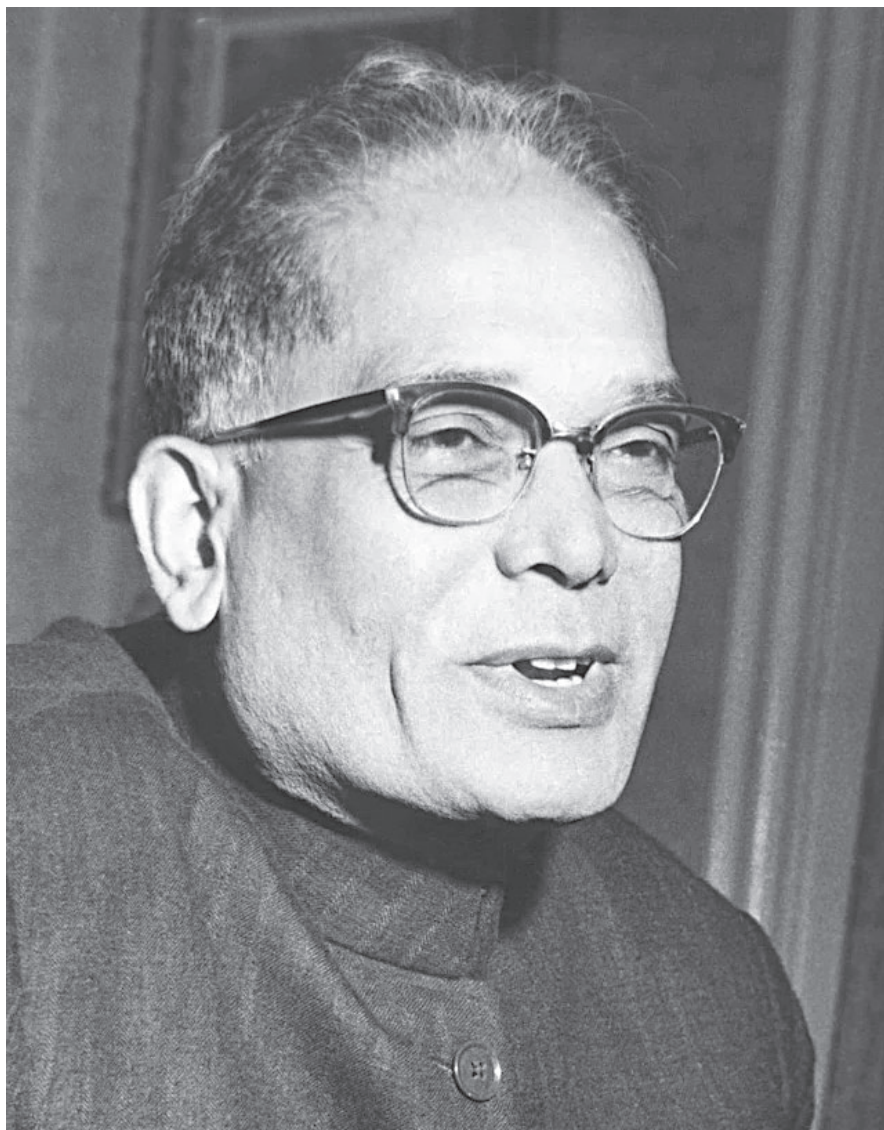
Emily Casper, a social neurologist

at the Netherlands Institute of Neurosciences has done an interesting research. Casper wanted to learn whether people decide to oppose the powers without fear or are they burdened with some kind of fear while doing this. The results of the research showed that natural psychology of being in agreement with the powers unknowingly has increased in recent times. Describing the results of her research Casper says that without proper guidance and awareness, people avoid taking their disagreement with the powers to open opposition. If we associate

the results of Casper's research with conditions prevailing in India today, a new basis of discussion could emerge.¹

The essence of what Casper says brings us to the relevance of Gandhi's and JP's understanding of polity, where the danger of centralised power being extremely powerful can damage the entire democratic system and its basic concepts, and in the current experience it is actually doing so. How the political leadership can become chaotic and individualistic in the unilateral and centralised structure of power is being felt today all over

the globe. It is interesting that JP had underlined this danger in 1959 when this threat was not so big. And, no big and basic understanding of such a danger was visible at that time. The suggestions which JP put forward before the world six decades ago regarding the shortcomings in the structure of Indian polity in his 'A Plea for Reconstruction of Indian Polity' may today be considered a historic document which remains standing between Gandhi's non-violence and struggle with dignity and commitment. Later JP's suggestions were released in a book form by Bharat Sarv Sewa Sangh Prakshan and the book in Hindi was named *Bhartiya Rajya-vyavastha ki Punarrachana ka ek Sujhav*. In its foreword, the first basic thing which JP says is about the election process. If someone wants to see the continuity of Jayaprakash's thoughts on History's larger horizon then we find that JP talks about the shortcomings in the election process in Indian Democracy during the Bihar Revolution too where he underlines the democratic need of the 'Right to Recall'. JP writes, "The first thing which I want to emphasize is that the question which is present before us cannot be limited to a developed election process as compared to the current election system. The topic before us is quite broader and extensive-and which is that in today's times which is the most appropriate system of governance or polity for us? The other thing to be kept in mind is that whatever may be the form of polity, it cannot be established from zero. As its objective is the benefit of society so it should be according to that only."²



It is clear that he was not concerned about a superficial reform of polity which could be fulfilled with a reformative decision regarding votes and the voting process. People from different schools of thoughts have been raising such demands in the country time and again. JP's basic concerns are deeper, on which he talks with conscience and logic. His further words on this issue are, "The suggestions which I am putting here will incorporate the outlines of such a polity which, in my opinion, is not only the most appropriate for our country, but is also logical and conscientious."³

We have already talked about Casper's research earlier. Many people and think-tanks are saying the same things today and are creating a discourse on the worries about democracy and their solutions by their research based explanations. JP reaches this ground of worries and solution six decades ago. Not only this, he puts his point with exemplary clarity about these worries and their origins. In *Bharatiya Rajya-vyavastha ki punarrachana ka ek Sujhav* he says in its beginning only in an emphatic and blatant way, "The current Western polity is based upon the debased society where the State has been built upon an individual structure. But, this is wrong because it ignores both man's sociality and society's scientific organisation. In the ancient Indian polity, these things had been taken into consideration. It is to be observed here that JP connects his thoughts about our current democratic structure and polity with those ancient traditions about which we have been prejudiced all

I have not reflected upon this issue with a pre-decided viewpoint. Besides, I have been careful that whatever ideas I am putting here, should not be accorded the nomenclature of any 'ism'. I have even used the word 'Communitarian' reluctantly. Sometimes, such descriptive words become necessary. My brothers striving in their quest to establish a 'Sarvodaya Samaj' should not be surprised to see the word 'Sarvodaya' not being used in this writing

these years. Not going into this in detail, the one thing which must be understood specially is that JP puts his refined thoughts and understanding before us besides his suggestions. This understanding is of a *Loknayak* who had offered a lifetime for socialism, communism and *Sarvodaya* and who had bid adieu to active politics; who believed in the sharing of truth and struggle, who in the series of Gandhi's creative experiments after going far in the *Sarvodaya* stream of the *Bhoodan-Gramdaan* movements with full commitment, desires to provide a solid conclusion to his inner confusions and conflict about the country and its polity.

He writes, "I have not reflected upon this issue with a pre-decided viewpoint. Besides, I have been careful that whatever ideas I am putting here, should not be accorded the nomenclature of any 'ism'. I have even used the word 'Communitarian' reluctantly. Sometimes, such descriptive words become necessary. My brothers striving in their quest to establish a 'Sarvodaya Samaj' should not be surprised to see the word 'Sarvodaya' not being used in this writing. But, I feel that the objective of my analysis is everyone's good."⁴

Putting his 'suggestions' properly, JP brings his concerns

to the surface regarding which we have mentioned Casper's research earlier. Here, he also questions the belief that there are inherent dangers in viewing the concept of Democracy through Western understanding and India also got afflicted by it after independence. He says about how individualistic democracy progresses to dictatorship, "It is doubtful that the people will be content to live in this situation forever. And, the way the system is being attacked by the dictatorial system, don't we feel concerned people living under a democratic system are not experiencing self-rule?"⁵

The big dissatisfaction being seen about the governments that are being formed and their democratic behavior in the entire Indian sub-continent and Europe and America will give birth to a big disenchantment and struggle. JP understood this so early on the very basis that is definitely that which creates an extreme situation in Direct Democracy or Direct rule. Further, JP says underlining HB Mayo's thoughts about Democracy, "The real form of Democratic System is that the people themselves should rule directly, should enact laws for themselves, should conduct the judicial system, and (although it is difficult), should run the

governance themselves or at least supervise it.”⁶

JP clarifies this and he refrains from putting blames regarding Democracy and wants to put some plain and practical suggestions before the country and society. He says, “With due respect towards the wise, and accepting that the ideal cannot be achieved, I beg for such a democratic system, where more and more people can rule themselves.”⁷

It is interesting that before his suggestions JP independently puts forward Gandhi’s saying where he says, “It is obvious that displaying of the true science of Democracy should be reserved for India.” During the Bihar movement, JP’s understanding based on Gandhi’s ideals was seen clearly. In the second phase of the movement, JP put forward the idea of people’s government and in about 40 regions of Bihar, Janata Governments took the first step of monitoring the local work of the government and the government offices, by which emerged the alert, active and autonomous role of the voter. This did not treat the ‘Political Sovereign’ as just a voter, but made him a medium of the local development of Democracy. An obvious responsibility came upon him. He never violated the constitution by this, but discovered a new origin of

people’s power in a Democracy.⁸

Actually, when in 1974 JP saw that the constitution was being used against Democracy, he exhorted this same ‘Political Sovereign’. It is true that the Political Sovereign is not recognized by the constitution, but it is recognized in Democracy. In India the constitution has been written in the name of the Political Sovereign only. JP’s argument was that Democracy cannot be tied between the pages of the constitution. And when the constitution itself becomes a tool for tyranny in the hands of the representatives (just as it became later during the Emergency and the people’s representatives practiced dictatorship), then it becomes the duty of the Political Sovereign to save Democracy by going beyond the constitution.⁹

He puts his understanding of polity in the form of ‘suggestions’ with his logic. Now we come back to the basis of the Indian polity. As it has been said, this basis would be self-rightenriched, self-dependent, agrarian, industrial, and local urban-rural community. The highest political body of the local community would be the ‘Gram-sabha’ and all adult citizens would be considered its members. The executive, i.e the *Panchayat* will be selected by the consent of all the members of the *Gramsabha*. No person will

be a candidate for any post. All electable postswould have clear responsibilities just like ancient times. After a fixed tenure no person would remain on any post. The Panchayat would run through various committees whose roles would be specified. There would not be any officer or any person nominated by the state in the Panchayat or any of the committees.¹⁰

The thing which is to be observed specially and conclusively regarding this, that JP puts his thoughts regarding the polity under the vision where the antiquity and traditions of the polity has been the tradition behind the construction of the Indian society. Writing the history of Hindi Literature, Acharya Ramchandra Shukla emphasises on the People and the traditions. This emphasis became so effective that these words became the seed-words of Hindi Literature and comment. JP’s logic and conclusions about the restructuring of India’s polity are also based on these two seed-words. In the foreword before the suggestions, his words are “In the second chapter, Indian polity has been described so that it may guide us in moving forward. In the third chapter, I have discussed about the rural Indian society of ancient times so that people may understand it and regard it as their guide.”¹¹

References:

1. *Vikalpheenta ke Virodh ka Vimarsh*, 28 July 2018 p. 4, Hastakshep, *Rashtriya Sahara*
2. Jayaprakash Narayan: *Bharatiya Raj-Vyavastha ki Punarrachana ka ek Sujhav*, 1959, Akhil Bhartiya Sarv-Sewa Sangh

- Prakashan, Rajghat, Kashi, p. 1.
3. *Ibid*, p.1
4. *Ibid*, p.1
5. *Ibid*, p. 2
6. *Ibid*, p.2
7. *Ibid*, p. 3
8. Acharya Rammurti: *Shiksha, Sanskriti Aur Samaaj*, 1990. Shram Bharati, Khadigram,

- Munger, Bihar, pp. 225-226
9. *Ibid*, p. 225
10. Jayaprakash Narayan: *Bharatiya Raj-Vyavastha ki Punarrachana ka ek Sujhav*, 1959, Akhil Bhartiya Sarv-Sewa Sangh Prakashan, Rajghat, Kashi, p. 76
11. *Ibid*, p. 2



Dr. Yogesh Kumar

Nehruvian Vision of Decentralisation

Gandhiji and Nehruji had their own views regarding the role of local panchayats in our political system. An overview of the way this difference of opinion affected the system

The speech of Shree Jawahar Lal Nehru in Nagaur in Rajasthan on the 2nd October, 1959 is seminal in articulating his vision of decentralisation.¹ He was speaking* on the occasion of the inauguration of democratic decentralisation program in the state of Rajasthan. Close to that time, India as a nation had undergone a serious crisis of division of two countries, mass loss of life on the one hand and handing over of a tattered economy, abject poverty, hunger and underdevelopment on the other. India gained sovereignty in such a difficult time, therefore establishing a stable democracy with a strong Union in a quasi-federal structure was pertinent and a challenging task. In the Constitution of India, State Assemblies were entrusted to design and define form and functions of local governance in state specific context.

The debates of the Constituent Assembly do indicate conflicts of the vision of India that Gandhiji envisaged of Gram Swaraj.² Self-reliance was a top priority of national leaders with the vision of robust economic growth to

address challenges of poverty, education, basic amenities, health and infrastructure etc. The emerging model of economic growth and proposed route of decentralisation in India was not getting symbiotically linked with the Gram Swaraj of Gandhiji. Moreover, Dr. Ambedkar had in some of his speeches underscored fear that societal division based on caste and class might restrict attainment of inclusive development and governance. He expressed his apprehension that the power at the Gram Panchayat will have stronghold of the local elite and upper caste undermining equal representation.³ In this duality, Gram Swaraj and local governance could not find its appropriate place in the vision of modern India of Nehruji.

In Nagore, Rajasthan Nehruji addressed elected representative of Panchayati Raj⁴ on the occasion of inauguration of democratic decentralisation program of the Rajasthan Government after establishment of local government.⁴ This speech is pertinent to understand his perspective and

*The speech available was the English translation. Therefore, the speech is quoted from the available text in English.

⁴The first elections under the Rajasthan Panchayat Samitis and Zilla Parishads Act, 1959 were held in September-October 1959. With the already existing Panchayats at the village level under the Rajasthan Panchayat Act, 1953, the three-tier scheme of Panchayati Raj began functioning on 2 October 1959

vision of local governance. He called it a historic moment and mentioned that Gandhi ji would have been the happiest person on establishment of local government in Rajasthan. He reiterated that the Government of Rajasthan has handed over responsibilities to the people and people of Rajasthan have pledged to take 'responsibility of democracy'. This showed his belief in people to manage their affairs at the grassroots.

The speech later articulates vision of Bharat Mata to address the apprehensions of decentralisation that may lead to political autonomy and anarchy. "Mother India means you, me and all of us together being part of this country". Addressing poverty was so paramount

in the country due to heavy dependence on the USA's Public Law-480 to provide wheat grain to India in large quantities to feed the food deprived nation. It needs to be mentioned that 90% of the food that the government distributed through the Public Distribution System (PDS) between 1956 to 1960 came from imports and remained as high as 75% even during the period of 1961 to 1965. At that point, India had less than half the food needed to provide a basic subsidised ration to the poorest 25% of the population. The dependence for food security on USA was bothering all the policy makers and political leaders. Therefore, he said, "We are trying to dress our Mother India up in new attire. Mother

India's old dress has become ragged because of her poverty. Now we want Mother India to wear new clothing and live in a beautiful house. We want all of our country's life necessities to be fulfilled. We want that our countrymen get food to eat and accommodations to live. We want these things not as charity, but rather want to achieve it by our own efforts". The seeds of green revolution however were sown during the Prime Ministership of Lal Bahadur Shastri that began in 1967-68 and coincided with the Second Five Year Plan.⁵

The model of decentralized governance therefore in the mind of Nehru was blended with economic progress as well as empowerment. He emphasised



that the work of Panchayats should be differentiated with the work of Co-operatives that were going to co-exist. The vision of Panchayat is to 'help in the day-to-day administration' of the village and the Co-operative is to 'manage its economic affairs'. His emphasis of decentralisation was on de-concentration of administrative powers as he said "The responsibilities of administration should not be only in the hands of big officials but should be divided among our 400 million people." Nehru ji was not talking of the political empowerment of Gram Panchayats as units of Gram Swaraj- the vision of Gandhi ji to develop each village as a 'little republic'.

He elaborated role of co-operatives sufficiently and underscored, "Therefore we have given due importance to the works of panchayats and co-operatives". His articulation of decentralisation was in his statement that "every village there should be a village panchayat with more powers, as also a co-operative society with enough economic powers." It reflects a clear understanding in his mind that for economic development and progress,

collectives of farmers and other activity groups will have to come together to protect and promote their business interests. However, the Gram Panchayats will have to take care of the issues that are in public interest. This distinction of roles reflected his strategic thinking while defining roles and functions of the Gram Panchayat and the Co-operatives. Nehru ji however again muddled the economic function of the co-operatives with the public interest that was the domain of the local government i.e. Gram Panchayats "Not only do they (co-operatives) share the profits with each other, but also setup small factories, open schools and run public hospitals and animal hospitals. And this way it will benefit all. Their children get opportunities for education, and everyone gets employment."⁶ The argument of co-operatives to have more economic powers while not defining powers of the Gram Panchayat showed his limited commitment to strengthen local Government as units of governance below the state level as elected Government.

The third important dimension, 'education in villages' was mentioned in his speech that needs to be understood

to build a comprehensive understanding of his vision for the rural India. He said, "There are new opportunities coming up everyday and it is important to have schools in every village so that the villagers could get education. But always keep this in mind that education is not only necessary for men, but women should have the equal access to education, as no country can ever progress until the men and women together try to make a prosperous nation. Gone are the days when the women were restricted within the four walls of the houses, and when they were not allowed to share the men's responsibilities." Gender equality was sufficiently emphasised. The trinity of the three pillars mentioned by him in his statement "Thus the panchayats, co-operative societies and schools are very important in our rural life." It may be implied that Nehru ji envisioned political empowerment at the grassroots through economic and social empowerment route. In other words, it will be real transfer of powers to the grass-root.

There were two barriers for strengthening of Gram panchayats which were very clearly identified by Nehru ji. The first one was that the administrative bureaucracy that may not allow delegation of powers to Gram Panchayats "Sometimes our officers start considering themselves to be masters. I hope that your Presidents, Sarpanchs and other elected representatives will not behave that way." His well-founded fear was that the elected representatives should not become part of the well-established power structure. The second fear was of caste-based discrimination that may create

There are new opportunities coming up everyday and it is important to have schools in every village so that the villagers could get education. But always keep this in mind that education is not only necessary for men, but women should have the equal access to education, as no country can ever progress until the men and women together try to make a prosperous nation. Gone are the days when the women were restricted within the four walls of the houses, and when they were not allowed to share the men's responsibilities

roadblocks for decentralisation. He mentioned that “We must annihilate caste discriminations. In today’s India no one should consider oneself superior to others. In political life every one has a vote; in economic matters everyone has equal opportunities; in our panchayats also, everyone should be considered equal; there should be no distinction between man and woman, high and low. We are all children of one country.” The message was clear that decentralised governance will be ineffective if principles of equality, equal opportunity and mutual respect for each other will not be followed.

The vision of Nehru ji was driven by the economic crisis of that time, therefore, self-reliance through co-operative movement in agriculture along with education for all to explore now opportunities of employment in industry and service sector was in his focus. The Second Five Year plans was coming to an end that had set up large scale dams for electricity generation and enhancing irrigation facilities. Heavy industries in core sector areas were coming up through public sector investments -BHEL, BALCO etc. There was a clear demand of educated and skilled people. Co-operative movement was envisioned to give big push to emerging green revolution propelled by high yielding varieties of seeds, adequate irrigation facilities and chemical fertilisers for high agricultural productivity and prosperity⁷. Therefore, Nehru was focused in attaining vision of modern India with a big push from the top to attain self-reliance.

Whether the roadmap

The vision of Nehru ji was driven by the economic crisis of that time, therefore, self-reliance through co-operative movement in agriculture along with education for all to explore now opportunities of employment in industry and service sector was in his focus. The Second Five Year plans was coming to an end that had set up large scale dams for electricity generation and enhancing irrigation facilities. Heavy industries in core sector areas were coming up through public sector investments -BHEL, BALCO etc

of industrialisation and development envisaged by Nehru ji was engrained in the socio-cultural context of India is a big question mark. Similarly, the vision of decentralisation that was articulated by Nehru ji was of empowering local governance and deepening of democracy is clearly questionable. We missed a great opportunity of giving responsibility of large number of leaders who participated in the freedom movement to run their own Governments at the village and town level to design development in local context.

The results of centralised and top-down model are visible in form of self-reliance in food, robust industrialisation and high economic growth. However, the ‘planned’ top-down development model has left behind a large population in poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy, distress migration and high dependence on State led welfare schemes. This was opposed to the philosophy of Gandhi to be bottom-up in planning to bring people in the center of decision making for self-reliance, respecting their local context, socio-cultural and economic diversity. Gandhi ji was emphasising on ‘people’s power’ in Gram Sabha where

the decisions are taken related to local development and governance. A good blending of the two approaches was missed out by the political leadership at the time of defining local government while drafting the Constitution of India.

The vision of Gandhi of modern India was embedded in sustainable development, environmentally sensitive business, labour intensive industrialisation, growth of indigenous household industries etc. so that more equitable development can be attained. He was aware that rapid economic growth based on western development model will lead to more skewed distribution of wealth and inequality. Gandhi ji was clear that sustainable development is possible by empowering local governments to take decisions related to economic development and social justice in their local context. The village Panchayats and urban local bodies have to join hands to build a bigger vision of their district or socio-cultural zone to build more sustainable economic enterprises, systems for delivery of basic services and infrastructure. In the model of Gandhi ji ‘power to the people’ would mean that local people

are empowered to govern locally to develop their vision of socio-economic change. The state and the central governments and their administrative machinery should demonstrate capacity to aggregate such plans, guide local leadership with modern knowledge, facilitate integration of their vision with national goals and convert community led visions into a reality.

Growing economic

disparities, exclusion of various communities in attaining benefits of welfare state, environmental degradation, and de-legitimisation of local wisdom definitely poses several questions. Whether India as a nation had made right choices? Is the form of local governance that India got after the 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendment, after almost four decades of Independence, is the one

envisaged by Gandhi ji? Will today's Gram Panchayats become little republics as conceived by Gandhi ji? There is a need for serious introspection on the current socio-economic scenario and it will be worthwhile revising the form, power and functions of the local governments as defined under the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment to attain structural transformation at the grassroots. ●

References:

1. Nagaur Speech of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru. Jan Swaraj. [Online] Rajiv Gandhi Panchayati Raj Sanghathan, August 6, 2015. <https://rgprs.wordpress.com/2015/08/06/nagaur-speech-of-pandit-jawahar-lal-nehru/>.
2. Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand. Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule. s.l. : Navajivan Publishing House , 1909.
3. Sivaramakrishnan, K.C. Courts, Panchayats and Nagarpalikas: background and review of case laws. s.l. : Academic Foundation, 2009. p. 18.
4. Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj. [Online] Nov 2, 2021. <http://rajpanchayat.rajasthan.gov.in/en-us/aboutus/history.aspx>.
5. Water and Agricultural Transformation in India: A symbiotic relationship- II. Shah, Mihir, Vijyashankar, P.S and Harris, Francesca. s.l. : Economic and Political Weekly, 2021, Vol. LVI no. 30.
6. Nehru's Framework of Panchayati Raj and Rural Development. Palanithurai, Ganapathy. 1, s.l. : Madhya Pradesh Institute of Social Science Research, 2016, Vol. 21.
7. Dandekar, V.M. Forty Years After Independence. [book auth.] Bimal Jalan. The Indian Economy: problems and prospects. 1992.

Government based on Dhamma

Society may choose not have any Dhamma, as an instrument of Government. For dhamma is nothing if it is not an instrument of government.

This means society choose the road to anarchy.

Secondly, Society may choose the police, i.e. dictatorship as an instrument of Government.

Thirdly, society may choose dhamma plus magistrate wherever people fail to observe the Dhamma.

In anarchy and dictatorship liberty is lost.

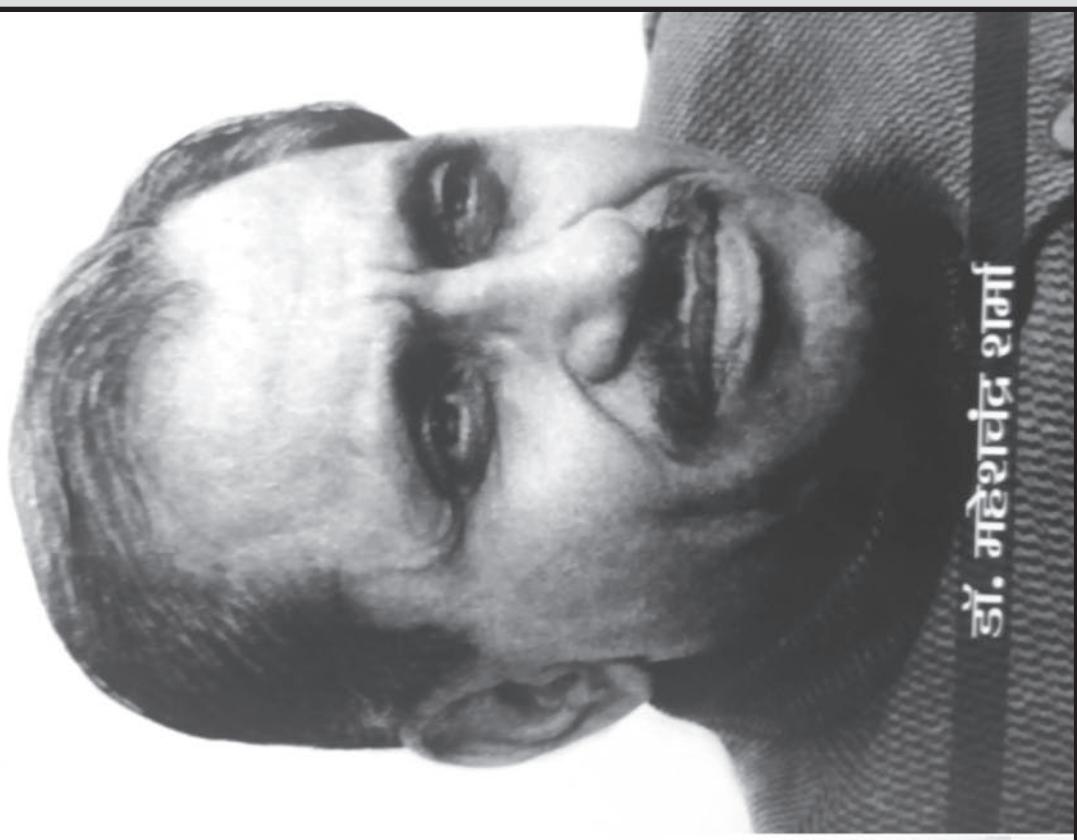
Only in the third liberty survives.

Those who want liberty must therefore have Dhamma.

Now what is Dhamma? And why is Dhamma necessary? According to the Buddha, Dhamma consist of Prajna and Karuna.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar
The Buddha and his Dhamma
P.317(point 14 to 21)
Writings and Speeches
Vol. II

पं. दीनदयाल उपाध्याय कर्तृत्व एवं विचार



डॉ. महेशचंद्र शर्मा

पं. दीनदयाल उपाध्याय कर्तृत्व एवं विचार

डॉ. महेशचंद्र शर्मा



“पंडित दीनदयाल उपाध्याय के विषय में जानकारियाँ बहुत ही सीमित हैं। डॉ. महेशचंद्र शर्मा ने इस विषय पर गवेषणात्मक अध्ययन किया है। इस शोध-ग्रंथ का प्रकाशन न केवल जनसंघ की राजनीति व विचारधारा के प्रति लोगों को लाभदायक जानकारियाँ देगा वरन् राजनीति शास्त्र की वैचारिक बहस को भी आगे बढ़ाएगा। दीनदयाल उपाध्याय व भारतीय जनसंघ को समझने के लिए यह शोध-ग्रंथ प्रामाणिक आधारभूमि प्रदान करता है।”

—डॉ. इकबाल नारायण

पूर्व कुलपति-राजस्थान विश्वविद्यालय,
काशी हिंदू विश्वविद्यालय तथा नॉर्थ-ईस्ट हिलज यूनिवर्सिटी,
पूर्व सदस्य-सचिव, भारतीय सामाजिक विज्ञान अनुसंधान परिषद्

“यदि मुझे दो दीनदयाल मिल जाएँ, तो मैं भारतीय राजनीति का नक्शा बदल दूँ।”

—डॉ. श्यामा प्रसाद मुखर्जी

पं. दीनदयाल उपाध्याय द्वारा लिखित पुस्तकें



प्रभात प्रकाशन

ISO 9001 : 2008 प्रकाशक

www.prabhakarbooks.com

Manthan

Journal of Social and Academic Activism

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

Please subscribe to *Manthan*, a quarterly research oriented thematic journal, published by Research and Development Foundation for Integral Humanism.

For membership of this journal, individual/institutions may inform to the address given below and payment should be made in the favor of “**Research & Development Foundation for Integral Humanism**”. Pay at New Delhi in **State Bank of India, A/c No. 10080533188, IFSC-SBIN0006199**.

SUBSCRIPTION DETAILS

Name :

Address :

.....City/District :

.....State : Pincode:

Land Line : Mobile : (1) (2)

Email :

Revised price change from Oct-Dec 2019

Subscription Type	In INDIA	OVERSEAS
Single Issue	₹ 200	US\$ 9
Annual	₹ 800	US\$ 36
Three Year	₹ 2000	US\$ 100
Life Time	₹ 25,000	

Managing Editor

Manthan Quarterly Magazine

Ekattm Bhawan, 37, Deendayal Upadhyaya Marg, New Delhi-110002

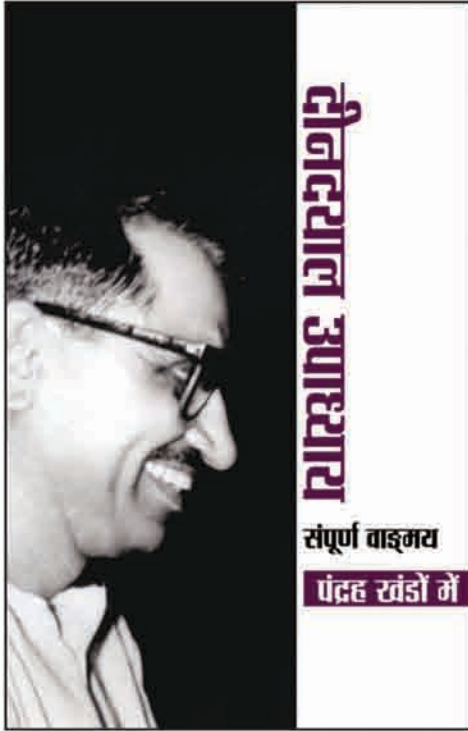
Phone: 9868550000, 011-23210074

E-mail: info@manthandigital.com



प्रभात प्रकाशन

नवनूतन प्रकाशन की गौरवशाली परंपरा

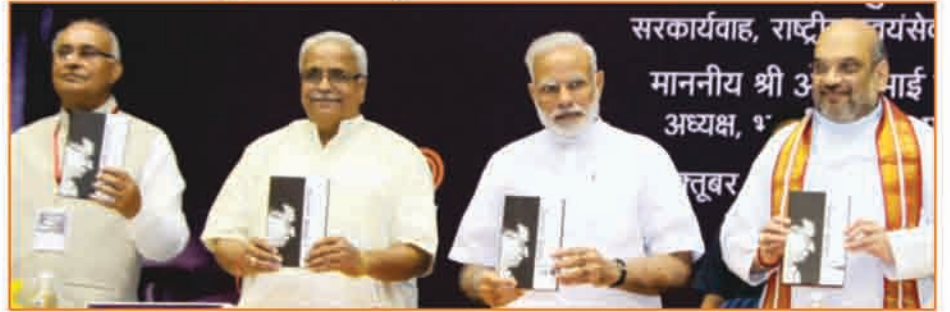


दीनदयाल उपाध्याय

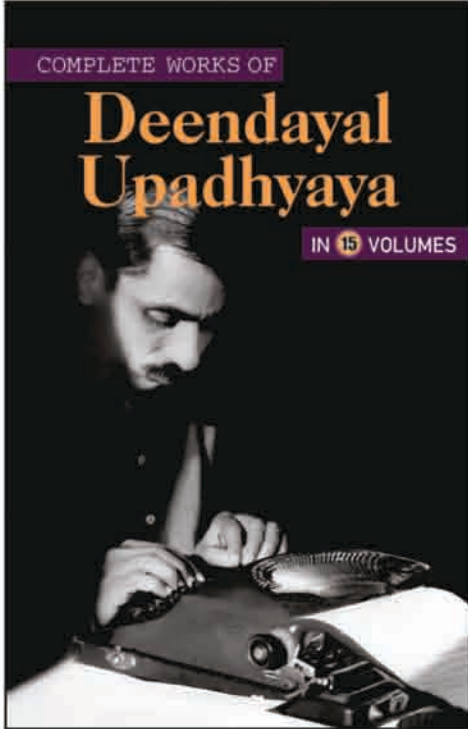
संपूर्ण वाङ्मय

पंद्रह खंडों में

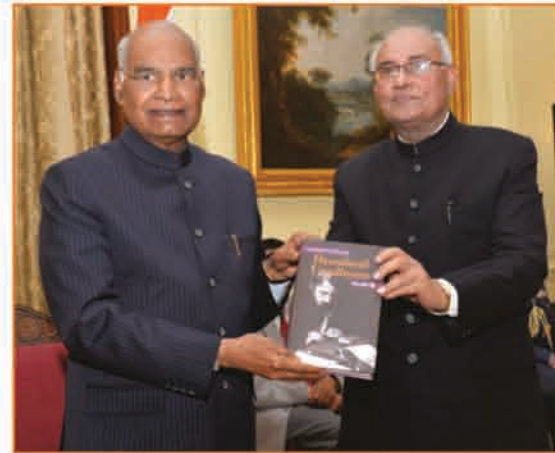
दीनदयाल उपाध्याय संपूर्ण वाङ्मय (पंद्रह खंडों का सैट)



9 अक्टूबर, 2016 को नई दिल्ली के विज्ञान भवन में पं. दीनदयाल उपाध्याय जन्म शताब्दी वर्ष के अवसर पर डॉ. महेश चंद्र शर्मा द्वारा संपादित एवं प्रभात प्रकाशन द्वारा प्रकाशित 'दीनदयाल उपाध्याय संपूर्ण वाङ्मय' के पंद्रह खंडों का लोकार्पण भारत के प्रधानमंत्री मान. श्री नरेंद्र मोदी, राष्ट्रीय स्वयंसेवक संघ के सरकार्यवाह मान. श्री सुरेश (भय्याजी) जोशी व भारतीय जनता पार्टी के राष्ट्रीय अध्यक्ष मान. श्री अमित शाह के करकमलों द्वारा संपन्न हुआ।



COMPLETE WORKS OF DEENDAYAL UPADHYAYA (Set of 15 Volumes)



11 फरवरी, 2019 को भारत के राष्ट्रपति मान. श्री राम नाथ कोविंदजी को 'Complete Works of Deendayal Upadhyaya' की प्रथम प्रति भेंट करते हुए प्रधान संपादक डॉ. महेश चंद्र शर्मा



प्रभात प्रकाशन

ISO 9001:2015 प्रकाशक

4/19 आसफ अली रोड, नई दिल्ली-110002
हेल्पलाइन नं. 7827007777 ☎ 011-23289777

E-mail : prabhatbooks@gmail.com ❖ Website : www.prabhatbooks.com



एकात्म मानवदर्शन

अनुसंधान एवं विकास प्रतिष्ठान

28 मीना बाग, नई दिल्ली-110001

☎ 011-23062611

ई-मेल : ekatmrdh@gmail.com



“AGRICULTURAL PROGRESS MEANS NATIONAL PROGRESS”

BIPLAB KUMAR DEB
CHIEF MINISTER, TRIPURA

AGRICULTURE & FARMERS WELFARE

Mukhya Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (MMFBY):

Enabling the paddy growers to come under insurance coverage by paying only Rs. 10/ per kani (0.16 ha) an amount of Rs. 5.04 Cr. has been supported from the state budget during 2020-21. Due to the support from the state government farmers enrolment has been increased by 1190% (during 2018-19 to 2020-21) over achievement during 2015-16 to 2017-18. Similar programme is being implemented during 2021-22 also.

Pradhan Mantri Kisan SammanNidhi (PM-KISAN):

With a view to supplement the financial needs of the small and marginal farmers in procuring various inputs for ensuring proper crop health and appropriate yields and also to protect the farmers from falling in the clutches of moneylenders for meeting such expense, Government of India has launched new Central Sector Scheme, namely, "Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN)" on 1st February, 2019. Each eligible farmers is being paid Rs. 6000 per year directly to their bank accounts in three equal installments.

Year	Farmers benefitted @ Rs.6000/-per annum(No.)-Cumulative	Amount transferred directly to the accounts of beneficiaries (Rs. in Crore)-cumulative
2018-19	151857	30.37
2019-20	199707	113.29
2020-21	229915	129.26
2021-22	235950	361.63

Krishak Bandhu Kendra(KBK):

Farmers of 8-10 adjacent villages are being trained on modern agricultural practices, different plant protection measures available scheme benefits, soil health, use of modern machineries & implements etc. under a single roof on every working day from 2 PM to 5.30PM. Till November 2021, 25 such Krishak bandhu kendras have been opened and are functional in different corners of the state. More 12 KBKs will be functional shortly.