

PANCHAYATI RAJ
to
GRAM SWARAJ

An Unfinished Journey towards Decentralisation



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FOREWARD

The guiding principle of democratic decentralisation in India is Gandhi's Gram Swaraj. Even during the early days of freedom struggle Gandhiji visualised self reliant villages as part of the constructive programme. Twenty years have passed after the passing of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts. But where India stands in democratic decentralisation is a point for discussion. Some states have gone ahead and some are lagging behind. But the state of Kerala has made strides in this regard. In terms of devolution of 3Fs ie. Finance, Function and Functionaries, Kerala has created a model for other states to emulate. Kerala reached at this state because it followed 'big bang' approach. Kerala has been learning from experience beginning from the IX Plan onwards. The Peoples' Campaign for IX Plan was a remarkable movement to enlighten the mass. The learning by doing process which Kerala adhered to led the state move forward in decentralisation. When we conceive 'Swaraj' our ultimate aim we are only in midway. A fresh framework is essential to take decentralisation forward. Discussions, dialogue and policy interventions are integral part of such process. This tiny book speaks about Swaraj comprehensively. The relevance of this book is much appreciated as it is published in connection with the International Conference on Gandhi's Gram Swaraj. Ajith Venniyoor, the author of this book is a Gandhian with rich experience in decentralisation. It is the crux of different articles; published by the author on various occasions. I thank Ajit for his strenuous effort in bringing out this book on time.

Dr. P.P. Balan
Director, KILA

Though imperfect and suffering from several drawbacks, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, ushering in a new era of local self-governance can be considered an important milestone in the efforts of the nation to realize the sublime vision of Mahatma Gandhi. Kerala certainly can take legitimate pride about providing workable models for the rest of India towards bridging the gap between vision and actualization in the area of people-centered governance and development.

- Ajith Venniyoor

At a critical stage in the freedom struggle, a journalist asked Gandhi, “When will India attain complete freedom?” Without taking even a moment for reflection, Gandhi replied: “when the people begin to feel that they can change their destiny and situation by their own effort”.

Gandhi added foundational dimensions to the freedom struggle. His aim was not to wrest freedom from the British, but the creation of a new social order. Gaining political power was only a means to it. Even while fighting the British Empire for political power, Gandhi dreamt of a new Indian society. He wanted to build up a democratic structure from below- the self government- the real Swaraj- by instilling into the masses a sense of their power and dignity. He reminded the people that they constitute the real power of the nation; they are the real masters of their destiny. He worked towards it relentlessly and gave shape to a set of actions. Thus was born the famous ‘Constructive Programmes’.

DEMOCRACY FROM THE GRASSROOTS

Khadi became the focal point of constructive programmes and the charka the standard of freedom struggle. In course of time, these became the foundation stones of economic planning, aimed at rural re-construction. Charka associations and khadi centres were formed to pay attention to manufacturing and marketing of khadi products. When these began to develop into institutions, Gandhi warned: “Constructive programme is not mere employment generation. Its end and means are neither compassion nor charity, but to activate the people by cultivating in them the spirit of self-reliance and will power. Their skills and abilities should develop. The people should be become strong to control the centre of power and resist abuse”.

Gandhi stressed that “real Swaraj will come, not by acquisition of authority by a few, but by the acquisition of capacity by all to resist authority when abused”. He added:”True democracy can not be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village.” His “Gram Swaraj” was not the recreation of the old village system, but the formation of fresh independent units of villages enjoying a self-sufficient economy.

True Swaraj, for Gandhi, means the happiness of millions. Mere change from British to Indian rule does not mean Swaraj. As long as one class dominates the other, the poor remaining poor or becoming poorer, there will be no Swaraj. In real Swaraj the millions will lead happy lives.

Although the word “Swaraj” means self-rule, Gandhi gave it the content of an integral revolution that encompasses all spheres of life. “At the individual level Swaraj is vitally connected with the

capacity for dispassionate self-assessment, ceaseless self-purification and growing self-reliance” Politically, swaraj is self-government and not good government (for Gandhi, good government is no substitute for self-government) and it means a continuous effort to be independent of government control, whether it is foreign government or whether it is national. In other words, it is sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority. Economically, Swaraj means full economic freedom for the toiling millions. And in its fullest sense, Swaraj is much more than freedom from all restraints, it is self-rule, self-restraint, and could be equated with *moksha* or salvation.

Adopting Swaraj means implementing a system whereby the state machinery is virtually nil, and the real power directly resides in the hands of people. Gandhi said, “Power resides in the people, they can use it at any time. This philosophy rests inside an individual who has to learn to be master of his own self and spreads upwards to the level of his community which must be dependent only on itself. Gandhi said, “In such a state (where swaraj is achieved) everyone is his own ruler. He rules himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbor and also “ It is Swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves.

Gandhi explained his vision in 1946:

Independence begins at the bottom... A society must be built in which every village has to be self sustained and capable of managing its own affairs... It will be trained and prepared to perish in the attempt to defend itself against any onslaught from without... This does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbours or from the world. It will be a free and voluntary play of mutual forces... In this structure composed of innumerable

villages, there will be ever widening, never ascending circles. Growth will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose center will be the individual. Therefore the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it.

Gandhi was undaunted by the task of implementing such a utopian vision in India. He believed that by transforming enough individuals and communities society at large would change. He said, “It may be taunted with the retort that this is all Utopian and, therefore not worth a single thought... Let India live for the true picture, though never realizable in its completeness. We must have a proper picture of what we want before we can have something approaching it.

Gandhi conceived the village as the centre of a series of ever-widening circles. Not one on top of the other, but all on the same plane, so that there is none who is higher or lower than the other. He has, elsewhere, poetically pictured his village-based polity and he cautioned that the successive upper units should not weigh down on and crush the people constituting the base, “In this structure, composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex, sustained by the bottom. But it will be 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.. Therefore, the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the

inner circle, but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it”

Democracy and exploitation cannot co-exist. If we want to create a society free from exploitation, democracy has to be strengthened. The centralization of democracy will lead to exploitation. The democratic process must begin in the small groups – from the fellowships of families.

On sensing that ‘An Economic Plan for India’, a book written by M. Visweswaryya, was becoming the guidelines for the Planning Council, Gandhi presented his dissenting views at the public fora. Gandhi did not agree with the view that what was needed for the success of economic planning was rapid industrialization. He had reservations, especially in the plan for setting up heavy industries.

He was for re-structuring the plans in consonance with the village situations. What was required was the organized development of the rural economy. The innovation of heavy industries would lead to an exploitative social order. Gandhi’s position was that attempts at bringing about social revolution in this way would unleash the forces that would endanger our cherished social values, such as freedom, brotherhood and the Indian people do not want it.

GUIDELINES OF DEVELOPMENT

The socio-economic model Gandhi proposed for the independent India was a decentralised and people-based one. It is not an ideology that imposes pre-fabricated solutions to problems. It provides the vision for transparent and self-directive guidelines.

The problems faced by each village and each community are varied. The contexts too are varied. The solution of the same problem in two different villages may demand different approaches, because

the situations may be varied. This being the truth, the centralized planning and implementation is a futile exercise. This is what subsequently happened in India. Gandhi had foreseen this tragedy, which lies at the root of the sufferings of the rural communities in India.

GANDHI'S CONCEPT OF A VILLAGE

Gandhi suggested that in order to build up self-reliant rural communities, the self-governance institutions at the village level should be strengthened.

Ever since Gandhi returned to India in 1915, he had been laying the greatest emphasis on the need to revitalize the Village Panchayats and establish Gram Swaraj. He believed that the real India lives in its seven lakh and odd villages and that India has no future worth the name unless these villages play their proper part in the life of the country. His scheme of such a Grama Swaraj comprehended every department of rural activity, which went to make each village self-governing and self-contained, as regards the essential needs of its inhabitants, so that on the solid foundation of a vast network of such little 'republics', peacefully cooperating with one another for mutual benefit, the life of the nation as a whole could be broad-based, enabling it to progress smoothly towards its destined goal.

The India that Gandhi dreamt was a federation of villages of enlightened and non-violent people. Self-reliance and self-rule will be possible there. But these village units have no independent existence.

In the proposed structure of self-government at the grass-roots, basic handy units will be self-reliant, self-sufficient and

self-sustained. These autonomous units will primarily attend to the basic needs of living and the barest necessities of human life, leaving wider concerns for larger units. The polity would rise, storey by storey, from the foundation. Primary units will progressively federate, tier by tier, into larger wholes, again for common benefits, without prejudice to the basic tenet of democracy to maintain equality among the people. Every basic unit will satisfy the basic needs of living, namely full employment, healthy environment and educational development.

Gandhi further elaborates the functions and the working of the basic unit- the Village Self-Government:

“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 the village’s first concern will be to grow its own food crops and cotton for its cloth. It should have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and play ground for adults and children...The village will maintain a village theatre, school and public hall. It will have its own water works, ensuring clean water supply. This can be done through controlled wells and tanks. Education will be compulsory up to the final basic course. As far as possible, every activity will be conducted on co-operative basis. There will be no castes, such as we have today with their graded un-touchability. Non-violence, with its technique of Satyagraha and non-cooperation, will be the compulsory service of village guards, who will be selected by rotation from the register maintained by the village”.

“The government of the village will be conducted by the Panchayat of five persons, elected annually by the adult villagers, male and

female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. They will have all the authority and jurisdiction required. Since there will be no system of punishment in the accepted sense, this Panchayat will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate for its year of office. Any village can become such a republic without much interference, even from the present Government, whose sole effective connection with the villagers is the extraction of village revenue. I have not examined here the question of relations with the neighboring villages of the centre, if any. Here there is perfect democracy, based upon individual freedom. The individual is the architect of his own government. The law of non-violence rules him and the government. He and his village are able to defy the might of a world. For the law governing every villager is that he will suffer death in the defense of his and his village's honour”

Gandhi worked out meticulously the details of a wide variety of practical things, which are vital to build a graceful village life. His conception of a village was not anchored in the modern notion of development, but on the post-modern perspective of quality of life. His main emphasis was on the quality of life. Gandhi added: “There will neither be plague nor cholera nor small pox. No one will wallow in luxury; everyone will have to contribute his quota of manual labour.”

Gandhi qualified the centralized government levying tax and using it for projects planned by the rulers at the centre as violence done to the villages.

REVOLUTIONARY THINKING

Gandhi put forward the suggestion that the Gram panchayat should have authority to identify the needs of the villages, look

for practical solutions and mobilize the resources for implementing plans.

He also suggested rural sanitation, rural economy, village peace, agriculture, medical aid, nature cure, the resurgence of rural industries, cooperative cattle rearing etc. as means of rebuilding the vitality and self-reliance of the rural communities.

Dr. J. C. Kumarappa, Gandhian economist, who elaborated on the village concepts of Gandhi in his famous work 'The economy of subsistence', has painted a clear picture of the structure and the functioning of the Gram Panchayat. His ideas can be summarized like this:

- The village self-governance movement must have three types of institutions:
 1. The Gram panchayats for managing the self-rule of the village,
 2. Multi-purpose cooperative societies for organizing economic activities,
 3. Voluntary village service societies for mobilizing the support of the people and the initiatives for the rural development programmes.
- The Gram Panchayat must be elected by the adult village population. All the basic needs of the village, such as water supply, primary education, care of the sick, public roads, sanitation, public lighting, legal protection (within certain limits) should be the responsibility of the panchayat. The panchayat should have the authority to collect taxes for ensuring these services. The state should give supplementary grants.
- There should be a union of panchayats to coordinate and improve the activities of the panchayats and to audit their

accounts. This union can take over the functions of basic education, higher education, woman and child care centres, large hospitals and so forth. The union can make arrangements for working out estimates and carrying out public works.

- The panchayat should never be a mere administrative council. It should organize learning/ training programmes around the theme of citizens duties and responsibilities and try to eradicate superstitions, wrong practices and crimes. The panchayat should also ensure prosperity of those suffering from social injustices and focus on the development of women.
- The responsibility of the multi-purpose cooperatives is to regularize the economic activities and undertake successful production programmes.
- The village service societies (Gram Seva Sangam) should implement programmes for ensuring the active participation of the people in the activities undertaken by the panchayats and the cooperative societies.

WE NEED A RURAL CULTURE

Dr.J.C.Kumarappa emphasizes that these objectives can be realized only through the resurgence of the village culture. He has put fourth integrated plans based on the village community for building up a refined village culture incorporating components of the study of the history, traditions, institutions, practices of the village, research into the people's art forms, the revival and improvement of village crafts and technologies, non-denominational festivals, the mobilisation and the distribution of the raw materials needed for the rural industries, marketing of products, the setting up of rural reading rooms, study centres and museums, the starting of

information centres, creating facilities for arts, sports, entertainment etc.

- The huge amount of money spent for collecting the rough materials from the various parts of the country and for creating artificial markets for marketing the products can be diverted to productive enterprises.
- Since the production methods are based mainly on human resource, the workers get a major share of production cost as wages. This leads to the improved purchasing power of a large number of people. Production can be augmented depending on the need, thus generating employment for more people.
- When the producer becomes the sales person, his purchasing power grows and he pays greater attention to the quality of the products. With these, each citizen turns an entrepreneur, the human resource of the nation gets enriched and meaningful.
- Instead of mass production, production by the mass for the masses-that was Gandhi's vision. This means a production mode for the community in which all the members of the community participate. This is the only way of ensuring employment for all.

However, Gandhi only laid down the broad principles of the functions and role by the panchayats. It was essential because these could vary from time to time and place to place. Shriman Narayan divided these functions in to several categories and supplied the details which Gandhi approved. He was on the view that since the villages would enjoy maximum local autonomy, the functions of the Village Panchayat would be vary wide and comprehensive covering almost all aspects of social, economic

and political life of the village community. The various functions to be carried out by the Village Panchayat may be summarized as follows:

1. Education

- a. to run a primary or lower basic school through the medium of productive craft, thus combining cultural and technical education.
- b. To maintain a Library and a reading room. Books in the library should be educative, having a direct bearing on social, economic and political activities of the village. The books are very important for the new ideas and knowledge for practice.
- c. To run a night school for adults. The old persons can study in the night schools. Therefore Panchayat should make an effort for it.

2. recreation

- a. Provide for Akhada, Gymnasium and Playgrounds. Swadeshi games and sports shall be encouraged.
- b. To arrange art and craft exhibitions from time to time.
- c. To celebrate collectively the important festivals of all communities.
- d. To organize seasonal fairs.
- e. To conduct Bhajan and Kirathan Mandal
- f. To encourage folk-songs, folk-dances and folk-theatre

3. Protection

- a. to maintain village guardians for general protection of the village, against thieves, dacoits and wild animals.

- b. To impart regular training to all citizens in the technique of sathyagraha or non-violent resistance and defense. There should be proper arrangements for the protection of the people of the village.

4. Agriculture.

- a. to assess the rent of each agricultural plot in the village.
- b. To collect rent from the land holders.
- c. To encourage and organize consolidation of holdings and cooperative farming.
- d. To make proper arrangements for irrigation.
- e. To provide for good, seeds and efficient implements through cooperative stores
- f. To see that as far as possible, all necessary food grains are produced in the village itself. In this connection the present system of injurious commercial crops shall be discouraged.
- g. To review, scrutinize and if necessary, scale down the debts and regulate their rate of interest where possible, to organise cooperative credit banks.
- h. To check soil erosion and reclaim waste land through joint effort.

5. Industries

- a. to organise the production of Khadi for village consumption
- b. to organize other small scale cottage village industries on cooperative lines.
- c. To run a cooperative dairy.
- d. To run a village tannery using the hides of dead animals.

6. Trade and Commerce

- a. to organize cooperative marketing of agricultural and industrial products.
- b. To organize cooperative consumers' societies.
- c. To export only the surplus commodities and import only those necessities which cannot be produced in the village.
- d. To maintain cooperative godowns.
- e. To provide cheap credit facilities to village artisans for necessary purposes.

7. Sanitation and medical relief

- a. to maintain good sanitation in the village through proper drainage system
- b. to prevent public nuisances and check the spread of epidemics.
- c. To make adequate arrangements for healthy drinking water
- d. To maintain village hospital and maternity home, providing free medical treatment.
- e. Indigenous system of medicine, naturopathy and biochemistry shall be encouraged.

8. Justice

- a. To provide cheap and speedy justice to villagers, the panchayat shall have very wide legal powers, both criminal and civil. The panchayats according to Gandhi, have better access to the situation of the incident and therefore, these can provide justice which cannot be provided by the higher courts of law. The panchayat can perform the more important role of solving the conflicts of the villagers and of maintaining law and order .

9. Finance and Taxation

As Gandhi wants a village to be self sufficient the village panchayat must find financial resources locally for carrying out its multifarious functions, so it is required:

- a. To levy and collect village taxes for special purpose. Payment in kind and collective manual labour for village projects also can be taken account of.
- b. It may collect private donations on social and religious occasions. But it is to keep proper accounts of income and expenditure.

The panchayats of Gandhi's view hold a good deal of autonomy and thus becomes effective instruments for the diffusion and decentralisation of authority.

THE CRITERION OF GROWTH

The Gandhian perspective reminds us that the growth of a society is not determined solely by the gross national product. The citizen must participate in each movement of change. Only then will it contribute to the development of human being.

Gandhi considered the resurgence of the lowest in the society as the criterion for development. The development of all is possible only through the development of the lowest and the least- justice with development-development that ensures justice. This vision of Gandhi was reflected in the proclaimed objectives of our national planning in the initial years. Gradually it became mere lip service.

THE RELEVANCE OF LOCAL LEADERSHIP

While initiating development programmes with the aim of making the villages self-reliant, Gandhi considered the institutions as centres of inspiration and the Gandhi workers its motivators.

Gandhi gave emphasis to three things:

One: Identifying local leadership in the work area and transferring the responsibilities to them at the earliest, paying special attention to bring to the leadership those who belong to the weaker sections.

Two: Organize people's groups and enable them from local action.

Three: Attempt to create production and marketing methods based on local resources.

The beneficiaries must become the creators

Development depending on the doles of the state or rich nations is not social progress. It should be the results of the will and the work of the people. The beneficiaries should be also its creators. We are suffering the consequences of forgetting this principle.

The decentralisation process will not be complete with the decentralisation of development projects alone. It should start from the decentralisation of political power. Structures need to be created for the distribution of resources, for taking decisions on their proper use and for implementing these decisions without external interference. This calls for enlightened political will. Herein lies the relevance of Gandhian socio-political thinking.

THE BASIC COMPONENTS

There are five basic components to the Gandhian economic planning.

- One : Should ensure the maximum utilization, promotion and development of human resource.
- Two : Should emphasize on production which does not endanger natural resources.
- Three : Should ensure the equitable distribution of wealth.
- Four : Before arranging for luxuries, the basic needs of ordinary people must be completely satisfied.
- Five : Every activity should help in maintaining peace and co-existence in society.

THE ADVANTAGES OF DECENTRALISATION

In a country like India, with scarce capital and abundant human and natural resources only through decentralised modes of production and marketing can the above mentioned objectives be achieved. Decentralisation has a few more elements.

- It helps to promote the cultural pluralism of our country, its handicraft skills and the creativity of the workers.
- It abolishes the centralization of power, which is the bi-product of centralized production and marketing.

To realize the dreams of the Father of the Nation, independent India launched its first programme of rural reconstruction, the Community Development Programme, with much fanfare in 1952. It had the potential of developing into a people's movement within the Gnahian framework of rural development. But it remained a programme run by the bureaucracy without popular participation at the local level. The programme could not generate the required enthusiasm and it was felt that the remedy lay in decentralisation of responsibility and power to levels below the state.

Following the failure of the Community Development Programme, the Belwant Rai Committee was appointed in 1957 to study and report on the Community Dev Programme keeping in view “economy and efficiency” and to assess the extent to which the programme had succeeded in utilizing local initiative and in creating institutions to ensure the involvement of the community in the process of improving socio-economic conditions. The committee felt that development can not progress without responsibility and power being given to the community. It was for this objective that the team recommended an early establishment of statutory elective local bodies and devolution to them of the necessary resources, power and authority. Thus by early 1960s PRI Institutions came into being in most of the states. PRIs became basic institutional apparatus, through which socio-economic transformation of rural India was to be achieved.

But unfortunately, in due course the strains in PRIs were visible and the desired results were not forthcoming. The system, as it unfolded itself, had the least hue of Gandhi an paradigm. Many Panchayats were superceded and even elections were not held. In 1977 the Ashok Mehta Committee was appointed to make suitable recommendations.

The committee drew up three phases of PR in India after Independence. from 1956-64 it was ascendancy, 1965-69 was phase of stagnation and from 1969-77 of decline. The Ashok Mehta Commiittee report favoured two-tier model of PR The emphasis shifted from the block level to District Parishad level, with block functioning merely as an executive committee of the Jilla Parishad. It did not consider the village as as basic unit of development, which remains a fundamental unit in the Gandhian theory, instead

suggested a bigger area than the present panchayat as the second tier of PR for a population of 10-15 thousand and called it Mandal Panchayat.

In fact to a large extent both these committees only tried to incorporate Gandhian values into their models, which were distant from the Gandhian model of Gram Swaraj. The search for an appropriate model for rural upliftment continued even though we had a Gandhi an Blue-print. In 1980s efforts were initiated to confer constitutional status to Panchayats which resulted in the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments enacted in 1992. It took about fifty years to transfer power to the people.

Though imperfect and suffering from several drawbacks, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, ushering in a new era of local self-governance can be considered an important milestone in the efforts of the nation to realize the sublime vision of Mahatma Gandhi. Kerala certainly can take legitimate pride about providing workable models for the rest of India towards bridging the gap between vision and actualization in the area of people-centered governance and development.

Panchayat Raj
THE MIND OF MAHATMA GANDHI

Village Republics

INDIA HAS had experience of.... village republics, as they were called by Mayne. I fancy that they were unconsciously governed by non-violence..... An effort has now to be made to revive them under a deliberate non-violent plan. (H, 4-8-1940, p. 240).

The best, quickest and most efficient way is to build up from the bottom..... Every village has to become a self-sufficient republic. This does not require brave resolutions. It requires brave, corporate, intelligent work..... (H, 18-1-1922, p. 4).

Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus, every village will be a republic or Panchayat having full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world. It will be trained and prepared to perish in the attempt to defend itself against any onslaught from without. Thus, ultimately, it is the individual who is the unit.

This does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbours or from the world. It will be free and voluntary play of mutual forces. Such a society is necessarily highly cultured in which every man and woman knows what he or she wants and, what is more, knows that no one should want anything that others cannot have with equal labour.

This society must naturally be based on truth and non-violence which, in my opinion, are not possible without a living belief in

God, meaning a self-existent, All-knowing living Force which inheres every other force known to the world and which depends on none and which will live when all other forces may conceivably perish or cease to act. I am unable to account for my life without belief in this all-embracing living light.

Widening Circles

In this structure composed of innumerable villages there will be ever-widening, never-ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, 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. Therefore, the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle, but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it. I may be taunted with the retort that this is all Utopian and, therefore, not worth a single thought. If Euclid's point, though incapable of being drawn by human agency has an imperishable value, my picture has its own for mankind to live.

The Ideal

Let India live for this true picture, though never realizable in its completeness. We must have a proper picture of what we want before we can have something approaching it. If there ever is to be a republic of every village in India, then I claim verity for my picture in which the last is equal to the first or, in other words, none is to be the first and none the last. In this picture every religion has its full and equal place. We are all leaves of a majestic

tree whose trunk cannot be shaken off its roots which are deep down in the bowels of the earth. The mightiest wind cannot move it. In this there is no room for machines that would displace human labour and would concentrate power in a few hands. Labour has its unique place in a cultured human family. Every machine that helps every individual has a place. But I must confess that I have never sat down to think out what that machine can be. I have thought of Singer's sewing machine. But even that is perfunctory. I do not need it to fill in my picture. (28-7-1946,p.236).

I know that the work [of making an ideal village] is as difficult as to make of India an ideal country. But, while it is possible for one man to fulfill his ambition with respect to a single village some day, one man's lifetime is too short to overtake the whole of India. But if one man can produce one ideal village, he will have provided a pattern not only for the whole country, but perhaps for the whole world. More than this a seeker may not aspire after. (H, 4-8-1940, p. 235).

Under Village Republics

I have not pictured a poverty-stricken India containing ignorant millions. I have pictured to myself an India continually progressing along the lines best suited to her genius. I do not, however, picture it as a third-class or even a first-class copy of the dying civilization of the West. If my dream is fulfilled, and every one of the seven lakhs of villages becomes a well-living republic in which there are no illiterates, in which no one is idle for want of work, in which everyone is usefully occupied and has nourishing food, well-ventilated dwellings, and sufficient Khadi for covering the body,

and in which all the villagers know and observe the laws of hygiene and sanitation such a State must have varied and increasing needs, which it must supply unless it would stagnate. (H, 30-7-1938, p. 200).

Village Swaraj

My idea of village Swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vita wants and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is necessary. Thus, every village's first concern will be to grow its own food crops, and cotton for its cloth. It should have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and playground for adults and children. Then, if there is more land available, it will grow useful money crops, thus excluding GANJA, tobacco, opium and the like. The village will maintain a village theatre, school and public hall. It will have its own waterworks ensuring clean water supply. This can be done through controlled wells or tanks. Education will be compulsory up to the final basic course. As far as possible, every activity will be conducted on the co-operative basis. There will be no castes such as we have today with their graded untouchability. Non-violence with its technique of Satyagraha and non-co-operation will be the sanction of the village community. There will be a compulsory service of village guards who will be selected by rotation from the register maintained by the village.

Government Of Village

The Government of the village will be conducted by the Panchayat of five persons, annually elected by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. These will

have all the authority and jurisdiction required. Since there will be no system of punishments in the accepted sense, this Panchayat will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate for its year of office..... I have not examined here the question of relations with the neighbouring villages and the centre if any. My purpose is to present an outline of village government. Here there is perfect democracy based upon individual freedom. The individual is the architect of his own government. The law of non-violence rules him and his government. He and his village are able to defy the might of a word. For the law governing every villager is that he will suffer death in the defense of his and his village's honour..... There is nothing inherently impossible in the picture drawn here. To model such a village may be the work of a lifetime. Any lover of true democracy and village life can take up a village, treat it as his world and sole work, and he will find good results. (H, 26-7-1942, p. 238).

Public Opinion

When Panchayat Raj is established, public opinion will do what violence can never do. The present power of the zamindars, the capitalists and the rajas can hold sway so long as the common people do not realize their own strength. If the people non-cooperate with the evil of zamindari or capitalism, it must die of inanition. In Panchayat Raj, only the Panchayat will be obeyed and the Panchayat can only work through the law of their making. (H, 1-6-1947, P. 172)

The real rulers are the toiling millions. (H, 15-6-1947, p. 193)

Kisan-The Backbone

In Panchayat Raj , the man who should count most in India is naturally the kisan. How to advance him is the question. (H, 7-12-1947, P. 458).

The greater the power of the Panchayat the better for the people. Moreover, Panchayat to be effective and efficient, the level of people's education has to be considerably raised. I do not conceive the increase in the power of the people in military, but in moral terms. Naturally, I swear by NAI TALIM in this connection. (H, 21-12-1947, p. 473)

Function Of Panchayat

It is the function of the Panchayat to revive honesty and industry.... It is the function of the Panchayats to teach the villagers to avoid disputes, if they have to settle them. This will ensure speedy justice without any expenditure. You will need neither the police nor the military... Then the Panchayat should see to cattle improvement. They should show steady increase in the mild yield..... the Panchayat should also see to an increase in the quantity of foodstuff grown in their village. This is to be accomplished by properly maturing the soil. You have your indigenous games. You should banish intoxicating drinks and drugs from your midst. I hope you will eradicate untouchability if there is any trace of it still in you village. The Hindus, the Muslims, the Sikhs, the Parsees and the Christians should all live as brothers and sisters. If you achieve all I have mentioned, you will demonstrate real independence, and people from all over India will come to see your model village and take inspiration from it. (H, 4-1-1948, p. 500)

State Of Panchayat

If we would see our dream of Panchayat Raj, i.e., true democracy realized, we would regard the humblest and lowest Indian as being equally the ruler of India with the tallest in the land. This presupposes that all are pure or will become pure if they are not. And purity must go hand-in-hand with wisdom. No one would then harbour any distinction between community, caste and out-caste. Everybody would regard all as equal with oneself and hold them together in the silken net of love. No one would regard another as untouchable. We would hold as equal the toiling labourer and the rich capitalist. Everybody would know how to earn an honest living by the sweat of one's brow and make no distinction between intellectual and physical labour. To hasten this consummation, we would voluntarily turn ourselves into scavengers. No one who has wisdom will ever touch opium, liquor or any intoxicants. Everybody would observe Swadeshi as the rule of life and man would regard every woman, not being his wife, as his mother, sister or daughter according to her age, never lust after her in his heart. He would be ready to lay down his life when occasion demands it, never want to take another's life... (H, 18-1-1948, p. 517).
