

Gandhi and Panchayati Raj

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The Panchayat raj (Hindi: पंचायती राज) is a political system, originating from the Indian subcontinent, found mainly in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. It is the oldest system of local government in the India. The word raj means "rule" and panchayat means "assembly"(ayat) of five (panch). Traditionally panchayats consisted of wise and respected elders chosen and accepted by the local community.

Gandhi had long and varied experience in dealing with the State system in three continents viz. Europe, Africa and Asia. He witnessed the cruel and harsh face of the State in his own life as well as in the lives of the people. As well as Gandhi was aware of the uniqueness and centrality of villages in the national life of India. He believed that village's betterment lead to the development of whole country. At the same time he wanted to bring the old system in tune with the modern life by removing excretions which has gathered in the course of historical development. And all his ideas reflected in his writings on an ideal

village. An ideal village of his dreams which would be self-sufficient and self-reliant in its very nature.

Gandhi's concept of democratic decentralization bears the stamp of his passionate belief in non-violence, truth and individual freedom. He calls it Panchayati Raj or village Swaraj. He wants to see each village a little republic, self-sufficient in its vital wants, organically and non-hierarchically linked with the larger spatial bodies and enjoying the maximum freedom of deciding the affairs of the locality. Gandhi wanted political power to be distributed among the villages in India. Gandhi preferred the term 'Swaraj' to describe what he called true democracy.

Mahatma Gandhi advocated Panchayat Raj, a decentralized form of Government where each village is responsible for its own affairs, as the foundation of India's political system. The term for such a vision was Gram Swaraj ("village self-governance"). Mahatma Gandhi advocated panchayat raj as the foundation of India's political system. It would have been a decentralized form of government where each village would be responsible for its own affairs. The term for such a vision was Gram Swaraj ("village self-governance"). Instead India developed a highly centralized form of government. However, this has been moderated by the decentralization of several administrative functions to the local level, empowering elected gram panchayats. There are significant differences between the traditional panchayati raj system, that envisioned by Gandhi, and the system formalized in India in 1992.

It very clear that concentration of either economic or political power would damage all the essential principles of participatory democracy. Gandhi suggested the institution of village republics both as institutions

of parallel polities and as units of economic autonomy. Village is the lowest unit of a decentralized system. Politically a village has to be small enough to permit everyone to participate directly in the decision-making process. It is the basic institution of participatory democracy. The technical skills of the villages will be fully developed, there will be no dearth of men with high degree of skill and artistic talent. There will be village poets, village artists, village architects, linguists and research workers. Gandhian decentralization means the creation of parallel politics in which people's power is institutionalized to counter the centralizing and alienating forces of the modern state. According to Mahatma Gandhi, utilization of the local resources is quite fundamental to the development of the Panchayat Raj system.

Independence must begin at the bottom, so we should focus on our bottom level of governance I mean villages. As India belongs to the agrarian economy we should promote agriculture means. Gandhi said that real India is living in our villages , we have to do something for our 'real India'.

Gandhi's System of Village Governance

He presented a new system of village governance which he called Village Swaraj or Panchayat Raj. The basic idea behind Panchayat Raj is to raise a system of village governance as a basic unit of popular democracy. It is true that Gandhi did not present a full-fledged blueprint of village governance, but he visualised its basic parameters. '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. The law of non-violence

rules village's government. In this ideal form of village governance Gandhi tries to transcend the dichotomy between the liberty of the individual and the common good of the people. This he does by enunciating a very novel idea of what he calls the oceanic circle.

His concept of oceanic circle as follows: '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. Gandhi through his concept of oceanic circle presents an ideological contour which transcends the well proven limitations of both liberalism and Marxism. The strength of the Gandhian scheme is that it reverses the usual system of hierarchical and vertical institutional set up of governance which becomes so top heavy that it crushes the lower units.

Panchayat Raj is a system which is liked with process of good governance. The Gram Sabha can become the cornerstone of the whole Panchayat Raj institutional set-up, thereby the Indian democratic system. So in this paper focus is on Gandhian concept of Panchayat Raj.

IMPLEMENTATION of PANCHAYATIRAJ

This system was adopted by state governments during the 1950s and 60s, as laws were passed to establish panchayats in various states. It also found backing in the Indian Constitution, with the 73rd amendment in 1992 to accommodate the idea. The Amendment Act of 1992 contains provision for devolution of powers and responsibilities to the panchayats both for the preparation of economic development plans and social justice, as well as for implementation in relation to 29 subjects listed in the eleventh schedule of the constitution. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee was a committee appointed by the Government

of India in January 1957 to examine the working of the Community Development Programme (1952) and the National Extension Service (1953) and to suggest measures for their better working.

The recommendations of the committee were approved by NDC in January 1958 and this set the stage for the launching of Panchayat Raj Institutions throughout the country. The committee recommended the establishment of the scheme of 'democratic decentralization' which finally came to be known as Panchayat Raj which includes establishment of a 3-tier Panchayat Raj system.

Conclusion

But from day today experiences, we can easily conclude that the Gandhian ideal of village Swaraj was not given proper attention in the major part of post-independent India. One may recall that the Gandhian idea of decentralization was not limited to the village level but it was supposed to cover from village to the Centre. Gandhian idea of decentralized governance, sound relevant particularly in the context of criminalization of politics and endemic corruption that our nation is facing today. Unfortunately, the Gandhian perspective on decentralized polity still remains as a distant dream in our country. If we really want to solve the problems created by the centralized system of governance, the Gandhian vision of Panchayat Raj should become the basis of Indian polity and governance.

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