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CHAPTER – FIVE
FROM OPPOSITION TO CONVERGENCE: GANDHIAN VISION IN THE MARXIST PROGRAMMES OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The notion of development has become prominent after the Second World War. During that period a large number of countries have emerged as independent countries. The process of the development of these newly independent countries has drawn attention of various scholars. The endeavour of the developed countries to civilise or develop these newly independent countries of the Third World has motivated the scholars to study the development process which has been followed in the Third World Countries.

Studies in political development have been encouraged in the U.S.A. under the auspices of Comparative Politics of the Social Science Research Council.

Generally by development is meant the maintenance of such a socio-economic and political condition where everybody can enjoy his freedom best by fulfilling his needs and desires.

With a view to changing the existing socio-economic and political condition into a better one various principles and methods are propounded by various schools of thought. Amongst them, important ones are modernists, liberals, Gandhians and the Marxists respectively.

Samuel P. Huntington and S.N. Eisenstadt have considered political development as a process of institutionalisation of organisations and procedures in order to enable them to become viable and persistent in rapidly changing
environment. This process permits the growth and spread of strong, durable and specialised institutions, e.g., political parties, pressure groups and so forth. These newly emerged powerful institutions check and balance one another's power and prevent abnormal concentration of power in one individual and institution. Because, according to Huntington, democracy is the primary object of the inhabitants of the Third World countries.

In order to meet this demand, economic development of the third world countries is badly needed. And such economic development would be feasible only by expanding market economy and creating a strong bourgeois class.

From the structural functional approach, Almond and Powell have said that an important feature of the developed politics is the functional diversification and specialisation among various branches and agencies of the government. To them a political system would be regarded as developed if that system effectively reacts to the 'developmental problem through structural diversification, functional specialisation and cultural secularisation'. Such functional diversification based on specialisation provides the ordinary citizens with better protection of rights from the attack of persons, usurping powers and authority inordinately in the society.

The propounders of the Dependency theory regarding 'development' have opined that there are certain problems like population explosion, stagnant social structure, absence of agrarian reforms and so forth and so on embedded in the developing countries of the Third World Development is supposed to be achieved only through the eradication of these internal problems from the society. And eradication of these internal problems would only be feasible when these developing countries come to close contact with the developed countries, which have been able to solve these problems judiciously.
The propounders of the Dependency Theory have said that in this present socio-economic world order, the industrially advanced and developed countries with the U.S.A. at zenith make the hinge around which the developing countries move like satellite. Thus it may not be wrong to say that the developed and developing countries are nothing but the off-shoot of the present in-egalitarian global order hierarchically structured. Therefore, it is very natural that only proper industrialisation in the developing countries can fill in the gap between developed and developing countries.

Some thinkers have thought that economic development and democracy can not go hand in hand for ever. Professor Lipset has said that there is a positive relationship between economic growth and democracy but during 1970s unfortunately it has been found that some countries which have developed economically to some extent have failed miserably in attaining democracy. Thus many scholars have held the opinion that in comparison to the democratic form of government, development oriented authoritarian form of government is more acceptable in the developing countries. Professor Huntington has opined that the democratic form of government can not always attain the high rate of economic growth.

Professor Amartya Sen has offered a critique to such typically western paradigm of development. In the opinion of Professor Sen, for all-round development of human beings certain pre-requisites for better human life, e.g., expansion of basic primary education, primary health care, agricultural advancement, eradication of untouchability and so forth and so on must be fulfilled.
Another important approach to development and the one that concerns us most in the present study is derived from the vision of Gandhi as we have shown in details in chapter three. It is true that Gandhi has developed this approach keeping in mind the specific socio-economic and cultural traits of India, unfolding in course of her encounter with colonial rule.

Gandhi has laid emphasis upon the decentralised production system with a view to generating employment opportunity for unemployed people. According to Gandhi, there is no other alternative to providing jobs for millions of villagers who are in ‘forced idleness’. This is the main principle of the ‘small industry small city’ model imagined by Gandhi.

For the proper all round development of India, Gandhi has firmly believed that rural development is essential. For him, India lives in her villages. By rural development is implied the expansion of irrigation facility for agricultural development, construction of school building with a view to expanding education in rural India and expansion of small-scale and cottage industries to provide employment to rural masses.

Gandhi has put emphasis on three conditions for building his ideal village. These three conditions are:-

i) Power, which has been erstwhile usurped by the people, residing in urban areas, should be distributed amongst the people, living in rural India.

ii) The mentality of voluntary co-operation should be developed amongst the rural people so that they can enjoy freedom properly by extending co-operation to others.

iii) Gandhi has strong reasons to believe that such type of village would be internally cohesive and harmonious rather than being torn into internal caste-class conflicts.\(^1\)
Gandhi has described very nicely and minutely his ideal type of village.\(^2\)

In the ideal village, wherein noble values, cherished by Gandhi would be supposed to be manifested, every inhabitant, irrespective of gender differences, would enjoy equality. In such a village, illiterate men would not hesitate to go to the learned people to be literate. Alike this, the learned people would not be reluctant to do the laborious job like ploughing, spinning etc. The members of the society would distribute medicine amongst the epidemic affected people with a view to preventing the epidemic diseases. And in the time of famine, the villagers would distribute food grains among the famine ridden masses. The propertied class would invest for the production of essential commodities through the needy artisans of the villages, resulting in, the increase of production and generation of employment opportunity.

For the administration of rural India, Gandhi has suggested the Panchayati Raj Institutions. As for him, the Panchayati Raj Institution is the only institution through which democracy would be manifested properly. Gandhi is in favour of democracy as to him, democracy is the only form of administration wherein poor and weak people will get equal opportunity like the rich and the strong.\(^3\) He has also said that such kind of democracy would be manifested only in the self-dependent, simple villages.\(^4\)

From the above discussion on the ideal village, depicted by Gandhi, we may infer that some steps should be taken by the Panchayati Raj Institutions for the establishment of such villages. These steps may be delineated in the following way –

i) With a view to developing ideal villages, Gandhi has said, the village would be self-sufficient. To make the village self-sufficient, Gandhi has intended to spread Swadeshi Mentality among the dwellers of the village, which will help them cast-off foreign goods from their daily life.
ii) Gandhi has been against the establishment of large scale industries. Gandhi has said that the rural people remain unemployed for maximum time in a year. To eradicate such unemployment crisis Gandhi has been always in favour of establishment of small-scale and cottage industries.\(^5\)

iii) Gandhi has always wanted that local people should formulate their own future planning, keeping in mind the locally available resources. In this phase integrated development programme may be initiated. By integrated development programme is meant that surplus production of one sector may be utilised as the raw materials for other.\(^6\) The integrated development programme is very helpful for the development of the village.

iv) Most of the urbanite people are not pre-occupied with any type of prejudices. But the situation in rural India is very gloomy. The rural people are swayed by various prejudices. Gandhi has said that the learned people would take the onus of spreading education amongst the rural illiterate people so that they may be free from the curse of the prejudices.\(^7\)

v) Gandhi has strongly believed that co-operation and mutual aid play a very pivotal role in the evolution of human development.\(^8\)

vi) In Gandhian ideal village, there should be no place for the caste system. With an eye to removing the caste system and untouchability, Gandhi has strongly supported the new education system called Nai Talen, whose curricula would be coined from our daily life. This form of education would be continued from cradle to grave.\(^9\)

vii) For the establishment of such ideal village, Sarvodaya is very useful. For the all-round development of society, all-round metamorphosis of human being is very important.
Gandhi has firm conviction that the method of rural development can only be properly implemented through the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Thus Gandhi has said that the Panchayati Raj Institutions should play some important role in addition to their being decentred and decentralized administrative units in a federal political setup.

He has said that the members of the Panchayati Raj Institutions should play some major role so that they may be treated as idol by general people. They should wear dress made from Khadi. Their habit of wearing khadi would instigate the people to wear khadi dress. They should behave in such a manner that the general people of either the rural or urban area would consider them worthy of emulation. 10

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In every country, through out the world, capitalism has brought about the technological revolution, resulting in the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the capitalist class. The other inevitable result of the technological revolution is the emergence of working class who are deprived of all the benefits of the technological revolution. Thus a chasm between the two main classes of the society, i.e., the industrial capitalists and the working class, has widened.

But the scenario of India is totally different. The technological revolution, led by capitalist class, could not free India from the curse of feudal society.

Some imperfect features, such as feudal lordship, usury, caste oppression still persist in the Indian society. Capitalist development has, therefore, remained incomplete and distorted in post-independent India, exposing the rural workforce to twin exploitation of a landlord-capitalist class state. People from backward communities, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes together with women
constitute the most disadvantaged segments of rural Indian society under such socio-economic dispensation.

The Indian women have become the victims of two forms of exploitation and oppression, i.e. the exploitation and oppression from the capitalist as well as the pre-capitalist classes. And such form of oppression and exploitation make 50% of the total population a really weaker section.

In such socio-economic and political milieu, no measures for development of the weaker section should be either properly formulated or implemented sans their full emancipation from pre-capitalist and capitalist mode of exploitation and oppression. The Marxist thinkers have strongly believed that the emancipation of such marginal classes from the exploitation and oppression would not be feasible without making them aware about their power. Without self-conscious organisation and struggle for emancipation on the part of the disadvantaged segment of the society, no measures adopted for their development, could be implemented.

The Marxist thinkers have wanted to change the correlation of class forces by involving poor and working people in an organised manner in the process of development. Owing to the strong political will of the Left Front, swayed by the Marxist ideology and organised peasant movement under the leadership of peasants’ organisation, induced by the Marxist ideas, various right and rational demands, e.g., implementation of land reforms, better wages, tenancy rights, and so on have been met. In order to change the existing situation the neglected and exploited people have been made more and more powerful by giving various resources. Thus pro-poor, labour intensive, local resource based technology has been introduced. It has been the realization of Marxist votaries of panchayats in India that unless these poor people
have been made powerful and protected from exploitation, democracy can not be survived.\textsuperscript{11}

Dr. Ashim Dasgupta, an economist and the finance minister of the Left Front Government in West Bengal has opined that without land reforms, the establishment of Panchayati Raj Institution can not change the rural scenario much. The land owners will try to influence the decision making process of the Panchayati Raj Institution in their favour. On the other hand, large number of the people, not being the owner of landed property, would not be able to participate in the decision making process, resulting in their total cessation from the participatory system of rural development. This will not serve the basic interest of the decentralisation process.\textsuperscript{12}

Land reform programme, initiated in West Bengal by the Left Front, under the leadership of the C.P.I. (M), serves the interest of the poor people in two ways. Firstly, the erstwhile poor landless people, who have become the owner of the small plot of land, are now very enthusiastic in cultivation. Secondly, it is found that landed people have lost interest in the agricultural production for various reasons. On the contrary, enthusiastic cultivators, who are benefited by the land reform programme, by getting lands, have now shown keen interest in agriculture. Thus the land reform programme not only increases the agricultural production but opens a new avenue of employment opportunity.\textsuperscript{13}

But the Marxists have held the view that only land-distribution amongst the landless people will not serve the purpose of rural development. Planning is also important for proper use of the landed property, distributed among the poor. For this end, planning through the Panchayati Raj Institution is very urgent. Because, only planning through the Panchayati Raj Institution has enabled people, belonging to all strata of the society, to participate in the policy formulation process.\textsuperscript{14}
E.M.S. Namboodripad, one of the leading Indian Marxists, has not been ready to accept democracy only on paper. He has firmly believed that if democracy is properly implemented, it will help the poor people in their struggle against the exploiting class. But the so-called exploiting classes have endeavoured heart and soul to keep democracy only on paper so that the struggle of the poor may be kept within limits or diverted from basic issues.\(^{15}\)

But with a view to supporting the struggle of the exploited class against the exploiting class, the Indian Marxists have put emphasis upon the Panchayati Raj Institution for creation and maintenance of democratic environment in the society.\(^{16}\)

E.M.S. Namboodripad, also one of the important members of Ashok Mehta Committee, did not want to divide the functions of the Panchayati Raj Institution merely in regulatory and developmental functions. He said that only some important national functions should be entrusted upon the Central Government. All other residual functions would be distributed between the provincial governments and the Panchayati Raj Institutions.\(^{17}\)

The Indian Marxists have identified the district as the unit of the Panchayati Raj Institution for mainly two reasons. One of them is, that historically, the district has played a pivotal role in local administration and other reason is that the efficient staff, required for not only proper planning but execution of planning too, are found in the district level.\(^{18}\)

After district, the Mondal Panchayat would be considered as the centre of development. At this level, local people would get the opportunity to finalise the planning for which locally available resources would be utilised for their own development. In this way, the local people would feel an attachment with the total decentralisation process.\(^{19}\)
As various types of responsibilities have been entrusted with the Panchayati Raj Institution to carry out, they should be economically self-dependent. For this purpose power of imposing and collecting tax for providing the people with various types of civic amenities has been given to the Panchayati Raj Institutions.\textsuperscript{20}

The Marxists have favoured the election method in place of nomination method, followed earlier for the formation of the Panchayati Raj Institution. E.M.S. Namboodiripad opined that the Panchayati Raj Institution would not only be regarded as the vanguard of development, but also would play an active role in the administration. E.M.S. Namboodiripad suggested that proportional representative system should be introduced for election to the Panchayati Raj Institution. He strongly believed that through the proportional representation system, people, coming from all strata of the society would get the opportunity to represent themselves in the Panchayati Raj Institution properly.\textsuperscript{21}

In the election process, the political parties should be allowed to actively participate facilitating people's choice from a whole range of ideologies and political programmes.\textsuperscript{22} Marxists have no faith in so called party less democracy or talk about NGO centric development, the new \textit{Avatar} of participatory rural development abhorring party politics.

The Marxist thinkers do not oppose reservation policy in the Panchayati Raj Institution. But they have firmly opposed reservation on the basis of caste-system. On the contrary they have favoured the reservation for socio-economically backward sections of society. Otherwise, in their opinion, an intellectual class would emerge as a fraction from the oppressed class enjoying all government privileges, resulting in clear cleavage in that oppressed class.\textsuperscript{23}
Though it has been said that there is a gulf of difference between Gandhian idea and Marxism. But in the approach to rural development, we find that there are some similarities as well as some dissimilarities. And it would not be an exaggeration if we say that the contemporary Marxian approach to rural development in India has been immensely influenced by some of the ideas propounded by Gandhi. The Indian Marxists have followed the Gandhian approach to rural development knowingly or unknowingly.

A) Gandhi has been in favour of the emancipation of women from the shackle of male domination. Thus he has said again and again that women should not remain confined within four walls. He has been of the opinion that women should possess the qualities which men lack in their character. Women should be treated as the queen of the family. She should be engaged in the cottage industries resulting in more production. And more production will beget more money for the subsistence of the family.

Through reservation policy for women, the Indian Marxists have tried to empower women. According to 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act one third seats of the Panchayati Raj Institution should be kept reserved for women candidates. This attempt has been taken to ensure not only the women’s representation in the Panchayati Raj Institution but to ensure the women’s active participation in the Panchayati Raj Institution.

This endeavour is in tune with the Gandhian notion of women’s empowerment. Though through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act reservation for women and other weaker sections of society in the Panchayati Raj Institution has been made compulsory to alter their socio-economic and political condition, unfortunately the women and other weaker sections of society have not been properly
empowered. For it is very frequently found that in the name of woman member of the Panchayati Raj Institution, her power has been practically exercised by the male members of the family usurping her power. And the women member has become mere rubber stamp. This is not in tune with the notion of the Panchayati Raj Institution, cherished by Gandhi. 24

With a view to eradicating such malaise, proper propagation is badly needed on the part of the Government led by the Left Front, under the leadership of C.P.I.(M).

B) Both Gandhi and the Indian Marxists have been very eager to change the power structure of the rural society.

Gandhi has been in favour of changing the power-structure in the rural society. Thus he has propounded the trusteeship theory. According to this theory the rich people of the rural area should be the trustee of their property. From this property, they would take that share which would be required for maintaining their family and the rest would be utilised for the benefit of the poor. Gandhi has strongly believed that if the rich people can not change their attitude, the poor people will withdraw their cooperation from the rich. In such a way the power structure of the village may be changed. 25

Gandhi has not supported reservation policy of the British Government, but at the latter stage he has become flexible enough to accept reservation policy, initiated by the British Government. Marxists, who have never wanted to reserve seats on caste basis in the Panchayati Raj Institution, have accepted reservation policy on caste basis in the Panchayati Raj Institution owing to some social obligations. 26
The Marxists have also said that the poor people would be empowered through land reform programmes; otherwise the object of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, i.e., the emancipation of the weaker section from the yoke of exploitation by the rich people would remain only on paper.27

C) In the rural society, idealised by Gandhi, no horizontal class formation would be allowed, as in such society, differences among various services would not be recognised. According to Gandhi, every kind of work, i.e., from physical labour to intellectual labour should be treated alike. Thus Gandhi is in favour of class-less society. Naturally a question would come what would be the motivational force in such society. Self-less social service should be the motivation for work. In place of personal gain and competition, community service should be the guiding force.28

The Indian Marxists also favour such a society where there is no division among classes. Thus, they ask for the implementation of land reform programme which may eradicate all the differences among the classes based on landed property. In this programme the Panchayati Raj Institution would be supposed to play a very vital role in bringing about a peaceful transition of the agrarian social structure.

D) Gandhi has asked the rural people to settle at the villages shunning their intention to abode in the urban areas permanently so that they may help the poor and illiterate rural people in the preparation of their future planning. According to him, this will bridge the gap between poor and rich in the rural areas as the poor people may identify the affluent people of the neighbouring areas as their own relative. Thus he has propagated the policy of Constructive Programme.
The Panchayati Raj Institutions, under the Marxist regime, also try to minimise the gap between the poor and the rich. Thus, various small-scale and cottage industries have been established at the rural areas under the patronage of the Panchayati Raj Institutions which have opened the avenues of income for the rural poor.

Both Gandhi and the late 20th century Indian Marxists seem to have converged on the idea of initiating planning for rural development at the grass root level so that people of the locality can formulate their own plan for future. 29

E) After the Seventy-third Constitutional Amendment, measures have been taken to set up Gram Sabha which would be the legislature of the village where the programmes and planning would be framed with the initiative taken by the local people. Before the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, in West Bengal, the Gram Panchayat was the nodal agency for undertaking planned rural development at the bottom layer of the administrative hierarchy. Now planning has been further decentralized in West Bengal down to the Gram Sansad level.

This concept is in tune with the Gandhian idea of rural development. He has opined that the Panchayat should play the role of the legislature where planning and programmes should be formulated by the local people, who would be affected by the planning, keeping the locally available resources in mind.

The notion of Gram Sabha, which has become familiar to all through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, is not a new one. In the Act of 1957, the concept of Gram Sabha was found. This Gram Sabha was constituted by all the electors whose names were in electoral roll. According to this Act, Gram Sabha would play the role of legislature. At that time Gram Panchayat, which was mainly the executive agency
of the Panchayati Raj Institution at the village level was elected by the members of the Gram Sabha.  

The Gram Sabha has been formed following the Gandhian notion of the Panchayati Raj Institution wherein he has envisaged that it would perform both the role of legislature and executive.

Following the Gandhian notion of popular participation, the Left Front Government in West Bengal, under the leadership of the C.P.I. (M), has initiated two platforms, through which the people of the same locality keep surveillance over the functioning of the Panchayati Raj Institutions. These two forms are Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad. Gram Sabha is composed of all voters of a Gram Panchayat. But as the number of voters is large, the meetings of the Gram Sabha are convened twice a year. But convening the meeting twice a year is not enough to transact all the functions. Not only that all the members of the Gram Sabha can not attend the meeting for various reasons. Thus the role of the Gram Sansad has become very important. For the Gram Sansad is composed of all the voters of a ward, which is less than the members of the Gram Sabha. Convening the meeting of the Gram Sansad twice a year has become compulsory. The elected members of that locality for the Panchayati Raj Institution are supposed to be present in these meetings.

It is true that after Seventy-third Constitutional Amendment Act, the Panchayati Raj Institution has been empowered to a great extent so that they can decide their programme keeping their needs in mind. This attempt has been made according to the Gandhian notion of the Panchayati Raj Institution. Not only the above measure, some other steps are taken in this direction. For example, we may say that the Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad, have been used for both the formulation and implementation of planning and keeping surveillance on the proper execution of that planning.
F) The Seventy third Constitutional Amendment Act, through which tribute has been paid to Gandhi, has initiated a new era in rural life. Through the Panchayati Raj Institution, general rural people have become more and more conscious about their rights and privileges which are so long denied. Not only that the bureaucrats, who have considered themselves as the masters of the rural poor people are now compelled to change their attitude. Now the bureaucrats have come forward to solve the various problems faced by the rural people, being their friends and guides.33

The most remarkable development, which is the result of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, is the emergence of new and young leadership through the Panchayati Raj Institution for future India from the grass root level.

G) Through the Seventy-third Constitutional Amendment Act, measures are taken to strengthen the self-dependence of the Panchayati Raj Institution. These measures are taken following the Gandhian notion as he has thought that with the help of strong and self-dependent Panchayati Raj Institution, freedom of general people would remain unchallenged.34

Gandhi has wanted to make the Panchayati Raj Institution self-dependent in all respects. The Marxists also want to do so. Thus they have intended to empower the Panchayati Raj Institutions to collect taxes in order to raise their own resources. In case, the Panchayati Raj Institution has become resourceful, it would not depend upon the aids of either the Central Government or the Provincial Governments for implementation of its own planned small scale projects. The Marxists have firmly asserted that economic dependence of any institution tends to cripple that very institution.
But the track-record of collecting taxes on the part of the Panchayati Raj Institution is very poor. Thus, they have become mere implementing agency of various schemes, sponsored by either Central Government or State Government.\textsuperscript{35}

\textbf{H) Gandhi has been in favour of direct election for all three tiers of the Panchayati Raj Institutions.}\textsuperscript{36}

After the 73\textsuperscript{rd} Constitutional Amendment, steps have been taken so that all the office-bearers of the Panchayati Raj Institution would be directly elected, following the Gandhian philosophy. But unfortunately, the inclusion of the Parliamentarian and legislators excluding the ministers as the ex-officio members is not in tune with the Gandhian notion.\textsuperscript{37}

\textbf{I) Gandhi has said that the Panchayati Raj Institution should play the pivotal role in rural administration. The Panchayati Raj Institution is supposed to monitor all the functions, meant for the development of the rural area.}

The Panchayati Raj Institutions, under the Marxist regime, undertake various programmes, like administration of public health, primary education, literacy, sanitation, formation of self-help-groups with larger scale participation of women and other provisions for welfare of the marginal communities, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in particular. Not only that the allocation of funds for rural development, is now spent only through the Panchayati Raj Institutions, in place of state level ministries. This system has reduced the wastage of resources at the delivery stage to a great extent.
J) Gandhi has said that the leadership of the Panchayati Raj Institution would be vested upon five people, possessing minimum qualifications and elected for a year. In this way the leadership of the Panchayati Raj Institution should not be concentrated in the hands of a few men with vested interest.

On the other hand, under the regime of the Left Front led by the C.P.I. (M), the cudgel of the Panchayati Raj Institution has been taken away from the so-called rich landed rural people by the newly emerging leadership composed of the rural poor, coming from mainly middle and lower strata of society.

K) In his ideal village Gandhi has been in favour of such a development approach which would be eco-friendly. He has thus said that in the ideal village, reared by him, nature should not be allowed to destroy at any cost. Gandhi has contended that agricultural surplus can be properly utilised for the development of Animal Husbandry and the raw materials available from these fields can be utilised for the production of essential common goods. Gandhi has suggested to adhere to this principle for the development of rural area. For it is his staunch belief that if village perishes, India will perish too.

The Panchayati Raj Institution under the leadership of the C.P.I. (M.) are following the principle of sustainable development while planning for future. Thus now-a-days various eco-friendly steps are found to be taken by the Panchayati Raj Institution. As for example we may say the programme of afforestation on the bank of the river, ponds, lake and roads, de-silting of river and ponds, excavation of ponds for various purposes in the rural areas, encouraging rainwater harvest, using bio-gas plants for domestic purposes and so forth and so on. Such programmes are adopted with a view to protecting the nature from various forms of destruction.
Here we also see that there is very little difference between two approaches, propounded and practised by Gandhi and Indian Marxists.

Now the differences between Gandhi and the Indian Marxists in their approach to rural development may be discussed.

i) Gandhi has said that the controlling unit of the village would be the Panchayat which would be constituted of five annually elected members, possessing minimum qualifications. Gandhi has opined that the Panchayati Raj Institution should enjoy judicial, legislative and executive power. In this connection Gandhi has uttered that as there is no need of punishment in any case, the Panchayati Raj Institution will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate for its year of office.

But the Panchayati Raj Institution under the Marxist regime, even after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment has no judicial power. They only possess the executive and legislative power through the Gram Sabha or Gram Sansad to some extent.

ii) Gandhi has prescribed certain qualifications for the members of the Gram Panchayat. According to Gandhi, the members of the Gram Panchayat must imbibe those qualifications in such a way that through their activities, some virtues, e.g., love, fearlessness, knowledge, industry and cleanliness would be expressed.38

But the Indian Marxists have never prescribed any qualification for any member of the Panchayati Raj Institution, for even any office-bearer of the Panchayat.

iii) Gandhi has always wanted to reorient the rural life through the Panchayati Raj Institution. He has been very much eager to see that no one would remain illiterate, none would remain idle for want of work. To the contrary, everyone would get
sufficient food, full of vitamin, well ventilated dwellings and sufficient Khadi to cover
them. Gandhi has said that with a view to meeting these needs, the village would be
self-dependent. Gandhi has said for such self-sufficient, self-sustaining village, the
Panchayati Raj Institution should play the important role in the maintenance of proper
order of the village.\(^{39}\)

But at present, the Panchayati Raj Institution has become mere an implementing
agency of various schemes, sponsored by either the Central Government or the State
Government. So the Panchayati Raj Institution has not become the self-sufficient, self-
sustaining and self-administered republic of Gandhi's dream.

iv) Gandhi has said that through the Gram Panchayat, people would be trained to
sacrifice themselves for others. Villagers would be guided to lead their daily life in such
a way that they would be humble and would always co-operate with each and all.\(^{40}\)

But unfortunately, after independence, such ideal type of village has not been
attained through the Panchayati Raj Institution. In the rural area conflicts among the
villagers based on caste, community and religion have come to the fore.

v) Though Gandhi has depicted the concept of the Panchayati Raj Institution only for
rural development, the same has become in its more recent Marxist idea, a mere
political tool, not for rural development, but for mobilisation of people in support of
the political party, enjoying power in West Bengal. The political parties have used the
Panchayati Raj Institution to communicate their cherished ideas to the rural people.
On the contrary, Gandhi has intended to use the Panchayati Raj Institution as a device
with whose help the political leaders would be informed about the demands and
aspirations of the local people so that proper planning would be done from below.

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Gandhi has strongly opposed the policy that planning should be imposed upon the rural people from above.

With a view to adjusting with this principle of Gandhi the concepts of Gram Sabha and Gram Unnayan Samiti have been introduced. But unfortunately the Gram Sabha has no effective role as it has become mere the ratifying agency of the planning, adopted elsewhere.

vi) Decentralisation is very important to Gandhi, as for him decentralisation is such a wide phenomenon that ‘it touches all the basic problems of life’. Gandhi has been against centralisation, as it is not in tune with the non-violent structure of society.

But the Marxists have used decentralisation as a means to go to the poor people with a view to strengthening their political position in rural India.

vii) In the election of 1978, all political parties actively participated. The Left Front, under the C.P.I. (M) has strongly favoured the participation of all political parties in the election, as they have apprehended that if the political parties have not been allowed to actively participate in the election process of the Panchayati Raj Institution, they would do so in disguise which would lead to confusion among the rural people.

But Gandhi has been strongly against the participation of political parties in the election process. As for him, the Panchayati Raj Institution should be a non-political institution.

Thus here the notion of the Panchayati Raj Institution, supported by the Indian Marxists, is not in tune with the notion, propounded by Gandhi.
viii) Through the Seventy-third Constitutional Amendment Act in 1992, the position and the role of the Karmadhyakshas of the Sthayee Samiti of both Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad respectively have been strengthened. They are now responsible for financial and executive liabilities of the programmes or schemes under the control of the Sthayee Samiti.

In the Gram Panchayat level, as there is no provision of Stayee Samiti, all the responsibilities have been entrusted upon the Pradhans but now the situation has changed to a great extent. The responsibility, which had entrusted upon the Pradhans of the Gram Panchayats, so long, has now been distributed among the Upa-Pradhans and ward-members of the Gram Panchayats through formation of a minimum of five upasamitis in a Gram Panchayat as per newly incorporated statutory provisions in West Bengal Panchayat Act.

Another important step, taken through the Constitutional Amendment in 1992, is that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of both Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad respectively should be fulltime functionaries.
References:


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13. Ibid. p. 32.
14. Ibid. p. 34.


16. Ibid. p. 163.

17. Ibid. p. 163.

18. Ibid. p. 37.

19. Ibid. p. 42.

20. Ibid. p. 170 and p. 121.


22. Ibid. p. 52.

23. Ibid. p. 168.


28. Sharma, Jai Narayan, op. cit, p. 79.


33. Pandey, Janardan, op. cit, p. 88.

34. Ibid. p. 88.


38. Ibid, p. 86.

39. Ibid, p. 86.

40. Ibid. p. 86.