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PANCHYATI RAJ AS AN INSTRUMENT OF CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL INDIA GANDHI AND THE INDIAN MARXISTS.

A

The present world has been divided into two groups – one is developed and the other is developing. India, till now, is in the group of developing countries. The greater the development, the greater becomes the chasm between the poor and the rich. Despite political and legal attempts at equitable distribution, the bureaucrats and the capitalists take a lion’s share of the production. This is the tragedy. In order to change this tragic condition, various methods, e.g., subsidisation, credit remittal etc. have been adopted in India. But the situation remains unchanged. The plan, based on scientific technology, failed too. As the participants of this technology based revolution will be deserted in utter poverty sans the necessary purchasing power. The technology based development programme brings the old story of imperialism back. Today, in the rural areas, producers of necessities of life and raw materials for large industries are being exploited by the urban and city-dwellers in a planned way.

Having inferred such problems, Gandhi has laid emphasis on decentralised production and generation of employment opportunity for unemployed people. According to Gandhi, there is no other alternative to provide job for millions of villagers who are in a ‘forced idleness’. This is the quintessence of ‘small industry and small city model’ propounded by Gandhi. Side by side, Gandhi has emphasised the development of standard of living for rural people to transform the villages from ‘dung heaps’ into the ‘Garden of Eden’.

(34)
Conceptually, by rural development is implied the all-round development of rural areas. Generally, by rural development is meant the expansion of irrigation facilities, electrification, advancement of agricultural process, construction of school building and provision of educational facilities, health care and so forth and so on. But this is a narrow view of definition on rural development.

Rural development can be defined as a process of improvement of well being of the people, living outside the urbanised areas. These non-urbanised areas, however, have not any separate entity, but are part and parcel of a far flung system of spatial and economic linkages between rural and urban areas. According to Gandhi, if village perishes, India will perish too.

B

With a view to giving proper place to the villages, Gandhi has stressed on three factors. These are – (i) the power, concentrated in the large metropolitan cities, should be properly distributed among the villagers, (ii) the voluntary co-operation amongst the villagers should ensure new order and freedom, (iii) this type of system, according to Gandhi, would perpetuate, instead of its own internal problems.

Gandhi opines that liberty should be at the grass root level. Thus every village would be a republic wherein power would be concentrated. Not only that these villages would be capable of resisting any onslaught from outside. Though individual should be the unit of the village, but there would be no dearth of co-operation in such self-dependent villages.

In the village, conceived by Gandhi, no distinction would be made amongst the villagers on the basis of religion. Any villager, belonging to any religious community, would perform his religious rites without any fear. In such ideal village,
pictured by Gandhi, machinery would play least role. According to Gandhi, only that kind of machine would be permissible, which is supposed to help every individual.

In Gandhi’s own words, “In this picture every religion has its full and equal place. We are all leaves of a majestic tree whose trunk can not be shaken off its roots which are deep down in the bowls of earth. The majestic wind can not move it.

In this there is no room of machines that would displace human labour and that 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.”

The ideal society of his ideal village, cherished by Gandhi, is like this –

In the ideal society, consisting of ideal values of Gandhi, men and women of every stratum would enjoy equality. In this society illiterate man would be literate with the help of literate. On the other hand, the learned man would not hesitate to take on the laborious job such as ploughing, spinning etc. The members of the society would distribute medicine with a view to preventing the epidemic diseases and in time of famine, they would assist various organisations through the distribution of food grains among the famine ridden masses. The moneyed class would invest for the production of essential commodities through the needy weavers, resulting in the increase of production.

In his ideal village Gandhi has laid importance on democracy. Because, Gandhi has firm belief that under this system the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest. This can never happen except through non-violence. He has strongly believed that such type of democracy would be developed only in the self-dependent, simple and easy villages.

Gandhi has depicted the picture of ideal village in the article, named ‘Content of Independence’.
"My idea of village Swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbour for its vital wants, and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity. Thus every villager’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 adult 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 water works ensuring clean 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 to-day with their graded untouchability. Non violence with its technique of satyagraha and non-cooperation 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 Panchayat of five persons, annually elected by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. This 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 years of office."

From the above-mentioned quotation of Gandhi, we may infer that the village, idealised by Gandhi, is a self-dependent republic, enabled to protect itself from foreign invasion. According to Gandhi, important pre-requisites for the establishment of such ideal village are well-lighted, well ventilated houses, built by raw materials, available from the same localities, clean roads, wells for villagers’ purpose, place for worship for all communities, general meeting place, primary and secondary schools and so forth.
For the formation of such ideal village, Gandhi has talked about various methods. These methods can be described in the following way –

1. According to Gandhi, the main purpose of rural development should be self-sufficiency. For this he has emphasised the development of Swadeshi Mentality among the villagers. Gandhi has always wanted to utilise local-resources for rural development. He has said that things, produced at the local areas, should not be produced in the urban areas.

2. Gandhi has always wanted that large factories must sub-serve the villages and their crafts. Gandhi has said again and again that the villagers are constrained to live idly for maximum time of year. But setting up of the cottage industry should be encouraged, so that these people would be provided with jobs. Thus Gandhi has opined that eradication of unemployment through the generation of employment with the help of setting up new cottage industries is one of the important method of rural development.7

3. Gandhi has suggested that local people should actively participate in the rural development programme. The inhabitants of the concerning area would formulate their own development programme. Not only that in order to implement that programme, the local people would depend mainly upon the resources, available from the same area. At this level, integrated development would be feasible. 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.

4. Gandhi has emphasised the Constructive Programme. In the Constructive Programme, social development should be given importance from bottom through proper utilisation of the locally available resources. In the opinion of Gandhi,
through this method, eradication of poverty would be feasible. And he has asked that literate persons should take the initiative.  

5. The urbanite people can look after their well being. But the villagers do not reach that stage. In the villages superstitions, prejudices are very much in vogue. The learned urbanite people should take the onus of such task of driving away these shortcomings through spreading proper education. The villagers should be given proper information to lead a clean and healthy life. But now-a-days the learned rural people favour setting up in the urban areas. Gandhi has intended to stop this trend. Gandhi has asked the educated people should identify themselves with the villagers and teach them how to economise time, wealth and money.

6. Gandhi is of the opinion that in the evolution of human being co-operated and mutual aid plays a vital role. In reality Gandhi has attached more importance to Kropotkin’s theory than Darwin’s. Thus he has motivated to work among small rural group, for in such group there is no dearth of co-operation. Gandhi has said on Gram Swaraj, “Swaraj of my dream is poor man’s swaraj. The necessities of life should be enjoyed by you in common with those enjoyed by princes of moneyed men. But that does not mean that you should have palaces like theirs. They are not necessary for happiness. You or I would be lost in them. But you ought to get all the ordinary amenities of life that a rich man enjoys.”

7. Gandhi has been always in favour of decentralisation for the development of industry. He has wanted to increase production only for public use. But he has strongly opposed to increase production for business purpose. For the development of industry, co-operation and mutual dependence rather than competition should be the main mantra. Gandhi has intended heartily that human values should dominate our economic values.
As Gandhi said, "the poor of the world can not be helped by mass production, only by production by the masses .... The technology of production by the masses is conducive to decentralisation, compatible with the laws of ecology, gentle in its use of scarce resources, and designed to serve the human person instead of making him the servant of the machine." 10

8. There is hardly any place of caste-system in the ideal village, depicted by Gandhi. In order to establish such rural society, Gandhi has advocated a new education system, named Nai Talem. The basic elements of this education system would be gathered from our daily life. This form of education has to start with birth and continue till death. 11

9. With a view to establishing such an ideal society, Gandhi has put emphasis on the method of Sarvodaya. For the all-round development of the present society, internal metamorphosis of human nature is very urgent. For this end, no earthy institutions can play any pivotal role. In that case internal change of human being can play the vital role. Which the state can do is to give only its sanction.

Gandhi has said that the method of rural development can be properly followed through the Panchayat. Thus Gandhi has enlisted some other functions excluding the conventional functions, say, legislative, judiciary and executive functions for the Panchayats. These functions can be described in the following way –

i) Every worker of the Panchayat will wear Khadi. They would abhor caste system in their social life and regard would be paid to all religions.

ii) Every member of the Panchayat would know every inhabitant of his locality personality.

iii) Every Panchayat would make arrangement of training for the villagers and maintain register of the name of the trained persons.
iv) Every worker should enlist his daily programme.

v) Every Panchayat should make arrangement so that every village would be self-sufficient through agricultural means.

vi) Panchayat will give training on sanitation and hygiene and try to eradicate various diseases.

vii) Panchayat will make arrangement of education for villagers. Basic elements of the education should be coined from daily life.

viii) Panchayat should enlist the name of the villagers in the voters’ list.

ix) Panchayat would arrange training for its own staff.

According to Gandhi, if a member of a Panchayat follows these methods scrupulously, it would help the village in the process of development.

From the aforesaid discussion on rural development activities, it can be inferred that annually elected five members of the Panchayat should be sprinkled with the qualities like love, fearlessness, knowledge, cleanliness, industrious.

In the opinion of Gandhi Panchayat would train people to sacrifice for others. Villagers would be trained in such a way that they will not attack others rather they would be docile and co-operative with each other.

10. Gandhi has firmly believed that the liberty and prosperity of the country would largely hinge upon the sacrifice and enlightenment of the woman of India. 

Gandhi has been against the division of gender between man and woman. He has said that by nature there is a difference between man and woman. In reality man and woman are same. In essence their problem is same; the soul in both is same and they lead the same life. The one can not live without other’s active co-operation. They are made for each other. In stead of such sameness, man is not willing to vest woman with their requisite power. Thus, Gandhi has said that
women should be endowed with necessary important power. It is his staunch belief that "women would have to determine with authority what she needs".\textsuperscript{13} Along with this, Gandhi has said women must have franchise and an equal legal status.\textsuperscript{14}

11. Gandhi has strongly withstood the reservation policy, adhered to by the British Government. The Scheduled Class, outcome of the British reservation policy, has claimed the reservation of all the important portfolios of the elected bodies. In order to pacify such claim the British Government has made separate electorate for them. Gandhi has opined that there may be merit behind this policy but it is not at all acceptable. Because Gandhi has reasons to believe the people belonging to Scheduled Class, would not have requisite quality for the highest position of the administration. He has prescribed to spread education among this Scheduled Class. As a result the people, belonging to this Class would be eligible for the post. Otherwise, importance of the post would be waned.\textsuperscript{15}

C

In every country throughout the world, after the collapse of the feudal system, mainly capitalism leads to the technological revolution. The inevitable result of such revolution is the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the capitalist class. On the other hand, as an unavoidable circumstance of this technological revolution is the emergence of the working class. Generally this working class is deprived of the profit of the technological revolution. As a sequel the cleavage between the two main classes of the society, i.e., the industrial capitalists and the working class, has been widened.
Notwithstanding the emergence of capitalism owing to the technological revolution the problem of India is totally different in nature. In India the development of capitalism can not uproot the pre-capitalist society, i.e., the feudal system. Thus some peculiarities of the feudal society, e.g., feudal lord monopoly, usury, caste-oppression, socio-cultural backwardness and so forth and so on are still in vogue. These existing peculiarities of the obsolete feudal society become the impediment in the way of the modern India. As both the pre-capitalist and capitalist systems are dominant, the people of India have become the victim of the oppression of the two systems. On the one hand they are exploited by the pre-capitalist system, on the other hand they are oppressed by the capitalist system. Again the development of the Indian capitalist system is to a great extent dependent on foreign aid.

The oppression of the pre-capitalist and capitalist systems has given the exploited class a specific character. On the one side, there is a weak class who is exploited by the various forms of exploitation of the pre-capitalist system prevailing in the pre-independent and post-independent era. The feudal lord system, usury, caste oppression and so on are the various forms of exploitation. Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Other Backward Class belong to this exploited weak class.

Unfortunately the Indian women have become the victim of two forms of exploitation also. One form is pre-capitalist and other is capitalist. And such form of oppression and exploitation make 50% of the total population a really weaker section.

In such socio-economic and political condition, no measures for the development of the weaker section should be properly implemented unless and until they are emancipated from such pre-capitalist and capitalist form of oppression and exploitation. The Marxist thinkers are of the opinion that for the emancipation from such exploitation and oppression the weaker section should depend more and more on
their own power than the assistance of other section. Without the self-conscious organisation and struggle of the working class no measures, adopted for them, could be implemented. And for this, democracy should also be expanded further.

Marxist thinkers know it very well that no state has enough assets, required for the implementation of the strategies, adopted for the emancipation of the poor people from the poverty and exploitation.

Thus they think to bring about changes in favour of poor the existing socio-economic and political milieu should be altered. The people would be conscious about the existing problems when they actively participate in the formulation and implementation process of the policies, adopted for the poor. In that time they would unleash movement throughout the country to eradicate the existing problems and to compel the authority to implement the alternative strategy of development.

Marxist thinkers are in favour of bringing about a change in 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 ministry, influenced by the Marxist ideology and organised movement of the peasantry under the leadership of the peasants' organisations swayed by Marxist ideas, various right and rational demands, e.g., implementation of various enactments for land reforms, better wages and tenancy rights have been fulfilled. In order to perform these functions smoothly, attempt has been made to make the neglected, exploited, poor peasants, agricultural labourers powerful by giving them various assets. Thus pro-poor, labour intensive, local resource based easily transferable, production technology has been adopted. In accordance to the opinion, cherished by S.K. Mishra, an eminent Marxist leader, unless these poor people have been made powerful and protected from exploitation, democracy can not be viable.\textsuperscript{16}
Professor Ashim Dasgupta, another eminent Marxist thinker of West Bengal expressed his opinion in the symposium in the honour of Professor Lakdawala, organised by the Institute of Social Science that unless and until the decentralisation process and the system of the Panchayati Raj Institution are implemented without accomplishing land reforms programme, the big farmers and the owners of the landed property endeavour to influence the decision making process and the decisions. On the other hand, maximum number of people, not being the owner of the landed property, do not participate in the decision making process. Thus, they would lose interest about the decentralisation process. Whose result is either they separate themselves from the system or they demand total land reforms programme.17

Land reform movement serves the interest of the poor rural people in two ways. Firstly, land reform movement creates enthusiasm among the deprived rural poor land less people. Secondly, they become the owner of small plots of agricultural land. In effect they participate in agricultural production enthusiastically. In many cases the owners of the vast landed property lose interest in the agricultural production activity for various reasons. Naturally it not only increases the agricultural production but opens the avenues of new types of employment opportunities. But no enactment is sufficient for the implementation of the land reform programme, unless and until the powerful political parties of that specific region have strong political will. Land reform programme strengthens the Panchayati Raj Institution system as the economic condition of the deprived backward poor rural people would be improved, side by side they would participate in the various process of the Panchayati Raj Institutions properly.

Marxist thinkers know it very well that through land reform programme distribution of land among poor landless people is not enough. Exact planning should
be made so that they can properly utilise the land, distributed among the poor. In other words, high yielding seeds, irrigation facilities would be provided with the non-irrigable agricultural lands. Non agricultural land should be utilised for the production of economically profitable items. With a view to meeting this goal proper planning is required through the Panchayati Raj Institution. If this is made rural people belonging to all categories, would actively participate in the planning process and the implementation of that planning. For rural development, the Marxist thinkers are in favour of accepting the help of various voluntary organisations, e.g., Kishan Sabha, organisation of agricultural labours. As their influence upon the local people is unquestionable, though organisations are swayed by specific political ideology.

E.M.S. Namboodripad, one of the prominent Indian Marxist thinkers, was not ready to accept democracy only in the literary sense. He was very much eager to introduce parliamentary form of democracy in true sense in India. He firmly believed that the main principles of parliamentary democracy, if implemented properly would help the exploited and oppressed class in the struggle against the pre-capitalist and capitalist form of exploitation. The Indian exploiters and oppressors have tried to transform parliamentary democracy into a formality to nip the struggle of the exploited and oppressed working class in the bud.

In order to driving away such impious desires of the exploiting class and to strengthen the parliamentary democracy the Indian Marxists intend to expand democratic system beyond the district level, instead of keeping it within the boundary of the centre and the provinces. So, they think that it is very important for the development of Indian society. Thus they put emphasis upon the Panchayati Raj system for creation and preservation of democratic environment in India.
In the post independence period two tier or three tier Panchayati Raj system was in vogue in many provinces in India. For a uniform Panchayati Raj system throughout India, E.M.S. Namboodripad proposed to introduce two tier Panchayati Raj system. To him, this form of Panchayati Raj system is less expensive and through this institution decentralisation system as well as democratic set up would be more effective.

Besides this, Namboodiripad was not in favour of any division of the functions of the Panchayati Raj system into regulatory and developmental functions. In accordance with his opinion, some very important responsibilities should be entrusted with the Central Government and the remnant functions should be discharged by the provincial governments. And some responsibilities, taking from the provincial government, should be endowed with the elected bodies at the level of district and the lower levels.

They are in favour of decentralisation of the process of planning, development and power under the state level for the total social and political development of human being. According to the opinion, held by the Marxist thinkers, the tendency of usurping power by the Central Government is detrimental to the main principles of the establishment of the Panchayati Raj system. E.M.S. Namboodiripad was at one with the report of Ashok Mehta Committee where it has been stated that “unless there is a commitment to the process of decentralisation at all levels, the Panchayati Raj Institution will not be able to fulfil the expectations that we have from them. Means shape the end and the process determines the product.”

The Indian Marxist thinkers are strongly in favour of identifying district as the unit of decentralisation for the establishment and development of the Panchayati Raj system. The district has been identified as the unit of decentralisation for mainly two
reasons. Firstly, historically district has played a very vital role in the local administration during last few centuries. Secondly, for the development, only planning is not enough, the execution of planning is also very important. The number of efficient staff, required for the accomplishment of the planning would be sufficiently available at the district level. But it is very hard to get sufficient number of efficient staff at the subdivision or block level.

After the district, Mandal Panchayat should be treated as the hub of the development. At this level, local people would get the opportunity to determine the method of development. Alike this, local people would finalise local planning through which local resources would be utilised for the development of that locality. For local people would know very well what resources are abundant in that locality, side by side the people of that area would decide for what purpose such abundant resources would be utilised. The people of that area, through the process of the formulation and implementation of the planning would actively participate in decentralised development programme, so the people of the concerning locality would not lose interest regarding the development rather they would be attracted with the total system. Thus socio-economic development of the concerning area would be easily feasible.

The Marxist thinkers opine that through the Panchayati Raj system, off shoot of the decentralisation process, people can be involved in the development process. Through the decentralisation process, people’s participation in the process of planning, implementation and supervision have been ensured and for this at the rural level, planning committee, consisting of elected people, has been formed. Not only that through the amendment of Panchayat Act in 1985, convening of two meetings of Gram Sabha within one year has become mandatory for Gram Panchayat. This step
has been taken to encourage the people to participate in the planning process. In this meeting planning, adopted for the future and the audited detailed accounts are placed before the electors.

The Marxist thinkers opine as various responsibilities of development should be entrusted with the Panchayati Raj system, they should be made economically self-dependent. Therefore they propose to empower the Panchayati Raj Institutions to levy and collect taxes from some items. But in reality either the Central Government or the State Government levies and collects taxes from maximum items. Naturally, if a Panchayat imposes taxes on the same item, it would only increase the burden upon the people. But the Marxist thinkers strongly believe that so long the Panchayati Raj system would remain dependent upon the State or Central Government for financial support, Panchayati Raj Institutions would never be recognised as the vanguard of the development. “For this fresh thought should be given on the incidence of taxation on particular types of property or on particular commodities, which are levied by the Centre and the States and now proposed to be levied by the Panchayati Raj Institutions”19

One important source of income of the Panchayati Raj Institutions is the grant from the State Governments. In many cases the salaries of all the staffs, under the control of the elected Panchayati Raj Institutions, are paid by the State Government. Many times the State Government provides grants to the Panchayati Raj Institutions as incentive to encourage the increase of agricultural production, planning for general development etc. In accordance with the opinion of the Indian Marxist thinkers a finance commission should be set up at the state level to distribute financial resources properly between the State Government and the Panchayati Raj Institutions,
eradicating any feud between the State Government and the Panchayati Raj Institutions regarding allocation of funds and grants.

With a view to getting the Panchayati Raj Institution rid of the financial control of the State Governments, various steps should be taken to make the villages self-dependent financially. As for example, shops, markets, bus-stand, rest house so forth and so on should be made, side by side fruit trees should be planted on the barren land. The income of the villagers along with the Panchayati Raj Institutions would be enhanced by the selling of the fruits of these trees. Along with this, for the eradication of the rural poverty and for the enhancement of the income various scientific methods should be implemented successfully.

E.M.S. Namboodiripad strongly believed that the higher bodies of the panchayat might increase their income by adopting new means and methods apart from the old one. In this context he told that the Panchayati Raj Institution might sell power at a profitable manner as the Panchayati Raj Institution did in the past. Not only this development of the communication system may also play a pivotal role in the increase of the income of the Panchayati Raj Institution. Beside this, the Panchayati Raj Institution may borrow loans from either their higher level or the Government. Marxist thinkers have suggested that the Panchayati Raj Finance Corporation should be established following the recommendations of Shantanam Committee. Taking loan from this corporation, the Panchayati Raj Institution would remain viable.

E.M.S. Namboodiripad was in favour of election of all members of the Panchayati Raj Institution in lieu of nomination. As nowadays the Panchayati Raj Institution is not only the vanguard of the development, but plays a very crucial role in the administrative system. He suggested proportional representation system for the
election of the Panchayati Raj Institution. Because he hold the opinion that through
the proportional representation system, people, belonging to every strata of the society
will get opportunity to represent themselves in the Panchayati Raj Institution properly.

Various political parties ought to be allowed to actively participate in the
election of the Panchayati Raj Institutions. For our political evolution has reached
such a stage wherein it would be unjust if political parties are not allowed in the
election process. To the contrary if political parties are not allowed to participate in
the political process, they would involve in the process in disguise. Two forms of
problems would come from such situation. Firstly, electors would be bewildered as
there is no symbol. Secondly, political parties would not have any political
accountability. On the contrary if the political parties are allowed to actively
participate in the election process, electors would become aware of their
administrative efficiency and planning of development at the grass root level.

Many thinkers have demanded reservation for the socio-economically
backward class in the Panchayati Raj Institution. The Marxist thinkers are not against
the reservation for the socio-economically backward class. But they say that the
reservation should be made on the basis of economic ground. As they believe that due
to reservation policy a fraction would emerge as an intellectual section from this
oppressed class. But this newly emerged section does not think about the development
of the other members of the oppressed class to which they formally belong. On the
contrary they would become a privileged class.

As a sequel the cleavage in the oppressed class is found. Such cleavage would
sow the seeds of contention among the same class. But according to the Marxist
thinkers if the reservation policy is adopted on the basis of economic criteria, the
economically backward class would get a legitimate share in the employment and
other development opportunities, while the unity between them and poor, belonging to the upper caste, would be preserved. Again the Marxist thinker, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, was against the reservation of a particular post of the Panchayati Raj Institution for a particular backward class. For in many cases elected members express their unwillingness to function with a person, holding a position in the Panchayati Raj Institutions by reservation. The effect of this problem is that a stalemate may arise in the development process.

But in West Bengal economic criterion is not adhered to in the formulation of reservation policy in the Panchayati Raj Institution. After 1977, the social structure of the Panchayati Raj Institution has been changed very much. From the very beginning it has been accepted as a policy that if proper representation of the women, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes is not found in any Panchayati Raj Institution, two women and two members from Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes would be nominated in the Panchayati Raj Institution. The Government of West Bengal has adopted this policy as the Government of West Bengal having been influenced by the Marxist ideology strongly believe that caste and sex differences would not be eradicated as long as class differences remain in vogue.

The main responsibilities of the rural development are entrusted upon the Zilla Parishad and the lower level of the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Naturally, all the personnel, responsible for the execution of the development planning should remain under the control of the Panchayati Raj Institution. Thus a separate development administration on a decentralised functioning would develop along with a composite Zilla Parishad Secretariat.

All the staffs of the Zilla Parishad, who would be responsible for the implementation of the development planning, would be brought under the
administrative control of Chief Executive Officer. Therefore, a unity of command as well as co-ordination among the staffs could be ensured, on the other hand a locus for staff, Chief Executive Officer would be under the elected body.

Along with a full time secretary to the Gram Panchayat, another staff, named Job-assistant is provided with the Gram Panchayat for performing various duties. Except this, various part-time employees, like tax-collectors, chowkidar etc. are attached with Gram Panchayat. At the middle level of the Panchayati Raj Institution. Block Development Officer and Panchayat Extension Officer perform the duties of the Executive Officer and Secretary to the Panchayat Samity respectively. Besides this all the staffs of the Block have been brought under the purview of the Panchayat Samity. District Magistrate acts as the Executive Officer of the Zilla Parishad. One full time Additional Executive Officer of the rank of Additional District Magistrate is placed at its disposal. A senior state civil service officer is made available to the Zilla Parishad as its secretary. Services of Technical Officers at the rank of Executive Engineer, Assistant Engineer etc. are also placed under the Zilla Parishad in addition to their own clerical accounts and technical set-up existing previously.

The Marxist thinkers opine that the control of the Panchayati Raj Institution upon the government officials is not enough for the implementation of the policy of decentralisation and rural development programme. The differences between the officials of the Central Government and the State Government and the State Government and the Local Self Government which are the result of various factors, e.g., different pay scales, prestige, status and so forth and so on should be eradicated. Same pay structure, terms and conditions for the employment should be formulated and implemented. This alone will make the administration an integral whole.
The present socio-economic condition is the breeding ground of the poverty. Thus, the implementation of the poverty eradication programme can not be feasible without the co-operation of the pro-poor Panchayati Raj Institution. For this reason, the Panchayati Raj endeavours to accomplish various programmes.

i) The Panchayati Raj Institution endeavours to create employment opportunity under different planning and programmes. These newly created employment opportunities will help agricultural labourers and rural poor people. The Panchayati Raj Institution endeavours very much for the structural development through which rural resources would be generated.

ii) The responsibilities of the Panchayati Raj Institutions do not end with the provision of employment opportunity for the poor and the endeavour of the eradication of the rural poverty. The Panchayati Raj Institutions, elected by the people, make arrangement for the relief for the people, suffering from natural calamities and take initiatives for the rehabilitation of them.

iii) When the problem of unemployment is very acute, the Panchayat Samities take the initiatives to give the rural unemployed youth the training, necessary for self-employment.

Except this, certain other functions, e.g., rural water supply, distribution of minikits, agricultural implements, development of fishery, development of small and cottage industries are duly performed by the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

The Marxist approach to the change and development through the Panchayati Raj Institution may be described in brief in the following way.

i) The Indian Marxist thinkers have fostered the view that the technological revolution is the main reason of the capitalist development in India. But the development of capitalism, effect of the technological revolution, can not
uproot the basic shortcomings of pre-capitalism from the present society. The majority of the Indian people, including the women, are the victims of the pre-capitalist exploitation system prevailing till now.

ii) The Indian Marxist theorists are in favour of adopting new techniques for the emancipation of the Indian people from the pre-capitalist form of exploitation. This new technique is pro-poor labour intensive local resource based easily transferable production technology. They have favoured this technique as they have firmly believed that unless and until the poor have become powerful and have been unchained from the exploitation, democracy in India would not remain viable.

iii) With a view to setting the rural people free from exploitation, the Indian Marxist thinkers have intended to form the Panchayati Raj Institutions. They have put emphasis upon the land reform programme to strengthen the Panchayati Raj Institution. The poor landless rural people would be benefited by the land reform programme, if properly implemented. For they would become the owner of the landed property. Being the owner of the landed property, they may exert influence upon the decision making process of the Panchayati Raj Institutions. In effect, the Panchayati Raj Institution would no longer remain the sole safeguard to the interest of the rich. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, a veteran Marxist, has suggested implementing two tier Panchayati Raj system in lieu of three tier Panchayati Raj system throughout India. In such Panchayati Raj system the district ought to play the pivotal role.

iv) The Marxist thinkers have strongly opposed the division of the function of the Panchayati Raj Institution into regulatory and developmental functions. In accordance with their persuasion, assigning the important responsibilities to
the Central Government, repository responsibilities should be distributed between the provincial and the local self government. If certain developmental responsibilities are entrusted with the local self-government, local people can participate in that developmental work. In consequence, they would feel interested with the development and the decentralisation process.

v) The Marxist thinkers have asked to make the Panchayati Raj Institution financially self-dependent so that they can accomplish properly the responsibilities, already allotted them. Thus, they have suggested searching new avenues of income for the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

vi) The Indian Marxists have cherished the notion that the members of the Panchayati Raj Institutions ought to be elected politically rather than nominated. They have apprehended the political parties may participate in the administration of the Panchayati Raj Institutions in disguise, if they are not allowed to do so. Besides this, the political system of India has been evolved such a stage that it would be unjust if the political parties are not permitted to participate the election process of the Panchayati Raj Institutions directly.

vii) The Marxists do not favour any reservation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions for any specific caste or class. They are in favour of reservation for the economically backward and deprived section of the society, irrespective of their caste or class allegiance. To them, economic condition should be the only criterion of the reservation.

viii) They have suggested bringing all the personnel, responsible for developmental function, under the control of the elected local self-government. They have also recommended to implement same pay scale, condition of services and
status to the services of the same category, so that no inferiority complex may crop up within the employees under the control of the local self-government.

ix) The Marxist thinkers have fastened importance on the implementation of the land reformation programme. The Marxist thinker, Harekrishna Konar, strongly believed that the government bureaucrats would not come forward to implement the land reformation programme at their own pleasure. Thus they have intended to hinge upon the initiative of the poor local people and peasants and the movement unleashed by the Krishak Sabha for the real implementation of the land reformation programme, delineated by the Indian Marxist thinkers.

D

There is a strong resemblance between the Indian Marxists and Gandhi regarding their approach towards rural development and the role of the Panchayati Raj Institution in the rural development process.

Gandhi has perceived various problems of the western approach towards development. Thus he has suggested an alternative approach towards development. According to him, rural development would be easily feasible if the development policy is formulated keeping the needs of locality and the available resources to meet the needs in mind. Prosperity of the country would be hastened through the speedy rural development. In other words, Gandhi has attached special importance upon the rural development for the all round development of the country.

The alternative approach towards the development, propounded by the Indian Marxist is also village centric. They have strongly held the opinion that a large
number of people reside in the village. Thus through rural development, the development of the country would be expedited.

Secondly, Gandhi has said that democracy should thrive in the self-dependent, easy and simple rural life. He has firmly believed that equality of opportunity for the weak and the rich should be attained in the society where democratic values have been flourished.

The Marxists have intended to establish democratic set-up in the rural areas through the Panchayati Raj Institutions. In accordance with their opinion, through democratic system, the majority exploited class can unleash struggle against the minority exploiting class.

Thirdly, Gandhi has suggested that the Panchayat would be the legislative and the executive arms of the local self-governing rural institution.

The Marxist thinkers say that a new institution, named Gram Sansad should be established under the Panchayati Raj Institution. Here all the citizens of the village would discuss the future planning and audit report of various adopted and executed planning and programmes.

There is also a Gram Sabha consisting of persons registered in the electoral role of the concerned Gram Panchayat. The Gram Sabha will meet annually, usually in the month of December after completion of the half yearly meeting of the Gram Sansads. The Gram Panchayat, on considering and collating the resolutions of the Gram Samsads, is required to place before the Gram Sabha the resolutions of the Gram Samsads and the views of the Gram Panchayat together with its reports on the actions taken and proposed to be taken on them for deliberation and recommendations of the Gram Sabha.
Fourthly, Gandhi has strongly suggested that local people should be encouraged to formulate the planning for their own locality. And for the implementation of the planning, resource available from that locality only would be used first.

The Marxist thinkers think alike. They also say that keeping the local requirements and locally available resources in mind planning should be formulated by the local people.

Fifthly, Gandhi has vested the Panchayati Raj Institutions with the power to eradicate the problem of unemployment. Thus he has proposed that the Panchayati Raj Institution should encourage the establishment of cottage industries and the members of the Panchayati Raj Institutions would don and consume the product of cottage industries with a view to encouraging such industries.

The Marxist thinkers have said that the Panchayati Raj Institutions should take the initiative to make the rural people financially independent through setting up markets, shops, orchards etc. Apart from this, the Panchayati Raj Institutions should make arrangement for the training of unemployed youths to make them self-employed and economically self-dependent.

Sixthly, Gandhi has believed that having been controlled by man, inferiority complex has been developed among the women and she strongly believes in the truth of self-interested teaching of man which propagates that she is inferior to man. But Gandhi has said that man and woman are expected to be made for each other. The qualities which are lacking in man must be embedded in women. Otherwise the human race would be extinct. Thus, in accordance with the opinion, cherished by Gandhi every Panchayati Raj Institutions would be made with equal participation by
both men and women. So he has proposed that female representation ought to be ensured in the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

The Marxist thinkers have said that the Indian women are the victims of both the pre-capitalist and capitalist form of exploitation. Thus, with a view to setting them free from such dreadful exploitation, their representation in the Panchayati Raj Institution should be guaranteed. Though the Marxists have opposed any reservation in the Panchayati Raj Institution for any specific community, but they have too said if women are not properly represented, two female members should be nominated in the Gram Panchayat.

Though there are certain resemblance between the approach towards rural development, imagined by Gandhi and the alternative approach towards rural development, propounded by the Indian Marxists, but the difference between the two are not very few.

Contrariety may be discussed here under –

(i) Regarding the democratic ideologies, there are unlikeness between Gandhi and the Indian Marxist thinkers. According to Gandhi, in the ideal society the weakest person of the society should enjoy the privilege like the richest of the society. Only in the real democratic society such form of privilege can be achieved. Gandhi has said that formation of such society would be feasible only through non-violence means.

But the Indian Marxists have identified democracy as the method of revolution. According to them, with the help of this democratic method poor people, including the poor peasants may wage struggle against the rich of the society. Through land reformation programme, the poor may become the owners of the landed property. Thus, the landless poor people would start movement for the implementation of the land reformation programme. Under the pressure, exerted from
movement, the government official would be compelled to execute the land reform policy.

(ii) For the establishment of such ideal democratic society Gandhi has said that movement would be directed through non-violence. He has firmly believed that only through the non-violence method, the attitude of the people would be changed. If the attitude of the people is changed, the abatement of the chasm between poor and rich would be possible.

On the other hand, Indian Marxists have put emphasis on the land reform programme for the setting up of the ideal democracy.

In the post-independent phase, the owners of the landed property have dominated the Panchayati Raj Institution. Thus, during this time the Panchayati Raj Institution generally has taken decision in their favour. In effect the poor landless people have not considered the Panchayati Raj Institution as their own institution. In order to change this situation Harekrishna Konar, General Secretary of the All India Krishan Sabha, Member of the State Legislative Assembly for Memary (1969) laid importance upon the peasants' movement. In accordance with his opinion, being tamed by the rich the government official is not very much interested in the execution of the land reform programme. Rather they would be compelled to do so under the pressure of the peasant movement. 22

(iii) Gandhi has firmly believed that the Panchayati Raj Institution would play a pivotal role in the rural development programme. The Marxist thinkers have also admitted the vital role of the Panchayati Raj Institution in the rural development programme. But they are not at one with Gandhi regarding the duration of the Panchayati Raj Institution. Gandhi has said that the Panchayati Raj Institution should be formed for one year but the Indian Marxists have said nothing about it.

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(iv) Pertaining to the number of the member of Panchayati Raj Institution the Indian Marxists have differed from Gandhi. Gandhi has said the Panchayati Raj Institution would be composed of five members. But the Indian Marxist thinkers remain tacit regarding this.

(v) Gandhi has not wanted to delimit the structure of the Panchayati Raj Institution within a specific region. In his own words, "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 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 the 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." 23

But the Indian Marxists have proposed two-tier Panchayati Raj Institution. In accordance with the opinion, cherished by E.M.S. Namboodiripad, a veteran C.P.I. (M) leader, two-tier Panchayati Raj Institution is less expensive. The two-tier of Panchayati Raj Institution is Gram Panchayat and Zilla Parishad respectively. The Gram Panchayat would be composed of several villages.

(vi) As the unit of the Panchayati Raj Institution, Gandhi has identified individual. 24 But Indian Marxists have treated Zilla Parishad as the unit of Panchayati Raj Institution. In other words, Zilla Parishad should be considered as the unit of the Panchayati Raj Institution and the unit of the development through the Panchayati Raj Institution.

(vii) Gandhi has strongly opposed the principle of reservation of a specific position or seat of the Panchayati Raj Institution for a specific class or caste. On the contrary, he
has been in favour of spreading education among the backward class for their social uplift.

"We have now arrived at a stage, thanks to the Government policy, when to be included among the Scheduled Classes is to be coveted. The Government have created a separate electorate agitating for seats in all elective institutions. I do not mind such ambition, if it carries honest merit with it. But it becomes positively mischievous, when seats are coveted irrespective of merit. The wish to be so educated as to be qualified for the highest post is to be appreciated and encouraged, the wish to be appointed to such a post on the basis of belonging to a caste or a class is essentially to be deprecated and discouraged." 25

Though the Indian Marxist thinkers have opposed against the reservation in the Panchayati Raj Institution for a specific caste or class. But they have strongly endorsed the reservation for the economically backward class. The result of which is no privileged or opportunist class or section would emerge within the specific class or section.

(viii) Gandhi has not endorsed the participation of the political parties in the Panchayati Raj Institution. In other words, Gandhi has intended to make the Panchayati Raj Institution an apolitical institution.

But the Indian Marxists have wanted to ensure the participation of the political parties in the Panchayati Raj system. They think that the political evolution has reached the zenith. Thus, if the political parties are not allowed to participate in the Panchayati Raj Institution system, they would partake of the Panchayati Raj Institution system indirectly and the people would be bewildered.
(ix) Gandhi has said that the members of the Panchayati Raj Institution should possess certain minimum qualities. The minimum qualifications are love, fearlessness, knowledge, cleanliness and industries.

But the Marxist thinkers have not determined such qualities for the elected members of the Panchayati Raj Institution.

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