

# Gandhi, Nehru, Jayaprakash and Lohia

## (Democratic Decentralization and Village Development)

*Professor C. Lakshmana*

*“The constitution is primarily shaped and moulded for the common man. It is a constitution not meant for the ruler but for the ranker, the tramp of the road”*

*- N A Palkiwala.*

### **Introduction :**

The dream which the four foremost leaders of Indian Freedom struggle and Indian Independence dreamt, namely that India's liberation lies not in its political freedom but in its social and economic emancipation, still remains unfulfilled even after sixty (to be precise sixty three) years of political freedom. All the four of them did live to see India gaining liberation from British rule but no to see that the “Common man” of “the street” was free of want from ‘hunger’, ‘shelter’ and ‘security’. That is, perhaps, the greatest tragedy of free India. India might have achieved growth and prosperity but the fruits of growth have not trickled down to the daliths and dispossessed in the far flung corners of village India. India is one of the most illiterate societies in the world. Poverty prevails, still, among a large section of the rural population. Health and Medicare is a distant dream for many of the rural Indians. Recent advances in Medicare and technology have only increased inequalities between the haves and have-nots. Caste looms large as a living curse to many Indians, notably among the rural population. No doubt efforts are being made to reduce these maladies but not sufficient enough to banish these evils from the lower segments of the Indian population. One can not say with conviction that there is sufficient “will” and “commitment” on the part of those who are at the helm of affairs in the country to meet

these challenges. It may be a long way before the dreams of the leaders who waged a relentless war for Indian independence are achieved, unless renewed attempts and reasonably well articulated strategies and programmes are chalked out and executed for fulfilling their cherished goals.

### **Gandhi and Gram Swaraj :**

“To serve our villages is to establish swaraj. Any thing else is but an idle dream” asserted Gandhiji. Gandhi felt that freedom for India is meaningful only when the remote village in India gained self rule. Gramswaraj or Village self rule was, thus, central to his philosophy of development. He wanted a political and social organization in India which centred around the village and villager. For him India was nothing but a confederation of village republics. The villager could perceive his felt needs in a meaningful way and, thus, could formulate the plans and programmes in a way suited to his concept of development, with a full view of the comprehensive growth of all the villagers. As usual. in his thinking, the village development should basically centre around truth and nonviolence.

Gandhi was convinced that there was enough to meet man's needs but may not be enough to meet with his greed. He basically looked at villages and villager's independence and interdependence. He was clear regarding the net

working of the village republics. He considered each village as its own republic. He derived this philosophy from the existence of such self-reliant village republics in ancient India. In 1942, Gandhi wrote, “(village was) independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is necessary”. He was realistic that all requirements of village could not be met within the village but that we should also look beyond its boundaries. He argued that each village should be basically self-reliant making provisions for all necessities of life, namely food, clothing, clean water, sanitation, housing, education and others including governance and self-defence. In short, all socially useful and productive amenities required for sound and healthy living within the community should fall within the purview of each village in its self-rule. He also thought of a theatre or a public hall as necessities for a village community. Independence for India for him, therefore, meant that every village would be a republic with full powers. Its dependence on confederating units could be minimum. Gandhi was indeed a revolutionary in his conception of Gramswaraj with village self-rule and interdependent net working.

There are some misconceptions about Gandhi's views on technology and industrialization. It is to be stressed that Gandhi was not opposed to technology and its use. He only cautioned about its wrong use and over-emphasis. He considered technology as a good servant and a bad master. In so far as man had control over mechanics of technology, Gandhi had no difficulty with it. He was, however, opposed to the indiscriminate use of technology for technology's sake. Similarly he was clear about the industrialization, particularly in the rural areas. The philosophy of Khadi and Gramodyog amply

demonstrates his idea of industrialization in the villages. Gandhi advocated removal of all inequalities and injustices. Gandhi's village socialism stood for 'decentralization of production' and 'regional self-sufficiency'. The persistent wretched conditions of the farmers point to the need of Gandhi's ideas on agriculture and village development, in the absence of which the villages have become dependent on the towns and cities. In Gandhi's own words: "my idea of village swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its wants, and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity. Thus every village's first concern will be to grow its own food crops and cotton for its cloth. It should have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and play ground for its adults and children. Then if there is more land available, it will grow some useful money crops, thus excluding ganja, tobacco, opium and the like. The village will maintain a theatre, school and public hall. It will have its own waterworks 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 the co-operative basis. There will be no castes such as we have today with their graded untouchability. Non-violence with its technique of Satyagraha and non-co-operation will be the sanction of the village community. There will be a compulsory service of village guards who will be selected by rotation from the register maintained by the village. The government of the village will be conducted by the Panchayat of five persons, annually elected by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. These will have all the authority and jurisdiction required. Since there will be no system of punishments in the accepted sense, this Panchayat will be the legislature,

judiciary and executive combined to operate for its year of office. Any village can become such a republic today without much interference, even from the present Government whose sole effective connection with the villages is the exaction of the village revenue. I have not examined here the question of relations with the neighbouring villages and the centre if any. My purpose is to present an outline of village government. Here there is perfect democracy based upon individual freedom. The individual is the architect of his own government. The law of non-violence rules him and his government. He and his village are able to defy the might of a world. For the law governing every villager is that he will suffer death in the defence of his and his village's honour". It is indeed a reasonable basis for contemporary sustainable development in the country side.

### **Nehru : Planning and Democratic Decentralization :**

Nehru was a lifelong associate and disciple of Gandhiji. He participated in struggles for freedom under Indian Nation Congress. He was jailed several times by the British. Nehru's was an enigmatic personality. He came from a cultured family of Alahabad and was son of a rich and successful lawyer. Motilal Nehru who later became a prominent congress leader and the President of the Indian National Congress. Jawaharlal Nehru jumped into freedom struggle on his return from England after his studies there. While he was in UK he was greatly influenced by the Russian Revolution and the Soviet rule. In addition, he became an ardent follower of socialism. On return to India, however, he joined the Indian National Congress and participated in the freedom struggle. He was also greatly influenced by Gandhi. The appreciation was mutual and Gandhiji often declared that Nehru was his political heir. Both had a great

understanding of India and Indian people. Their paths were, however, different. For Gandhi, village self rule and village self reliance were testament of faith. Nehru believed in planning and planned development. With that he believed that rural areas also will be developed. He held a holistic and integrated view of the growth and development of the country. Though Nehru had faith in "Bottom up" thesis of development process, yet his programmes resulted in "Top down" in decision making syndrome which dried up some where in the middle and the bottom of the pyramid craved for the fruits of development. Congress rule in post Nehru period consolidated this process further where as for Gandhi true independence for India meant a comprehensive transformation of Indian society and polity. For Nehru, it meant no more than the political independence of India from Britain. Devolution of significant governmental power to villages or clusters of villagers was not the main agenda in Nehru's thinking. Nehru ardently desired to carve out India as a modern industrialized and democratic socialist nation state. His nearest attempt at Gramswaraj was his Community Extension Projects which he initiated on Oct 2, 1952 in different parts of the country. In this scheme of things, the Block Development Officer, Extension Education Officer and Gram Sevak occupied central positions. But these schemes failed to deliver goods. Nehru was still determined about democratic decentralization. At his initiative, Balwant Rai Mehta studied the problems associated with community extension programmes and recommended a comprehensive programme of Three Tier Panchayati Raj, Nehru initiated this Three Tier Panchayati Raj system October 2, 1957 in Rajasthan and on November 1, 1957 in Andhra Pradesh. Gradually all the states adopted this system. But after several amendments, the devolution of powers and

finances to the Gram Sabhas is still a distant reality. The decentralized Panchayati Raj institutions are deeply drowned in the cesspool of corruption and bureaucratic muddle. That the gram panchayats should become effective instruments of development with transparent devolution of powers and finances is an urgent desideratum to day.

### **Jayaprakash Narayan Gram Dan and Village development :**

Jaya Praksh Narayan or Jaya Prakash (J.P) as he was popularly known is one of the stalwarts of freedom movement. He was a hero during Quit India Movement. Along with Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, Achyut Patwadhen, Aruna Asif Ali, Youssouf Mehrauli and others, he organized under-ground movement during Quit India Movement. While he was pursuing his studies in sociology in US, where he earned his livelihood by doing odd jobs, he came under the influence of Marxism and greatly admired Communism and Soviet Union. But humanist as he was, he moved away from communism but remained a socialist through out his life. Before proceeding to US and after return, Jaya Prakash was immensely influenced by Gandhi. On return to India, Jaya Prakash joined Indian National Congress and started in 1934 Congress Socialist party as part of it, along with socialist minded leaders. During this period, he identified with the work force and worked for their liberation. In the wake of 1935 India Act, he fought for inclusion of the demands of kisans and workers in the election manifests of the Congress Party. He sided with Kisan Sabha and presented a ten point draft note on an order of society based on equality and justice which was published by Gandhiji in his "Harijan" at Jaya Prakash's request. Jaya Prakash fought for India's freedom as a prelude for the establishment of society free

from exploitation and inequalities. The unbearable conditions in Congress Party after independence, he established an independent Socialist Party in 1948 with himself as the General Secretary.

Jaya Prakash's restless mind was in pursuit of more lasting solutions to the problems of the rural poor. By 1954, Jaya Prakash was attracted to Vinoba Bhave's Land Gift (Bhoodan) Movement. Regarding this, Jaya Prakash made it clear in his own words, "For many years, I have worshipped at the shrine of the goddess-dialectical materialism which seemed to me intellectually more satisfactory than any other philosophy. But while the main quest of philosophy remain unsatisfied, it has become pertinent to me that materialism of any sort robs man of means to become truly human. In a material civilization man has no rational incentive to be good." Thus he came to the conclusion that "Socialism must eventually merge into Sarvodaya". He called Sarvodaya as "people's socialism" as opposed to "state socialism". In what he called "Communitarianism" the goal was to create human community's "self governing, self sufficient, agro industrial, urban-rural local communities". An eminent personality, he influenced Land Gift (Sarvodaya) Movement greatly to popularize it and its message. Though he had become nonpolitical with his involvement in Bhoodan and Sarvodaya, (theses movements were Gram Dan for him ) yet he was active with several problems which confronted the society. This diversion from active politics, perhaps, made him not to devote much time to the village self rule and rural governance. But he applied his mind to Panchayati Raj institutions when he headed an Evaluation team. His report on Panchayat Raj is a land mark achievement. His report emphasized on the role of leadership in democratic decentralization. He suggested



“Escalator Model” for the growth of leadership from the village to the national stage. In this ‘bottom up’ system, the leaders should emerge from the rural areas and move upwards, which alone can safe guard the interests of the villages. He built up the All India Panchayat Parishad and the Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development to strengthen the grass root democratic development. For settlement of disputes by peaceful means, he established an Arbitration Council and for propagation of Gandhiji’s idea’s, a Trusteeship council. All these institutions are a tribute to his remarkable qualities to keep track of all those problems and issues confronting the grass root society. While he was involved in other profound activities, Jaya Prakashji lived and strived hard thought out his life to build a Vibrant India devoid of injustices and inequalities.

#### **Lohia and Socialist Agenda :**

Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia was a rare intellectual among Indian politicians. He was a democrat and humanist at the same time. He fought against inequalities and injustices thought out his life. He was an iconoclast. At a young age, when he was a doctoral student in Germany in early thirties, he revolted against Hitler and his Nazism. He was anti-imperialist in his thought and deed. He was a true Marxist and a great Socialist. He stood for common man and strived for his liberation from oppression and exploitation. While he admired Nehru, he was not afraid to oppose him tooth and nail when he felt that Nehru was deviating from the socialist ideal. He did not hesitate to pronounce Nehru dead when he felt he deviated from socialist democratic path. He remained a bitter critic of Nehru through out his life in independent India. He was with Nehru in enunciating the non aligned policy when he headed the Foreign Affairs Division of the Indian

National Congress while Nehru was its President Later he faulted with Nehru’s nonaligned policy in independent India. It was evident, more pointedly, during Korean War in early fifties. He was opposed to Hitler and Mussolini in their imperialistic designs. He equally considered the British and American stand in Second World War as imperialistic.

Lohia opposed despotic rule any where. He opposed feudal forces in Nepal and was arrested and deposed from Nepal. He was relentless against despotic Portugese rule in Goa and fought for its liberation and merger with India. He detected dictatorial tendencies in Indira Gandhi quite early and opposed her government in and outside Parliament.

In Lohia’s thinking there was no place for police firing in democratic and free India. He demanded the resignation of Pattom Thanu Pillai from Chief Ministership when there was police firing in Taivancore-Cochin state (later Kerela), and Pattom Thanu Pillai was the first Socialist Chief Minister in independent India. In an oblique reference to Neelam Sanjiva Reddy in LOhia’s famous India Coffee House (Lucknow) discussions. I remember to have heard him say with appreciation of ‘the police firing free rule’ of Reddy’s chief ministership. It was further evident in his relationship with him when Reddy was the speaker of Lok Sabha in 1967 of which Lohia was a distinguished member. These two instances clearly testify to the democratic traditions of Lohia.

Lohia was an astute thinker. His works on Marx, Gandhi, Wheel of History and Caste are evidence to his fertile mind. They contain some of the fine seminal ideas on events and individuals. He admired Marx and Gandhi even more. He had unique understanding of the caste system. He was certain that there was no place for caste

in democratic and free India. It was exploitative and pernicious. It heaped favours on some and oppression on many. It divided the society on lines of untouchability. Its abolition is good for Indian society and sooner, the better.

### **Lohia and Chauhambha Raj (Four Pillars of Democratic Rule) :**

Among several contributions of Lohia for India's society and its development, the one on Chauhambha Raj is exemplary and seminal for rural leadership, village self rule and integrated development. It stands for the four tier, devolutionary and integrated development. Lohia recognized the four important levels of India's governance. Each of them is important for a holistic growth model, They are not disparate segmental arrangements. They are inter linked, and absence of development of any one of them spells disaster for the development of the whole process. Chauhambha for Lohia meant the recognition of the fact that democracy stands on four pillars, viz the centre, the states, the districts and the villages. It is believed that even within the existing limitations, the Panchayat Raj can be a big instrument of highly relevant social change. And imagine the status of the society, with great speed and gusto of development, after these limitations are recognized and redeemed. For achieving this, Lohia was not content with decentralization in growth. That is to say, he did not stop with economic growth with decentralization. He stood for decentralization in social and political fields. He was restless with the efforts made to strengthen the central administration. He bemoaned the concentration of powers at the union level. He stood for devolution of power and finance right up to the village level. On the way, he recognized the importance of the strong States and Zilla Parishads. In other words, he stood for decentralized power structure and leadership. He was opposed to all sorts of discriminations and

imposition of limitations and disparities across gender, age and rural urban division. With his, "Chauhambha Raj", he was ahead of his times and anticipated subsequent changes in Indian governance.

### **Conclusion :**

A critical appraisal of the foregoing discussion presents the following salient points.

1. All the four important leaders of the Indian freedom movement, discussed earlier, were concerned with the development of the grass roots society.
2. While Gandhi and Jaya Prakash were concerned more with Gramswaraj and Sarvodaya (with Bhoodan and Gramdan), Nehru and Lohia were keen for the development of a decentralized society. None the less, all of them recognized different levels in society and polity. They stood for cohesive, integrated and all round development.
3. They were witness to varying levels of development because of variance in time of their presence after independence. All the four of them did not live long to oversee the development process. Three of them had no role in independent India's governance. Nehru was wedded to macro development process, believing in planning and centralized development programmes..
4. In the centenary year of Lohia, all democratic minded people in the country should ponder over the strengths and weaknesses of our leaders and work out a process which brings out an all round development in the country.
5. Gandhi, Nehru, Jaya Prakash and Lohia had faith in participatory democracy. Because of their, as well as of other leaders efforts, Indian democracy is vibrant. It is the responsibility of present generation to sustain and strengthen this grass roots democracy.