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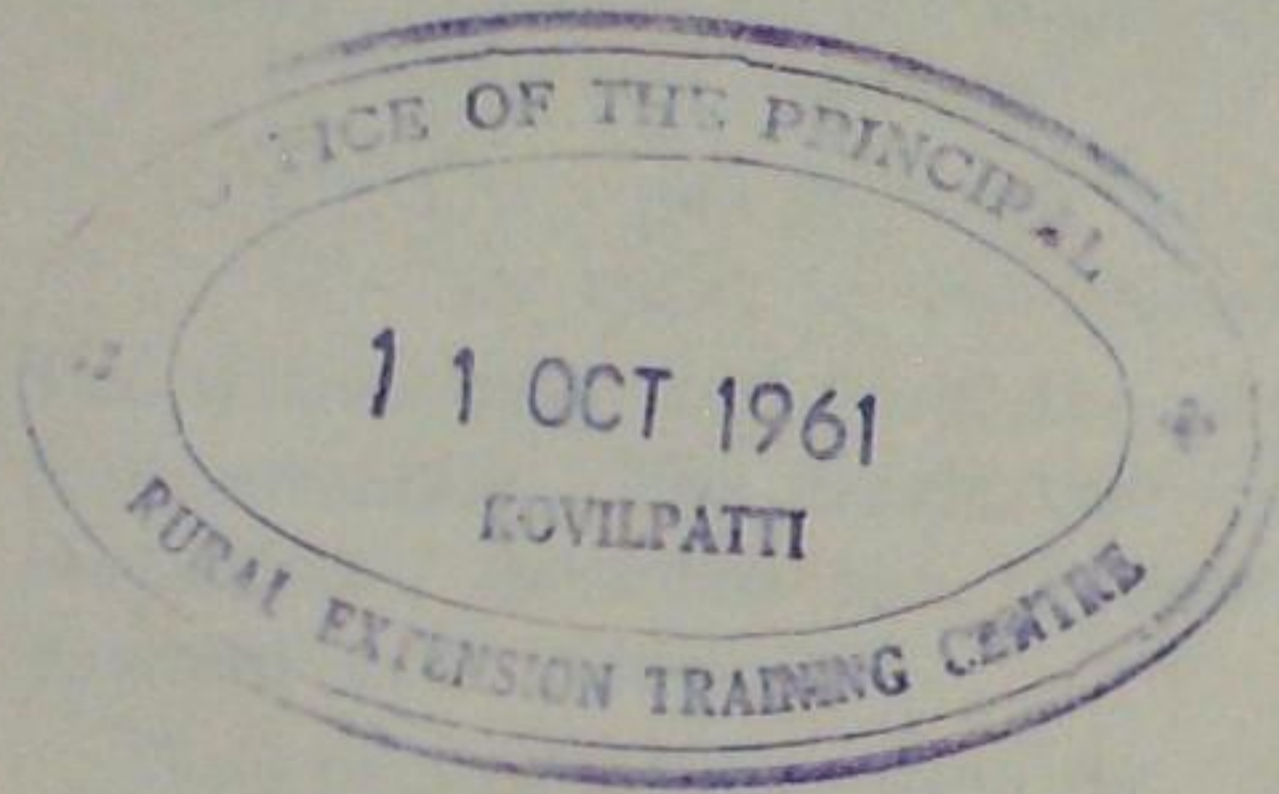
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

THROUGH

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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH PANCHAYATI RAJ

Pilgrimage is a process. It is not a consummation. One phase of our pilgrimage was over when we grew independent of alien domination. The other phase began soon after. The new phase was to usher in the freedom promised. Freedom can only be based on the triple charter of rights:

- (1) The right to live,
- (2) The right to work for a living,
- (3) The right to receive what is earned.

The nation inherited from the past preachers and preachings in abundance. The ideals before the nation soared and skyrocketed. Between the preachings and practices the gap yawned ever wider.

Five packed years rolled by. The period saw the installation and consolidation of a national Government, one manned by representatives chosen by the nation. But Delhi, the national capital, and the headquarters of States are far away from the people. The bulk of the people, 82 per cent of them, had been slumbering and slogging in the 550,000 far-flung villages. These villages were hives of activity once, humming with the music of the mind, muscles and the spirit of our people. They had fallen into stagnation through centuries of disrepair and one-way traffic towards the towns and cities that grew as carbuncles on the soil. The petty Government servant lorded it over the countryside. When asked how much he earned, he winked significantly. He mentioned the official salary as "Jal-pan". The real income he left for the imagination of those who chose to make the query.

The First Five Year Plan

The First Five Year Plan began in April, 1951. The Plan was based largely on earlier thinking, weighted in favour of the cities. Villages came in only on the periphery. True, large sums of money were earmarked for multipurpose projects and Grow More Food schemes. But these projects

would benefit relatively small areas, over a long period of time. Grow More Food schemes suffered from inequity in design. These gravitated towards specially favoured areas and people. Besides, the realisation was still to come that food, like health, cannot be secured for one limb in isolation from others in an organism. A nation is an organism. If food production is to increase in bulk, the food producing population as a whole should be activated. It was still to be realised that food production called for efforts not merely in agriculture but in animal husbandry, irrigation, village industries, co-operation, communication, public health, youth and women's programmes, education and adult education. There had to be joint effort on all fronts if the impact was to be enduring, self-propelling, and significant.

Administration—The Paradox

In a country waking up after centuries, it is but natural that as between the people and the Government, the Government would be the stronger partner. People would be dependent on the initiative flowing from Government, at least to start with. The Government, during alien rule, responded to single-line impulses from Whitehall in London and the Vice-regal Lodge in New Delhi. The situation changed since midnight of August 15, 1947. Whitehall was replaced by the people of India. The old mandate had disappeared. Power had to be shared. The new mandate based on democracy was still to emerge. Under the new Constitution of India, all vital matters of development in villages fell to the share of State Governments. The Centre, vis-a-vis the States, had been endowed with powers only to influence. In the States, powers had to be shared under the Constitution between elected Ministers. Co-ordination in thinking and efforts, in a growing democracy, is a gradual growth through trials and errors.

Meantime the legacy inherited from the past were Departments of Government at the Centre and in the States which, except for law and order, existed mainly as a merry-go-round. When these reached out for the people, there were mostly eddies and whirls gravitating back to the circle. Co-ordination as a process can be attempted only when there is a commonly accepted purpose. When the purpose is the ladder or the merry-go-round, co-ordination works spontaneously

almost to perfection. The new regime, however, made a different call. It was the service of the people. The service of the people and the merry-go-round are features that stand at opposite poles. The situation grows worse when the "engineers" running the "power house" themselves work at cross-purposes. No wonder the new call made on the organisation meant only the expansion of the circle. The official habitat multiplied manifold. This happened as much in New Delhi as in State capitals. Taxes rose. But little flowed back to the people save paper and exhortations galore.

A Way Out

A new approach was the need of the hour. Who should work it out? Should it be a new organisation more akin to the needs of the people? Or, should it be the existing machinery reoriented to a new term of reference? The village is an organic whole. Its needs are inextricably inter-related. The village called for massive efforts on all fronts with but temporary adjustments in priorities. To do this over the sub-continent, through a new agency of Government, would mean in effect two parallel Governments in concurrent operation. It was obvious that the new agency would hardly have a chance to lift its head. The old agency was far too deeply entrenched in power to permit an alternative agency stealing a march over it. There was also the question of resources—both money and trained manpower. What was even more important, the servants of Government meant picked men. No better material could be had in India. True, the natural gravitation in Government was towards the ladder and the merry-go-round. But given a challenge and the masters to harness the current, the agency had a phenomenal capacity for adaptation. The decision necessarily followed that the existing agency should be put to the new task. The National Extension Service formed the new pattern for the administrative organisation. Community Development came in as the concept and method. The development agencies of Government hitherto functioning in isolation from each other were called upon to work under a unified direction. October 2, 1952, the birthday of the father of the nation, saw the inauguration—the new pilgrimage.

“The Silent Revolution”

Money is proverbially slow to move in any new programme of Government. But the concept of the programme and the manner in which it brought the dreaded officials in touch with the people with open arms and shorn of armour, acted like a hypnotic spell. People came forward in overwhelming numbers. The efforts offered a sight for the gods. Believers in astrology, the talisman and Alladin's lamp, we gasped in wonder. “A silent revolution, a miracle is on,” we shouted in delight. Organisations which prided themselves on their monopoly of social service looked down-cast. The official agency paraded itself in jubilation. Came the universal demand for multiplication of the programme. The expansion came faster than the resources. Encomiums flowed from every direction—from Ministers, Members of Parliament and State Legislatures, foreign visitors and the press alike. Technical departments, as also administrators from Commissioners to Sub-Divisional Officers, had been spectators at the beginning of the programme. When the programme had developed a vast potential, it attracted the attention and interest of all onlookers. Members of the State Legislatures and Parliament grew more alive to the programme.

The Scene Changes

The original set of projects started in 1952 were confined to a very small number in every State. These were before the prying eyes of the nation. The staff could be trained with special attention. Work could be supervised from the Centre down to the ground. When expansion took place, the programme encompassed within its orbit other functionaries from Commissioners to the Sub-Divisional Officers. Technical departments with their hierarchy from State headquarters to the ground, and representatives of the people from the Parliament to the Panchayat, came equally into the programme. The old intensive attention was no longer possible either for training or for supervision. Besides, technical skill and administrative efficiency in a democracy are features of organic growth. No wonder, the programme threatened to grow into a routine, subject more to manuals of operation than to emotions and affinity of the mind and heart. Meantime, people began to lose their fear of the Government apparatus. It

was an important objective of the Community Development Programme and marked no doubt a happy consummation. But it brought in its trail fantastically rising curves of demands for facilities from Government.

Brickbats Start Falling

The countryside continued to be dominated by the few strong men—strong in money, caste, or group politics. They had their counterparts in the petty servants of Government. The unholy combination helped a section of the village community to have the lion's share of the limited resources that could be offered by Government. The "many" in villages had to be content with schools, health centres, communications and such other common facilities. Economic resources were too limited to be shared by the few with the many. Even co-operatives meant to offer organised strength to the weak were used largely by the powerful to add further to their powers. The universal bouquet began to give place soon to brickbats in profusion. Even those who appropriated the lion's share in the villages began to decry the programme. Partly, this was a sop to their conscience. Partly, this was so because the programme with its limited resources acted but as an appetiser to their growing ambitions. Sections of the press echoed the tune in an amusing chorus. "The Lamp has failed, let us burn the witch-doctors on the stakes", was the feeling one could sense in the air.

Horizon Expands

The Community Development agency by this time had encompassed, directly and indirectly, virtually the whole administration of Government. The impact of the growing demands from the ground helped bring forth radically new policies for the Second Plan in all the nation-building ministries both at the Centre and in the States. Ground orientation as against paper pre-occupation was reflected in most key workers. The Ministry of Food and Agriculture drew up plans for seed farms, fruit nurseries, poultries, fisheries, fertilisers, compost and green manure, insecticides and other forms of assistance to the cultivators. The Ministry of Health planned for primary health centres with associate maternity-cum-child welfare centres in every block, besides plans for eradication of malaria, for drinking water, and sanitation

schemes. The Ministry of Education planned for the expansion of library services, primary and secondary education and social education, on a country-wide scale in terms of the block as the new administrative unit. The same pattern of thinking conditioned the approach to village industries in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and to village housing in the Ministry of Works, Housing and Supply.

Other ministries also continued coming in. The new Ministry of Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs began making block-wise plans for development of child art, cultural activities for youth and elders, and propagation of scientific outlook and the results of research amongst village people. The thinking on the Third Five Year Plan has been governed by the need to provide a basic minimum of services and amenities in all aspects of life for the 550,000 villages of India. While the other ministries at the Centre plan for trained manpower, supplies and services to aid the people, the Ministry of Community Development and Co-operation has been busy developing its resources at the fastest possible pace for training and orientation of all personnel—administrative and technical—from the State headquarters down to the ground. The apex National Institute for Study and Research in Community Development, the Orientation Training Centres, the Social Education Organisers and the Mukhya Sevikas' Training Centres, and the enormous expansion in training facilities for co-operative personnel, are all being designed to offer education in democracy and training in methodology as regards a "People's Programme".

People's State vis-a-vis Welfare State

Till lately the programme has been almost exclusively a Government programme to assist the people. If the programme is to grow and democracy is to be real, it is the people's organisation which has to be more overwhelming in character and vitality. The Government agency has to act but as an instrument to carry out the behest of the people transmitted through representative institutions. A People's State will invariably be a Welfare State. A Welfare State not run by the people themselves is not a People's State. Even welfare in such a State cannot be an enduring feature. History is

replete with examples to illustrate this phenomenon. The current world society will offer further corroboration. A People's State and an administration controlled through long-distance transmission lines are features that exclude each other. This is even more so in an under-developed economy where the bulk of the people are steeped in darkness. Democracy confined only to the Parliament and the State Legislatures, especially in a sub-continent such as ours, can neither grow nor endure for long. There is thus the crying call for extension of true democracy.

The Fateful Decision

Demands grow geometrically alongside for services and assistance of Government. These call for a clear and urgent decision. One of the decisions could be to enlarge the Government apparatus. This would involve a number of Government servants in every village to look after the volume and complexity of demands. This galaxy of Government servants in a backward economy such as ours is clearly beyond our resources. Besides, the system will call for a supervisory organisation of a very complex character. The experience needed is impossible to secure in present conditions. It will be even more so, to maintain the efficiency of such a supervisory apparatus except on the basis of fear. Fear and democracy do not mix together. Democracy practised through the galaxy of Government servants through long-distance control may offer a pastime for some. A backward economy cannot afford such a luxury. The road will then be clear for such a democracy to succumb to totalitarian control of one kind or the other. Democracy either way will be the inevitable casualty. The administration of Government has been squeaking under the weight of these contradictions. A substantial number of workers from the Centre to the ground have borne the brunt of this dilemma over their bleeding hearts. They have, strange as it may seem, been more eager to take a plunge in the new direction demanded by logic.

New Institutions of People

At the cross-roads, the Community Development movement began accordingly to chart a new course. Panchayati Raj is the new concept. It offers a new orientation of the programme. On October 2, 1959, the State of Rajasthan was the

first to transform the entire structure of administration in the State. This was followed by Andhra on November 1, the anniversary of the Andhra State. The stagnant District Boards stood abolished. So also did the other institutions below the State Legislature except the village panchayat. Village panchayats send their elected representatives to the new statutory body known as the Block Panchayat Samiti. The Samiti has other co-opted members representing women, depressed and scheduled classes. It has a President and a Vice-President. The administrative personnel in the block, besides the budget and other resources of Government, have been placed at the disposal of this new body. The Community Development programme, along with all individual departmental programmes of Government in the block, are vested in this body. The Presidents of Block Panchayat Samitis together with the M.P.s and the M.L.A.s in the district constitute the Zilla Parishad. The Zilla Parishad in collaboration with the Collector and the technical departments at the district level offers guidance and assistance to the Block Panchayat Samitis, without controlling them. This is the constitution. This is in the process of implementation round the clock in all the States in India.

From Parliament to the Panchayat

The State Legislature will thus travel from the State headquarters down through the District and the block to the village panchayat. The new institutions, as people's organisations, are responsible for planning and implementation of programmes approved in the State Legislature. The suzerainty enjoyed by local government agencies is ending. These will be subject to support and control by democratic institutions of people all along the line, with adequate charter of powers. Thus is democracy travelling from the Parliament to the Panchayat. Thus are the keys taken over by the select leaders at Delhi on the fateful midnight of August 15, 1947, on their journey to the people. But democracy also has a stomach—vocal, exacting. The stomach has to be served without the man being silenced in the process. Then alone can democracy lead to its ultimate consummation of Freedom—Destination Man.

Basic Institutions and Associate Organisations

The village panchayats, the Panchayat Samitis and the Zilla Parishad mean extension of leadership resources at the disposal of the people. The needs and demands of people and their elected institutions for supplies and services continue to outstrip resources in material and leadership. The demands and services grow increasingly out of step. Panchayati Raj institutions can initiate overall planning, mobilisation of people and resources, and look after general administration. Panchayati Raj cannot act effectively as the economic arm for itself. Co-operatives come in thus as sister institutions to take a dominant share of the growing economy. We have then the service co-operative as the mother economic institution at the village. Service co-operatives will be linked up with, and be serviced in turn by, federal functional institutions from above. There can also be specialised co-operatives with similar organic link-up above. But panchayats and co-operatives cannot by themselves meet the growing demands of the village. The need arises therefore for supplementary voluntary organisations. "Associate organisations", they are called. The Associate organisations are the Yuvak Mandal, the Bal Mandal, the Mahila Mandal, the Dastkar Mandal and the multitude of other organisations that will grow with the deepening of life in the countryside. These organisations will take up responsibility for implementing the respective village programmes on behalf of the statutory Panchayati Raj institutions. The members of these Associate organisations can be co-opted as members of the functional sub-committees, in representative institutions at the Village, Block and District levels. The Associate organisations will grow in depth, width and height as time passes. They will supplement the efforts of our representatives and the specialists in administration with the specialised skill innate in our people. They will act as deterrents to abnormalities in representative institutions and be affected so in turn.

Education—The Master Key

Mere manpower cannot be an asset to a nation. We know it to our cost. Mere institutions of people—representative or associate—can be no asset either. For, these may grow easily into a deadweight adding to the tax burden on the people.

A programme for education and training has, therefore, to be organised *en masse* all along the line. Institutions of Government from the apex to the base, hitherto meant for officials, can also be used effectively for the training of people's representatives and people's associates. There should alongside be a mass-scale programme of education also of the people. An ignorant people and enlightened representatives are either myths or uneasy partners. Powerful administration and a docile people offer fertile ground for the devil. Powers cannot be given. Powers have to be taken. Those who hold the title deeds to power have to be mobilised through education and discipline. This programme cannot be conducted from above, nor at the initiative of Government alone. Every institution and every group of people will have to play its part in the education and discipline of the group immediately below. A programme on this pattern has been chalked out in detail. In this the members of our Parliament, the State Legislatures and the voluntary social welfare institutions in the country, all have the most vital role yet to play. The village school will play in this context the master role as the third basic institution, the other two being the panchayat and the co-operative. It will be the community centre for the young and adult alike. It will offer adult literacy and guidance. It will lay the foundation for discipline, organisation and education in children.

Opportunities to All Parties

Symptoms of tension have been growing lately between the party in power and the parties in opposition. In some States there are tensions between groups within the party itself. These tensions will continue mounting and energies running amuck, unless these are resolved through provision for early constructive outlet. Some suggest the over-simple remedy of an all-party National Government at the Centre and in the States. A government of this composition can work and be justified only during a national emergency. Yet it is logical for the opposition to feel aggrieved and to function negatively if it has no other function open except of criticism. This has grown so more particularly because of the large-scale disbandment of former local self-government institutions. True, parties different from the one ruling at the

Centre can run the government in the States. But this does not carry democracy very far. The current programme of Zilla Parishads, Block Samitis and Panchayats, however, promises to provide the answer. People belonging to different parties in the country, including Independents, can exercise the powers of government, in institutions depending on the will of people. The new institutions thus offer "Equality of Opportunity" to all political parties, as they stand today, to compete constructively, and thus to qualify for responsibilities at higher levels. The electorate also can get an opportunity to judge parties according to their current performance in respect of the people, rather than on past records, present recriminations or future promises. The possibilities are also there that when real administration begins from the grass roots where basic requirements to be met may not offer different approaches to different parties, the administration will cut across right through the party line. In other words, parties may disappear automatically at least at points nearer the ground, yielding place only to those who would earn the approval of the people through sheer merit of integrity and service. Such a development cannot but lead to far-reaching repercussions to the nation's advantage at higher levels also.

The Final Picture

Thus the final picture emerges. The people of India will govern themselves through their representatives in institutions from the Gram Sabha to the Lok Sabha, based more on consensus than on numerical majority. There will be functional sub-committees in every institution looking after individual subjects of development. The functional sub-committees will consist of members of representative institutions and co-opted members from the Associate organisations. The village co-operatives, the Associate organisations and their formations higher up will undertake responsibility for development in all sectors of life. People would be involved and mobilised by each one of the functional sub-committees. The permanent administration of Government will be there to serve the needs of the people at the behest of their representatives. Representatives and associates will supplement each other. They will act and react on each other against unhealthy

trends. All plans and actions at the village will be conducted in close association with, and with the approval of, the Gram Sabha, the counterpart of the Lok Sabha at the national level, which will include all the adults of the village, both men and women. The village, the block and the district will thus acquire new importance as units for planning and development. The scope for political or official patronage will diminish enormously, if not be eliminated altogether. There will be greater vigilance at all levels. Officials or representatives will no longer function alone. Team work will act as a corrective to anti-social trends in individuals.

The concept of integrated growth of the village as a community will be the dominant factor. The dynamic elements in village today dissipate themselves in centrifugal or subterranean pulls and conflicts. The new system of administration with its elaborate programme of education and discipline will give these a centripetal direction. The rich and the strong will earn their dignity in the community by serving the weak and acting as trustees for them. Bapu had dreamt of New India as a federation of villages, each village constituting a growing joint family. The villages were to produce the bulk of the needs for day-to-day living. They were to be self-sufficient in sanitation, communications, housing, health of the people, food for men and animals, clothing, shelter against the weather, sports, music and drama for recreation, and village institutions of justice and reformation for the anti-social elements in the family. Every member in the community was to be the supreme master of himself in the dance of the cosmos.

“Shahibagh” or Panchayati Raj?

Badshahi and Panchayati Raj cannot co-exist. One has to give the right of way to the other. Shahibagh of alien origin came to dominate the Indian scene because there was a vacuum to be filled, and powerful native elements were there in sufficient numbers to act as junior partners in the iniquitous traffic. Alien power is gone. But the virus of indigenous origin is yet fairly intact. The Government of India may resolve to abdicate its arbitrary authority from above. But the ghosts of history are there behind the curtain to vie with the new forces unleashed. They have the ravenous eyes of the vulture. 550 feudal States disappeared from the scene with

the advent of our Independence. But feudal States and feudalism of the spirit are totally different entities. Princes, Jagirdars and landlords have, by and large, heeded the "writing on the wall" and adjusted themselves to the new age. But the shadows left behind them lack both the sense and the wisdom. The nostalgic craving for the past and the disguised or brazen-faced struggle for its revival are but the hangover of the old disease.

The Acid Tests

Community Development is "Sarvodaya". It is the common goal of all who believe in the doctrine of the Socialist society, whatever the pattern or form. The joint family was a model of the living concept of socialism in India. Community Development is but the expansion of the Indian joint family till it grows organically to encompass the Village, Block, District, State and the Nation. Community Development is the end. Panchayati Raj is the means. For Community Development to be achieved, Panchayati Raj has to rise equal to certain acid tests. Broadly, the tests will be whether or not there is:

- (1) Production in agriculture as the top national priority;
- (2) Promotion of rural industries;
- (3) Promotion of co-operative institutions for development of the economy;
- (4) Development of local resources including the utilisation of man-power;
- (5) Optimum utilisation of resources available to Panchayati Raj institutions such as money, staff, technical assistance and other facilities from higher levels;
- (6) Assistance to the economically weaker sections of the village community;
- (7) Progressive dispersal of authority and initiative, both vertically and horizontally, with special emphasis on the role of voluntary organisations;
- (8) Progressive increase in competence both in officials and non-officials;
- (9) Understanding and harmony between the people's representatives and the people's servants through comprehensive training and education and a clear demarcation of duties and responsibilities; and
- (10) Cohesion and co-operative self-help in the community.

No Short-Cut

Community Development is no Alladin's Lamp. The Community Development agency can act as the attorney of the people. It cannot be the substitute for the administration as a whole in a democracy. How then is the child to survive, and will he? The prognosis is an affirmative one, judging historically. The logic, however, demands that people should understand the contradictions that are yet to be resolved if the journey in the direction of "Destination Man" is to begin. Democracy demands that we abjure methods of violence for conversion of others to our line of thinking. The "few" on a joy ride have to get off the shoulders of the "many". Administrative and political rackets have to be eliminated. Amputation, as a method, is precluded. The process then has to be the creation of an enlightened public opinion. "Socialist pattern" and "unwillingness to face logic" are uneasy concepts for co-existence. Which is the agency to work out the extension of this understanding? What are the forces in the country which will support the Community Development agency in its effort upstream? Who will pull the agency up with sympathy and understanding, when it tends to succumb to local forces of gravitation?

A mansion can be built overnight with stone, cement and mortar, subject only to the requisite skill and organisation. A single leaf in a plant cannot be made to sprout, with all the skill in the world, except in conformity with its own organic law of growth. Happily, man in India continues still a living organism, a very complex one, despite all the vicissitudes of centuries. The organism refuses to yield to over-fast efforts. The organism has to be re-adapted to the "World of Tomorrow". Yesterday was bypassed through slumber. "Today" is enveloped in hypnotism. If growth is to be real, adequate allowances have to be made for organic adjustments. The process can certainly be accelerated if there is honesty. Honesty has to be supported by devotion, purpose and the requisite skill. The pilgrimage is young. There is a long road ahead. The direction is right. A giant is on the march. The speed of the journey will be determined by the pull from behind and the pull from ahead. Short-cuts are but the pranks of the devil.

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