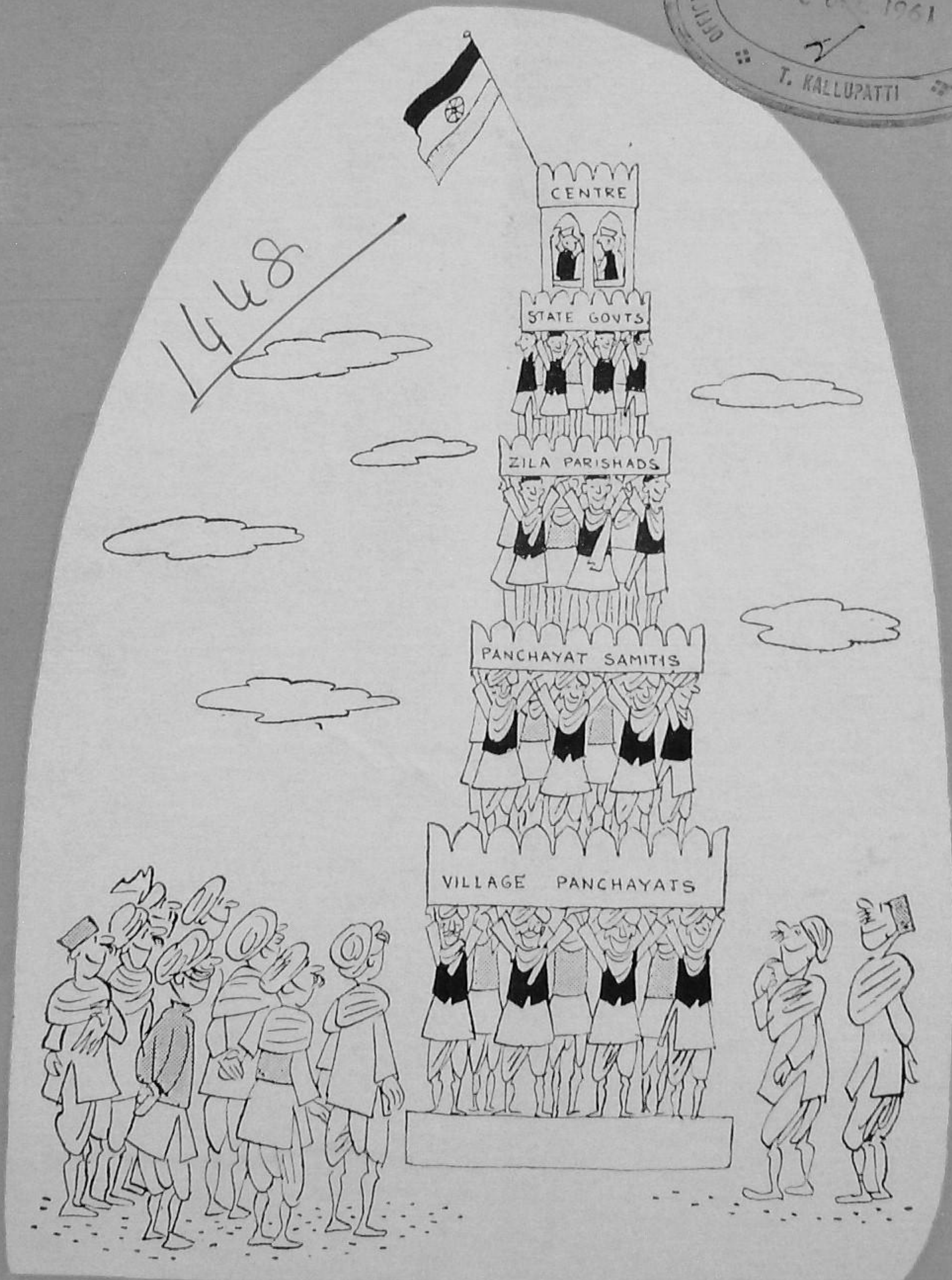


Panchayati Raj

JUNE 1961

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PANCHAYATI RAJ

(Incorporating Gram Sevak)

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PAYMENT TO CONTRIBUTORS

To encourage readers of *Panchayati Raj* to share with their friends their thoughts, experiences and achievements in the field of Community Development, Co-operatives and Panchayats, it has been decided to pay for letters and contributions appearing in this journal with effect from March, 1961. The payment will be made at the rate of Rs. 5 for each letter and about Rs. 10 for each accepted article. Readers are requested to write articles and letters on subjects of common interest and to address them to:

**The Editor, Panchayati Raj,
Ministry of Community Development and Co-operation,
371, Krishi Bhavan,
New Delhi.**

MESSAGE

S. K. Dey

THE ALL-INDIA Panchayat Parishad is meeting this year at a crucial stage of Panchayat development in India. When the Parishad came into being several years ago, Panchayats were more or less self-contained village units looking after municipal functions in the villages and these also under heavily circumscribed conditions. The native genius of India and our cultural traditions however have pushed us during these years in a direction which is much more comprehensive. The new concept of Panchayati Raj derived its official inspiration from the Balwant-ray Mehta Study Team. Panchayati Raj is no longer a concept on paper. It is already under implementation in a number of States. Before the year is over, legislation will have been enacted in almost all States or been implemented on the ground. The speed with which the country has assimilated the concept and is implementing it is something of which any nation will justly be proud.

NO TALISMAN

But Panchayati Raj is no "Talisman". It is an organic system of democratic administration which aims at the ultimate abdication of government from above, and grows federally from the family upwards till it encompasses the nation. If the process is to succeed and endure, the battles which were bypassed in our non-

violent fight for independence will have to be fought to the finish. The fight for independence is over. Battles for freedom are yet to be fought. These battles will have to be fought within our own selves between that part of us which wishes to dominate the weak and the unwary and the other which wishes to martyr itself in the service of the group whom the former exploits. These battles can be fought free of violence only if the mass of people can be educated in the processes of democracy, in the understanding of Panchayati Raj. People must understand their rights and obligations, those of their representatives and the permanent servants of Government. They must have a clear picture of the inter-relationship—both vertical and horizontal.

THE CATALYST

Democracy by definition demands the highest form of development,—mental, physical and spiritual—of the people, and the growth of enlightened and enduring leadership at all levels. The leaders in the long run are what the people are. An enlightened, organised and determined public opinion grows thus to be an essential pre-requisite to democracy. Which is the organisation that can act the catalyst for this consummation? It has, of necessity to be an organ of the people growing from the ground up to the

national "level such as can act the friend, philosopher and guide" to the statutory institutions of democracy. The All-India Panchayat Parishad will have to undergo a major change in its structure and terms of reference if it is to serve in tune with the fast growing and all-embracing needs of Panchayati Raj in India.

Now that we have Village Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis and Zilla Parishads connected organically, the Parishad in my view, should be a State and national organisation fully representative of the Village Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis and the Zilla Parishads. The Parishad should take the responsibility for promotion, education and evaluation. It should promote administrative and democratic competence, integrity and objectivity in action, the correct approach and healthy growth in Panchayati Raj institutions. It should educate the people in the processes of democracy so that the people can provide support to honesty, integrity and efficiency and deterrents to injustice and arbitrary actions. The Parishad should undertake periodic evaluation of the working of these institutions and the progress the people are making in their journey towards self and community development.

May the forthcoming sammelan at Jaipur prove the turning point in the growth of our democracy in India!

ALL INDIA PANCHAYAT PARISHAD

THIRD CONFERENCE

THE ALL-INDIA Panchayat Parishad under the Chairmanship of Sri Jayaprakash Narayan held a 2-day session in Jaipur on 13th and 14th May to discuss important issues facing the Panchayats. The conference was addressed among others by Shri S. K. Dey, Union Minister for Community Development and Cooperation, and Shri Mohan Lal Sukhadia, Chief Minister, Rajasthan.

In his presidential address to the conference, Shri J. P. Narayan laid stress on the fact that parliamentary democracy at the National and State levels and Panchayati Raj below the district level did not go well together because the former tended to centralise power and crippled the latter. He advocated extension of the Panchayati Raj to the top layer parliamentary bodies as well. He urged that the three-tiers of self-Government, viz. the Gram Panchayat, the Panchayat Samiti and the Zilla Parishad should be given due recognition in the constitution. He did not favour the vesting of control over the Panchayati Raj bodies in the State Government which could not but be guided by party interests. Instead, he recommended the setting up of an autonomous Commission for the purpose.

Shri Sukhadia proposed that Khadi and Village Industries Board should func-

tion through Panchayats and Cooperative institutions. He expressed himself in favour of unanimous elections to Panchayats but, as his experience in Rajasthan had proved, such unanimity should not be achieved through inducements offered by Government. He felt that unity on post-election programmes was far more valuable than mere unanimous elections.

Shri S. K. Dey said that Panchayats could do what Government had failed to achieve—that is making administration a human activity and demolishing the authoritarian concepts so firmly embedded in a centralised administration. He cautioned against the tendency to concentrate power in a few hands that was part of Indian social thinking. He felt that unless a proper education of the Panches and the people in general was undertaken, the Panchayati Raj bodies could become new 'Jagirs' and the Sarpanch a new 'Jagirdar'.

EIGHT RESOLUTIONS

The Parishad passed eight resolutions on some of the important issues facing the Panchayati Raj. In one of the resolutions, it recommended that Panchayat elections should not be fought on party basis and urged upon the political parties to keep themselves away from the elections. It also called upon

the members of the Panchayati Raj bodies to take necessary steps in this direction.

By another resolution, it urged the Panchayats to hold unanimous elections in order that they may be in a better position to shoulder their heavy and onerous responsibilities of administration and development work. It called upon Panchayats, rural people, voluntary organisations engaged in constructive work as well as the Central and State Governments to take effective measures to achieve the objective.

In another resolution, the Parishad laid down that for the healthy growth of Panchayati Raj bodies it was essential to keep them free from any strangulating influence from outside. It, therefore, recommended to the State Governments to ensure that the members of the State legislatures and Parliament should only be associate members of the Panchayat, Samitis and Zilla Parishads. They should not be allowed to accept any office in these bodies and should have no voting rights.

Another important resolution passed by the Parishad related to the financial resources of the Panchayats. It recommended that the entire land revenue collection should be handed over

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SWARAJ FOR THE PEOPLE

Jayaprakash Narayan

In this thought-provoking article, Shri Jayaprakash Narayan has given the philosophy and logistics of Panchayati Raj. One may or may not agree with all the views of the Sarvodaya leader, but few will assail the soundness and profundity of his ideas. That explains why we decided to bring out a Special Number primarily based on his article. We do hope, this will stimulate thinking amongst all the well-wishers of Panchayati Raj. Panchayati Raj is a new adventure both horizontally and vertically in the unchartered ocean of democracy. Much of the progress will be achieved through "trial and error" method. Viewed in that light, some of the novel ideas suggested by Shri Jayaprakashji such as the extension of Panchayati Raj to higher tiers of self-governing bodies at the State and national levels so as to have an organic structure from the Gram Sabha to Lok Sabha, the raising of a decentralised economic structure alongside the political, and the introduction of a novel system of elections so as to minimise the evils of keenly contested elections based on party system are worth their trial even though this may involve far-reaching changes in our Constitution. But the gains promised in this vital process of transformation are of such basic national importance that no pains and no efforts are too much.—Ed.

THE PEOPLE of this country may justly be proud of the fact that they have deliberately chosen the democratic way of life, despite the example of many neighbouring countries having embraced dictatorship of one kind or another. It is evidence of the people's cultural and spiritual maturity that they have done so.

While affirming all this, it is desirable to take stock of our decade of democratic experience. This should be done in the light of the experience of other countries of Asia and Africa as well as of the mature Western democracies.

The most striking fact that has emerged from the working of ten years of our Constitution is that the people of the country, that is to say, the twenty crores of voters have felt rather *left out of it all*. They have no doubt had

the opportunity of participating in two General Elections, but beyond that transient contact with the working of democracy, they have had nothing further to do with it. It is very common to hear the remark made by common people even in the countryside that though *Swaraj* came, it had not come to them. They complain that they are ruled much in the same manner and by the same kind of people as during British rule. They find that not even in local affairs have they a hand or that even the humblest civil servant is in any manner accountable to them; on the contrary, they find that he lords it over them and even exacts illegal gratification much as in the old days. The truth must be faced that the people have not been able to experience the sensation of *Swaraj*. It is only the very thin layer of the educated

middle class, and even of them only those directly engaged in political activity, who are involved in the working of our democracy.

INVERTED PYRAMID

The result of this state of affairs is that our democracy is found to be resting on a very narrow base. It is like an inverted pyramid that stands on its head. Our obvious task is to set this picture right and stand the pyramid on its base. The mere fact that every adult Indian has the right to vote does not make the pyramid broad-based. The crores of individual and disparate voters are like a heap of particles of sand that can never be a foundation for any structure. The particles must be united to form bricks or encased within concrete moulds to be able to act as foundation stones. It is, therefore, obvious that

if stability has to be imparted to our democracy, the base must be broadened and the top layers suitably architected into the basic structure. If the base were strong, there would be little danger of the whole edifice of democracy toppling down at the adventurer's touch. Ours is a country of historic ruins. One has only to visit any of the ruins to see what happens when an edifice falls to the ground. It is always the roofing that comes down first, then the walls; the upper storeys first, then the lower, and the foundation stones are found intact even after the passage of thousands of years. The durability of a structure—no matter how ambitious—depends on the strength of the foundation and the lower supporting structures.

In some countries of Asia and Africa the outward forms of Western democracy had been imported. That is to say, there were, generally speaking, adult franchise, a number of contending parties, an elected parliament and a Government responsible to it. That meant, as in India, that there was a mass of disparate individual voters at the bottom—the sand heap—and on that foundation of sand was raised the topmost storey of Government. In such a state of affairs, it was only natural that people should feel that they had no stake in that kind of democracy even though they had the votes and that at the slightest push the pyramid of democracy standing on its

head would topple down and the millions of particles of sand, viz., the disorganized voters, would look on as helpless spectators. It is conceivable that if the democracy that had been knocked down was corrupt and inefficient and had failed to tackle such vital problems as those of food and unemployment, the voters might even welcome the event. It is not the abstract virtues of democracy that so excite us, the democratic intelligentsia; but the concrete fruits of democracy in terms of welfare and the palpable stake they have or part they play in working it that determine the attitude of the mass of the people anywhere to the institutions and the process of democracy.

It would be foolish not to profit from the experience of so many countries of the world, that are by no means confined to the continents of Asia and Africa. It is true that there is no imminent danger of subversion of our democracy; but we should never forget that it also suffers from the very same defects that have sent democracy to its doom elsewhere. The danger quite conceivably might become imminent once the few national leaders of today disappear from the political scene.

There is no doubt that the developed and mature democracies of the West are not so top-heavy and devoid of the support of broad-based infra-structures of various kinds. Nevertheless, even

there government and decision-making do remain the privilege of the few. Except in Switzerland and perhaps the Scandinavian countries, Western democracy is little more than government by consent. With the growth of science and technology and a complex economic system, government is becoming more and more the business of smaller and smaller numbers of people. With the consequent growing concentration of economic and political power in the hands of fewer people—whether they are private citizens or officers of the State—democracy would soon be just a matter of form rather than of substance.

PARTICIPATING DEMOCRACY

Western democracy will perhaps solve its own internal problems, but it must be emphasised that the Western concept of democracy as government by consent, or, in other words, as a political system that offers an opportunity to the people to change their government peacefully, is not an adequate enough concept, and that we should profit from the experience of the West and try to move forward towards a more adequate democracy. The next step beyond government by consent is people's participation in government, or a participating democracy.

Now, it is obvious that it would be impossible for the millions of Indian voters to participate in government if that were to be run only

from Delhi or the few capitals of the States. In order that the people might participate in government, government must be brought as near to the people as possible. This would require a thorough-going system of political as well as economic decentralization.

There is in the West a very healthy and vigorous system of local self-government. While this is to be welcomed, local self-government by itself cannot satisfy the needs of participating democracy as I visualise it. In the West, while there is a substantial measure of local self-government, the Central Government is all powerful; that is to say, all the major and vital decisions are taken at the Centre. This is far from my concept of participating democracy. What I have in mind is what Gandhiji often used to emphasize, namely, that as you proceed from the bottom level of government to the top, each higher level should have less and less functions and powers. To go back to the image of the inverted pyramid, the broad upper levels of present-day democracy must be drastically sawed off and large portions of the vast upper floors brought down to earth, so that the pyramid of democracy could become a real pyramid—narrow at the top and broad at the bottom. In such a system the people at each level would have the fullest opportunity to manage all those affairs that might pertain to that level. Such a

system of democracy could give the people a stake in democracy as well as the sensation of *Swaraj*.

DEMOCRACY IS DEAD: LONG LIVE DEMOCRACY

It is a remarkable phenomenon that when a dictator knocks down a democratic set-up of the Western type, he at the same time protests his faith in a 'true democracy of the people' that would arise tier by tier from the village upward. The latest instance of this is King Mahendra of Nepal. Sometimes the protestation is sincere, sometimes it is only a ruse to fool the people. Be that as it may, the question is, why is such a protestation voiced at all? The reason is obvious. It is not that such a people's democracy is a hoax, and therefore a convenient tool in the hands of a dictator. Democracy, when standing on its head, as formal democracy of the Western type does, at least where it lacks the infrastructures, is easily toppled over. The reason the dictators always speak of some kind of basic democracies is that they are shrewd enough to realise that that kind of democracy would be more readily understood by the people as a system in which they would come into their own, rather than be made a plaything by the politicians as in the Western system; and that consequently, the people would rally to the support of the dictators. It is reasonable to expect that those dictators who are sincere in their professions of

democracy would make a serious effort to build the new democracy of which they speak. It remains to be seen if the dictators, from the U.A.R. to Nepal, would translate their promise into action and eventually hand over all power to the people and their democratic institutions. The setting up of the National Union in the U.A.R. and Basic Democracies in Pakistan is some little advance in the promised direction, but these countries are still far from being a democracy of any kind whatever. But, this unique phenomenon in which the two cries go up simultaneously, 'democracy is dead' and 'long live democracy', merits attention.

NATIONAL UNITY

Political and economic decentralization and strengthening of the lower organs of government might make it appear as if that process would weaken the fabric of the Nation and impair the strength and unity of the Centre. The fact that fissiparous tendencies do exist in the country and there are local and linguistic patriotisms and tensions lends force to this view. But a closer examination of the matter would show that we would be far more cohesive and strong as a nation, and the diverse groups making up India would live together far more happily if they had as much freedom and opportunity as possible to manage their affairs and preserve and develop their uniqueness. An all-powerful Centre

concentrating too many functions in its hands would only be outwardly strong. Inwardly, it would be under severe stresses and strains, and the danger of its falling apart would be ever-present. It should also be evident that such a 'strong' centre would have gradually to move away from democracy and become more and more totalitarian. It is not without reason that those in India who advocate a unitary form of government have marked fascistic tendencies.

Devolution of power so that the Centre has only as much of it as required to discharge its *central* functions and all the rest is exercised by the lower organs, need not necessarily imply a weak Centre. It is all a matter of competence: at each level the elected authority does *all* that it is competent to do. And, because at each level the authority concerned finds that there are tasks that lie beyond its competence, it has to federate with other authorities at the same level so as to create a higher level of authority. It may be parenthetically observed that even nation states find in the present age that there are tasks that the strongest among them cannot face; and so, opinion is growing in favour of a world union of peoples. It is this factor of competence that is a guarantee of the strength of the Centre in this system, because it is in the interest of the lower authorities to give all power and opportunity to the Centre to do efficiently and expedi-

tiously all that they themselves cannot do. Defence, foreign affairs, inter-State relations, currency, regulation of imports and exports, preservation of national unity are, for instance, tasks that fall within the competence *only* of the Centre. A Central Government that is armed with these powers cannot by any stretch of imagination be described as weak, just because the range of subjects in its charge is not so wide. Indeed, such a government is bound to be strong, powerful, streamlined and effective. On the other hand, a top-heavy sprawling Centre, poking its finger into every pie might have the appearance of strength and power, but in actual fact it would be weak, flabby, slow-moving and ineffective.

National unity or strength does not depend upon the list of subjects that a Central Government deals with, but on such intangible factors as emotional integration, common experiences and aspirations, national ethos, mutual good-will and the spirit of accommodation, and, above all, upon large-hearted wisdom on the part of national leaders.

THE LOGIC

It may be doubted if the plant of democracy, no matter of what variety, can grow and thrive in a climate of dictatorship. But luckily for us in this country we have the opportunity to re-fashion, broaden and deepen our democracy under ample, if

not full, democratic conditions. My plea is that we take advantage of these conditions and get on with the job, so that while there is still time, we might make our democracy invulnerable and satisfying.

It is a matter of great satisfaction that in our country a beginning has already been made in laying the foundations of participating democracy in the shape of Panchayati Raj, or what was called at first 'democratic decentralization'. The initiative for this experiment came originally from Shri Balwant-ray Mehta and it has made headway in the face of overpowering odds only because of the drive and vision of Shri S. K. Dey, the Union Minister of Community Development, and the powerful support of the Prime Minister. The Congress Party has accepted the ideal of Panchayati Raj; it has already been introduced into several States; and it is expected that in a few years it will be extended to all the remaining ones.

In the past few months much has been written about Panchayati Raj; so there is no need to describe it in any detail. A few observations, however, are called for. First, it should be noted that the initiative for Panchayati Raj originally came not from the political motive of broadening the base of our democracy or laying the foundations of what I have called 'participating democracy', but from the anxiety to obtain full public co-opera-

tion in the execution of development programmes. On account of this restricted aim with which the experiment was started, its significance has not been grasped so well even by the conscious political elements in the country, much less by the people at large. It is clear, however, that the logic of the movement is driving it forward and constantly enlarging and deepening its implications. But there is still need of arousing popular enthusiasm about this measure, and of making the people realize that what was intended was not a procedural reform of the administration at the lower levels, but a political revolution of the greatest significance for the people; that, in effect, the intention and the attempt were to bring *Swaraj* to the people. This understanding and enthusiasm cannot be brought about by Development Officers but by the democratic and popular leaders of the country—irrespective of party and ideology—and by social workers and intellectual and moral leaders generally.

CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

In order that Panchayati Raj might become the base of a true participating democracy, certain conditions must be fulfilled.

First, education of the people, understood in the widest sense of the term, is an essential condition for the success of the experiment. This education can best be imparted by disinterested,

non-partisan agencies, engaged in social service or tasks of rural development. Political parties might also make a great contribution in this respect, provided they addressed themselves to the task in a non-partisan spirit. Perhaps the best way for them would be to create a common agency through which to carry on this work. Government officers and agencies might also do useful work in this sphere. Schools, libraries, co-operative societies have an important role to play here. It should also be considered whether a non-party and purely educative body of voters which might be called the "All-India Voters' Association" should not be formed in order to render educative service to the voters. There might also be a centre jointly set up and conducted by the Union Ministry of Community Development, the All-India Panchayat Parishad, other all-India local self-government organizations, the Akhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh, and other all-India rural service agencies. Such a centre could help by way of producing literature, conducting surveys, studying problems, etc.

Second, it is well worth emphasising that the success of Panchayati Raj would depend upon the extent to which organised political parties refrained from interfering with it and trying to convert it into their hand-maiden, and using it as a jumping ground to climb to power. There is no doubt

that as consciousness grows among the people at the ground level, they would be less and less liable to be moved about as pawns by political parties and ambitious politicians. But in the initial stages it is necessary for political parties, in the interests of the people whom they claim to be anxious to serve, to place themselves under a self-denying ordinance and refrain from either setting up party candidates or putting pressure on the elected representatives to become party members, so as to be able to control the basic institutions of democracy. For the sake of the health and vitality of these institutions and intelligent participation of the people in the working of democracy, it would be best to leave these institutions in the direct control of the people, without party interference. The parties might, however, carry on educative work among the people, even if that involved putting forward divergent ideas and policies. If the leaders of all the political parties came to an honest agreement amongst themselves, it should not be difficult to achieve this aim.

Third, there should be a real devolution of power and not a make-belief. It is possible to construct the outward structure of Panchayati Raj and to give it no substance. That would be like a body without a soul, dead from the start, a still-born child. There is need here for sincerity, imagination and courage. The people

must be trusted. There is a tendency among those of us who have received some education to distrust the ability and intelligence of the common people, and it is possible to talk of devolution of power without in reality surrendering any power. No one can learn to discharge responsibility unless responsibility is really given to one. Withholding of responsibility, either on account of lack of confidence in the people or of reluctance to surrender power, would lead naturally, as it has already done to a considerable extent, to an attitude of irresponsibility in the people who will for ever be on the look-out for heroes and miracle-makers to solve their problems. It is out of such a psychological situation that dictators are born. For democracy to be a success, it is necessary that the people are prepared, and given full opportunity to shoulder responsibility.

There are in the Panchayati Raj three tiers of authority and administration: the Village Panchayat, the Block Panchayat Samiti and the Zila Parishad. At each of these tiers the people must be given the opportunity to do for themselves all that might be within their competence. In the British administrative system the District Magistrate and Collector was the key-stone; his position still remains the same. But if the devolution of power in Panchayati Raj is real, then eventually the District Magistrate should disappear or remain only as a

representative in the district of the State Government just as the Governor is now only a representative in the State of the Central Government. Panchayati Raj even in Rajasthan, where it began, is yet a far cry from this consummation. True, such a process will take time, but it is not clear that there is agreement about the ultimate goal.

Fourth, it is imperative that at each level the local authority should be given its own minimum resources. If control of resources remains in the hands of the State Government, the devolution is bound to be rather nominal. 'He who pays the piper calls the tune' would be as true here as anywhere. I am afraid in this sphere progress has been even less marked than in the case of devolution of authority and functions. In this connection, I suggest that land revenue, even though it does not amount to very much, should be the first resource to be placed totally at the disposal of the Village Panchayat and the Panchayat Samiti. It should no longer be the prerogative of the State Government to allocate sums out of land revenue to these bodies. Subject to an equalization fund for the purpose of aiding the poorer villages and blocks, the entire land revenue should be left in the hands of the Panchayats and the Samities. Other possible sources of revenue must also be found and placed at the disposal of the Panchayati Raj in order that it might function with dignity and

enjoy its autonomy. This does not mean that for development programmes Panchayati Raj should not receive allocations of funds from the State or the Centre.

Fifth, Panchayati Raj should be able as soon as possible to exercise real authority over the civil servants under its charge, who should be held fully accountable to it. Even in the matter of recruitment, it should be advisable to associate the local authorities or their nominees. At the same time provision should be made to assure to the civil servants justice and security of service and freedom to discharge their duties without improper interference.

GRAM PANCHAYAT

Sixth, of the three-tier structure of Panchayati Raj, the bottom tier, the gram panchayat, is obviously the foundation. The strength and vitality of the whole structure and its democratic nature would depend upon the strength and vitality and democratic nature of the gram panchayat. I have been emphasising here the element of people's participation as a true measure of democracy. Now, if there is any level of self-government at which the fullest participation of the people is practicable, it is at the village level. It is only there that direct democracy can adequately function.

But, if at the village level the only recognised and statutory body were to be the panchayat, and the people were to have no other part

in the management of village affairs than to cast their votes at panchayat elections, even village democracy would fail to be satisfying, adequate and sound. And that would render unsound the whole structure of Panchayati Raj. The effectiveness of the village panchayat, its strength and vitality, would depend upon the sustained, intelligent and enthusiastic interest and cooperation of the village community in its affairs and activities.

Even before the advent of Panchayati Raj there were village panchayats; but they were not agents of village democracy then: they were rather agents of the State Governments, or worse, of the local officers. If under Panchayati Raj too, the village panchayats were not to draw their strength, authority and sustenance consistently from the village community, they would remain, as before, instruments through which the State Government and its officers would control and manipulate the village population. Panchayati Raj reared on such a foundation would not be a structure of democracy rising from below but an extension of bureaucratic rule from above.

In order, therefore, to give a true base to our democracy and to involve actively and continuously the whole people in its working, it is necessary to go lower down than the panchayat—to the people themselves—and to constitute the entire adult membership of the village community into a statutory

collective body,—the gram sabha. The panchayat should function as an executive of the *sabha*, which should have power to set up other committees and teams for specific purposes.

This is being actually attempted now; but there is a peculiar hesitancy noticeable in trusting the good sense and capacity of the people. Gram sabhas are being constituted, but they do not function and the panchayats, or some times only their presidents, usurp all authority, naturally inducing a sense of indifference among the people. The gram sabha should meet as often as possible, say, quarterly, and all important matters, including the budget, must be placed before it not only for discussion and eliciting opinion but for approval and acceptance.

Then would it be that the people would awaken to their responsibilities and opportunities, and the gram panchayats cease to be convenient tools in the hands of officers of the State or the vested and selfish interests in the village communities themselves and become fit instruments for execution of the people's will. When this happens, the gram sabhas and not the gram panchayats, will become the bottom tier, the ground floor, of the noble edifice of democracy, providing it with the broadest and most stable and solid foundations.

Therefore, all those interested in strengthening Indian democracy and helping the

people to govern themselves should join together and endeavour to develop in them the necessary social consciousness, practical ability and moral quality. Here is a truly inspiring challenge for all the democratic parties of this country—that is, if they have time from the scramble of power for themselves. All training and educative programmes, official and non-official, should be aimed at this over-riding objective.

Wherever panchayat presidents have been given powers to nominate some members of their executive, the law should be amended so that, even if nomination were to be found necessary and desirable, the powers of nomination are exercised by the groups or interests concerned, or by the panchayat as a whole, or by yet another method; but, in no case, should the panchayat president be encouraged by law to become a powerful boss with a number of members always in his pocket.

UNANIMOUS ELECTIONS

In regard to elections to village panchayats, it is my emphatic view that they should be held without contest. This view has been severely criticised in some quarters; in others, opinion seems to have veered round to it. For myself, the more have I thought over this question, the more have I discussed it with others and the more have I learnt of the workings of village panchayats, the more convinced have I become that if Panchayati Raj is to succeed,

contests at elections to village panchayats must be avoided. The village today is a much divided house. There are caste and class differences; there are family and other factions. There is no collective will in the village. On the other hand, the tasks that the villages face can never be tackled unless there is united and collective effort. A community spirit must be created before there could be proper community development. To introduce electoral contests into the village is to throw a monkey-wrench into the works. Let the people understand that the condition of their enjoying self-rule is that they agree to work together for the common good; not because any dictator wishes to impose his will upon them, but because that is the naked, imperative condition on which they can at all rule over themselves and advance both their personal and common interests. Self-government through faction-fighting will not be self-government, but self-ruination. Let it be remembered that the village is a primary, face-to-face community where the people are physically thrown together and have to share their joys and sorrows. This village, as I have just said, is a disrupted community. It would be a tragedy and a mockery of democracy if the latter were to be made an instrument of further disruption. The cry has already gone forth from certain parts of the country that the villages had better be left as they were, rather than be made cock-pits in the

name of Panchayati Raj. The reason for that is that electoral contests have already produced such tensions that there is a virtual stalemate in the affairs of the panchayats. If this state of affairs continues, there is danger that in a few years every one would become so sick of the very words 'panchayats' and 'Panchayati Raj' that government from above through bureaucratic civil servants would come to be welcomed with open arms and people's democracy would have been declared to be a total failure and a chimeric. That would be a terrific blow to the cause of democracy in this country, which might open the way for dictatorship.

In opposition to this view, it is pointed out that as the village community is rent with conflicting interests, it is impractical to talk of uncontested elections to the panchayats. The view presented above stresses that just because the village is a disharmonious community at present, contests should be avoided so that the panchayats might be able to mobilise the entire community for tasks of reconstruction and development.

However, since this argument is persistently trotted out, let us examine it a little closely. True, there are different, even conflicting interests, in the village. But it is not the panchayat that can bring about any radical socio-economic change in the village community: it can-

not abolish land-ownership, alter tenancy law, re-distribute land, legislate on interest rates and money-lending, or do anything else of the sort. In the case of elections to the Vidhan Sabha and the Lok Sabha the differences in village society might play an important part, but for purposes of panchayat elections they are irrelevant. The real remedy for the economic and social divisions in the village is, (a) to hurry up with the needed economic and social legislation, (b) to enforce strictly the existing law in these regards and, (c) to intensify the vital but neglected work of adult mass education; rather than to encourage the existing regrettable divisions to be used further to accentuate conflict and disharmony.

To return to the main point. Let us ask what the functions of a panchayat are. Clearly, its most important function is to initiate and, after approval of the gram sabha, to execute plans and programmes of development. The vital question is, can the panchayat perform this function better when it represents unity and harmony than when it reflects factionalism and discord? Even a slight acquaintance with reality should leave no one in doubt as to the answer. The sad thing is that there should be persons with such split minds as to ask the villagers, in one breath, to make a common endeavour to better their lives, and in the second breath, ask them to fight among themselves for the

power to achieve that very end.

It is sometimes urged that in the name of uncontested elections, the traditional bosses of rural society will be able to capture the panchayats. This might and does happen. But the same thing might and does happen even when there are contested elections. The remedy for bossdom is not electoral contest, but daring and imaginative socio-economic reform and education and enlightenment of the masses.

There is another important aspect of the matter to be stressed. The gram panchayat, in order to discharge its moral responsibilities, must work for providing a minimum of social security and welfare to the weaker sections of the community. In the absence of legislative powers to alter the socio-economic pattern of rural society, the only conceivable manner in which the panchayats might be able to fulfil this task is by obtaining the good-will and cooperation of the stronger sections and by persuading them to share voluntarily a part of their wealth, talent and time with their less fortunate neighbours. Any other approach at the village level would be ruinous and self-defeating. Experience has shown that even when backward sections of the village have captured a panchayat, defeating the traditionally dominant section, they have failed to achieve anything because of the non-cooperation and opposition of the defeated

interests. The class-conflict approach at the village level is likely to help least those very sections of the community that stand most in need of it.

Thus, the conclusion is inescapable that it is desirable from every point of view that there should be no contests at elections to village panchayats. The question now is how this can be done. Several suggestions have been made in that behalf, and experiments made, particularly in the old Saurashtra under the Chief Ministership of Shri U. N. Dhebar. If the principle were accepted it should not be difficult to find a way to translate it into practice. Unfortunately, it is the view in some quarters that unless there is electoral contest, there is no democracy. It is this static, abstract, wooden view that comes in the way of finding a solution. But I am certain that unless a solution is found, Panchayati Raj would never be a success.

It might appear to the political parties in the country that if there were to be no contest, they would have no function to perform in the village. Far from it: they would have a very constructive job to do there. If they accepted the idea that it was in the best interest of the village to choose uncontested panchayats, that should become a challenge to them, and they should all join together to educate and persuade the villagers to do so—a challenging and creative task. If one leaves aside per-

sonal ambitions, this should not be difficult for the parties to do, because after all, the affairs of the village hardly admit of party-political differences.

PANCHAYATI RAJ COMMISSION

Seventh, the day-to-day working of Panchayati Raj should be put outside the purview of the State government. Panchayati Raj is being ushered in through enactments of the State Legislature. This is only right and proper. It is also proper that the State governments should have power to frame the necessary Rules under the Acts, care being taken that the former do not go contrary to the spirit or intention of the latter. After the necessary Acts and Rules have been passed by the proper authorities, their working should be placed under the care and control of an autonomous body of the kind of the Public Services Commission, the Election Commission, the Universities Grants Commission, etc.

The State governments, as all governments under the parliamentary system must be, are party governments. Therefore, without imputing any undue partisanship to them, it is natural to assume that before taking any action they would pause and consider the possible consequences of that action for their party. They would be more than human if they did not do that. Now, party interest need not be identical with the people's interest. It might be considered to be in the interest of

the ruling party to capture or control the institutions of Panchayati Raj, whereas for the health and growth of the latter it might be essential to keep them from being made pawns in the partisan warfare for power. In view of the deteriorating standards of public conduct, the interference of the State government, or the Minister concerned, in the affairs of Panchayati Raj might go even beyond party interests to factional or communal or personal interests. Opposition parties in the country have often alleged that District Boards and Municipalities have sometimes been superseded entirely for partisan reasons and elections to them unduly delayed because of them. Charges have been made of other kinds of partisan interference with the working of these bodies.

There is also another aspect of the matter. It is a common observation that those in power are reluctant to give it up. In the present power-structure at the State level, there are two partners—the Ministers with their supporters and the higher bureaucracy. Both of them might suffer from that common weakness, and surrender power in words and withhold it in deeds.

On account of the above considerations, it should be desirable to entrust the job of assisting, guiding and supervising the establishment, working and development of Panchayati Raj to a non-political, autonomous body headed by a person who does not

belong to the Civil Service. The latter stipulation seems to be necessary because a civil servant is likely to be under the thumb of the government and to be partial to the rights and privileges of the civil servants working under Panchayati Raj. The functions of the proposed Panchayati Raj Commission would be to see that the different bodies are set up and function according to law; allotment of funds from the State and Centre are properly paid out and utilized; the higher tiers do not unduly interfere with the lower; the administrative staff functions under the democratic control provided for in law and that at the same time its interests are protected; proper corrective or disciplinary action is taken against any offending officeholder or institution of the Panchayati Raj. The functions of the Commission should not be negative only but also positive. In other words, it should be the duty of the Commission also to help the institutions and individuals concerned to function properly and efficiently so that Panchayati Raj might become strong, self-reliant and competent.

CRITICISM

Two types of criticism are levelled against Panchayati Raj. It is said that the village people are too backward, ignorant and ill-informed to be able to govern themselves. There is no doubt that the pattern of our society for centuries has been such that the rural masses have perforce had to suffer from extreme

backwardness in some matters. They are, however, no more backward morally, or deficient mentally, than the urban elite. But, it would be wrong, undemocratic, even presumptuous, on that ground to deny them the right to self-government. Our foreign rulers, it will be remembered, were accustomed to use exactly the same kind of argument to deny India her right to independence. This kind of argument was answered a long time ago when it was said that good government can never be a substitute for self-government.

Moreover, a little reflection should induce some humility in those who are wont to trot out such absurd arguments. May not the backward rural masses turn round and ask of the 'advanced' urban classes, who give themselves such airs of superiority, if they have been able to manage the affairs of the country with any great success or distinction?

It is not my intention to suggest that the village people would be able, from the beginning, to make the best possible use of the power and resources that are going to be thrust upon them in the wake of Panchayati Raj. There is no doubt that they will make mistakes. But, first of all, it is only by actually handling responsibility that the necessary competence and ability for self-government can be acquired; and secondly, the remedy for backwardness is not to deny the people their sovereign rights but to enlighten, educate and train

them with as much expedition as possible. Only those who wish to shirk this task talk glibly about the backwardness of the country 'yokel'.

Another criticism of Panchayati Raj, which has led a few even to oppose its introduction, is that rural society being so conservative and so dominated by traditionally privileged classes, village democracy cannot but be exceedingly conservative and illiberal. It is feared, accordingly, that the traditionally dominant classes will use the political and economic institutions of Panchayati Raj to perpetuate their privileged position. There is considerable force in this view. But, once again, the remedy is not to distrust the people and prevent the frontiers of democracy from advancing. Here too the chief remedy is social education, without which no revolutionary change could be possible. No amount of progressive legislation from above would be of any avail in the absence of an energetic and effective campaign of education. The other remedy is to build in such safeguards and guarantees in the very structure of Panchayati Raj as would make it unavoidable for those in command to work for lifting up the particularly backward and weak sections of the community.

Let me in conclusion warn that refusal to hand over power and opportunity to the people for self-government would surely lead to complete corrosion of democracy in this country, and either to decline

and self-destruction or to some kind of dictatorship.

THE ECONOMIC PYRAMID

Political decentralization cannot be effective without economic decentralization. It is a matter of satisfaction that India is committed to a democratic socialist pattern of society, even though no one has any clear concept of what that pattern should be. Yet, it is gratifying to know that the country is thereby committed to democracy and to the socialist values of life. Now socialists at one time used to believe that if 'the means of production, distribution and exchange' were nationalized, economic democracy would automatically come into being. The experience, however, of totalitarian communism has proved that even the complete nationalization of all these means does not necessarily result in economic democracy; on the contrary, it ends up in the most rigorous economic dictatorship, giving rise to new forms of economic exploitation and inequality. Therefore, democratic socialists, or at any rate the more sensitive and thoughtful among them, have come to realise that if they were not to give up the aim of economic democracy, they must not remain content with the traditional slogan of nationalization, but seek ways of decentralizing the economic institutions and processes of society.

It is clear that such an economy must be a small-machine and labour-intensive economy. At the same time,

it is also clear that there must be a constant and planned effort made to improve the small machine, so that without adding much to its cost, its efficiency and productivity keep on rising. For this the necessary research must be planned and encouraged. Wherever necessary and available, power should be utilised, keeping in mind the over-all and integrated picture of the economy, so that, as far as possible, imbalances between cost, production, consumption and employment are not created.

A decentralized economy must aim at relating full utilisation of local and regional resources, human and material, to the satisfaction of local and regional needs. For this, regional surveying and planning would be necessary. This would, further, assume that for production and consumption of different commodities, different areas would serve as economic units, so that there might be some industries that are village industries, some that are block area industries, others that are district, State or Union industries. (Some of the State and all of the Union industries will, of course, be of large-scale.) This does not mean, however, that surpluses from one area would not be exchanged for surpluses of other areas, but it does mean that, by and large, for each type of industry the area concerned would be the geographic zone within which it would operate. It is obvious that suitable economic measures will have to be devised

to facilitate small-scale industrialization of this type, and, what is more important, to protect this sector of economy from the large-scale centralized sector, so that it develops healthily and becomes viable.

In view of the man-land ratio and rate of population growth in the country, the rural population, despite agricultural development must face progressive impoverishment if it has to remain dependent solely upon the land. Therefore, the industrialization described above must be integrated intimately with agriculture, so that every village or at least every small group of villages is developed as an agro-industrial community. The term 'agro-industrial' here does not refer only to industries concerned with the processing of agricultural products. It means an organic blending of agriculture and industry. An agro-industrial community would, for example, not only process wheat and paddy, fruit and vegetables, sugarcane and cotton, but also manufacture radios, cycle-parts, small machines, electrical goods, etc., that might be needed in the region. Such a development might also narrow down the gap that is widening between city and village and mitigate the evils of urbanization.

It is clear that the organizational pattern of decentralized industry and trade must also be different from that in the centralized sector, whether private or public. The decentralized pattern would overwhelmingly be of the

owner-worker or co-operative type. Thus, this sector would neither be bureaucracy-ridden nor exploitative. It will also be more egalitarian than the centralized-sector, whether public or private.

The political institutions of Panchayati Raj will have to play an important role in this economic development. The problem is to discover how this could be done.

I should like to make clear that it is not my concern at all to preserve traditional modes of production. For my purpose the debate between the modern and traditional is irrelevant. What I am suggesting is, indeed, a most modern type of economy, the like of which does not exist or has existed anywhere, and to create which the utmost possible help of science, including social science, would be required. In other words, a new machine technology as well as a new socio-economic technology, would have to be created. It is not the type of decentralization that exists in the highly centralized economies of the West or of Japan that I have in mind. Decentralization in those countries is subservient to centralization and is a mode of existence for the latter. For me, the dominant pattern of the economy is one of decentralization, with such centralization as is found unavoidable. There has to be a certain balance between the two, no doubt, but the decentralized sector is not to be just a complement of the centralized one.

SOME BENEFITS

It is important to remember that the decentralized economy I am advocating is desirable not only because it would be democratic, but also because, and this is an important point, it would yield immediate benefits to the masses. It would do so because it would offer employment on a mass scale and produce wealth in a manner that would ensure its wide distribution and make 'wage-goods' immediately available to ordinary consumers. In the centralized sector, let it be remembered, benefits of industrialization have slowly to percolate down from the top to the bottom. In the West it took no less than a century for those benefits to reach the common man. It is obvious that in a country of such poverty as India, where even articles of the barest necessity are scarce, and where unemployment and under-employment are so chronic and have such gigantic proportions, a decentralized and not a centralized economy is the crying need—that is, if the aim of economic development is welfare of the people.

In the present extraordinary situation in the country when ambitious plans that have to depend upon massive foreign assistance are the fashion, it is natural that the Centre should become disproportionately powerful and all the lower organs should be reduced to the status of beggars. This naturally plays havoc with the growth of democracy, but this is not the place to go into the complex

question of foreign assistance and its impact not only on economic growth but on every aspect and institution of national life. Suffice it to point out that decentralized economic development would have the benefit of being less dependent than the centralized sector on foreign aid and the Centre,—mainly for three reasons: (a) the element of voluntary labour would be greater; (b) it would absorb and utilise a far larger proportion of small savings; and (c) over-head charges, transport and other social costs would be much lower. Thus, in this sense too, a decentralized economy would be more democratic.

In order to create an economy of the type described above it would be necessary radically to reform rural education. To serve this purpose, rural education must be predominantly non-bookish, practical and technical education, with special emphasis on training in agricultural techniques. Such educational reform must be a part of the research and planning mentioned earlier. Further, rural education must include large-scale practical adult education. Such education incidentally would also provide an answer to the difficult question: wherefrom and how the entrepreneurial personnel required for the development of the decentralized economy could be obtained.

FULFILMENT OF DEMOCRACY

While the attempt to establish Panchayati Raj is a step in the direction of a

more stable, popular and satisfying form of democracy, a step that, when properly executed, might succeed in taking swaraj to the people, it is not adequate by itself. In order that the edifice of democracy might be strong and invulnerable, the top layers of it must be built into the foundational structure. But, as the situation stands at present, the foundational structure is going to be raised only up to the district level, beyond which, i.e. at the State and Union levels, a completely different structure will continue to exist, resting on nothing more solid than a sand heap, namely, the amorphous mass of individual and disparate voters. This is a very unhappy mixture of two different principles and processes of democracy that, like water and oil, will not mix.

The system that rests on individual voters has invariably a tendency towards concentration of power at the top, while the other system tends towards dispersal of power; in the former, organised parties that are run from above by small and powerful elites, play the decisive role; in the latter, communities and communal representative bodies working from below, exert the decisive influence; in the former, again, the representatives elected by the unorganised voters are not and cannot be under their control, in the latter, the electing bodies exercise a continuous influence over the representatives they send to the higher levels; in the former system, the people's participation is limited

to casting of votes, in the latter, there is direct participation of the whole people through the gram sabha and fairly close participation through the higher representative bodies; in the former system, elections are expensive, in the latter, just the opposite; the former requires mass media of propaganda and involves unhealthy psychological and emotional excitement, in the latter, these evils are reduced to the minimum; in the former most voters are more unlikely to understand the issues which are placed before them than in the latter in which the voters at each level are expected to be well acquainted with the problems that they have to deal with.

It might be useful to elaborate some of the above points of distinction. Take the question of concentration of power at the top in the inorganic system of democracy based on individual voters. This is a very vital matter, but unfortunately is not much appreciated. In this type of democracy there is hardly any force that tends to pull power down towards the people. The voters, though their number may run into millions, in the nature of things lack any organizational means to check the upward suction of power. There are, of course, political parties and their membership too might run into millions, but the trend everywhere is, even in the democratic parties, for power to be concentrated in a caucus of leaders. There are also special interests, chiefly economic, that

attempt to influence this type of democracy, but this influence too tends to be exercised over the centres of power. The growth of economic centralization which aids and abets political centralization has already been referred to. It is true that there are trade unions, cooperative societies and other similar organizations that provide a broadening structure for this type of democracy, but they are not built-in structures of the democratic pattern, and they themselves are tending to become top-heavy and over-centralized. The press does exercise some measure of influence upon the centres of power, but the press is not the people.

Take again the question of voters' control over their representatives. In the existing system the voters have no means to exercise any control over the person they choose to represent them. It is true that if he does not satisfy them, they might not elect him again, but this is a very remote and ineffective kind of control. It is also no doubt true that the political parties to whom the "people's" representatives might belong, do exercise some kind of control over them, but party control is an entirely different cup of tea from the control of the voters.

All these circumstances combine to make this kind of democracy a very illusory affair indeed.

The position is quite different in the case of participat-

ing or organic democracy. Because the structure of this democracy is to be built of several tiers, beginning with the basic tier of the gram sabha and going right up to the Lok Sabha, and because the powers and functions and duties and resources of each tier are clearly defined, power cannot but be dispersed in this system. Further, because the higher tiers are constituted of the representatives of the bodies at the lower tiers, power is much more likely to be exercised from below upwards, rather than from above downwards. For the same reason the representatives at the higher level are under the constant gaze of the bodies at the lower levels, and thus subject to the control of the latter. It should be borne in mind that at no level are the bodies mere collections of amorphous individuals, but organized, statutory entities with well-defined collective powers and functions.

Now, if Panchayati Raj stops at the district level and above that, shall we say, Party Raj rules supreme, the people are bound to feel cheated. They will interpret this illogical situation to mean reluctance on the part of the politicians really to give up power. It would seem to them—and they would be right—that power still remained locked up in Delhi and the State capitals and that what had been given to them was not the genuine article; not milk, so to say, but plain water whitened with a little wheat flour. This

kind of disillusionment might produce disastrous results. Therefore, Panchayati Raj must not be terminated at the district level but extended forward up to New Delhi. Although this cannot be done immediately, it should be set clearly as the goal.

The obvious defects of our electoral system have often been stressed by the political leaders of the country, including the Prime Minister. The latest to do so was Mr. Sanjeeva Reddy, the Congress President, at Bhavnagar. But it is noteworthy that whenever this issue is raised it is only in the form of direct versus indirect elections, it being pointed out, no doubt rightly, that the present system of direct elections has become excessively costly and that it also aggravates such evils as casteism and parochialism.

There is nothing wrong in such formulation, but it does miss the fundamental point, namely, the nature and form of democracy that should satisfy the people and give them a larger share in government. Or, to put it in another way, the real issue is that of devolution of power and decentralization of administration. Power, as I have tried to show, cannot be devolved, nor administration decentralised, if (a) there were no institutions and centres of self-government below the present State level, and (b) all the different levels of government were not organically or structurally integrated together, so that the higher

level drew its support and authority from the lower ones and the whole structure rested ultimately upon the broad base of the gram sabhas, comprising the entire adult population of the country.

There will be evils and faults in every system. In Panchayati Raj or participating democracy too there will be evils. The question that now remains to consider is: in what manner should the Panchayati Raj be extended to the higher levels. It would be logical, as I had suggested in my original paper, that each lower level should elect the higher—that is to say, the Village Panchayats the Panchayat Samiti, the Samitis the Zila Parishad, the Parishads the State Assembly, the Assemblies the Lok Sabha. But on second thoughts such a procedure would seem to be undesirable. Two main objections might be raised against it. First, that it might encourage parochialism and make the individual citizen and the lower organs of democracy feel that they had no hand in shaping the institutions at the State and Union levels and bore no responsibility to them. Secondly, as the number of electors at each level, except the lowest, would be small it would be easier for moneyed interests to corrupt them.

The present system may also be said to be open to these objections in varying measures. But that should be no reason for not seeking ways to remedy the defects of the proposed system. The solution cannot be to cling to

the existing system which suffers from even graver faults.

I suggest tentatively that each gram sabha in every constituency should select, at a properly convened general meeting, two delegates to an electoral college, that might be called the Electoral Council, in the following manner. At that meeting nominations should be called for, and all the names proposed and seconded should be listed, preferably on a prominently displayed board. If no more than two names are proposed, they automatically become the chosen delegates. In other cases, each name should be voted upon—votes being taken by show of hands—and the votes received by each nominee entered against his name on the board. Thereafter, there should be repeated balloting in order to eliminate all except two of the nominees. This might be done by dropping, at each ballot, the name receiving the least votes at the previous ballot, and the voters voting for the remaining names. This would be a simple, inexpensive procedure and, as the gram sabhas gather experience in conducting meetings, passing budgets and making other collective decisions as a result of their vital role in Panchayati Raj, this electoral procedure should soon become one of their simpler jobs. A few rehearsals under the guidance of the panchayat president should remove whatever difficulties they might at first encounter in working it.

The next step should be for the Electoral Council to be convened, in other words, for the chosen delegates of the gram sabhas of the constituency concerned—whether of the Vidhan Sabha or the Lok Sabha—to meet at a central place in the area. It should be the task of the Electoral Council to set up candidates for election. The following procedure might be adopted for this purpose.

First, there should be nominations, and then votes taken on each name proposed and seconded. Persons receiving not less than a given minimum of votes, say, 30 per cent, should be declared to be the candidates from the constituency for the Vidhan or Lok Sabha as the case might be.

As I consider it necessary for the fulfilment of democracy—no matter what be its kind—that its processes are as little divisive as possible, or to put it positively, as cohesive and unitive as possible, I urge strongly that every constitutional and educational means should be adopted to encourage the Electoral Councils to set up no more than one candidate for every seat. After all, in the ultimate result, no matter what be the number of candidates and the procedure of election, there is one and only one person elected to represent the whole constituency. (I am speaking of single-member constituencies). Democratic theory somewhat illogically lays down that once a representative has been elected, no matter how much

opposition there had been to him at the election, he represents his constituency as a whole and should serve even those who had opposed him. The illogicality, as well as the unnecessary excitement and wastage of energy and money could be avoided if the delegates to the Electoral Council could be persuaded to select only one name to be put up as a candidate. If, however, this does not happen to be practicable in some cases the names selected in the manner described above should be declared to be the candidates. Final elections should then be held in the following manner.

The names of the candidates selected by the Electoral Council should be sent to all the gram sabhas of the constituency concerned. Each sabha should convene a general meeting where votes should be taken for each candidate. Thereafter one of two alternatives should be followed:

(1) The candidates receiving the largest number of votes should be declared to be the person whom the particular gram sabha wants to represent it in the higher sabha. Of all such persons the one receiving the largest number of gram sabha votes is finally declared to be the Member of the Vidhan or Lok Sabha (as the case might be) from that constituency.

(2) Alternatively, the votes received by each candidate at the general meeting of each gram sabha should be recorded. Then the votes that each

has received at the different gram sabha meetings all over the constituency should be totalled. The candidate receiving the largest number of such votes then becomes the Member from that constituency.

This system of election, it will be seen, achieves several desired results. First, it binds structurally the upper storeys of the democratic edifice with the lowest, lending prestige, strength and meaning to the gram sabhas and lifting them out of the possible morass of localism; secondly, it gives a direct opportunity to every adult citizen to participate in choosing the highest organs of democracy, making it possible at the same time—and this is very important—to do so in an organised manner through the gram sabhas and the Electoral Councils so that he might be in a position to exercise due influence over his representatives: the particles of sand are no longer separate little helpless things, but cohesive bricks of stone. A house built on a foundation of stone-bricks is very different from a house built on sand.

NEXT GENERAL ELECTIONS

As pointed out earlier, the lower tiers of the democratic structure described here are being presently created under the initiative of the Prime Minister and Mr. S. K. Dey, with full endorsement of the last plenary session of the Congress. The extension of this structure upwards will obviously take some time. In

the meanwhile, the third General Elections are going to be held some time in the next year. The questions that present themselves before all those who believe in building democracy from below are whether there is to be no impact of their ideas upon the next Elections and what steps should be taken in the transitional period so that ground might be well prepared for extension of Panchayati Raj to the highest levels.

Election time is obviously a time of intense political activity and mass education. It should, therefore, appear to be obvious for these ideas to be projected as far as possible into the election campaign, so that the new Parliament, as well as public opinion, might be ready to sanction and make the necessary constitutional arrangements in order to erect the two higher and remaining storeys of Panchayati Raj. Accordingly, all parties and persons holding these views should make an all-out, concerted and co-ordinated effort to educate public opinion. For this purpose, it should be necessary for representatives of parties, voluntary social movements such as the Sarva Seva Sang, and other kindred spirits to meet together and reach amongst them a broad general consensus; and then place the agreed proposals and ideas before the people, particularly the voters. It should also be necessary for them to obtain the support of the Press, which is rightly the chief maker of public opinion and to carry on a continuous

process of discussion, elucidation and persuasion.

While the educative campaign should cover the whole gamut of ideas connected with Panchayati Raj, I should like to single out one of them for special emphasis, because while other ideas might appear to voters to be somewhat unrelated to the election campaign; this particular one has a clear and direct bearing on it. I refer to the system of selecting candidates through voters' councils.

In my original paper I had put forward the view that the practice of parties setting up candidates limited the choice of the voters and vitiated democracy. I had also pointed out that in that system it was natural for would-be candidates to look up towards the party leadership and try to win its favour in order to obtain a party ticket. That further strengthens the forces of centralization and concentration of power and weakens democracy. I had, therefore, suggested that a new procedure should be devised by which the people, i.e., the voters themselves, could set up candidates. That would help to pull power downwards to the people and give them an opportunity to participate in a vital process of democracy, and make elections more meaningful to them. In the present system the candidates are 'party' candidates, imposed over the people, whereas in the procedure I am suggesting they would be people's candidates. That should make a world of

difference to the attitude of the people to democracy.

I feel that it would be appropriate and important to project this idea into the next General Elections. Because it would have a direct relevance to the elections; it is likely to make a considerable impact upon them. The effort, to my mind, should not be confined to propaganda alone, but wherever possible the idea should also be put into practice. Perhaps, the practice would be limited to a few constituencies only, but the experience gained would be of far greater value.

Earlier, I have suggested, a procedure through which Electoral Councils could be established for the purpose of choosing candidates. By the time of the next elections, however, it is not likely that statutory gram sabhas would be established throughout the country, so that Electoral Councils could be set up for this purpose. Wherever, in an entire constituency, gram sabhas have been established by then, this procedure could be followed if the people so desired. In constituencies where this might not be the case, *ad hoc* Voters' Councils might be set up through a somewhat similar procedure. A constituency, for instance, could be divided into a number of small areas, and voters' meetings might be held in each area at which two or more delegates could be elected. These delegates could then meet together in what might be called a Voters' Council and select the candi-

date or candidates in the same manner as described in the case of the Electoral Council. The desirability of choosing a single candidate has been stressed in this context: it is needless to say that this should apply to the Voters' Councils and for the same reasons.

There is another suggestion that I wish to put forward in the context of the General Elections. The suggestion is Shri Vinobaji's, who has laid great stress on it. During election campaigns the general practice is for contending candidates and their supporters to hold meetings separately from one another. This practice, among other things, makes it possible for mutual misrepresentation, recrimination, even outright abuse, to be widely indulged in. It also gives an opportunity for fanning communal, religious and other passions. All this not only lowers the morale of public life and the dignity of democratic processes, but also confuses and misleads and mis-educates the electorate, who cannot on that account judge issues dispassionately. The present practice also involves unnecessary expenditure.

A great many of these evils could be mitigated, if not completely eradicated, if all the candidates and their propagandists were to appear together on the same platform and explain their policies and offer mutual criticisms in the presence of one another. Each speaker could be given equal

time and after their performance, the audience could put them questions.

TWO WAYS

Such a practice could be initiated in one of two ways. There could be an agreement about it between all parties and candidates concerned—whether party candidates, 'peoples' candidates or independents. Or, the voters of a constituency might decide among themselves to ask all concerned to appear together. Incidentally, it should be clear that if the practice of joint meetings is followed, there would be an appreciable reduction in election expenses.

All those who are concerned with the health and quality of our democracy should join hands to see that at the next Election this practice is followed over as wide an area as possible, if not over the whole country.

It will be of interest to know that what has been suggested above was actually put into practice at least in one village, Sameli, in the district of Purnea in Bihar at the time of the 1937 elections. The people of that village had served notice then that there could be no election meeting held within their area unless all the candidates agreed to address them together. Agreement to that effect was actually obtained and there was only one joint election meeting held in that village. What Sameli did in 1937 could be done by every village in 1962.

It is obviously necessary, for the success of the ideas

expressed here, to take care that the urban areas are not excluded from their impact—either from the point of view of social and political education or actual experimentation. This is still more essential in view of the fact that programmes both of Panchayati Raj and community development leave these areas completely out of their purview.

Urban self-government could be established on similar principles and practices as those of Panchayati Raj. Concrete steps should be taken in that direction wherever possible, culminating eventually, not in the distant but near future, in amendments of the existing Municipal Acts. The necessary initiative might be taken by conferences of municipal bodies and the All-India Panchayat Parishad.

In the meanwhile, even under the existing law attempts should be made to put as much of these ideas into practice as possible. For instance, both the public and the parties should be persuaded not to allow party politics to intrude into civic affairs. That is to say, it should be agreed upon that the political parties do not set up any candidates at municipal elections. For those elections too, the candidates should be selected through Electoral or Voters' Councils in the same manner as described above. And again in the same manner and for the same reasons, attempt should be made to secure agreed candidates so as to avoid contests and divisions in the community. As

I have said before, true democracy demands that existing divisions, inequalities and conflicts in society are not accentuated by its processes, but smoothed out and ultimately eliminated by the promotion of community spirit and common endeavour towards the common good.

IMPREGNABLE FORTRESS

Here is a political programme in which every citizen can participate, and by doing which he can convert Indian democracy into an impregnable fortress. At present the political atmosphere in the country is charged with tension, nervousness and uncertainty. The fate of the country seems to lie in the hands of a few great leaders. This is a very unstable state of affairs and, along with other consequences, it is likely to lead to national paralysis. The only remedy seems to be for the people to take their fate in their own hands and shape it according to their will. Here is how they can do it. Will the people accept the challenge? If they do not, their fate seems well nigh sealed to me.



*Some Thoughts on Panchayati Raj

Jayaprakash Narayan

FIRST OF ALL, I wish to deal with the question of the constitutional position of panchayati raj. As is well-known the initiation and development of panchayati raj were due to certain disappointments encountered in the execution of rural development programmes. It was the famous Balwantray Mehta Report that set in motion the present process of democratic decentralisation. The main objective behind this process is to accelerate the rate of development of the rural areas. I should, however, like to recall in this connection the relevant proceedings of the Constituent Assembly. It was on May 10, 1948 when Dr. Rajendra Prasad, President of the Assembly, expressed the view that the Constitution should be based on village panchayats and built up tier by tier according to a system of indirect elections. There were hundreds of amendments, I believe, to the same effect. The Constitutional Adviser, Shri B. N. Rau, gave the opinion that it was too late to revise the whole Constitution as suggested; and advised that the matter might be left over for the Union and State Legislatures to consider later. On November 22, 1948 an amendment of Shri K. Santhanam was accepted by Dr. Ambedkar and later incorporated

in the Constitution as Article 40, which says that "the State shall take steps to organise village panchayats...as units of self-government."

It is clear from a study of these proceedings that it was the intention of the Constituent Assembly that the Union and State Legislatures should take steps in due time to amend the structure of the Constitution in the spirit of the President's views and the amendment of Shri Santhanam. The latter speaks of the village panchayats as "units" of self-government. The implication of the word unit is that the panchayats were not to exist and function in isolation, but were to form parts of larger units of self-government, which in turn would form part of still larger units. In short, the concept of panchayati raj was implicit in Article 40.

I have brought this matter up to emphasize that the principles and institutions of democratic decentralization flow not only from the experiences of community development but directly from the decisions of the Constituent Assembly. This aspect of the matter is of great political importance because it puts panchayati raj in quite a different light and endows it with great significance and a new dignity.

It was perhaps inevitable that the Constitution of India should have originally presented the picture of a highly centralised government. During British rule there were only Central and Provincial Governments. Both together presented a high degree of centralization. It was the same pattern that was carried over into the Constitution. The fact that the Union and State Governments are now elected by adult franchise does not alter the fact of their centralization. Even dictatorial regimes have been known to be established by popular vote. Constitutions only reflect social facts. They cannot create them. At the time of writing the Constitution the given social facts did not perhaps warrant any decentralisation of government beyond the State level. The struggle for freedom had not thrown up from below organs of popular will that could be given powers of government. The existing institutions of local self-government were wholly farcical and without any substance whatever; nor, could the village, *mandal* and district Congress Committee be treated as organs of popular will to be entrusted with powers of government.

Since the inception, however, of panchayati raj, what-

*(Extracts from the Presidential speech delivered at the third conference of the All India Panchayat Parishad).

ever be its motivation, a new set of social facts is being created in that three tiers of self-governing institutions from the village to the district level are being established. This vital development will have, sooner rather than later, to be given its rightful expression and place in the organic law of the land, thus fulfilling, incidentally, the wish of the Constituent Assembly. At present the Constitution recognizes only two territorial organs of government: the Union and the State. The emerging three tiers of self-Govt.: gram panchayat, panchayat samiti and the zilla parishad, should also be assigned their due place in the Constitution which should clearly lay down their powers, responsibilities and share in the national resources.

Planning From Below

The Draft of the Third Plan makes a brief reference to panchayats and panchayati raj and lays down the following four "essential conditions" under which to test the success of "the scheme of development through democratic institutions at the district and block level":

- (i) mobilization of local man-power and other resources and securing cooperation of the people;
- (ii) expeditious supply of materials and services to the agencies concerned according to accepted programmes and prevention of loss due

to waste or misapplication of funds;

- (iii) increase in agricultural production; and
- (iv) special care for raising living standards of the less privileged sections of the community.

I am sure that we will all agree that not only the village panchayats but the two higher tiers also should do everything possible to fulfil the expectations set forth in the Third Plan. I should, however, like to draw the attention of the Planning Commission to the undemocratic manner in which the task of planning has been conceived. In a vast country like India planning for the whole country as a single unit from one Centre unnecessarily centralises the whole process and removes it from the people and the realities of the situation. I have tried to show in my *Swaraj For the People* how political centralisation is bound to fail without economic decentralisation. This is being realised more and more. An important aspect of the same problem, however, namely, that of decentralised planning does not yet seem to have been grasped.

The Third plan points out that the Planning Commission had from the very beginning emphasised "the role of local bodies in the development programmes." But that role seems to have been limited to responsibilities for implementing plans prepared above. The possibility of the democratic institutions at each level of self-government

preparing their own plans, which could be integrated with the plans both of the lower and higher institutions, does not seem to be accepted yet. Each self-governing region from the village upwards has its own natural and human resources as well as its needs. The full utilization of the former in order to meet the latter would obviously be the basis of regional planning. We have very little experience in this country of this sort of decentralised, yet integrated, planning. I, therefore, suggest that a few pilot projects might be undertaken so that the process could be understood better and then multiplied over the whole length and breadth of the country.

I firmly believe that it is only such planning and development that would be able to bring about the widespread urbo-rural, agro-industrial development that is so much talked about, but is not in evidence anywhere. Only such a development can solve our problem of unemployment, raise the common standard of living of the people of this country, pull the villages and the small towns out of the pit of economic and cultural depression into which they seem to have permanently fallen and make of panchayati raj a genuine democracy.

Sarvodaya Ideal

We are apt to describe the institutions of panchayati raj as being those of self-government. Self-government cannot mean coercion by one section of the community of

other sections. There is a danger that the powers, privileges and resources that are being placed in the hands of the institutions of panchayati raj might be used for the benefit not of the whole community but of a part of it. It is here that the sarvodya has its most significant contribution to make to the development of people's democracy as represented by panchayati raj. Every practical proposition that has been put forward by the Sarvodya movement, such as that of un-contested elections to the village panchayat; or that of community ownership of land, i.e. gram-dan; or of labour-employing economic enterprises being owned and managed on a cooperative basis is motivated by this concern for the good of the whole community.

It is true that our village society is at present riven with conflicting interests, in view of this it appears academic to speak of a common good. The alternative of precipitating a class-struggle between the various socio-economic interests of rural society cannot but spell disaster, not only to democracy, to economic development, but also to the very sections of that society that are at present weak and backward. I cannot see any other way in which the future well-being of all sections of village society can be assured except that of creating a spirit of cooperation and community, and a sense of responsibility among the advanced sections for the

uplift of the weak and backward. I do not think it is difficult to show to these sections that even their interest lies in the speedy uplift and welfare of those whom they have so far neglected and oppressed. I cannot say if the representatives of the panchayats gathered here would dismiss this view as idealistic and impracticable. It would make me very sad if they did so and fill me with dark forebodings for the very future of the panchayats. I hope, therefore, that you will all realise that the idealism of Gandhiji, which the sarvodya movement is feebly trying to inculcate in the people, will be seen as the only practicalism that would save the village from destroying itself.

Popular Initiative

In our discussion we rightly emphasize that real power and control over the necessary resources should be handed over to the panchayats and the other organizations of local self-government. While there is no doubt that that is necessary, we should not forget that power generated from below by the collective will and effort of the people is of far greater importance. I know of small gram-dani or gram-sankalpi villages that, without any power having been given to them from above, have by the will of their people reached a level of self-management and self-rule that can never be created by any process of devolution of power. These villages have been able to establish com-

munal ownership of land and economic and social equality, remove unemployment from their midst, provide collective health and educational services, make themselves self-sufficient in clothing or some other article of necessity, cure themselves of the habits of drink and litigation, build up a reserve fund through shram-dan for the community. I should like, therefore, to emphasize that whether power is or is not granted from above, the panchayats should try to develop the people's initiative to the fullest possible extent. The further we advanced in that direction the nearer we are to establishing real gram-raj.

Unfortunately it is exactly in this sphere that the situation is rather unsatisfactory. In order that this task is successfully tackled, there must be a large band of self-less workers to inspire, arouse, help and guide the people. There is at present a dearth of such devoted voluntary workers. Where will such workers come from? I think it is unreasonable for us to expect people from outside our villages to come and offer us their services. It should be the job of the Panchayat Parishad to instil in the minds of the members and office-holders of the panchayats the requisite spirit of service and sacrifice. The spirit of self-seeking and power-grabbing that is often noticed would more effectively destroy panchayat raj than anything else. Here then is our greatest challenge and opportunity.

There are fortunately several voluntary bodies performing rural service. The premier among them is the Sarva Seva Sangh. There are others, for instance, the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi; organisations engaged in Khadi, village industries and Nai Talim, the Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development, the Bharat Sevak Samaj, the large group of workers engaged in the field of Cooperation, and several other voluntary agencies. There are, in addition, a large number of village school teachers. The All India Panchayat Parishad should try to bring together all these bodies and individuals so that a concerted attack might be made on the problems of rural development. For any such common effort to be made it would naturally be necessary for common objectives and approaches to be agreed upon by all concerned. I do think that the spiritual, cultural, social, political and economic objectives of the Parishad would be acceptable to most of these voluntary organisations and individuals I have in mind.

Political Stability

I have had occasion before to speak of the atmosphere of political anxiety and tension that pervades the top political layers of the country. In this connection all attention seems to be centred upon leaders and their factions and the fortunes of the country are made to depend upon the fortunes of individuals and groups. This is one of the results of exces-

sive political centralization that at present obtains in the country. Panchayati raj in this context assumes an added significance by offering some guarantee of political stability. The panchayats that you represent, being the very foundations of the democratic structure can become, if properly developed, the surest foundations of the

political stability and continuity of this country. You are thus called upon to play a historic role at the present moment and your success might assure the success not only of Indian democracy but of democracy in the whole of Asia. May the realization of this historic mission inspire you to unceasing and dedicated effort.

ALL INDIA PANCHAYAT PARISHAD

(Continued from page 2)

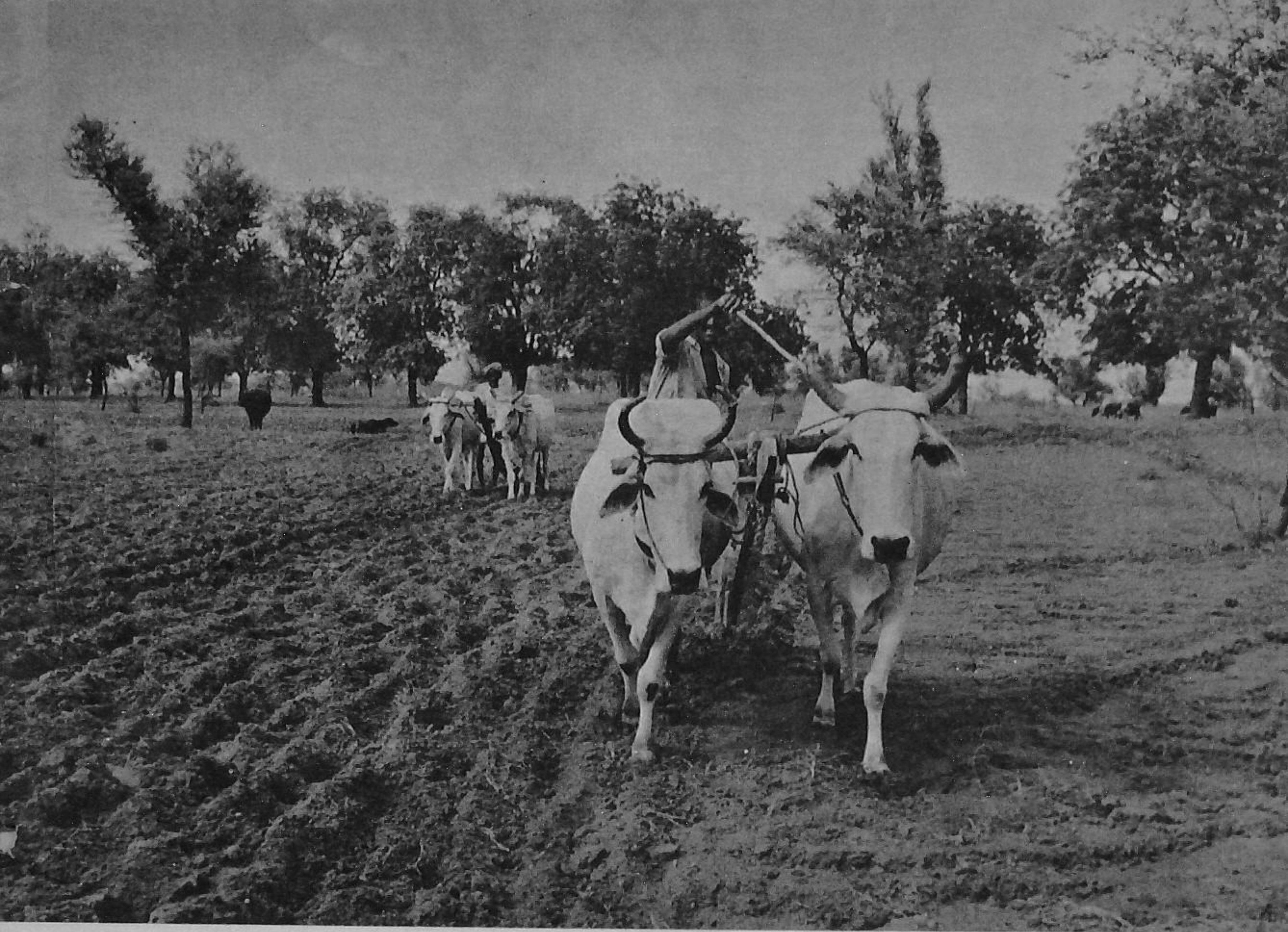
to Panchayats to make them economically self-sufficient and organisationally sound. It also drew the attention of the Panchayats towards the urgent necessity of raising their own sources of income. It recommended that local services engaged in land revenue work should be transferred to the Panchayats.

The Parishad, by another resolution, decided to undertake study, research and training on an extensive scale on the problems arising out of Panchayati Raj so that it could make progress unhampered. It urged the Central and State Governments to make available adequate financial and technical assistance to enable the Parishad to discharge its functions in this regard.

The Parishad endorsed the declaration of Gram Swarajya programme (given elsewhere in this issue) announced recently by the

Sarva Seva Sangh. It approved that the establishment of cooperatives and fully integrated social units in every village constituted the true foundations of Panchayati Raj. To realise this objective, it called upon the residents of each village to assume collective responsibility to see that there was no unemployed person in the village and if there were any, they should be supported till they got employment; and to resolve their disputes inside the village itself.





*With the spread of Community Development movement in different parts of the country
the agricultural development work has received a great impetus.*



Panches discussing with the farmers the Village Production Programme for the coming year.