



# Mahatma Gandhi and Legacy of Democracy in India

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Mahatma Gandhi was an ardent believer in the theory and democracy His belief was based on his own conception of democracy which was quite different from classical concept of democracy of the west. **Methodology:** His innate love of equality, unflinching support of individual freedom, and his consistent plea for bringing about a just order through the brotherhood of man that recognized no barriers of sex, religion, language and culture testify to his faith in democracy of his conception. **Results:** It is true that Gandhi was not a system builder as Plato or Aristotle. Gandhi’s ideas on democracy are to be found in his speeches and writings, though they do not appear to be systematically developed in the sense that he carried ideas to a logical conclusion. **Conclusion:** Gandhi expressed his views on democracy in response to questions put to him by his friends and well-wishers, depending upon his own study. Observations of life experiences and experiments.

## 1. Introduction

by place and time? Was he an ordinary person who rose to extraordinary Mahatma Gandhi a product of his milieu, and his relevance circumscribed however, that the same heights or a person extraordinary? These and similar questions invoke endless debate and discussion. It can be safely argued, wo World Wars, of racism, of apartheid, produced many great personalities but only one Gandhi that the world milieu of British colonialism, the t .(Y·\Sanford, ) recognised as unique personality

contextual responses to the objective conditions of his time and I would like to submit that the relevance of Gandhi is best assessed not just in terms of his reliance (swadeshi), the -cooperation (Satyagraha) the spinning wheel (charkha), self-violent non-like non -place for bringing about social transformation but in terms of the conceptual and -aparigraha), unto the last (antyodaya) and so on ) ”wantlessness“ (hayati rajcommunitarian village republic (panc al import which If I were to single out some of the most significant abstractions of unifers .(Y·\Guha, ) theoretical abstractions that lie embedded in these :many in the world have come to recognise, these would be

- violent revolt by Buddhist monks for restoration of democracy in -violence in thought and deed (the non-The transformatory power of truth and non (thoritarian regimes as in Iran and the Philippines; and other examplesviolent ouster of au-Myanmar; the non
- representative democracy The concept and theory of participatory democracy embedded in his vision of Panchayati Raj. This is a counter to the elitist . in the western formulation
- exploitative technology, a cooperative mode of production and trusteeship that would make for an economic order -earch for a nonThe s . inequalities commensurate with distributive and social justice .Emancipatory power of women and the rejection of social
- . ty of preventive health care over prescriptive medicationPriori
- . alists the world overHumankind as an integral part of Nature, and not apart from Nature. A principle that is invoked by ecologists and environment
- . as being embedded in one”s obligation to the other The primacy of obligations over rights. Rights
- . state-The paradigmatic alternative to the western concept of the nation and nation

umably in the world, that Gandhi I shall restrict myself to the legacy of democratic decentralisation and the deepening of democracy in India, and pres patory democracy. Like most of bequeathed for the future. Embedded in his search for an ideal polity based on panchayati raj lies the formulation of partici ng and competing interests and ideologies. I wish to demonstrate that in India, the his ideas, participatory democracy is a contested terrain of clashi

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zag direction, consistent with Gandhi's formulation of participatory -dialectics of contestation over panchayati raj, has taken an irreversible, albeit a zig-zag direction. (Kochanek, ) focus will be on rural Indian democracy. My f

## 2. Materials and methods

### *Indigenous Polity and Grassroots Democracy 1*

Gandhi was (Republican) At a time when democracy was defined exclusively in terms of western representative democracy of the West (parliamentary or governing village communities, in which the individual will be the unit and-on the innumerable self "centred" for a democratic polity that would be dependence on and willing help from neighbours or the world This would not exclude d "every village will be republic or panchayat having full powers" His vision was that of complete republic, independent of its neighbours for "In such an arrangement there will be ever widening, never ascending circles" -violence with its technique of Satyagraha and non-necessity...Non r many others in which dependence is aits vital wants and yet interdependent fo tempts at an ongoing cooperation will be the sanction of the village community. His elaborations, from time to time, on gram swaraj were so many a Embedded in this romanticisation was the hard "se to portray a holistic picture of the village republic ,though never realisable in its completenessexerci During the Indian national movement, he structural reality of rural governance that was native and indigenous to India's unparalleled complexity hayats suffered from spearheaded the establishment of village panchayats by the Congress Committee, and was fully aware of the problems these panc (Malik & Vajpeyi, )

had proposed an alternative to the Westminster model up approach, he-Consistent with his bottom l of them voting. Then there There are seven hundred thousand villages in India each of which would be organised according to the will of the citizens, al age, in other words, would have one vote. The villagers would elect the district administration; the would be seven hundred thousand votes. Each vill the executive district administrations would elect the provincial administration, and these in turn elect the President who is the head of wield only that the real development of India was possible through its indigenous political system in which the centralised state would Gandhi believed the facilitator of development. More such power as was not within the scope of lower tiers of participatory governance. The state was not the architect but s villages and its superstructure at the layered autonomous vertical integration of political institutions with its base as India-positively, he was for a multi (Corbridge & Harriss, ) people as one moved from base to superstructure manifesting a descending level of power over the -Centre pervasive western paradigm of modernity, traditional values and institutions were regarded as obstacles to development, -In the post Second World War all pposition to Gandhi's ideals of gram swaraj and panchayati raj. India witnessed a contestation between forces of „modern" consequently, it was in o more emocracy representative democracy, and those convinced that the inadequacies of representative democracy could only be met by making d tion begins with the writing of participatory through the introduction of panchayati raj, transforming villages into „units of self government". The contesta (Saberwal, ) the Constitution for free India

### *of Panchayati Raj Draft Constitution and Willful Omission 2*

it in the mere survival of Babasaheb Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian Constitution, had a polar opposite view of village republics. He found no mer With "msilanummoc dna ecnarongi fo ned a ,msilacol fo knis a tub,, village republics that were the cause of „the ruination of India". They were nothing "dual as its unitan air of finality, he had concluded, „I am glad that the Draft Constitution has discarded the village and adopted the indivi from the architecture of the Indian polity met with a barrage of criticism, from the time the draft was tabled The willful omission of the village panchayat A host of distinguished members including, H. V. Kamath, Arum Chandra (1944 November 22) until a resolution had to be passed (1944 November 4) Tyagi, K.T. Shah Guam, T. Parkas, K. Santana, Shebang All Sabena, Allude Krishnaswamy Ayyar, N. G. Ranga, M. Ananthasayanam Ayyangar, Mahavir led. The points that recurrently echoed in and others voiced their inability to accept this gross omission. Resolution after resolution for amendment was tab (Bhana, ) the debate were

a's ruination, it was the i) Ambedkar's view about village republics was narrow and factually erroneous; (ii) far from villages being the cause of Indi olonial exploitation; (iii) the Constituent Assembly that was now engaged in scripting India's Constitution, owed its very villages that were ruined by c the Drafting movement for independence; (iv) none of the members of existence to the rural masses who had contributed principally to the national rural masses and their potential Committee, except one, had participated in the freedom struggle, hence their inability to appreciate the contribution of the (Brass, ) power to transform the country

tical significance. Kamath posed the fundamental question: Now what is the State for? ...The ultimate conflict that The debates dwelled on issues of theore tion or Ranga asked, „Sir, do we want centralisa ""has to be resolved is this: whether the individual is for the State or the State for the individual e of the most important decentralisation? Mahatma Gandhi has pleaded over a period of thirty years for decentralisation." He went on to add, „Sir, on er power not to the Central Government but to the consequences of over centralisation and strengthening of the Central Government would be handing ov "Central Secretariat

:When Gandhi came to learn of this willful omission, his trite observation was spondent) says that there is no mention of or I must confess that I have not been able to follow the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly (the corre shadowed Constitution. It is certainly an omission calling for immediate attention if our -direction about village panchayat and decentralisation in the fore eater the power of the panchayat, the better for the people." Finally, Ambedkar very graciously independence is to reflect the people's voice. The gr :November 22 accepted the following historic resolution moved by K. Santhanam on take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them with such powers A. The State shall-21 "the following article be added ,21 That after Article "government-and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self





- (10) .minant powers Political and economic clientelism in an iniquitous agrarian and caste structure perpetuates the role of do
- (11) .State levels-There are problems relating to ambiguities in the distribution and sharing of power at the various sub
- (12) -improvement in life Most importantly, there are problems of poverty, illiteracy and malnutrition that provide structural barriers to the . chances of the deprived and marginal groups

#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the dialectics of contestation has entered a new phase after the constitutional breakthrough. The process of contestations that I have highlighted in the presentation points to the resultant, irreversible ascendance of the forces of gram swaraj. It must be distinguished from the wave of decentralisation in many developing countries prompted by structural adjustment programmes since the 1980s that seek efficient service delivery as its main objective. Decentralisation per se is not necessarily democratisation. Neither deconcentration nor delegation of power is a sufficient condition for effective democratisation. What is important is real devolution of power to the constitutionally elected representatives at the level of local self-government. Had Babasaheb Ambedkar been with us today, he would have been pleased to note that the serious apprehensions he had nurtured about panchayati raj at the time of drafting the Constitution, no longer remain in the same measure. Had Gandhi been alive he would remind us that if only the people were able to hold on steadfastly to truth, non-violence and love the process would be so much the easier.

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