

Village Reconstruction Model: as Envisioned by Sri Aurobindo

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Abstract

In this present article we have to search for the notion regarding Village Reconstruction as conceived by Sri Aurobindo. He was mainly known to be a great yogi and profound mystic whose concepts of yoga was much discussed than his other notions. But astonishingly like all other contemporary thinkers of his time, e.g. Tagore, Gandhi etc, Sri Aurobindo was also not reluctant to develop the life-structure of the villages and villagers. This theory concerning Palli Unnayan or Village Reconstruction, according to Sri Aurobindo, is thought to be a part of National Self-Help programmes taken at hands by the Indian political leaders at the time of 1905. And it was preached by him very clearly and distinctly as he thought National Self-Development program is an intrinsic part of Indian politics or Swaraj. National Self-Development scheme is useless unless it could be used to advance the daily life-structure of each and every Indian villagers.

Keywords : Sri Aurobindo, Village Reconstruction, National Self-Development scheme, Indian politics, Swaraj.

I. INTRODUCTION

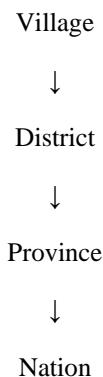
Village reconstruction is thought to be a part of National self-help and National Self-development programme. Now if we investigate properly, then we could find out that the actual aim of the British rule was to destroy the social strength of India. How this foreign rule gradually destroyed Indian social life-structure, is vividly depicted in Sri Aurobindo's own writings – '...the Village samiti is the seed of Swaraj...when a nation is in a natural condition, growing from within and existing from within and in its own strength, then it develops its own centres and correlates them according to its own needs. But as soon as for any reason this natural condition is interrupted and a foreign body draws to itself all the sources of nourishment and the natural centres, deprived of their sustenance, fail and disappear. It is for this reason that foreign rule can never be for the good of a nation, never work for its true progress and life, but must always work towards its disintegration and death...We in India had our own instruments of life and growth; we had the self-dependent village; we had the Zamindar as the link

between the village units and the central governing body and the central governing body itself was one in which the heart of the nation beat. All these have been either destroyed or crippled by the intrusion of a foreign organism. If we are to survive as a nation we must restore the centres of strength which are natural and necessary to our growth, and the first of these, the basis of all the rest, the old foundation of Indian life and the secret of Indian vitality was the self-dependent and self-sufficient village organism. If we are to organise Swaraj we must base it on the village.' In this above citation from Sri Aurobindo we become aware of the fact that villages are considered as the basis of spreading swaraj among common Indian people.

II. STEPS OF VILLAGE RECONSTRUCTION

Hence for the revival of India from the political slavery of British rule Sri Aurobindo dreamt of reconstructing our villages. Now what are the steps of village reconstruction? There must remain some necessary steps in this regard. To find out them again we have to look into Sri Aurobindo. The villages of Indian territory must not be considered as self-sufficient in themselves, but as living within a common group for common purposes. Each group again must be the part of the district, each district must live as a subordinate part of the province, and the province in its turn that of the country. This is the actual plan of reconstruction included into National Self-development programme in India. It is known to be a famous Apex system of National Self-development system. Villages are the core area without whose development the advancement of the entire Indian territory seems quite impossible. To make it a healthy growth and not an artificial construction we must begin at the bottom and work to the top of the apex. The cell-life of the village must be healthy and developed for the national body to be healthy and developed. Swaraj begins from the village. Thus it seems from Sri Aurobindo's social-political thesis that villages remain as the basis of an entire nation, so that we have to raise the cry for Swaraj from the villages.

Figure/Picture: Village to Nation



The Apex System of National Self-Development Scheme

In Gandhi and Tagore, we also find out the somewhat similar explanation about the village reconstruction scheme or *palli unnanayan parikalpona*.

III. GANDHI'S VILLAGE RECONSTRUCTION

Actually Gandhi gave practical explanation of how to reconstruct a village thoroughly. Gandhi vividly demonstrated the true nature of self-sufficient village communities by mentioning – ‘My [Gandhi’s] idea of village Swaraj is that it is a complete republic.... Thus every village’s first concern will be to grow its own food crops and cotton for its cloth. It should have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and playground for adults and children. Then if there is more land available, it will grow useful money crops, thus excluding Ganja, tobacco, opium and the like. The village will maintain a village theatre, school and public hall. It will have its own waterworks ensuring clean water supply. This can be done through controlled wells or tanks. Education will be compulsory up to the final basic course. As far as possible every activity will be conducted on the co-operative basis. There will be no castes such as we have today with their graded untouchability. Non-violence with the technique of *Satyagraha* and non-co-operation will be the sanction of the village community. There will be a compulsory service of village guards who will be selected by rotation from the register maintained by the village. The government of the village will be conducted by the *Panchayat* of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. These will have all the authority and jurisdiction required. Since there will be no system of punishments in the accepted sense, this *Panchayat* will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate for its year of office.

Any village can become such a republic today without much interference, even from the present Government, whose sole effective connection with the neighbouring villages and the centre if any’. This is the purpose of Gandhi’s creation of Village Government.

IV. TAGORE'S VILLAGE RECONSTRUCTION

We also find out the Rural Reconstruction model even in the writings of Tagore. His familiarity was as a renowned poet, but he was also considered as one of the pioneer of rural development programme. He started rural reconstruction project at Sriniketan in 1921 aiming to make villagers self-reliant and able to use all rural resources fully. Tagore realized that this problem of rural reconstruction were manifold and it was co-related with health, economy, education etc. essential parts, and these parts are as well as inter-linked with each other. The objectives of the programme, in the words of Elmhirst depicted as follows – ‘from the outset, we had two main objectives, to survey the economic, social and scientific needs of the cultivator in his home, village and fields, and secondly to carry out our own laboratory experiments in health, education, craft, cultivation and animal husbandry’. Accordingly Tagore laid emphasis on economical background of villagers. Regarding economic development Tagore’s aspiration was to make the peasants self-developed and he truly realized that economic advancement should be done on the scientific ground. In this procedure, he considered education as one of the important corollaries, because the educational development of rural children remains as the foundation of the rural reconstruction programme. Without proper education nobody can be able to realize the essentiality of the village reconstruction procedure. And the village welfare department of the institute [Sriniketan] from the very beginning took the programme of health and sanitation in the surrounding villages. In the year 1929, the institute treated 6760 patients. Tagore firmly believed that poverty, disease, depopulation, joylessness and backwardness of rural area could be removed only through co-operative efforts of village reconstruction. In this regard, we can discover his theory is quite bit similar with that of Gandhi.

V. PART OF SELF-DEVELOPMENT SCHEME: AUROBINDO VS. GANDHI

Thus village reconstruction is one of the important organizations of National Self-help movement. For the development of a strong nation, the village also has to be developed. So village samiti appears as an indispensable instrument of the National development procedure. What is the process of the so-called development of Palli Samiti? In its answer we

have to again mention about Sri Aurobindo. We have to set up village schools in which our children will grow up as good citizens and patriots to live for their country and not for themselves. We have to take up the control of the administration of justice, of self-protection, of village sanitation, of small local public works etc in small scales, so that the life of the village may again be self-reliant and self-sufficient. Self-help and self-dependence, the first conditions of Swaraj must depend for their proper working upon the village Samiti. Hence in the social aspect, swaraj becomes equivalent with the idea of gram swaraj. In this regard Sri Aurobindo's thesis became somewhat similar with that of Gandhi.

VI. TWO NECESSITIES OF VILLAGE RECONSTRUCTION: AUROBINDO'S VIEW:

Hence we could discover two such necessities of village reconstruction as following Sri Aurobindo.

The first one is, for the true attainment of Swaraj, we must awake the political sense of the masses. In this endeavor, the reconstruction programme seems mandatory, as it will help to develop the lives of the villagers. Thus we should start our mission of political reconstruction from the grass-root level, i.e. the villages. In a democratic state the villages remain as the core of the nation and without the development of rural masses, the development of urban people as well as that of the entire nation seems impossible. Without evoking the political sense of common masses, the dream of attaining Swaraj cannot be fulfilled at all. And Palli Samiti is alone compatible in work of evoking the political sense of rural India. The work of the village Samiti will be to make the masses feel Swaraj in the village, Swaraj in the nation. They cannot immediately rise to the conception of Swaraj in the nation; they must be trained to it through the perception of Swaraj in the village. The political education of the masses is impossible unless you organise the village Samiti. Actually Sri Aurobindo's main intention was to make India as the spiritual guide of other nations. And for doing this, India's political mastery seems very much essential. However for making a whole nation politically developed, we have to develop the political sense of the masses. Most people of a nation reside in villages, so we should develop the political sense of the villagers at first of all. By the improvement of village life-structure, and then by the mandatory advancement of that of cities, we can be able to develop the life-structure of the entire India. Hence the development of Palli Samiti remains as an indispensable part of India's political advancement.

The second necessity is this reconstruction of village Samiti will be helpful enough to destroy the social differences between Hindu and Muslim races. It

also seems helpful in uniting them not only from the political stand-point, but also from the bottom of their heart. The foreign rule truly destroyed this so-desired Hindu-Muslim unity as it conceived this one as a great threat against its rule of two decades over India. The ancient Hindu rule, even the Muslim eras were different from this British era not only in their thought and culture, but also on its nature. The Hindu and even the Muslim *rajās* and *jamindars*, in the ancient time, felt themselves as parts of the ruled persons and so mutual love, trust and worship sustained between both the ruler and the ruled. They strictly maintained the unity between both the Hindu and the Muslim these two completely separate sects as it seemed mandatory for their self-preservation. But the foreigners advocate diversity between these two sects, so that they will become powerless by constant fighting and quarrelling among them and never could even try to preach for the necessary political liberty. Sri Aurobindo very wisely advocated the importance of Palli Samiti in this regard. In his view, it will destroy the aloofness, the separateness of our lives and bring us back the sense of community, the habit of mutual assistance and mutual beneficence. It will restore the lost sense of brotherhood. In this way, the old unity of our lives will be restored and the basis of Swaraj will have been laid in the tie which binds together the hearts of the people of both these two sects. Thus by spreading communal love by sharing every work, every happiness, every custom little bit with each other, the Hindu-Muslim unity could be achieved. And in this above way, when religious as well as social unity can be attained properly, then the attainment of the so-called political unity of entire India cannot remain far behind.

VII. NEED OF VILLAGE SAMITI FORMATION

Formation of Village Samiti is therefore urgently necessary in the view of Sri Aurobindo. Village Samitis are, therefore, conditions to be fulfilled for the achievement of Swaraj or political freedom. Because for gaining the political freedom of India, the arousal of political sense among common masses along with the most desired and even the most controversial Hindu-Muslim unity seem mandatory. And Palli Samitis are the criterion to make these two essential goals possible. Hence for attaining Swaraj, we need to advance our national self-help or national self-development programmes along with our on-going national movements. Thus the formation of Palli Samitis must remain as our practice of Swaraj. In the Kishoregung Speech (Kishoregung area is situated in Mymensingh district, East Bengal) Sri Aurobindo ordered the entire Bengal to guide entire India in this political endeavor.

VIII. RELATION OF VILLAGE & NATION: AUROBINDO'S VIEW:

Now, in this context, we can search for the answer of the stated question – what is the relation between a nation and its constituent, i.e. the villages? Actually the national life cannot proceed towards a glorifying future without the advancement of its rural life. In the article named “Back to the Land” Sri Aurobindo clearly depicted that – ‘It is an ascertained principle of national existence that only by keeping possession of the soil can a nation persist; the mastery of the reins of government or the control of the trade and wealth of a country, does not give permanence to the people in control. They reign for a while and then the virtue departs out of them and they wither or pass away and another takes their place; but they tillers of the soil, ground down, oppressed, rack-rented, miserable, remain, and have always the chance of the day overthrowing their oppressors and coming by their own. When a small foreign oligarchy does the trading and governing and a great indigenous democracy the tilling of the soil, it is safe to prophesy that before many generations have passed the oligarchy of aliens will be no more and the democracy of peasants will still be in possession’. Thus the development of panchayat or village reconstruction scheme stood as the essential social ingredients of the nationalist leaders after 1905. Actually when we have to make our nation politically free, then the freedom of social aspects of the nation is also mandatory. The development of human health, sanitary system etc are also tremendously necessary to use the self-help scheme of politics. Hence for the total advancement of the national life, the development of human life’s every aspect, whether small or big, was given equal importance by the nationalist leaders. In this way, it became an essential tool in Indian politics after 1905. Sri Aurobindo also took the village reconstruction scheme as one way to achieve India’s freedom from social ignorance and means of social reconstruction after becoming free from foreign domination. Sadly due to the lack of proper interest in developing Indian villages after the Indian independence on 1947, we are suffering till now. If we can follow the concepts of Sri Aurobindo, Tagore or Gandhi, at least even partly, then India will surely be socially and economically grown like other developed countries, e.g. Japan, China etc, of the third world.

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