

# Swaraj in every village

Vinoba

## Welfare or dependence ?

After Independence, people were hoping that the condition of the villagers would improve. They were not wrong in hoping so. What could be the value of Independence if it does not result in improvement in the condition of people ?

You certainly have got the voting right; but do you think that you have got real power ? In Calcutta, cows are slaughtered in large number; do you think that the people there favour this slaughter ? On the other hand, cow-slaughter is banned in Uttar Pradesh. Does this mean that the public opinion in Uttar Pradesh differs from the public opinion in Bengal ? In fact, there is absolutely no question of any public opinion. It is the writ of the Chief Minister that runs in his state. In Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, streams of liquor flow. Does this mean that the public opinion in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar is in favour of drinking ? And that the public opinion in the states that have introduced prohibition is against drinking ? No, it is what the Chief Minister thinks that matters. It is the quality of Chief Minister that determines the quality of administration. The same was the case in the age of the Mughal emperors. Akbar's reign was good, whereas that of Aurangzeb was bad. Public opinion mattered neither in that era nor does it matter now, although the facade of voting obscures the fact from our eyes.

You, the voters, are the real rulers. You elect your servants for five years. But if you are not alert, your servants will become your masters. These servants ask for more and more power, ostensibly for your welfare. This is what the 'Welfare State' means. The day we adopted this concept marked the beginning of our slavery.

Sometimes I wonder whether the 15th August 1947 was our Independence Day or the Day of Slavery ? The reason is that we used to do something before that day, but now look to the state for everything. During the rainy season last year, we were trekking in the flood-affected areas of Bihar. The flood had devastated Muzaffarpur and Darbhanga districts and many villages in the Sitamarhi region were submerged in water; but still the cinema theatres in Sitamarhi were having regular film shows. In the public meeting there, I implored them to stop them for at least a few days and help the flood-affected. Why such callousness and hard-heartedness ? It is so because we think that it is not for us to do anything; it is for the government to look after these things. For everything, our reliance is on the government. This is a mark not of independence, but of slavery.

After Independence, it is for us to work for the betterment of our condition. But the people have not realized this. They think that just as earlier there was Mughal Rule or British Rule, now their own people are ruling. But now we are independent, and those who are ruling over us are not our masters; they are the servants elected by us. It is up to us to choose the servants. A farmer engages a labourer for a period of one year and extends the latter's service only if he is satisfied with it; otherwise he engages another labourer. Similarly, you would re-elect your servants only if you are satisfied with their performance.

What this means is that all of you are now masters; you are the real kings. Of course, no one among you is a sole master; all of you together are the master. Still, you have little realization that the power belongs to you, because what has actually happened is a sort of drama. Suppose there are about half a dozen stupid children in the house and they are asked about their opinion as to how the affairs of the house should be run, what could be their reply ? They would say, "Why this make-believe ? You are our guardians; you should care for us." Likewise, the people tell the rulers that the latter are like their guardians and it is for them to carry out the administration. Thus, while the rulers seek to be the elected servants of the people, the people look upon them as their

guardians and expect that they should care for them.

Power can never be doled out. It has to be gained through one's internal strength. Indians do not, in fact, lack wisdom; however the long spell of slavery has conditioned their thinking and they look up to the government for everything. Although the people have now power in their hands, they do not experience its glow. Does anybody give a mother her powers ? She feels them inside her. Has anybody anointed the lion as the king of the jungle ? He feels the power inside him. Likewise the people should feel the power of independence within themselves. They should look after the affairs of their respective villages and gain the experience in administration.

### **Power to serve**

These days, what we have is no 'Rajya' (Kingdom) but 'Prajya' (Rule of the people). In the old days, the one who could dominate used to become king. The lion is called the 'King of the jungle', which means that all the animals in the jungle are his prey; they are frightened of him. Such type of kingship is out of place in these days. Now power to rule should mean the power to serve. What authority does a mother have in her house ? The first right she has got is to feed the children when they are hungry. The second right is to put the children to sleep and sleep thereafter. The third right is to keep vigil by the bedside when the child is ill. And the fourth right is to fast if the food in the house is sufficient only for the children. We have to create in every village model of such an authority.

The intelligent, the rich and the wise in the village should act as guardians of the rest of villagers and they should work in such a way that the rest of the villagers surpass them in intelligence and wisdom in due course. A father is happy when his child forges ahead in life and surpasses him. A teacher is happy when his pupil gains such fame that the teacher is forgotten. That, in fact, is the mark of a great teacher. If the wise in the village work with this attitude, the 'gramraj' (the village self-government) will be transformed into 'Ramraj' (the ideal government)

### **From gramraj to Ramraj**

By *swaraj* we mean Independence of the country. It means that no other country is ruling over our country. But when every village gains *swaraj*, the villagers become wise and there is no need to exercise power over anybody, 'Ramraj' is the result. When the conflicts and quarrels within a village are taken to the city courts and the city-dwellers pronounce judgements on them, that denotes slavery. The real village *swaraj* implies that the quarrels and conflicts within the village are resolved in the village itself. And when the conflicts and quarrels cease altogether, it would mean the ushering in of *Ramraj*. What we should work is *gramraj*, which would then blossom into *Ramraj*.

We have to build the village *swaraj* first as the first step towards *Ramraj*. That is why we move from village to village and ask the people to think of the good of the village. They should sing the glory of their village, just as we sing the glory of our mother India. Glory to every village will mean glory to the country. When every organ of the body functions well, the body as a whole functions well. It would not function well even if a single organ is malfunctioning. The body then carries a disability. In the same way, our *swaraj* would function well if the *swaraj* of every village functions well.

All the activities that go on in the country are there in any village, and therefore all the departments that we have at the national level should be there in every village. Every village should look after industries, agriculture, health, education, justice etc; and should therefore have arrangement for the same. Just as a country has to look after foreign affairs, a village has to look after its relations with other village.

### **University in every village**

Every village should have a university. That is a mark of the true village *swaraj*. It is said that every village should have a primary school; there should be secondary schools in the towns and colleges in the cities. But had this been divinely ordained, villages would be having children up to ten years only; the population of the towns would have been in the range of 10-15 years and the cities would have people above that age ! But we witness people in all stages of life in the villages.

They are born there, grow up there and ultimately die. So why should not they have full opportunity to educate themselves ? People plan for a university in every state; but my plan is to have a university in every village. Otherwise the villages would have to go to cities for higher education. This should not be the case. I should be able to get complete education in my village itself. My village is not a part, a fraction of anything. It is an integrated, complete whole. पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदम् - 'This is a whole and that too is a whole.' It is not that this is a part and that is a part, and both together make a whole. This is not what we stand for. We want complete self-government in every village.

### **Decentralization of Power**

The power that has been centralized in Delhi has to be distributed among all the villages. Had the Lord kept all the intelligence with Himself and not given it to any human being, what would have been the condition of the world ? Then everybody needing a little intelligence would have been required to order the same by sending a telegram to Vaikunth - the abode of the Lord ! But the Divine plan is such that intelligence has been distributed. Not only human beings, even the tiniest of the creatures has been endowed with some intelligence. Intelligence has not been stored somewhere in a single godown. That is why the Lord can lie in *kshirsagar* (the ocean of milk in which Lord Vishnu lies according to Hindu mythology) without a single worry ! Can our ministers have sound sleep like Him ? The Lord is so absorbed in sleep that even His very existence is not felt. We shall have real *swaraj* when the ministers in Delhi sleep in such a way. But it is said that our Prime Minister works for eighteen hours a day. Can it then be said that we have *swaraj* ?

The power that was concentrated in London has now reached Delhi. So far so good; but the parcel of power has been held up at Delhi; it should now reach every village. Power should be distributed; only then the villagers would well-versed in the statecraft and would never quarrel with each other, that would pave the way for a state-free society; that would usher in *Ramraj*. *Bhoodan-Yajna* seeks to bring this about.

### **Village *swaraj* - not Delhi rule**

We ask the people to gird up their loins for the betterment of the condition of their villages. Villages have landless labourers; they should be given land. How is this possible ? Can land be brought from another village ? They will have to be given a portion of the village land itself. Then, industries should be established in every village. You should resolve not to purchase cloth from outside and produce cloth for yourself. People dependent on others for such a basic need as cloth are in danger; if that is not available, they will have to wear torn cloths and will even have to go naked.

All this cannot happen through legislation. People ask me why I have to ask for *Bhoodan* (land-gift), why does not the government distribute its land ? But, in that case, we shall have Delhi Rule, not village rule. We ourselves have to eat if we are hungry; nobody else can eat for us. Likewise, if we wish to have *Ramraj*, we shall have to do *Bhoodan*. People in the village will also have to think about export and import – which things should be allowed to come in the village and which things should be allowed to go out of the village. Presently, everybody follows his sweet will in this respect. This cannot go on. Villagers will sit together and take decisions in this respect. Suppose, gur is needed by some people and it cannot be immediately produced in the village. Those needing gur will not then go out to purchase the same; they will purchase it through the village store for the time being. And next year they will grow sugarcane and produce gur, which will be kept for sale in the village store.

The whole of the village will thus think as one single entity. If there are 500 inhabitants, they will surely have 1000 hands, 1000 legs and 500 brains. But there will be only one heart. In the 11th chapter of the Gita, there is description of the cosmic form of the Lord. This form has thousands of hands and thousands of legs, but there is no mention of more than one heart. That would be the case in the village too. Everybody will think, participate in the discussions, but the decisions will be taken by all through consensus. This is what *Sarvodaya* aims for.

### **Village rule in every village**

Now, tell me, whether you are going to do this work or those sitting in the state capitals or

in Delhi are going to do it ? Those in the state capitals and in Delhi will certainly render some help; but planning for your village will have to be done by you.

Of course, all this will take time; but certainly not too much time. If it takes one year in one village, then how much time will be needed for five lakh villages in India? This is not an arithmetical problem. When mangoes get ripened in one village, mangoes all over India get ripened at the same time. So, the time taken by you to establish village *swaraj* will be the time required for establishment of village *swaraj* in five lakh villages of villages of India. Explain this in all the villages. What we want will not then take much time to fructify.

What we want is that the people should apply themselves to this task enthusiastically and with brotherly spirit for each other. Some people think that my scheme envisages self-sufficiency and not dependence on each other; although they concede that it is not for dependence. But we do want people dependent on each other. Today, I took milk. But I had not milked the cow myself. Others had made arrangement for the same. I thus render the service that I can and people arrange for my needs. But dependence can be of too types. The lame and the blind are dependent on each other; the blind can walk but cannot see and the lame can see but cannot walk. So they co-operate with each other. The lame sits on the shoulders of the blind and guides him. Do you want that the society should have some lame persons and some blind ones and then there should be co-operation between them ? I do want co-operation between the people dependent on each other; but I want all to have eyes and legs; they should then work together. In short, what I want is co-operation between the able and not the disabled ones, as some others want.

We know that all the necessities cannot be produced in a village. Villages will have to co-operate with each other and with the cities. But we do not want that polished rice, grain flour or sugar should be brought from the cities to the villages. Things like eyeglasses, thermometer or loudspeaker could be brought from the cities if the villagers need them. But these days the city-dwellers are producing things that should rightfully be produced by the villagers. Raw materials are produced in the villages; and they can be processed there to make finished goods. But the cities are making finished goods using machines. They, however, do not stop the flow of foreign goods. What we want is that villages should run their own industries and the goods that are imported from foreign countries should be produced in the cities. If village industries perish, not only the villages but the cities also will have to face crisis. In that case, the unemployed in the villages will storm the cities and the aggression of foreign goods will continue unabated. The city-dwellers will then be crushed between these two attacks. Our scheme avoids such an eventuality. Therein, every village will be an integral whole and there will be co-operation between such villages.

## **Population problem**

Let everybody realize that the land in India is not sufficient for its population which is quite high. And the land cannot grow. So the land will not suffice for the needs of all the villagers. Industries are needed. Machinery will not help in this respect. But science will certainly help us. Science and machinery are different things. If machines are introduced in agricultural operations, the work will certainly be finished in much less time, but this will result in the aggravation of unemployment problem.

God has given a mouth to everybody, but he has also given to everybody two hands to work and feed that mouth. Still we have the problem of unemployment. What could have been our plight had we got two mouths and only one hand ! People complain that they have five mouths to feed in their homes; but are there not ten hands as well ? Still people talk of the gravity of the population problem and think that development is impossible if it is not reduced. This line of thinking is of western origin. There cannot, in fact, be any population problem so long as every human being has two hands to work for the sake of a single month.

Our leaders are also worried about the growing population. This is strange. An army general is normally happy if he the number of men under his command is large. But our leaders are unhappy. I have been repeatedly saying that it is sin that is a burden on the earth, not human beings. Their number can increase through sin as well as merit, and can decrease as well through both of them. It is a sinful act that is a burden on the earth.

The earth has the capacity to provide for all that is created on it. She can sustain them, provided that whatever is generated is ultimately returned to her. Excreta and urine should be properly utilized; that should be returned to the soil as manure. The soil should get animal bones and such other things too. Even the leaves in forest are not useless. If the earth thus gets all these things back, Mother Earth will not have burden of the human beings, even if their number is large. Of course, everybody should work with his hands.

### **Integrated and comprehensive development**

In the *Sarvodaya* scheme of things, every villager will have the right to work in agriculture and will also have other occupations for his spare time. We should give sufficient land to as many as possible, and others should be provided with industries. I have called agriculture ‘Sita’ and village industries ‘Ram’. Villages will be happy only when the two unite. Village industries are an essential complement to the agriculture. Without them, neither can village life be self-sufficient nor can village *swaraj* be established.

We envisage not only the self-sufficiency of the villages, but also their integrated and comprehensive development. In other words, humanity will blossom in every village. Agriculture and village industries will lead to this consummation.

Everybody should have opportunity to work in the agriculture, to develop his intellect and heart. That will then lead to happiness and contentment in every village. But this is possible only when all of you understand this scheme and resolve to work for it. You should become one single family. Land should belong to all. Upbringing of the children should be the responsibility of all the villagers, who should plan for their best possible education. You should resolve to produce the basic necessities of life by processing the raw materials grown in the village.

### **Self-sufficiency in cloth**

Cloth is the first and foremost basic need of human life. Ordinarily food is considered as the foremost need; and cloth is thought to come thereafter. But looking at the way human civilization has developed, we have to say that cloth is the first need and food is the second one. I can remain hungry for four days, but cannot move naked for even half an hour. Cloth is a cultural necessity. Had it been necessary only for protecting ourselves from cold and sun, then it would have been second in the list of basic needs. But even a corpse needs to be covered though it does not need food. A village that is not self-sufficient in such a basic need can never be happy by any stretch of imagination.

You should therefore resolve to use the cloth you yourself have produced; even though mills may be working in the whole world and their product may be cheap, may even be free. Self-sufficiency is a prerequisite of development. People cook their food; likewise they should also produce khadi for their use. It should become part of their life. This cannot be brought about by the government’s effort. Government does want that all the children should be looked after well, but it cannot do so without their guardians. It is for the people to resolve. Government can only render some help in their endeavour. If it does so, it is welcome. But even if it does not, and even if it opposes the people’s endeavour, their resolve is bound to succeed through their own strength.

I have always held that the government, in itself, is totally powerless. People are the masters, government is but a servant. How can a servant be more powerful than his master ? To think that the government is very powerful and that it can bring about revolutionary transformation is tantamount to giving more respect to the servant. That is absurd. Power is within you; it is within your soul.

### **Redemption of the people’s heart**

The villages should be happy and prosperous, but they should be self-reliant as well. It is said that we have become independent. But independence is really an attribute of the soul. It is independence of mind that has real value. Under the British regime, the Privy Council in London was the last resort for justice. Real *swaraj* can be said to have dawned when the first court is the village, and God will be the last resort. If you can quarrel in the village, why cannot you resolve

the dispute in the village itself ? Why should we go for settlement of our disputes to the people known for being quarrelsome ? Stealing has its genesis in unemployment, in lack of work and the thieves are sentenced and punished by people who do no productive work and have fat salaries. All these jailors, judges, lawyers are useless. It is a misconception that one can have justice through them.

It is a mark of slavery to take our disputes to cities. Now we have to go to Delhi instead of London for the last appeal. That hardly makes any difference. Earlier, water was five miles away; now it is just a mile away. But will it satisfy a thirsty man ? He will be satisfied only when he gets water to drink. Similarly, *swaraj* that has reached Delhi or the state capital or even the district headquarter has little use for the people. *Swaraj* should reach every village, every hamlet. That is what we want. But resolution of disputes at the village level itself is a prerequisite for this purpose.

All the problems of the country should all be solved through people's power working independently of the government. Otherwise, all the power will be concentrated in the hands of the government and the world peace will remain a distant dream. It is wrong to legally vest in just a few persons the power to make or break the world. What we desire is redemption of the mass mind through people's power. We want the manifestation of the power of collective resolves. We want purification of the heart of the community. Unless its strength is manifested, the country and the world are in danger.

*(Translated by Dr. Parag Cholkar)*