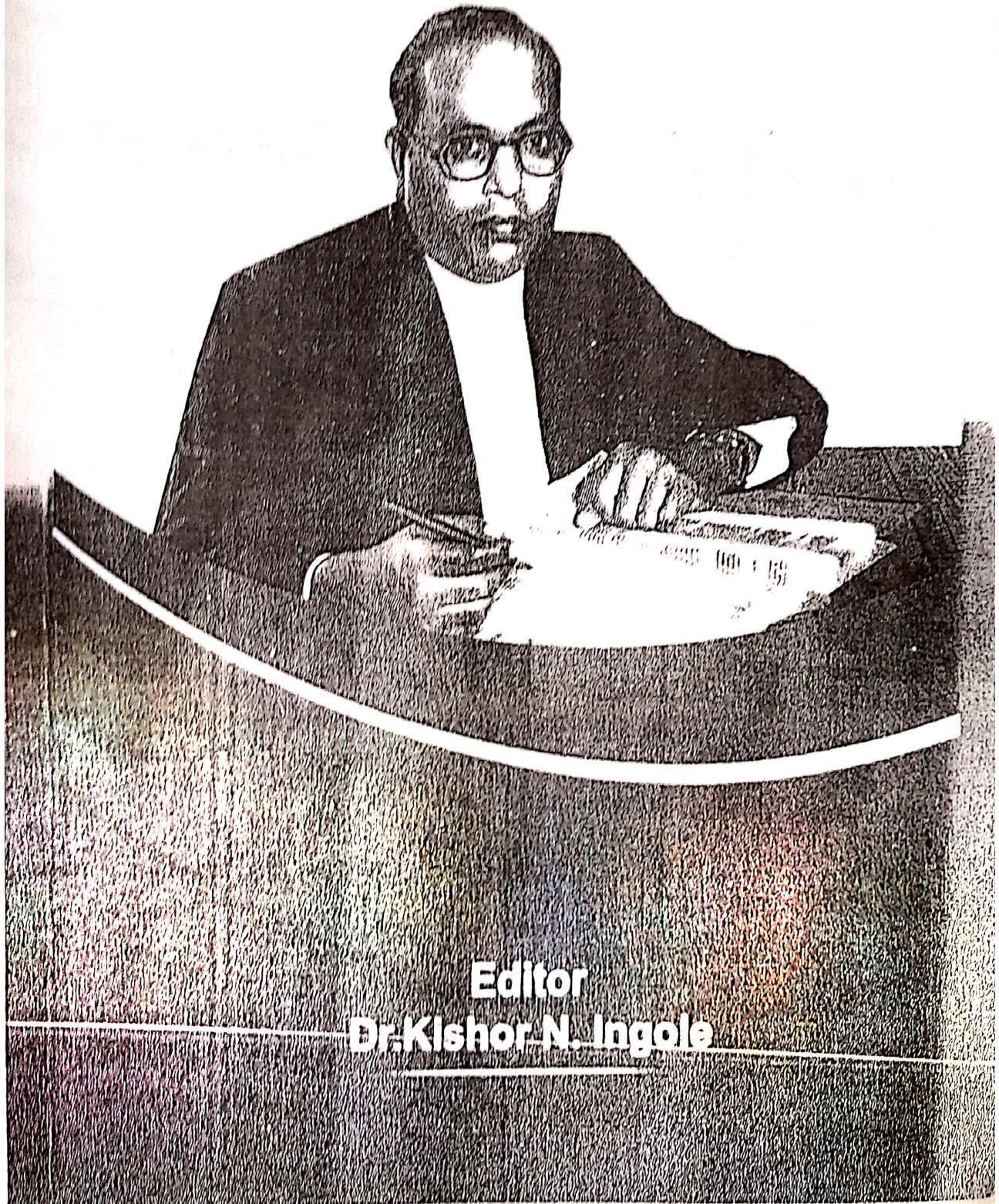




Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

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The Idea of Village in the Opinion of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar

MANISHA GAWALI

The second wave of the Covid-19 Pandemic has hit the economy, polity and society hard. The First wave was broadly an urban phenomenon whereas the second wave percolated into the rural and semi-urban areas.

In the course of Covid-19, the ongoing discourse has widely covered the aspect of healthcare reforms. One of the missing links is the absence of the discussion on villages as a unit of rural administration. Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh though made efforts to improve the necessary basic infrastructure, especially health facilities and livelihood options to absorb the returning migrant workers. Set against this backdrop, we need to explore the concept of village and its criticality in rural local governance.

On 4th November 1948, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar said, "What is the village but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism" during the constituent Assembly Debates (CAB). This led to the evolution of Article 40 of the Constitution: "the state shall take steps to organize village Panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self government."

Broadly, two viewpoints emerged in the CAB village perceived as a unit of administration and the other dimension imagined it as the transitory entity in the process of modernization. What is striking in both these ideas is the former concept of village is rooted in the history of freedom struggle, whereas the latter is embedded in the tradition of enlightenment and as a precursor of emancipatory politics.

Dr. Ambedkar's description of the village is entirely different from Metcalfe and M. K. Gandhi's conception. According to Sir Charles Metcalfe (1830), "the village communities are little republics, having nearly everything that they want within themselves and almost independent of any foreign relations." In 1942, Mahatma Gandhi wrote "My idea of village Swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants, and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity."

Both Dr. Ambedkar and Gandhiji's conception of a village needs to be understood in the context of a broader aim of rural development. In Postcolonial modernity, the idea of village has significantly undergone quantitative and qualitative changes indicating a gradual transformation from its traditional roots to modern identity. This

change is inevitable and is a socially iterative process. At the individual level, this transformation remains an intuitive process, which is evident in both Dr. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi's ideas.

This incremental transformation in the conceptualization of villages and its role in rural Indian life have given the scope for elements of conflict. However, the conflicting elements are absent in Dr. Ambedkar and Gandhi's conceptions as both of their village imaginations have only a divergent opinion rather than invoking a perceptual conflict among the members of the CAB or outside of it. Dr. Ambedkar's acceptance of the amendment and the insertion of Article 31A substantiate this point.

A critical aspect of this Article insertion and the acceptance of the amendment by Dr. Ambedkar is not an indication of the perception victory as understood then by some members of the Constituent Assembly members by Dr. Ambedkar as the chair of the drafting committee.

In envisaging the idea of a village, both Dr. Ambedkar and Gandhi have laid a foundation for the path of development of the nation. To illustrate, Gandhi's idea of a village as a self-sufficient entity provides a normative framework, whereas Dr. Ambedkar's conception lays down the path to achieve this objective. In simple words, Gandhi's conceptions indicate an end goal to be achieved; Dr. Ambedkar's description is a means to reach the intended goal.

Dr. Ambedkar's description has provided the empirical reality to Gandhi's normative framework. In this way, both ideas complement each other. Jawaharlal Nehru's view is like an intervening or explanatory variable supplementing the substance to empiricism. The normative framework, explanatory variables and empirical aspects are all necessary to explain and analyze the social phenomenon in the diverse and complex rural life.

Village as an administrative unit needs to be embedded in the development of individual citizenship. For the sake of the day-to-day administration, it can be given primacy, however, in order to achieve the village republic or Gram Swaraj, developing active citizenship among the individual is imperative and in dispute. The integrated approach is necessary to understand the divergent views of Dr. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi.

The relationship between the individual and the village as a unit of administration is like that role of individuals in a family set up. A healthy and harmonious relationship builds a dynamic family. Similar is the case of an individual's role in a village. In a Marxian framework, the analogy resembles the dialectical relationships between capital and labour.

Seen from this perspective, both Dr. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi's idea of a village must be read together rather than seeing it in isolation. A separate reading complicates the conception rather than simplifying it. Dr. Ambedkar's 'Annihilation of Caste' is a seminal work towards abolishing identity-based discrimination and giving a rightful place to the socially and economically disadvantaged sections.

The scheme proposed by Mahatma Gandhi, especially the rekindling of rural industries, is a necessary tool for the economic empowerment of villages. Social equality in rural society as envisaged by Dr. Ambedkar will be a reality only after achieving economic empowerment along the Gandhian lines.

The 27 years of decentralized governance experience shows that the efficacy of the Panchayats as the local state is a work in progress and still has a long way to go. The objective of 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment and social justice can be achieved by reading and applying the concept of village of both Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi.



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DALIT DISCOURSE

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES IN INDIAN LITERATURE



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Dr. Manisha B. Gawali

Chandalika is a short drama in two parts with only three characters- Prakriti, her Mother and Ananda who was one of the disciples of the Buddha. Rabindranath Tagore had a great passion for Buddhism. This religion which originated and thrived in India is rooted deeply in the cultural ethos of the Indians despite a strong opposition from the hardcore Hindu fanatics. For Tagore, it is the culture of humanity full of myths, legends, folklore and songs. One of the legends from this Buddhist lore shook the sensibilities of the dramatist and the result is a remarkable play of intense spiritual conflict entitled *Chandalika*. The play is based on a Buddhist legend associated with one of the Buddha's disciples Ananda.

The well-known legend narrated by K.R. Kripalani, in his introduction to the play, published in *Three Plays*, in this legend, Tagore found ready-made material for the propagation of his idea of equality and humanism. This legend has been used by the dramatist as a social Myth to highlight the inhuman social thinking of casteism. The untouchable girl from the tale is symbolically named by Tagore in this play as Prakriti, the 'nature' in literary sense and 'human nature' in philosophical sense. Her mother is turned into the mother of 'nature' that means the Earth. And the Buddhist monk Ananda has been made into a divine link between this human nature and the Earth to make them aware of the real 'human existence' in the world. Through this symbolic analogy, Tagore criticises the worst vice of the Vedic religion namely, Casteism. John Wilson, in his work *Indian Caste*, Volume One, observes: "Buddhism in its most important social aspect was a reaction against Caste, the tyranny of which multitudes had begun to feel to be unbearable....." (Wilson, 1877: 278)

The Buddhist monk, Ananda, opens the blind and subjugated mind of Prakriti with a divine preaching of equality and makes her aware of her human existence. Prakriti then becomes a symbol of revolt against this age-old malady of Indian society. Her mother, still under the spell of caste-suppression, fears the worst, but eventually yields to the entreaties of her daughter and tries to aid her cause by using her magical skills, sacrificing her own life in the end. In the process, the inner life of three characters becomes a battlefield of a conflict between the ethics of morality and the worldly desires.

living, breathing human being and not as an untouchable, socially neglected chandalini. In this play, water and its request by the holy man to the untouchable girl for quenching his thirst becomes a symbol for her liberation. A holy man asking for water from an untouchable was completely unheard of in those days. It was thought to be a violation of the social as well as religious norms. The shocked mother tries to warn Prakriti of the dangers in this change and attempts to instill the worldly wisdom in her mind: she even says to her daughter: "Be warned, Prakriti, these men's words are meant only to be heard, not to be practised." (150)

But the newly enlightened mind of Prakriti would not accept the age-old humiliating cannons of Hindu religion. For her a religion that insults is a false religion. Everyone united to make me conform to a creed that blinds and gags. (154). Her mentor, Ananda's preaching, thus, has brought a sea-change in her attitude and she has awakened to a new life-a life where She is no chandal but a human being on par with the world, even with the holy man. She argues with her mother: "Plenty of slaves Chandals are born of royal blood, but I am no slave; plenty of Chandals are born of Brahmin families, but I am no Chandal." (152)

Dr. Ambedkar, the modern social reformer of the downtrodden, is once said to have remarked: 'Make aware the slave of his slavery, and he would revolt.' Similar thing happens with Prakriti. The free mind now fires the emotions of love and desire for Ananda in her heart. Excited by the feelings of liberty and to prove her equal status, she revolts against the age-old shackles put upon her by religion and society and decides to get united with the very person who had liberated her. The Tagore scholar, Agarwal, says "Caste is a man-made institution confined to transitory ends. It can neither strengthen nor spoil the dignity of marriage" (Agarwal 87).

In the play, during *Chandalika*'s second chance, citing him, Ananda totally ignores her presence and moves on chanting the hymn of Lord Buddha. That crash lands her in an illusionary flight of worldly longing. It is a great shock to her sensitive mind, her female ego gets crushed. She cannot bear the humiliation. So, in rage, she orders her mother to cast her 'magical spell' on the male heart of Ananda to force him to beg for her company. This is a sensational twist. It now becomes a wonderful portrayal of female psychology by Tagore. The dramatist seems to be aware of the general belief that a woman, longing to give away everything to a man, can go to any extreme if her female pride is hurt. *Chandalika*'s mother is afraid that it would bring a curse for the unhappy girl and sure death for her own self, if committed the sin of forcing the holy monk to fornication. Therefore she tries to instil some sense into the enraged head of Prakriti. But blind in revenge, the

Due to the persistent pressure by her daughter, the mother surrenders herself into the dark and supernatural world of 'magic' to induce a carnal urge in the ascetic temperament of Ananda. Prakriti, like a wedded Indian woman, eagerly waits for her 'husband-in-spirit' to come to her and to fulfill her newly born sexual appetite.

As intended, this magical spell does affect the holy man and muddles his pure heart. This yearning for woman by Ananda, as noticed in Prakriti, is entirely against the concept of Buddhism, which forbids its adherents to indulge in such worldly pleasures associated with ordinary life. "According to the Buddha, suffering is samsara and cessation of suffering is nirvana" (Islam, 105). It is to be achieved by earnest moral effort and self-discipline by the individual. To attain it, the Buddha exhorts the individual to control all his worldly passions.

But this victory of the untouchable girl, however, remains short-lived. When Ananda is at the threshold of her home, she looks in the mirror, given to her by the mother to observe the effects of the magical spell of Ananda, for the last time, and is horrified at the change in him brought about by her mother's magic. The light, radiance and the shining halo have vanished from the beautiful, serene face of Ananda due to the effects of black magic. He appears to her completely worn out, faded and devoid of heavenly glow. He doesn't look like a revered monk whom she has loved to wed but, in fact, an animal twisted in womanly desire and suffering from intense suffering due to the agony of spiritual pain. In shock, she realizes the horrible mistake and the sin she had committed in her blindness. Thus, repenting, Prakriti stops her mother from further exercising the magical spell, and begging for forgiveness, falls at Ananda's feet. The mother, also begging for forgiveness, dies at the feet of the holy man. While chanting the name of the most pure Buddha Ananda returns to his usual self and regains his religious morality.

Lastly Chandalika, looks like a chronicle of Lord Buddha and his life. However, Tagore's introduction of the psychological revolt, against the age-old caste suppression overreaching its limits and resulting in tragedy, lends it a new meaning.

The Hindu concept of caste distinction based on one's birth is antiquated. It should be completely wiped out and equality tinged with democracy should be established. This is the order of the day. Yet, for the better functioning of the social order, some moral and ethical restraints should be exercised by the newly awakened human beings. This could be the idea of Tagore in dramatizing the Ananda legend through *Chandalika*. In the words of K. R. Kripalani, ".....a new consciousness after ages of suppression is overpowering and the one learns restraint only after suffering." That's what happens to the

tragic experience realizes the necessity of ethical values in her new world. Eventually, she corrects the mistake she had earlier committed of oversteering the ethical bounds of social cannons, and so, turns a better woman, an example worth to follow in the modern world, full of casteist strife.

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