

# Tensions in Panchayati Raj

## Reply

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COMMENTING on my paper "Tensions in Panchayati Raj: Relations between Officials and Non-Officials", Anil Bhatt (*The Economic Weekly*, August 8, 1964) has accepted the state of affairs analysed in the paper as 'true' but he has found the interpretation 'superficial' and the analysis 'simplicist'.

According to Bhatt the causes of tensions I had suggested -factionalism, vague demarcation of powers and poor quality of Panchayati Raj officials—"do not touch the heart: of the problem". He admits, however, that "in fact, faction as an operational category in Indian politics is to be found at all levels"; that vagueness in demarcation of powers is a cause of 'accentuating tensions'; and that "the few (officials) who like to remain in these institutions have their own axe to grind and like to play the game with politicians" (p 1359). All this only serves to confuse the issue. The fact is that the problem of tensions in the relations between officials and non-officials is not simply a politics-administration problem but it is a part of the far-reaching social change taking place in our country and hence it requires examination in that larger context.

### No Automatic Process

Bhatt maintains that "in the transitional phase the politicisation process fails to produce results, creates tensions and saps the administration of drive and determination" and "this very process of the politicisation may in the long run secularise caste" and hence, "they (non-officials) are integrative forces in the Indian Society, although their political role seems at the moment to be disruptive of national unity" (p 1361). If this analysis is accepted, there is no scope for 'social conduction' in our country and the politicisation of administration will usher in a new society automatically; as such the appointment of various committees and commissions is quite futile. While countries like China are making rapid progress, we should be satisfied to watch our society making gradual progress according to a particular theory. It seems that Bhatt simply fails to grasp the modernising process in a society. Modernisation is not the job of one group, nor the operation of democracy easy or

automatic. "If the democratic process is to work in the transitional period, the major groups in a society must achieve a broad working consensus that the primary business of modernising society is modernising itself, and that modernisation must be so designed as to spread its benefits to all the people".<sup>1</sup>

### Role of Political Parties

Bhatt maintains that The whole trouble in Panchayat Raj institutions is due to "non-clarity in party lines at local levels". He seems to hold the view that when parliamentary institutions and opposition parties grow stronger, party lines are clear at local levels and people are better educated and can understand the issues presented before them, such tensions will cease. On the other hand, I feel this situation may lead people to make wrong choices. All over Asia, we have countries where other than democratic systems are being experimented and some people in this country are also advocating controlled democracy or trusteeship by a dictatorial regime. It may not, therefore, be advisable to wait for subsidiaries of Parliamentary Democracy to succeed".- In fact, in our country, there are few political parties having well organised units at Panchayat level. It is frequently noticed that the workers of political parties at this level have no appreciable understanding of their party ideologies. At the village level, people also do not evince any understanding of such ideologies. In such a situation, without proper social conduction the situation which Bhatt anticipates may not come about at all.

Very strangely Bhatt argues that "the local leader's exploitation of administration, therefore, reflects his constant struggle for survival" (p 1361) and, therefore, easily condones it. But exploitation of administration for personal benefits is always wrong, whatever, may be the situation. It cannot be justified at any cost. It is a common experience that under modern democratic pressure, people have become more power-minded' than 'growth-minded'. It is, therefore, essential to put a check on the administrative activities of the non-officials, to divert their energies from administrative activities to developmental activities. Even Shri Jaya-

prakash Narayan is of the opinion that "the limit of power to be given to the people is to be determined by the competence of the people. All that the villager is competent to do, he should be allowed to do, and nothing should be granted to the villager in a manner of gift."<sup>2</sup>

Bhatt also takes objection to the suggestion that all powers of making transfers and fresh appointments should vest with district level officers of the concerned departments arguing that as the district officials are not "all honest", they would "succumb to favouritism". He seems to forget that standards of morality are not so low in our country; we have a constitution and the rule of law. Our officials can acquit themselves creditably in the task given to them provided the proper atmosphere for work is created in rural India. In the same way, clear demarcation of powers is necessary to avoid recurrence of conflicting instructions to the subordinate officials by the Pradhans and the Vikas Adhikaries. This will avoid unnecessary tensions and useless 'polities' among the subordinate staff. As regards the utility of training courses for the non-officials, the Community Development Evaluation Mission maintains that, "If the panchayat is ultimately to be an effective planning unit as well as executive of those plans, the members need a different kind of training, based 'm problem solving and illustrated by simple forms of case studies'.<sup>4</sup>

### No New Light

Bhatt has not analysed any new cause, nor has he given any new suggestion. He finds the present situation the natural creation of the process of politicisation in our country. He disposes of everything by saying simply that, "in the ultimate analysis it is one of those questions of democracy where much depends upon the good sense of politicians and administrators" while admitting in the same breath that "there is no guarantee that politicians would not exploit the administration for partisan or personal purposes" (p 1361). This is hardly enlightening.

"The nation state is a great association and its demands are more overriding than those of community group". Thus in the ultimate analysis, it is the

patriotism and firm faith in the nation's destiny which will create this 'good sense' in the politicians and administrators. The Indian Leviathan is to be awakened; the prime necessity for more positive and dynamic thinking.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Rostow W W, "The Challenge of

Democracy in Developing Nations" p 22. U S I S Publication.

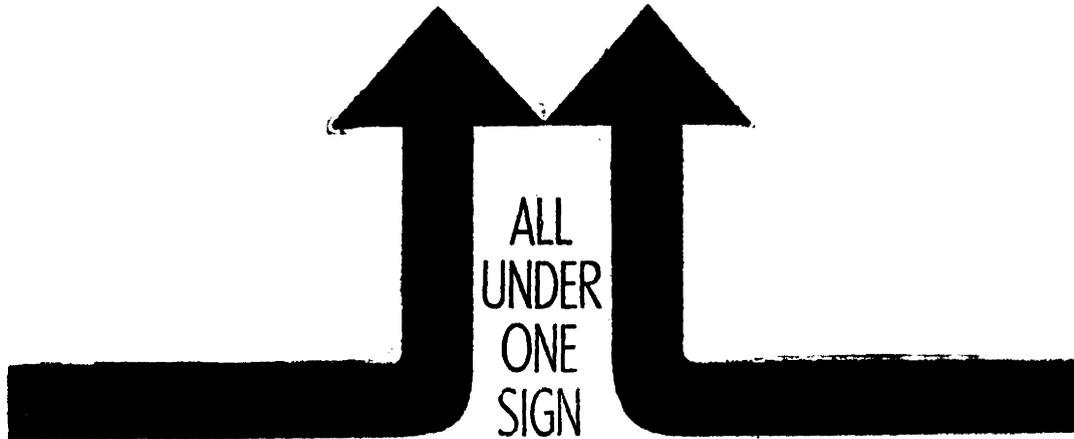
<sup>2</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, Talk given to the Central Institute of Study and Research in Community Development. Missouri, p 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p 2.

<sup>4</sup> M, J Coldwell and Others, "Report of a Community Development Evaluation Mission in India", p 53; Government of India Publication.

<sup>5</sup> Lethbridge H J, "Tensions of Economic Development in South East Asia", Bombay, Allied Publishers, p 42.

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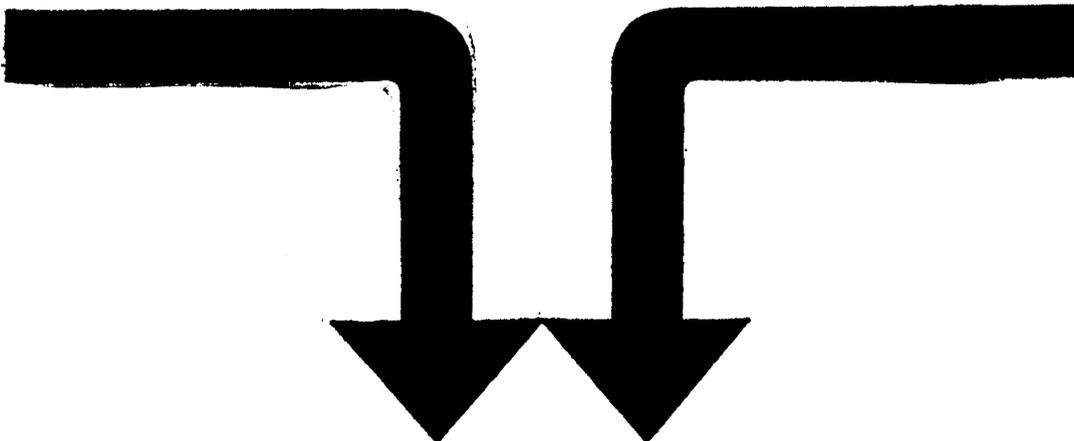
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