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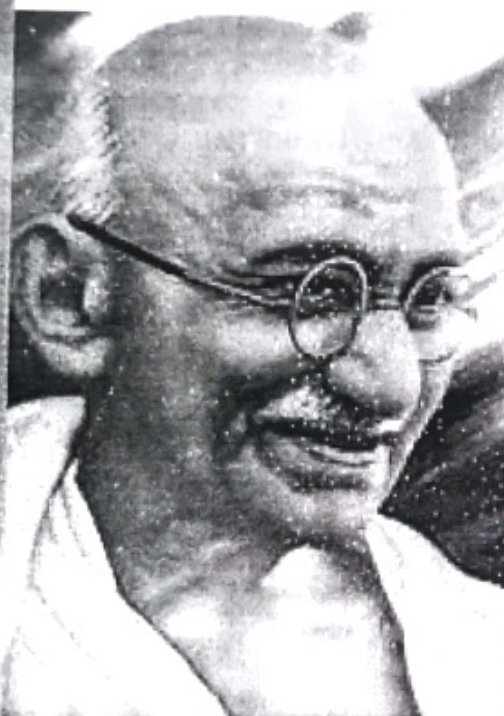
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डॉ. अजयकुमार मोहंसी
प्राचार्य,
कला एवं वाणिज्य पदवी महाविद्यालय,
पेट्रोलपंप जवाहरनगर,
त. जि. भंडारा

विशेषांक संपादक

डॉ. राजेंद्रप्रसाद पटले
डॉ. आर. आर. चौधरी
डॉ. हरगोविंद टेंभरे
डॉ. सुधाकर थूल
डॉ. अमोल राऊत

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INDEX

No.	Title of the Paper	Author's Name	Page No.
1	Understanding the Economics of Mahatma Gandhi's Sarvodaya	Dr. Poorva Bhonde	05
2	The Gandhi's Thought on Cleanness	Hemlata R. Selokar	09
3	Educational Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi and its Relevance in Present Scenario	Dr. (Mrs.) Ujjwala D. Sadaphal	11
4	Gandhi's View on Panchayat Raj	Dr. Sucheta Parker	15
5	The Contribution of Mahatma Gandhi with Context to Rural Development	Dr. G. N. Nimbarte	18
6	Mahatma Gandhi and Sarvodaya	Dr. Ranjana Shringarpure	21
7	Environmental Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi	Dr. Jayshree Bhagat	23
8	Mahatma Gandhi and Environment : Green Future	Dr. Sayeda Parveen Qureshi	26
9	Gandhian Ideology in Raja Rao's Kanthapura	Dr. Anita Wanjari	28
10	Relevance of Gandhian Solutions for Today	Dr. Hargovind Tembhare	31
11	The Gandhi Quartet- A Portrayal of Mahatma Gandhi	Dr. Rajendra Pise	33
12	Mahatma Gandhi and Universal Peace	Prof. Vijay Ganvir	36
13	Mahatma Gandhi - Father of the Nation	Dr. Chandrashekhkar Malviya	39
14	महात्मा गांधी के आर्थिक विचार	प्रा. पौर्णिमा राहांगडाले	41
15	गांधी विचारधारा में सत्य, अहिंसा के दर्शन एवं ग्रामीण सुधार	डॉ. रमेश बावनखडे	45
16	म. गांधी एवं सर्वोदय	डॉ. सुरेश खोन्नागडे	48
17	राष्ट्रपिता एवं ग्रामीण विकास कि संकल्पना	प्रा. अनिलकुमार गुप्ता	51
18	महात्मा गांधी के आर्थिक विचार	प्रा. एच. पी. पारधी	56
19	वर्तमान शिक्षा एवं गांधी विचार	प्रा. संतोषकुमार परिहार	60
20	पंचायतराज में गांधी विचारधारा कि भूमिका	प्रा. सुधाकर माटे	64
21	गांधी तत्त्वज्ञान एवं ग्रामीण जीवन	डॉ. प्रशांत पगडे	69
22	स्त्री सशक्तीकरण और महात्मा गांधी	डॉ. अलका दहीकर	72
23	नवजागरण, गांधी और राष्ट्रभाषा	डॉ. मनोज पाण्डेय	75
24	महात्मा गांधी एवं सर्वोदय	डॉ. विनोद बाली	81
25	महात्मा गांधी और राष्ट्रभाषा	कुंजनलाल लिहारे	84
26	स्त्री विमर्श एवं गांधी विचार	सुमिता राय	87
27	गांधीजी के आर्थिक विचार	प्रा. सारिका दमाहे	92
28	हिंदी साहित्य में गांधीवाद के प्रती यशपाल का दृष्टिकोण	एकादशी जैतवार	96
29	स्वदेशी संस्कृति के साथ आर्थिक विकास एवं शिक्षा	प्रा. अर्चना देशमुख	100
30	महात्मा गांधी के आर्थिक विचार	फैसल कुरेशी	103
31	महात्मा गांधी के आर्थिक विचार	प्रा. रोषना जनबंघू	106
32	महात्मा गांधी के राजनीतिक विचार	डॉ. सुशांत चिमणकर	109
33	महात्मा गांधी एवं स्वतंत्रता आंदोलन	डॉ. चुन्निलाल साखरवाडे	115
34	प्रेमचंद के उपन्यासों में 'गांधीवाद' : एक अध्ययन	डॉ. मनिष ठेंगरे	117



Gandhi's View on Panchayat Raj

Dr. Sucheta Parker
HoD Sociology
Kamla Nehru Mahavidyalaya
Nagpur

Abstract:

Gandhi was aware of the uniqueness and centrality of villages in the national life of India. Gandhi wanted political power to be distributed among the villages in India. Gandhi preferred the term 'Swaraj' to describe what he called true democracy. Panchayat were functional institutions of grassroots governance in almost every village. Gandhi suggested the institution of village republics both as institutions of parallel polities and as units of economic autonomy.

Key Words: Democracy, Panchayat, Swaraj, village republics ,economic autonomy.

Introduction :-

Mahatma Gandhi advocated *panchayat raj* as the foundation of India's political system. However, this has been moderated by the decentralization of several administrative functions to the local level, empowering elected gram panchayats. There are significant differences between the traditional panchayati raj system, that envisioned by Gandhi, and the system formalized in India in 1992.

History of Panchayati Raj

In the time of the Rig-Veda (1700 BC), evidences suggest that self-governing village bodies called 'sabhas' existed. With the passage of time, these bodies became panchayats (council of five persons). Panchayat were functional institutions of grassroots governance in almost every village. The Village Panchayat or elected council had large powers, both executive and judicial. Land was distributed by this panchayat which also collected taxes out of the produce and paid the government's share on behalf of the village. For the first time in 1959, the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee Report recommended a 3-tier Panchayati Raj System which included Zillah Parishad at the District Level, Panchayat Samiti at the Block/Tehsil/ Taluka Level and Gram Panchayat at the Village Level.

Importance of Democratic Decentralization:

Gandhi's concept of democratic decentralization bears the stamp of his passionate belief in non-violence, truth and individual freedom. He calls it Panchayati Raj or village Swaraj. He wants to see each village a little republic, self-sufficient in its vital wants, organically and non-hierarchically linked with the larger spatial bodies and enjoying the maximum freedom of deciding the affairs of the locality. Gandhi wanted political power to be distributed among the villages in India. Gandhi preferred the term 'Swaraj' to describe what he called true democracy. This democracy is based upon freedom. Individual freedom in Gandhi's view, could be maintained only in autonomous, self-reliant communities that offer opportunities to the people for fullest participation.

Gandhi was aware of the uniqueness and centrality of villages in the national life of India. He strongly believed that the salvation of India lies in the revival of idyllic nature of the village