

Mr. Vice-President : The question is:

“That Article 31, as amended, be part of the Constitution.”

The motion was adopted.

Article 31, as amended, was added to the Constitution.

Mr. Vice-President : We shall now proceed to Article 31-A.

Article 31-A

Shri M. Ananthasayanam Ayyangar (Madras: General): Mr. Vice-President, Sir, Amendment No. 927 stands in my name, but Mr. Santhanam has given an amendment to this amendment, for substitution of this. I find that that language is better. With your permission, Sir, he may be allowed to move his amendment in the place of mine. If you want me to formally move my amendment, I will do so, but I am prepared to accept the substitution for 31-A. I am prepared to adopt whichever course you direct.

Mr. Vice-President : Let Mr. Santhanam move.

The Honourable Shri K. Santhanam : Sir, I beg to move:

“That after article 31, the following new article be added:—

‘31-A. The State shall take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government’.”

Sir, I need not elaborate the necessity for this clause. Many honourable Members had given similar amendments for village panchayats, but they had also attached to it conditions like self-sufficiency and other matters, which many of us did not consider desirable to be put into the directives. What powers should be given to a village panchayat, what its area should be and what its functions should be will vary from province to province and from state to state, and it is not desirable that any hard and fast direction should be given in the Constitution. There may be very small hamlets which are so isolated that even for fifty families, we may require a village panchayat; in other places it may be desirable to group them together so that they may form small townships and run efficient, almost municipal administrations. I think these must be left to the provincial legislatures. What is attempted to do here is to give a definite and unequivocal direction that the state shall take steps to organise panchayats and shall endow them with necessary powers and authority to enable them to function as units of self-government. That the entire structure of self-government, of independence in this country should be based on organised village community life is the common factor of all the amendments tabled and that factor has been made the principle basis of this amendment. I hope it will meet with unanimous acceptance. Thank you, Sir.

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : Sir, I accept the amendment.

(At this stage Seth Govind Das rose to speak).

Mr. Vice-President : If you want to discuss anything, you can discuss after Prof. Ranga's amendment has been moved.

An Honourable Member : Prof. Ranga is not here.

Mr. Vice-President : I am on the horns of a dilemma. This amendment has been accepted. If I gave an opportunity to one speaker, then the whole question will have to be re-opened. I would value the advice of experts on this matter.

Shri M. Ananthasayanam Ayyangar : If you will permit me to say so, I shall only quote the procedure that is adopted in the House when it sits as a

Legislature. Even though a Member in charge of a Bill says he accepts an amendment, he only indicates the line of action for other Members to follow. They may go on speaking and he will always have a right of reply after they have spoken. Even to cut short the debate on certain matters which do not involve a principle, people would like to know what the attitude of the Government is. If it is found useless, they may not pursue that matter and it is for that reason that Dr. Ambedkar has said that he accepts the amendment. He still can reserve his reply after the speeches or debates are closed. I therefore request you to call upon other speakers who want to speak. It is a very important subject and every one would like to throw some light on it.

Mr. Vice-President : In that case, I shall call upon Mr. Prakasam to speak first.

Shri T. Prakasam (Madras : General): Mr. Vice-President, Sir, I feel happy that the Government have with grace accepted this amendment and agreed to introduce it in the Constitution. We should have tried to introduce this at the very beginning of the framing of the Constitution.

Shri Vishwambhar Dayal Tripathi (United Provinces : General): Sir, I do not know which Government he has referred to.

Shri T. Prakasam : I am referring to the Government as it is constituted today.

This is a subject which is so very dear to the country and to the Members of this House as is shown by the way in which they have intervened in the general debate and brought it to the forefront of the discussion that this should find a place in the Constitution itself. Dr. Rajendra Prasad, who is the President of the Constituent Assembly, himself expressed his opinion in favour of having village republics as the basis of the Constitution.

Shri Vishwambhar Dayal Tripathi : What has the Government to do with our discussions?

Mr. Vice-President : The reference was to the President of the Constituent Assembly and not to the Government.

Shri T. Prakasam : I have not referred to the Government. Thank you.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad has expressed his view in favour of making the village republic as the basis of the whole Constitution, which we are completing these days. On the 10th of May, Sir, Dr. Rajendra Prasad happened to express his views in this matter. The Constitutional Adviser, Sir B.N. Rau, when he dealt with this question, sympathised with the whole thing, but pointed out that it was too late to make any attempt to change the basis of the Constitution which has gone so far. I too agree, Sir, that if there was any mistake, the mistake was on our part in not having been vigilant enough and brought this before the House in proper time. When this was coming so late as that, I did not expect Dr. Ambedkar as Chairman of the Drafting Committee to be good enough to accept this.

Sir, a very serious situation was created by not making the village republic or the village unit as the real basis of the Constitution. It must be acknowledged on all hands that this is a construction which is begun at the top and which is going down to the bottom. What is suggested in this direction by Dr. Rajendra Prasad himself was that the structure must begin from the foundations and it must go up. That, Sir, is the Constitution which the departed Mahatma Gandhi indicated and tried to work up for nearly thirty years. Under these circumstances, it is very fortunate that this should come in at this stage, that this should be introduced and worked in a proper way. I must really congratulate Mr. Santhanam for having attempted to bring this

[Shri T. Prakasam]

amendment in this form so that all others who had tabled amendments, of whom I was also one, reconciled ourselves to accept this, because this gives opportunity to the people of every province and the whole of India to go on this basis and work up the whole thing, without interrupting the progress of the Constitution at this stage.

Sir, one of the distinguished friends of this House was remarking the other day to me, "why are you thinking of these village republics and all these things? The bullockcart days have gone; they will never come back." This was his observation. I may point out to that friend that the village republic which is proposed to be established in the country and worked is not a bullock cart village republic. The republic that would be established, Sir, under this resolution, under the orders of the Government as it were, would be a village republics which would use the bullockcarts, not for simply taking the fire-wood that is cut in the jungles to the towns and cities and getting some money for hire; these village republic would convert the work of the bullock carts to the work of carrying paddy and other produce which they produce in the village for their own benefit and for the benefit of the public. These village republics will also be serviceable to those men of ours who are now fighting in Kashmir. I was there the other day; I saw the way in which those friends in the battle field have been carrying on their work. Some of them said to us: "Well Sir, when you go back to the country, you please see that the prices of food-stuffs are reduced and that our people when they apply for small sites for habitation, they are secured." For all these things, the village republics will be of service to the military people in the best possible manner.

This is not a thing which should be looked upon with contempt, having forgotten our history and the history of the world. This is not the first time that this is introduced in our country. This is not a favour that we bestow upon our people by reviving these republics. When we fill the whole country with these organisations, I may tell you, there will be no food famines; there will be no cloth famine and we would not be spending 110 crores of rupees as we are doing today for the imports of food; this amount could be saved for the country. We have gone away far from the reality. These village republics will put a stop to black-marketing in a most wonderful manner. These village republics, if properly worked and organised on the basis of self-sufficiency, to which some may take exception, if the village is made a self-governing unit, it would put a stop to inflation also which the Government has not been able even to checkmate to any appreciable extent. This village organization will establish peace in our country. Today whatever the Government might be doing from the top here byway of getting food from other countries and distributing it, the food would not be distributed amongst the masses ordinarily through the agencies which we have got either in the Centre or in the provinces. All that trouble would be solved immediately so far as this business is concerned. Let me tell you above all that Communism—the menace the country is facing—we are seeing what is going on in China, we saw what was done in Czechoslovakia and we know what the position is in Burma, we know what the position is even in our own country with regard to Communism. Communism can be checked immediately if the villages are organized in this manner and if they are made to function properly. There would be no temptation for our own people to become Communists and to go about killing our own people as they have been doing. For all these reasons I would support this and I am very anxious that this must be carried out in all the provinces as quickly as possible, soon after the Constitution is passed, and I am seeing today the light and prosperity before the country when the Constitution is passed and when this village organization comes into existence.

Shri Surendra Mohan Ghose (West Bengal : General): Sir I am grateful to you for giving me an opportunity to express my feeling on this amendment moved by my honourable Friend Mr. Santhanam. Sir, you will find there is another amendment No. 991 which stands in my name almost identical with the present amendment which has been moved by my honourable Friend. I am glad that such an agreed amendment has been moved by my honourable Friend, Mr. Santhanam and that it has been accepted by the Honourable Law Minister, Dr. Ambedkar.

Sir, in my opinion the meaning of this Constitution would have been nothing so far as crores and crores of Indian people are concerned unless there was some provision like this in our Constitution. There is another point also *viz.*, for thousands and thousands of years the meaning of our life in India as it has been expressed in various activities, was this that complete freedom for every individual was granted. It was accepted that every individual had got full and unfettered freedom; but as to what the individual should do with that freedom there was some direction. Individuals had freedom only to work for unity. With that freedom they are to search for unity of our people. There was no freedom to an individual if he works for disruption of our unity. The same principle was also accepted in our Indian Constitution from time immemorial. Every village like the organic cells of our body was given full freedom to express itself but at the same time with that freedom they were to work only to maintain and preserve the unity of India.

Sir, our village people are so much familiar with this system that if today there is in our Constitution no provision like this they would not have considered this as their own Constitution or as something known to them, as something which they could call their own country's Constitution. Therefore, Sir, I am glad and I congratulate both my friend the Honourable Mr. Santhanam and the Honourable Dr. Ambedkar on moving this amendment as well as for acceptance of the same. Sir, I commend this.

Seth Govind Das (C. P. and Berar : General): *[Mr. President, very few speeches are being made now-a-days in this House in Hindi. I would, therefore, resume my practice of speaking in Hindi unless of course I have something to explain to my south Indian friends which requires my speaking here in English.

During the course of the speech he made while presenting this Draft to the House Dr. Ambedkar made some remarks about villages which caused me and, I believe, a great majority of the members of this House, great pain. It is a matter of deep pleasure to me that he has at last accepted the amendment moved by Shri Santhanam. We need not complain if one comes to the right course, though belatedly.

I belong, Sir, to a province in which perhaps the greatest progress has been made in respect to this matter. Our village Panchayats, our judicial Panchayats, and our laws for Janapadas are the talk of the whole of India today. There was a time when our province was regarded as a very backward province. But today the whole country will have to admit that our province though small in size, has given a lead in many matters to the other provinces of the country. So far as the scheme of village Republics is concerned, it is an undisputed fact that our province has progressed more than any other province towards its fulfilment.

Ours is an ancient, a very ancient country and the village has had always an important position here. This has not been so with every ancient country. In Greece, for instance, towns had greater importance than villages. The

* [] Translation of Hindustani speech.

[Seth Govind Das]

Republics of Athens and Sparta occupy a very important place in the world history today. But no importance was attached by them to the villages. But in our country the village occupied such an important position that even in the legends contained in most ancient books—the Upanishads—if there are descriptions of the forest retreats, of the sages, there are also descriptions of villages. Even in Kautilya's Arthashastra there are to be found references to our ancient villages. Modern historians have also admitted this fact. We find the description of our ancient village organisation, in 'Ancient Law' by Mr. Henry Man, 'Indian Village Community' by Mr. Baden Powel and in 'Fundamental Unity of India' by Shri B. C. Pal. I would request the members of this House to go through these books. They will come to know from these books the great importance the villages have had in India since the remotest times. Even during the Muslim Rule villages were considered of primary importance. It was during the British regime that the villages fell into neglect and lost their importance. There was a reason for this. The British Raj in India was based on the support of a handful of people. During the British regime Provinces, districts, tahsils and such other units were formed and so were formed the Talukdaris, Zamindaris and Malguzaris. The British rule lasted here for so many years only on account of the support of these few people.

Just as Mahatma Gandhi brought about a revolution in every other aspect of this country's life, so also he brought about a revolution in the village life. He started living in a village. He caused even the annual Congress Sessions to be held in villages. Now that we are about to accept this motion I would like to recall to the memory of the members of this House a speech that he had delivered here in Delhi, to the Asiatic conference. He had then advised the delegates of the various nations to go to Indian villages if they wanted to have a glimpse of the real India. He had told them that they would not get a picture of real India from the towns. Even today 80 per cent of our population lives in villages and it would be a great pity if we make no mention of our villages in the Constitution.

I support the amendment moved by Honourable K. Santhanam. I hope that the Directive Principles laid down in the Constitution would enable the provinces to follow the lead given by the Central Provinces in the matter and I hope a time will come when we shall be able to witness the ancient glory in our villages.]

Shri V. I. Muniswamy Pillai (Madras : General): Mr. Vice-President, Sir, by my Honourable Friend Mr. Santhanam moving this amendment and the Chairman of the Drafting Committee expressing that he is going to accept it shows the real feeling of the Sovereign Body towards their less fortunate brethren living in the villages. My Honourable Friend Mr. Prakasam referred to the statement made by the revered leaders Rajendra Prasad and Mahatma Gandhi. But we know it for a reality that the villages are in rack and ruin, and if there is to be any amenities or self-government, it is to the villages that the Sovereign Body must give them. The other day when I made a speech on the Draft Constitution, I pointed out that there is no provision to give the rural areas any choice of self-government. Now, under this amendment we bestow a certain amount of power to make the villages self-contained and to have self-government there. Sir, I am sure the seven lakhs of villages in the whole of India will welcome the provision of this amendment in this Constitution. Sir, it is with the revenue that is derived from the rural areas that it has been possible to create towns, with all amenities therein. But the man who gives the revenue by way of taxes could not get even the rudiments of amenities, due to a citizen. I feel that by accepting this amendment we will go a long way to re-construct

the villages that have been allowed to go to rack and ruin for centuries together. If the pies are taken care of, the rupees will take care of themselves. So I feel that by having this amendment, we are going a long way towards reconstructing our villages which are in such dire necessity of such reconstruction today.

Dr. V. Subramaniam (Madras : General): Mr. Vice-President, when our Mother India delivers her Constitution, if there is any living cell in the Constitution, it will be this village panchayat amendment which has been brought forward by my Honourable friend, Mr. Santhanam. It is a well-known fact that India is standing today as a self-governing unit in the world because of this living cell in our body politics—the village panchayat. Today, if we want to make the country strong and self-sufficient in every respect, this clause in the Constitution or in the Directive principles is very necessary.

Now, there has been some controversy about self-sufficiency. My interpretation when we speak of a village being self-sufficient is this. It may produce, say ground-nut in large quantities, and it may export it, even though it may be forced to import Dalda and other substances for the needs of the people in the village. By saying that it is self-sufficient, we only mean that it may grow all the articles that it can and also import what is necessary, from the neighbouring villages. That is my interpretation. But these are matters to be worked out in detail by the village panchayats themselves.

It is clear that as far as this amendment is concerned, there can be no two opinions about it. This amendment must be carried, and in our future constitution, much more powers must be given to the villages. As a matter of fact, we do not know how many carpenters there are in our land. If we have the panchayats, we need go only to their records and pick up the number of carpenters in every village. These panchayats will serve a very useful purpose. This clause is very essential, and I support this amendment.

Shri Satyanarayan Sinha (Bihar : General) : Sir, we have had enough discussion, and after Shri Bharathi, I would like to move for closure.

Shri L. Krishnaswami Bharathi (Madras : General): Mr. Vice-President, Sir, I congratulate the Honourable Mr. Santhanam for moving and Dr. Ambedkar for agreeing to this amendment. I must confess that I am not fully satisfied with this amendment, for the very simple reason that even today even under the present Constitution, I think the Provincial Governments have enough powers to form village panchayats and operating them as self-governing units. But to the extent to which it goes, I must express my satisfaction. It must be remembered that this is in the directive principles, and I see no reason why the idea of self-sufficiency should not have been accepted by Mr. Santhanam. The reasons that he gave for not accepting that principle are not at all convincing. In fact, two or three Honourable Members—Mr. Ranga, Shri Ananthasayanam Ayyangar, and Mr. Prakasam have given amendments with these ideas. Mr. Ananthasayanam Ayyangar's amendment says there is great need for effective decentralisation of political and economic powers. After all, what the amendment seeks to give is only political independence. Political independence apart from economic independence, has no meaning. The idea behind the Directive principles is to emphasise the way in which we want the country to function, and for that we must make it quite clear to the whole world that economic democracy is important and for that decentralisation of economic power is important. It is that aspect of the matter which Gandhiji emphasised. Decentralization both in the political and economic sphere is absolutely essential if India is to function as a democracy.

[Shri L. Krishnaswami Bharathi]

In fact, speaking at the Asian Relations Conference, Mahatmaji said pointing out to the City of Delhi:—

“This is not India. You people are seeing Delhi—this is not India. Go to villages; that is India, therein lives the soul of India.”

Therefore, I do not know why they should fight shy of ‘self-sufficiency’. It has been sufficiently explained by Mahatmaji, and if it is necessary I would like even to say some words from his speeches.

The Honourable Shri K. Santhanam: May I point out to the Honourable Member that self-government is not merely political? It may be economic or spiritual.

Shri L. Krishnaswami Bharathi: I quite understand it and that is the reason why it should be made clearer. If self-government includes that, it is much better that we explain it because that explanation is very necessary. I would very much like the word “self-sufficiency” in the Gandhian sense of the word, self-sufficiency not in all matters, let it be remembered, but in vital needs of life, self-sufficiency in the matter of food and clothing as far as possible. That is what Mahatmaji said. It does not mean absolute independence. Sir, I would ask leave to read from Mahatmaji’s articles certain important portions which will clear up the matter. This is what Gandhiji wrote:—

“My idea of Village Swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its vital wants and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity.”

An Honourable Member asked, “Well, what can you do? Some villages produce only paddy, they cannot have self-sufficiency”. Is it such an impossible proposition? Gandhiji was emphatic in saying that he was not at all suggesting that the village should be independent of all these things, but in certain matters you must have self-reliance, the basic idea being, “*no work, no food*”. Now the villagers think that as it is a Swaraj Government, *khadi* and food will flow from the heavens as *manna*. Gandhiji’s idea in this self-sufficiency is, “Don’t expect anything from the Government. You have got your hands and feet; work; without work you will have no food. You can produce your own cloth, you can produce your own food. But if you do not work, you shall have no food, no cloth.” That is the basic idea of decentralization and economic democracy. And if the villagers are to have that idea, we must put it here and tell them about self-sufficiency, “Do not expect any thing from the Government. Who is the Government? After all you constitute the Government. You must work, you must produce. Do not depend on these mills. Go on with your *charkha*, make our own food”. That is the basic idea of self-sufficiency and decentralization and economic democracy.

Mahatmaji said :—

“My idea of Village Swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its vital wants, and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity. 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 supply. This can be done through controlled wells and tanks. Education will be compulsory upto 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 its technique of *Satyagraha* and non-cooperation will be the sanction of the village community...”

(At this stage Mr. Vice-President rang the bell).

Sir, I think there are only a few more lines of Mahatmaji's picture of life. With your leave I should like to finish it.

"...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."

This is a rough idea of what Gandhiji felt, and therefore, in my opinion it is very necessary that this sovereign body should enunciate and give its views on this fundamental tenet of Mahatma Gandhi, his idea being that there must be decentralisation and the village must function as an economic unit. Of course, the Honourable Mr. Santhanam said that it is included. I only wanted that it should be made more explicit so that Mahatmaji's soul will be very much pleased. He said that India dies if the villages die, India can live only if the villages live.

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : Sir, as I accept the amendment. I have nothing more to add.

(An Honourable Member rose to speak.)

Mr. Vice-President : In this matter my decision is final. I have not yet found anybody who has opposed the motion put forward by Mr. Santhanam. There might be different ways of praising it, but at bottom and fundamentally, these speeches are nothing but praising the amendment.

The question is:

"That after article 31, the following new article be added:—

'31-A. The State shall take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government'."

The motion was adopted.

Mr. Vice-President : The question is:

"That the new article 31-A stand part of the Constitution."

The motion was adopted.

Article 31-A was added to the Constitution.

The Assembly then adjourned till Ten of the Clock on Tuesday, the 23rd November 1948.
