



Gandhi's Dream of the **New Democracy**

***The Parallel Consensual
Democratic Governance
System***

by Terry Mollner

The purpose of this paper is to tell the story of the new, consensual governance system Mahatma Gandhi began to create the last two years of his life - at the end of the 1940s. It is also the story of Jayaprakash Narayan's (JP's) efforts in the 1960s and 1970s to pick up where Gandhi left off. He later turned his attention to bringing smaller political parties together to overthrow Indira Gandhi in the 1970s. This effort found much support from those who had participated in the consensual parallel governing system. Finally, a modern design of a system, similar to what Gandhi and JP created, will be presented that can provide a way for a new, more mature democracy to be created around the world without the need of an official status with any government.

Gandhi Starts Over To Create a More Mature Democratic Government

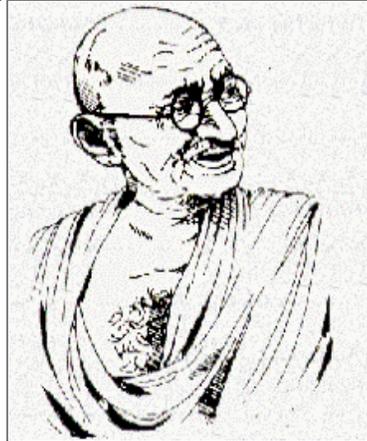
The last two years of Mahatma Gandhi's life he basically renounced all that he had done before and returned to the villages to create a new governance system. People thought that maybe Gandhi was losing his mind. He was the most powerful man in India; yet he left the halls of power and returned to the villages to start something brand new. However, Gandhi's judgment on himself was that he had made a large mistake in creating the Congress I Party as a political party in a competing political party system.

Gandhi understood the universe to be one thing where all the parts had the purest of primary intentions by nature. Nature is fundamentally cooperative, not competitive. He believed that all things were cooperating with one another for the good of the one whole - the way we think of the parts within our bodies cooperating for the good of the whole body. Therefore, to build a political system

based on competition rather than cooperation was to consistently polarize people into competing camps. That was the opposite of the kind of community and society Gandhi wanted to create. He believed this was going in the opposite direction of nature and it would, therefore, consistently bring misery.

Further, he believed that he had perpetuated this immature approach by creating the Congress I Party as a competing political party in such a system. He judged that this mistake to some degree made him personally responsible for the separation of India into India and Pakistan. He decided that, with what energy he had left in him before he died, he needed to successfully demonstrate a more mature governance system.

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A majoritarian democracy was not really as much a democracy as it was the last form of dictatorship before real democracy - the dictatorship of the majority over the minority. Rather than the leadership of the opposing groups sitting down and talking to one another, they organized their armies of followers and fought each other through ballots and the media...and seldom spoke to each other. It perpetuated war games rather than love games. Winning instead of the discovery of greater truth together.

The People's Committees

So he returned to the villages and began to create what he called "Peoples Committees (PC)." It was based on the ancient panchayat tribal systems of India. The way it functioned was as follows.

The main affinity groups in the village were identified. In today's small towns it might be every major church, the downtown business association, the manufacturer's association, the women's association, the major non-governmental organizations, the farmers association, the major non-profit and for-profit corporations, etc. Each group would be invited to elect their senior, most mature person, to serve on the PC. The only people who could not serve on the PC were those directly involved with electoral politics.

The reason was that they were going in the opposite direction. They were organizing against an opposition. The PC was based on finding consensus. The PC was looking to find common ground and to co-create greater understanding. While accepting all the differences that existed, it invited these elders in the community to search to identify as many agreements as they could find to peel off from their disagreements so the donut of agreements became larger and larger relative to the differences in the middle of the donut. The PC was seeking to find agreement, hopefully with 100% voting for the agreement but, if not, be able to observe the percentages going higher each time the proposed, or amended, agreement was once again discussed.

The PC would be open for anyone to attend. In fact, the entire village was encouraged to sit in a circle around the PC circle. In today's world, this possibility could be enhanced with the use of television and radio.

Gandhi's belief was that since this was a more mature way for people to relate, the result would be that the elected officials would never be able to go against the consensus decisions, or near consensus decisions, of the village elders. The result would be that people would slowly shift their priorities and give greater priority to the PC than to the competing political governance system. In this innocent and non-violent way, the PC would become primary; the competitive process would become secondary; and, hopefully, eventually the official competitive process would be reorganized to reflect the PC more in its processes as well.

Jayprakash Narayan Picks Up Where Gandhi Left Off

Gandhi had only begun to create these People's Committees when he was assassinated. There was a man named Jayprakash Narayan (JP) who was head of the Socialist Party in India during the time in the late 1940s that Gandhi began to work on this. Especially after hearing Gandhi's conversations with Mao Tse-

Tung, he became disillusioned with the perspective of the socialists and resigned. He went to the ashram of Vinoba Bhave, one of Gandhi's followers, where he meditated on these things from the late 1940s until the mid-1960s. At that point he came across an account of what Gandhi was trying to do the last couple years of his life and realized that Gandhi had discovered how to create a more mature governance system.

JP left the ashram and began traveling around India telling this story to students, followers of Gandhi, and others. He then organized them to go into the villages to set up People's Committees. They did this all over India with substantial success.



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JP Turns His Attention to Defeating Indira Gandhi and Away From the People's Committees

In 1975, Indira Gandhi decided to let her opposition out of jail and call a national election for about six weeks away. Her belief was that none of her opposition would be able to unite and organize against her in that short period of time and she would end up with such an overwhelming victory that she would have a mandate to govern.

There were many smaller political parties. JP requested that representatives from them come to his bedside. He was on a dialysis machine and thought to be dying. JP had tried in 1974 to persuade Indira Gandhi to fight corruption and venality in public life. But she refused to deal with him. JP argued she had to be defeated and that the only way to defeat was for all the smaller parties to unite and to put up only one candidate against the candidate from Indira Gandhi's party, the Congress I Party. They agreed to do it.

Many wanted him to also convert the PCs into a political party. JP said no. He explained that the entire purpose of creating the People's Committees was to create a more mature governance system than the current competitive political party system. He had to be true to Mahatma Gandhi's dream. It was his sacred responsibility. The reason so many People's Committees had been created so rapidly was because people liked them and preferred them to the other political system. To abandon it now would be a travesty. But JP agreed to turn his attention to the political process and work in collaboration with all the smaller parties to put up one candidate to defeat Indira Gandhi.

In six weeks, they agreed on candidates and had enough credibility that they defeated Indira Gandhi in the parliamentary system. JP became known as the second father of India. He handpicked Moraji Desai to be the Prime Minister.

JP Reveals His Error

In 1979 I was in India. I was a consultant to a man who was the grandson of one of the ruling families of India, the Poddars. He had a successful business in the USA and wanted to re-organize it into a trusteeship business.

Trusteeship was Mahatma Gandhi's word for his theory of economics. He believed that we were all trustees of our wealth and skills and were to manage them for the good of all and only take what we needed and no more. We were not owners who were to use all we could get our hands on for our own self-interests.

The Indian-American businessman hired me to assist him to convert his business into a trusteeship business. He, fourteen of his top employees, and I journeyed to India to study trusteeship. We were able to have a meeting with JP because the man who hired me was the man who had provided JP the funds to buy the dialysis machine.

At this time JP was the spiritual ruler of India. A few days before we met with him, there had actually been fistfights in the Lok Sabat (the Parliament) over the issue of allowing the slaughter of cows so people could eat the meat. The Hindu religion, as you may know, is against the slaughter of cows for food. The next day the front page of the India Times reported that JP believed it was too early in the changes that were occurring to take on this issue and that it should be tabled for a later time. The following day the Lok Sabat voted unanimously to not

slaughter cows. This was the kind of power JP had in India at the time. He was the spiritual leader, the second Father of India.

When we met with him we had a half an hour. Then he would have to return to his dialysis machine. I asked him questions about trusteeship for the entire half an hour. I knew what he would give as answers to all the questions. I was focusing on using the time to establish a very deep, quality relationship with him. I really only had one question I wanted to ask him.

At the end of the time I said that I had one last question for him and it would be OK if he chose to not answer it. I would understand.

“Go right ahead,” he responded.

Not knowing at the time that the Janata Party was created later, I said, “If you had to do it over again, would you have converted the People’s Committees into the Janata Party?” The public officials and news media in the back of the room, which had been jabbering away, suddenly shushed each other into silence. I was fully aware that I was asking the question that was not to be asked.

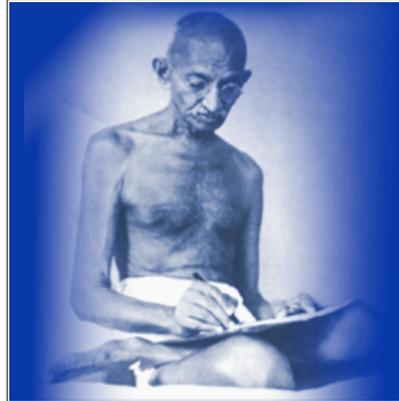
JP assumed my question was accurate, which was telling in itself, and gave me the politically correct answer. “It was a difficult time in the history of India. We had to take a decision. We looked at all sides of the issue and concluded that it was best for India at the time for us to turn our attention to the conventional political process.” Then he looked me straight in the eyes steadily without blinking and said, “Does my intelligent American friend have any other questions for me?” He gave a certain kind of emphasis on the word “intelligent” as he stared deep into my eyes such that I knew clearly what he was saying to me. Without blinking either, I looked straight back into his eyes and said, “Thank you so very, very much.”

With his eyes he had clearly communicated to me that it had been a mistake to turn his attention to the conventional political process. He was now stuck making the best of the situation. But I could feel his sadness. He believed he had let Mahatma Gandhi down. He had come to see the importance of creating a consensus building governance system based on oneness instead of separateness as Gandhi had and then he gave into the pressure of a moment and let it fall into disarray and become confused with the conventional political process. There was a quality in his eyes of an older man speaking in code to a younger man who saw the truth of his situation. With his eyes he was saying, “If you see the mistake that both Gandhi and I made, you have a responsibility to

step forward and correct it and not fail like we did.” It was the eyes of an elder speaking to those of a younger. I was in my mid-thirties at the time.

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...that it had been a mistake to have turned his attention from the People's Committees and to electoral politics.



Six months later, JP died. On his deathbed he told his secretary to report that it had been a mistake to turn his attention from the PCs and to electoral politics.

Their unity to defeat Indira Gandhi had been such a successful process for the smaller political parties that they had united to create a new political party, called the Janata Party. The PC's evaporated into it as well. It ended up being attacked by its enemies to the point, as with all parties in competing political systems, people did not know what was true or false. So it became seen as just another corrupt political party. It lost the next election, groups broke from it, and it soon disappeared from existence. It was almost as if JP had anticipated this.

We Could Pick Up Where Gandhi and JP Left Off

We could create a parallel consensus seeking governance system. Each community of any definition could create their own PC of representatives from the different affinity groups in the community. This group would make decisions with the goal being to build toward consensus, everyone working to find the common ground that all could agree upon. The focus would be on the "donut of agreement" getting thicker and thicker, and the differences inside the donut of agreement getting smaller and smaller. People would be talking with each other for the purpose of finding greater and greater common ground.

As mentioned earlier, in the competing political climate the right wing religious leader, the left wing progressive, the feminist leader, the minority leader, etc. seldom talk to one another. They organize armies and fight each other through

the media and ballot boxes. This is a very unhealthy, immature, polarizing, and a slow change way for evolution to occur.

In the PC system, the elder statespersons in the community are sitting in a circle and talking to one another with the entire community watching. They are seeking to find where they can agree on things and how they can accept and adjust to the places where they disagree. They also are committed to continuing the conversation for the purpose of sorting through the disagreements to as much agreement as they can find. The focus is on finding truth together, not on winning. Moving into deeper trust and openness together, not laterally creating walls between each other.

And the entire village is free to watch this process, and participate at times as well. This applies pressure to be truthful and to focus on nothing other than finding deeper, wiser, and self-evident truth together. This is a growing process rather than a fighting process. By staying in the conversation with one another, and the community insisting on openness and honesty in the search for truth, more and more truth is uncovered and agreed upon as people stay in the conversation. Once a truth can be seen, sooner or later there is no ability to act like it has not been seen. The wonderful thing about truth is that once we know it we can't ever fool ourselves into thinking that we do not know it.

There are people on the planet who still think the Earth is round. Given what we now know, who does not believe that in a caring conversation these people would not come around within a reasonable period of time to agreeing the Earth is round? It is conversation that is seeking agreement that brings truth to the place where it can become known. If people are left alone to fight in ignorance, they do not find truth.

A Design of People's Committees For Our Time

A group in any community could come together to create a Peoples Committee within their community. They would probably establish themselves as a non-profit corporation and recruit a number of respected leaders in the community to be on the board of directors and raise a small amount of capital to get started.

They would then invite every major church, downtown business association, the manufacturer's association, the women's association, the major non-governmental organizations, the farmers association, the major non-profit and

for-profit corporations, etc. to each elect their senior most respect statesperson to represent them on the PC. Criteria for which organizations would be invited would be created with an interest in having representatives from all walks of life in the community represented. The purpose of the board of directors and staff would be to facilitate the discussions and keep the community informed of the decisions of the PC.

Gandhi believed that when truth revealed itself it would be very difficult for all sitting in a circle, eye-to-eye and genuinely searching for it, to not admit it has appeared when it has.



The PC could meet as often as felt appropriate, but probably at least once a month. At these meetings, issues would be discussed based upon the priority being issues that are currently important to the community. There could be many subsequent meetings on a particular issue to reach agreements, as many as the PC concluded were appropriate. The PC could also serve as the place for all in the community to express their opinions when there is a crisis in the community that needs a forum for people to be heard and issues to be raised for the PC to discuss.

Excellent facilitation would be chosen to assure an orderly process and the priority forever being on finding truth together, not winning in a competition. Gandhi believed that when truth revealed itself it would be very difficult for all sitting in a circle, eye-to-eye and genuinely searching for it, to not admit it has appeared when it has. It would be very difficult to hold to one's position when this occurred. There would be smiles and joy and exaltation and embrace rather than judgment and the throwing up of fingers, indicating "we are number one!"

Each PC could elect a representative to a federation. Once this first federation has more than 50 people in it, but less than 100, it elects a representative to the next level of federation, a second level federation. Stages of federations continue, always making sure that the next level has less than 100 in it. Appropriate means are created to finance these federations, which would not need to be substantial.

Of course, each PC brings to its federation its decisions. The federation takes a look at the positions of all the PCs on an issue and tries to find agreements on that issue at its level. The next federation does the same. This system can grow to include as many communities that want to participate. It can be imagined that this unofficial consensus seeking parallel democratic governance system could eventually spread around the world and into every nation.

The PCs and their federations would have no actual legal power. Their only power would be the power of persuasion. The more a community reached a full consensus, or at least a high percentage of people uniting around a position on an issue, the more it would become very difficult for someone to become elected to office who does not support that position. In this way the PCs, and its consensus seeking process, can end up with the greatest power in the community without having any official power. This was Gandhi's dream.

A Consensus Seeking Democracy is A More Mature System of Government

The most striking aspect of this governance system is that it can emerge anywhere voluntarily, not by national design. As it emerges the goal can be to create a parallel, complementary governing system for the entire planet based on the building of consensus. This would be a way to extend democracy – consensus building democracy - around the planet without confronting existing governments. Then, just as Mahatma Gandhi believed, it would eventually be the governing system most highly valued by the people. The dictatorships and the majoritarian democracy systems would become secondary in importance in the minds and hearts of all... and this transition will have occurred without violence.



Terry Mollner, Ed.D.

(terry@trusteeship.org) is founder and chair of Trusteeship Institute, Inc., a think tank for spiritually responsible business. He is also founder and member of the board of trustees of the Calvert Social Investment Fund, and a member of the board of Ben & Jerry's

	Homemade, Inc. He is currently writing a book with the working title <i>What I Didn't Learn Growing Up In Mollner's Meat Market: Mature Freedom..</i>
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Terry Mollner
Chair & Executive Director
Trusteeship Institute, Inc.
61 Baker Road
Shutesbury, MA 01072
413-256-1331
Fax 413-256-2331
terry@trusteeship.org