



SK DEY'S contribution to the Indian political thought

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Abstract

S.K. Dey, the first Union minister for Community Development, Cooperation and Panchayati Raj, was, undoubtedly an original political thinker who made a significant contribution to Modern Indian Political Thought. However, this facet of his life remains eclipsed and ignored because he remained out of power after his resignation from the Union Cabinet in 1966. This brief paper is a modest attempt to bring to the sharp focus the significant contribution that S.K. Dey had made in this context.

Keywords: wardha model, agro industrial model, refugees, panchayati raj, community development cooperation, gram swaraj

Introduction

S.K. Dey, the builder of Nilokheri and Chief Administrator of Community Development Programme, the first Union minister for Community Development, Cooperation and Panchayati Raj, was, undoubtedly an original political thinker who made a significant contribution to Modern Indian Political Thought. However, this facet of his life remains eclipsed and ignored because he remained out of power after his resignation from the Union Cabinet in 1966.

This brief paper is a modest attempt to bring to the sharp focus the significant contribution that S.K. Dey had made in this context. It has been divided in the following parts

1. His Concept of Majdoor Manzil and Music of Muscles
2. His Idea of an Agro-Industrial Centre
3. His Concept of Community Development Programme
4. His Concept of Panchayati Raj
5. His Concept of Three Pillars of Democracy
6. His Plea for Linking the Gram Sabha to Lok Sabha

As the Commandant of the Refugee Camp at Kurukshetra from 1947 to 1949, S.K. Dey conceived the ideas of Mazdoor Manzil and Music of Muscles. He decided to channelize the energies of the refugees who had been living in that camp after being uprooted from their homes in Western Punjab as a result of partition of India. He prepared the Punjab Government to allot a piece of marshy land near village Nilokheri in Karnal district and motivated the refugees to reclaim it with their manual labour. He taught them the trades of mason, carpenter, blacksmith and used their voluntary labour for the construction of the township of Nilokheri for the rehabilitation of refugee. It was the first planned township to be built in the post-independence period. He handed over the houses to those who had built them with their labour. He called it the music of muscles and gave to Nilokheri the name of Mazdoor Manzil. This township had different areas for different occupational groups which included the Poultry area, the Kissan Basti, the School area and the Hospital area. It appears that Dey was inspired by Gandhian theory of Bread Labour. Perhaps, he wanted to inculcate dignity of labour in

them. However, he synthesized these ideas with that of the town planning. Nehru was so much impressed by it that he wanted ten thousand Nilokheris to be built in India.

S.K. Dey also developed a new model for rural development, perhaps he had been influenced by Wardha model of rural construction designed by Mahatma Gandhi. He might have also been influenced by Rabinder Nath Tagore's Sir Niketan Project. In fact, he developed a different type of model. It could be called an Agro Industrial Model of rural development. He wanted the building of such models as focal points for integrating the adjoining villages with the focal point, so that they could be developed. It may also be mentioned that he not only set up a Government High School, a Community Health Centre and a Polytechnic at Nilokheri but also installed a Printing Press and started the publication of a Monthly Journal, Kurukshetra so that residents of Nilokheri could express their difficulties and share their joys. It is now being published by the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India as its Monthly Journal. He also set up at Nilokheri the Integrated Industrial Training Centre where different trades such as welding and other crafts were taught to the youths. In fact, his model of rural development was based on integrated approach to rural development.

It is a well known fact that the idea of Community Development Project has been imported by Indians from the Tansley Valley Corporation of U.S.A. which was launched for mainstreaming the blacks in the American society. And it was an American expert, Albert Mayer, who had supervised the implementation of a Pilot Project at Etawa in Uttar Pradesh. It is also a fact that it was Chester Bowls – the Ambassador of U.S.A. in India – who had prevailed upon Nehru for adopting the programme which was later on launched in the selected rural areas of India on October 2, 1952 with the financial support from the Ford Foundation of USA. But it cannot be overruled that Dey had played an important role in convincing Nehru regarding the desirability of launching this programme for bringing about a silent revolution in rural society by awakening the dormant forces of progress in it. Here, it may

be necessary to mention that S.K. Dey had been appointed as the First Chief Administrator of this programme and again it was he who had played a major role in its institutionalization.⁴ He also played an important role in its supplementation by the National Extension Service Scheme. He also set up the Orientation Training Centre at Nilokheri in 1954 for the training of the Block Development Officers and for the orientation of the police administration oriented IAS officers into development administration. Hence, it would not be hyperbolic to call S.K. Dey as the pioneer of rural development of India.

S.K. Dey also played a major role in convincing the first Prime Minister of India, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru regarding the necessity of Panchayati Raj for the success of Community Development Programme. It is necessary to mention here that when Dr. B.R. Ambedkar had opposed the introduction of Panchayati Raj and condemned this concept in the constituent Assembly, Nehru had remained quiet. Perhaps he did not have faith in Gandhian Concept of Gram Swaraj because he wanted to modernize India. He also did not have faith in the village people for this purpose.⁶ It was at the instance of S.K. Dey that Nehru was instrumental in the appointment of Balvart Mehta Study Team in 1957 and in introducing the scheme of democratic decentralization popularly known as Panchayati Raj in 1959 on its recommendations. The Panchayati Raj was inaugurated by him at Nagaur in Rajasthan on October 2, 1959. Again it was S.K. Dey who got Panchayati Raj institutionalized in almost all the states of Indian Union as the Union Minister of Community Development Corporation and Panchayati Raj from 1956 to 1966.

The most novel idea of S.K. Dey was that of The Three Pillars of Democracy. According to him, these were Community Development Cooperation and Panchayati Raj. While, the Community Development was needed for Social Democracy, the cooperative movement was required for Economic Democracy and the Panchayati Raj needed for Political Democracy. Dey was of the view that parliamentary democracy in India will not be strong unless all the three pillars are created. It may be recalled that he wanted the creation of co-operative federation in different economic activities. In addition to the public sector and private sector, he favoured the promotion of co-operative sector of Indian economy. It appears that S.K. Dey had been greatly influenced by the Gandhian concepts of Participatory Democracy as well as Party-less Democracy. He did not want political parties to contest elections for Panchayati Raj Institutions. Moreover, he was against direct elections. Like Mahatma Gandhi's plea that people elect through consensus the members of Gram Panchayat and Gram Panchayat elect them of Mandal Panchayat. The Mandal Panchayat members elect District Panchayat and the District Panchayat members elect members of Provincial Panchayat and they elect members of Parliament. In the same way, S.K. Dey wanted Gram Sabha to be organically linked up to the Lok Sabha, he wanted Gram Sabha to elect the Gram Panchayat member of Gram Panchayat to elect members of Gram Samiti, Gram Samiti elect the members of Zila Parishad and Zila Parishad elect members of Lok Sabha. As a matter of fact, S.K. Dey wanted that democracy in India should be based on Gram Sabha.

Conclusion

On the basis of above discussion and analogous, we can safely conclude that S.K. Dey was an original political thinker who made a significant contribution to Modern Indian Political Thought. However, his contribution has remained eclipsed by Nehru and was subsequently neglected because his idea of democratic decentralization was not palatable. Successors of Nehru, particularly his daughter, Indira Gandhi did not share his enthusiasm for Panchayat Raj¹¹. In the present context there is an urgent need for an in-depth and objective study of his ideas as it may be helpful in teaching the problems which have emerged in India in the era of liberalization, privatization and globalization.

References

1. According to Singhvi LM. In the last few years, he and I made a common cause for a Constitutional Amendment. In 1973, I think, Jaya Prakash Ji asked me to Chair a Committee to draft a Constitutional Amendment for providing Panchayati Raj Institutions the status of third tier of government. S.K. Dey was a Member of the Committee. In 1973-74, when we worked together, I could see that remarkable quality of an engineer who was able to accept the failure in the design of a system. He felt that it was a mistake not to emphasize this aspect of self government in full measure". Refer to, "Tributes to S.K. Dey in Community Development and Panchayati Raj, Report of a Seminar, India International Centre, New Delhi, 1990, 8-9.
2. Jain LC. What is known as Nilokheri to me is far more important than the rest of what is called Community Development and other activities. That is a different sphere all together. At that moment when we were really short of ideas and there was despair, S.K. Dey lit a lamp and Nilokheri got together. S.K. Dey's contribution has always remained a flame as it were, with both heat and light because he was a very dynamic person. Every time I went to Nilokheri, I found him in a shorts and *banian*, out in the field with all the workers. That was his spirit. Ibid, 9-10.
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9. For these concepts, refer to Varma VP. Modern Indian Political Thought, Luxmi Narain Agarwal Educational Publishers, Agra, 1993, 596-602.
10. Dey SK. op cit, 5.
11. Mehrotra SR. Jawaharlal Nehru: A Reassessment, in Suneera Kapoor (Ed.), Thought and Vision of Jawaharlal Nehru, Anamika Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2005, 21-31.