

Gandhiji Gram Swaraj Decentralisation

Context and Content

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Swaraj in Exile: The Case of Tibetan Settlements in Bailakuppe, Karnataka

Joanna P Coelho

This article attempts to elucidate how Mahatma Gandhi's ideas on Gram Swaraj have been the basis around which Tibetan refugees in India have organised themselves. The arrival of thousands of Tibetan refugees in India began with the escape of the XIV Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso to India in March 1959. When a symbiotic national community with specific political and geo-cultural boundaries gets dismantled, it leads to the collective construction of a sense of community among the members of the former national community. Anticipating a long period in exile, the Dalai Lama decided to give priority to a more permanent rehabilitation in the form of settlements with facilities to enable all Tibetans to live in homogenous communities. Modelled along Gandhiji's views on gram swaraj, these settlements were self-sufficient with schools, monasteries and livelihood avenues for the Tibetan refugees. The aim behind relocating the refugees into these exclusive settlements was a prevention of assimilation to the country of refuge and a preservation of their Tibetan identity and culture, so

that not only the current generation, but also the succeeding generations would be prepared to take on the responsibility for the Tibetan struggle.

With its focus on the two Tibetan settlements in Bailakuppe, the objectives have been twofold i.e to understand the community's efforts at practising direct democracy in exile and to delineate the various organisations that helps the settlements in sustaining gram swaraj.

Thus by examining the practice of community governance adopted by the Tibetan settlements in India, this paper seeks to show how Mahatma Gandhi's advocacy for 'a village- based political formation fostered by a stateless, classless society' found a ready votary in the Tibetan refugee settlements in India.

From Village Republic to Gram Swaraj

Ideas pertaining to Gram Swaraj have always been part of the Indian ethos. Since early Vedic times, the village was considered the basic unit of administration in India. Pandit Nehru attributed this system of village self- government to be the foundation that gave strength to the Aryan polity. Although Indian village government has never been democratic in Western terms, there was a sense in which the whole body of villagers took their part in village affairs (Wade: 1987). Inscriptions recorded on the walls of the Sundaravarada temple in Kanchipuram documents a written constitution that dealt with elections to a village assembly around 750 AD (Lokraj Andolan). Included in the inscriptions were qualifications required of contesting candidates, circumstances under which a candidate would be disqualified, right of public to recall the elected members when they failed to discharge their duties properly, etc.

These village republics of India were part of the Indian political and social landscape until the Mughal rule and the later arrival of the East India Company. In 1830, the then acting Governor General of India, Sir Charles Metcalfe (Metcalf:1995) wrote:“ the village communities are little republics, having nearly everything that they want within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations...This union of village communities, each one forming a separate little state in itself, has, I conceive, contributed more than any other cause to the preservation of the people of India through all the

revolutions and changes which they have suffered, and is in a high degree conducive to their happiness, and to the enjoyment of a great portion of freedom and independence. I wish, therefore, that the village constitutions may never be disturbed.”

But as the centralising hold of the East India Company increased, the centralisation of all executive and judicial powers in the hands of the British bureaucrats diluted the village republics of their age-old powers and influence. During the nationalist struggle, Gandhiji's attempts at nation building were rooted in the concept of a confederation of villages. After Independence, this trend set in by the British, was continued by the Indian administration. This is because Pandit Nehru, influenced by his experience of partition, approached nation building and national reconstruction as primarily top down. For this he assigned a central role to the states. Ambedkar's condemnation of villages as a sink of localism and a den of ignorance and narrow mindedness and communalism (Ambedkar: 1948), also helped consolidate the marginalisation of Gandhi's views on and aspirations for village republics. A mere formal acceptance of the idea of local autonomy and local self-governance was reflected in the incorporation of village panchayats in the directive principles of the Indian Constitution (Behar and Kumar: 2002). Subsequently in 1959, the institution of Panchayati Raj was created by Pandit Nehru which set up local democracy at the district, block and village level. However the Panchayati Raj proved to be the proverbial God that failed on account of several reasons, prominent among which was the hostility of political leaders and bureaucracy (Borah :2012).

The real impetus to Panchayati Raj was given by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. Influenced by Gandhiji's ideas on gram swaraj, it has achieved some measure of success. In January 2001, the Madhya Pradesh Government added the word gram swaraj to the Panchayati Raj Act. Gram swaraj was claimed to be a new system of local-self governance, which moves from indirect to direct democracy. But it has so far not been very effective. Gandhiji's dream of a stateless democracy attained through gram swaraj has remained unfulfilled with the Panchayati Raj system of modern India.

Gandhi And Village Republics

Actually, neither was the picture of gram swaraj as conceived by Gandhiji a resurrection of the old village panchayat. Rather it was the formation of independent village units of swaraj in the context of the present day world. Being a practical idealist, Gandhiji realised the practical usefulness of the ideal of Stateless Democracy, which is not the “withering away of the State but “scattering of the State” (Vyas 1962: 8). In Hind Swaraj, he elaborates his idea of Gram swaraj:

“My idea of village swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of it’s neighbours for its own vital wants, and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity. ..Here there is perfect democracy based upon individual freedom. The individual is the architect of his own Government.”

In his conception of village swaraj, he specifies that the village’s first concern should be to grow crops for food and cloth. It should have a reserve for cattle, recreation, playground, village theatre, schools and activity that is conducted on a cooperative basis.

Though Gandhiji himself says that there is nothing inherently impossible in the picture of village swaraj of his conception, the Indian State has been struggling to come towards Gandhiji’s vision of gram swaraj. The failure has not been one of implementation alone. The philosophy and institution of the Panchayati Raj themselves are quite faulty in comparison with those of Gram Swaraj (Bhole). Although increasingly more and more people are now thinking of gram swaraj as an alternative social paradigm, many of them still do not have the confidence and courage to accept and implement it whole heartedly in its true nature (Bhole). Given this scenario where not only India, but various countries around the world have been unsuccessful in fully implementing Gandhiji’s idea of gram swaraj, it is interesting to note that this institution has not only been accepted as an ideal by a refugee community, but has been the basis of successful sustenance and development of the community in exile. The adoption of Gandhiji’s ideas on gram swaraj is just one of the many influences that Gandhiji and the Gandhian way of life has had on Tibetans and the Tibetan cause.

Gandhi's Influence on The Tibetan Cause

In the two versions of his autobiography *My Land and My People* (1962) and *Freedom in Exile* (1990), the fourteenth Dalai Lama writes of the influence he felt from Gandhiji's life when he visited the Rajghat on the first day of his first visit to India in 1956. He writes in *Freedom in Exile* (1990):

"I made a pilgrimage to Rajghat...where Mahatma Gandhi was cremated,... felt grateful also to be in a country that had adopted ahimsa...to me, (Gandhi) was – and is- the consummate politician, a man who put his belief in altruism above any personal considerations. I was convinced too that his devotion to the cause of non- violence was the only way to conduct politics."

In a foreword to Gandhiji's biography, "My Life is My Message" the Dalai Lama, who dedicated his Noble Prize to Gandhi, admitted that as a young man, he was deeply impressed by Mahatma Gandhi's principles of non-violence and ahimsa, as well as his simple living in accordance with Indian philosophy. The Dalai Lama has made Gandhiji's teachings of non-violence, ahimsa, as well as his ideas of Hind Swaraj as the guiding principles of the Tibetan struggles in exile. He has received praise as well as criticism for his insistence on ahimsa. Today Hind Swaraj is alive as a vision for freedom of a struggling Tibetan nation. Samdhong Rimpoche, the Tibetan Government in Exile's first Prime Minister has also published his Satyagraha manifesto, where he proposes the Tibetans should go back to Tibet and practice Satyagraha against the Chinese.

While Gandhiji's principles of ahimsa have been the more visible aspect of Gandhian influences on Tibetan struggle, Gandhiji's doctrines on gram swaraj have been an integral component to the Tibetan cause in exile. In his acceptance speech as Prime Minister on September 5, 2001 Prof Samdhong Rimpoche stressed that Tibetans need to establish a non-violent society to serve as a model for the rest of the world. He said "In order to do this, we should first develop a culture of ahimsa in our exile communities. We can begin by designing projects for non-violent means of livelihood in the exile communities...In short, I intend to promote the Gandhian concept of Gram Swaraj in our settlements" (<http://www.tibet.ca/en/library/wtn/archive/old>).

In this paper, two Tibetan settlements in Bailakuppe/ Karnataka, to observe how gram swaraj forms the bedrock of those two settlements. The specific focus has been on how the Tibetan refugees in Bailakuppe practice direct democracy in exile.

Refugees as the Victims

While the notion of refugees existed since Biblical times, refugee formation is largely a twentieth century phenomenon. It is often a direct consequence of the attempts made by the newly independent countries in Africa and Asia who transplanted the Western ideal of nation state in their own territories. The modern nation state with its homogenising principle led to the ideal of a unified cultural identity. Those that refused to be homogenised were looked upon as the 'other'. In its extreme, this intolerance of difference led to a situation where people were forced to flee their motherland and become refugees.

The persecution and alienation that defines the refugee, both in his home and host country, give the impression that a refugee is condemned to dictates beyond her/his control. While the refugees are victims of statecraft and the discursive power of nationalism and human rights, they are at the same time active agents of social transformation. They try to counter the experiences of loss, marginality and displacement by developing a sense of diasporic consciousness. The paper, has examined how the Tibetans, through their Government in Exile, have been successful in developing this sense of diasporic consciousness to such an extent, that they have been able to preserve their otherness, their distinct identity and avoid assimilation with the Indian nation state. The practice of gram swaraj, followed in the Tibetan settlements played a pivotal role in creating, sustaining and promoting the Tibetan nation in exile.

Birth of Tibetan Refugees

The status of Tibet has been a contentious issue since the twentieth century. While China claims that Tibet was a part of its territory since the thirteenth century, its current stand on the issue took shape only after the People's Republic of China (PRC) came into being. To question the legitimacy of Tibet's incorporation into PRC is to question the legitimacy of the idea of the Chinese State as constructed by the Chinese

Communist Party; it is to raise questions against the cultural and political nationalism that has been fostered within the PRC and has fundamental bearing on the identity of modern China (Sperling: 2004). The Tibetan position on its relationship with China and on the Chinese invasion, keeps changing in an attempt to build a vision of Tibet that reflects the new sense of nationalism that grew out of the 1959 revolt and the years of exile that followed. Discussing Tibet's status *vis- a-vis* China, and the intricacies of what Tibetans see as invasion, are beyond the scope of this presentation. This presentation suffices to say, after China occupied/ liberated Tibet in 1949, in 1950 the People's Republic Army of China, marched into and occupied Tibet. For nine years there were fruitless attempts at negotiations between the Governments of China and Tibet. In March 1959, fearing kidnapping and assassination, the XIVth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, fled to India. Following the Dalai Lama, thousands of Tibetans fled to India as refugees.

Construction of Tibetan Identity

Of the millions that have fled to their homeland, seeking refuge and a new life in host societies the world over, the Tibetans stand out. They have taken refuge in a neighboring country which has traditionally been their spiritual guru, not as individuals alone, but rather as a national polity that has escaped the destruction taking place in Tibet. Though the Tibetans were forbidden from using India as a base to fight their political battle against China, they were given *carte blanche* in their struggle against perceived cultural extinction. When a symbiotic national community with specific political and geo-cultural boundaries gets dismantled, it leads to the collective construction of a sense of community among the members of the former national community. In an alleged attempt to compensate for his alleged personal guilt and to placate the critics of his pro-China policy, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Indian Prime Minister took personal interest in facilitating the Tibetans in their goal of rehabilitation of the Tibetan refugees, and constructing and sustaining their collective identity through language and religion. The Dalai Lama with the support of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) soon got on with the task of the creation and sustenance of a unified Tibetan community in the face of disparity with regard to the Tibetan populace. Gandhi's concept of gram swaraj

became the basis around which they reorganized and governed themselves in the various Tibetan settlements. This in turn, facilitated the processes of direct democracy that has become one of the hallmarks of the Tibetan community in exile.

Direct Democracy as Part of Exile

Forsdyke (2005: 2) draws a linkage between exile and political power in the Archaic and Classical period in Greece. He argues that the revolution by which the democracy was established was a direct outcome of a particularly violent episode of intra-elite politics of exile. Though exile played an important role in the legitimation of democratic rule in the initial stages of democracy, in contemporary times democracy is associated largely with the nation states. In fact, democracy is seen as the most appropriate form of governance for the nation state.

In this context, the Tibetan case appears unique, as democracy arrived with the dissolution of Tibet as a separate entity. Prior to 1959, Tibet was a theocratic state with the supreme political power vested in the Dalai Lamas, though of course in practice there was a certain amount of decentralisation. The exile community therefore had no direct experience of democratic governance when it came to India, and the participatory democracy developed by the Dalai Lama and Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) since 1960 was the first in Tibet's history. In my opinion, the democracy practised by the Tibetans in exile is more of a direct democracy.

Frechette (2007: 98) argues that the Tibetan exiles are in a democratic transition, as they have embraced democracy as a normative ideal towards which they are reforming their political system. Though not legally recognised by any country in the world, including India, the Tibetan case is a social fact of how a Government can provide legitimacy and function in exile. Despite the limitations brought about by their status as refugees, their exile position hastened their efforts at democratisation. The absence of entrenched landholding interests in exile, which enabled new structures of governance to emerge, favourable host government policies, as well as considerable international aid, contingent at times on democratic reforms, assisted their efforts (Frechette 2007: 99).

The Tibetan Government in exile was re-established by the Dalai Lama with the setting up of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) at Dharamshala in the Himalayan State of Himachal Pradesh in India in 1959. The aim was to organise the refugee community and to guide the Tibetan struggle for self-rule. In many ways, the Tibetan refugee community is one of the most successful refugee communities in the world. A large part of the credit for the Tibetan success story should go to the efforts made by the CTA.

The CTA comprises of the *Kashag*, i.e. the cabinet with eight ministers called *kalon*, with the *Kalon Tripa*, that is the Prime Minister (now called *Sikyong*, i.e. political leader) as Chief of Cabinet. Whereas earlier the Dalai Lama played a crucial role in these elections, now these elections are more democratic, with the *Kalon Tripa* being directly elected by the people. In 1963 a Constitution - the Charter of the Tibetans in Exile - was adopted by the Assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies (ATPD). The Assemblies are structured around the Tibetan homeland, namely Kham, Amdo and U Tsang, rather than the exile communities. But once they are elected, they then represent Tibet as a whole. Mr. Lhasang Yeshi, an MP in the present Tibetan Government in Exile explained to me the logic of structuring the Assemblies along the Tibetan homeland. "Initially that is the main representation, the main symbol of Tibet, and I think that day as well as today the importance is still there because China always says Tibet is just Tibet Autonomous Region. So we say that Tibet includes the three provinces. So it makes a huge difference. It is a huge political statement. Anyway once we are elected we work for Tibet as a whole. So practically, as we do not represent any specific constituency, and get no MP development funds, having the Assemblies represent areas in Tibet, does not affect the development of the settlements in exile."

The people are directly involved even in the elections to the Assemblies (The elections to the Assembly are held in two stages: the preliminary and the final stage. In the preliminary stage, every voter could propose the name of maximum of ten persons on a ballot paper. A consolidated list of the top twenty candidates is drawn up at the settlement level, with twenty percent of the seats reserved for women

(Subramanya 2011: 66). The final stage is conducted in a similar fashion with additional mode of candidate selection, i.e. voluntary candidates.

The exile administration controls such resources as school admission, health care benefits, pensions, scholarship opportunities, direct aid to the desperately poor, and employment in the administration and its many businesses. Through this framework, the exile administration is able to govern effectively in the absence of its own coercive apparatus (i.e., police, army, courts and prison system). One of the primary functions of the CTA is to oversee the functioning of the refugee communities in the various settlements.

Case of Lugsung Samdupling

Following the Dalai Lama, eighty thousand Tibetans fled to India. In the following years, the numbers kept on increasing. Once the refugees were given asylum in India, accommodating them and facilitating them to maintain themselves became a priority. Though initially most of the Tibetans were allotted road construction work along the Himalayan border, it was not a permanent solution. The work was not financially sustainable and it led to the problem of hundreds of unattended Tibetan children living exposed to dangerous conditions, while their parents worked on the roads.

Anticipating a long period in exile, the Dalai Lama decided to give priority to a more permanent rehabilitation, with facilities to enable all Tibetans to live in homogenous communities. With the help of the Indian Prime Minister, a number of settlements were established in different parts of India. While in the late 1950s, the refugees pouring into India from Tibet were accommodated in various places in North and North Eastern India, in the 1960s it was decided that to relocate them to various settlements in South India. Such a relocation of the refugees served several purposes: it was a means to further rural development in India, it took some tension off the border, and it made the refugees easier to monitor, control, and register (Magnussum et al 2008: 6).

As of today, there are a total of fifty-eight agricultural, handicraft-based or scattered settlements of Tibetan refugees in India, Nepal and

Bhutan. Each settlement is administered by a settlement officer, who in turn is guided by the CTA, the Local Tibetan Assembly and the laws of the host country. Modelled along Gandhiji's ideas on gram swaraj, these settlements are self-sufficient with schools, monasteries and livelihood avenues for the Tibetan refugees. The logic behind the establishment of self-sufficient settlements was to enable the Tibetans to become economically self-sufficient within five years, thus reducing India's economic burden. The Indian Government also thought that it would help India's food needs by bringing unused land under cultivation (Kharat 2003:55). Relocating the refugees into these exclusive settlements was a prevention of assimilation to the country of refuge and a preservation of their Tibetan identity and culture, so that not only the current generation, but also the succeeding generations would be prepared to take on the responsibility for the Tibetan struggle. As mentioned earlier, the settlements were organised and governed along the principles of gram swaraj. In the following section of the paper will elucidate how the Mahatma's ideas on gram swaraj have been actualised in the settlement.

The Formation

When Pandit Nehru wrote to the Chief Ministers of State Governments asking them if was land available in their territories for the resettlement of Tibetan refugees, he received a positive response from the Government of the then Mysore State. Subsequently three thousand acres of forest land was identified in Bailakuppe for an initial number of three thousand refugees. In December 1960, the first group of Tibetan refugees were sent from various transit camps in North India, to Bailakuppe in the then Mysore State. While the beginning was tough with Tibetans having difficulty adapting to the lower altitude, different climate, topography, and the constant threat from the large number of wild animals, with the combined efforts of the Government of Mysore, the Indian Central Government the UNHCR and the Tibetans themselves, the Tibetan settlements of Lugsung Samdupling was established. A few years later another settlement Dickey Larsoe, was built adjacent to it. Both these settlements are referred to as Bailakuppe, the name of the Indian town that is closest to the settlements. Though their arrival was seen by both the refugees and the

local community, as being a temporary feature, after over fifty years, the refugees are now a greying community. Overcoming initial insecurity, reluctance and the topographic and climatic harshness, it has now evolved to be a model refugee settlement. It is the resilience, persistence and hard work of the Tibetans, support from the host Government, as well as the model of gram swaraj adopted by the settlement, that have made the two Tibetan settlements in Bailakuppe today one of the largest and most developed settlements of Tibetan refugees in India.

Once they arrived in 1960, the Tibetans slowly cleared the once thick forest, land with the help of tractors and other equipment provided by the Government of India. One agency that contributed immensely in the initial resettlement and development of the Tibetan settlement was the Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency (MYRADA). Inspired by Gandhiji's concept of village republics, MYRADA began as a voluntary effort to rehabilitate Tibetan refugees in India. The assistance given by MYRADA was largely technical- construction, engineering, agricultural and veterinary sciences and ground water exploitation. This programme, which also involved an establishment of a school, Cauvery Village Project (CVP), came to an end in 1978 with over twenty thousand Tibetans, successfully settled. The administration of the school as later handed over to the Central School for Tibetans.

Mahatma's ideas

Considering that Government is the best which governs the least, Gandhiji saw village republics as promoting a stateless democracy. In village swaraj, the village being the decentralised small political unit endowed with the fullest powers, every individual will have a direct voice in the Government (Gandhi 1962: 9). In the settlements, the Tibetans have their own administrative system, functioning under the CTA. The Settlement Officer (SO) appointed by the CTA looks after the immediate needs of the refugees and also functions as a means of communication between the CTA and the Tibetans. The SO also implements some of the programmes of the CTA such as training programmes for technical education and informs them of the

programmes and policies of the government -in-exile (Tarodi 2011: 9).

All the administrative posts are democratically elected, and ultimately accountable to the CTA. There is a three-layer hierarchy with the *chupon* or 'head of ten' at the base. The *chupon's* duty is to organise labour for community projects, organise festivals and hear grievances. At the next level in the hierarchy, is the camp leader. Every year, on an appointed date, the camp members gather at the settlement office and each member writes his or her preference on a ballot paper. The elected camp leader, works without monetary benefit for one year. He or she is the intermediary between the SO and the camp member. In case of any problem, the *chupon*, or the camp member has to first contact the camp leader. There is also the Tibetan Justice Commission situated in the settlement. This Commission is equipped to handle all non-criminal cases. The Commission entertains a complaint only if it has evidence that the person has first attempted to get the problem resolved at the level of the *chupon*, camp leader and lastly the Settlement Officer.

A Self Sufficient Village

In explaining his concept of village republic, Gandhiji had said that the unit of society should be a village or call it a manageable small group of people who would, in the ideal, be self-sufficient (in the matter of their vital requirements) as a unit (Gandhi 1959: 8). The Tibetans settlement of Lugsung Samdupling is self-sustained and manages its own affairs. The settlement has houses that were built by the Indian Government for the refugees that came initially to the settlement. Apart from the houses, each family (of five members) was given five acres of land. The settlement also has two schools- one Central Tibetan School, whose administration has recently shifted from the Government of India to the CTA; and TCV, a school run entirely on sponsorship and managed by the Tibetans themselves.

Gandhiji stressed the contribution of cooperatives in the smooth functioning of gram swaraj. In 1964, the Tibetan Cooperative Society was registered under the Karnataka Cooperative Society Act. This Society is the political and economic nerve centre of the Bailakuppe settlement and its functioning is a classic example of the principle of

direct democracy. There are four sections of the Lugsung Samdupling Cooperative. One is IOC, Indian Oil Corporation petrol bunk; there is also a workshop for tractor and for the mechanic and for lithe. Third, the cooperative also has supermarket, and the fourth section comprises handicraft. Earlier, the Cooperative also had the profitable section of poultry farming. But, wanting the settlement to be associated with Gandhiji's principle of ahimsa, the Dalai Lama requested that the poultry project be abandoned. Today an Old Age home for elderly Tibetans stands in the same building that housed the former poultry farm.

Hygiene and Sanitation

In the earlier years of exile, unaware of the health, hygiene and sanitation requirements of a hot and humid country like India, a large number of Tibetans fell sick and even died, due to lack of hygiene. In course of time, they adopted earlier unknown hygiene and sanitation practices. Paying heed to the centrality of health and hygiene in Gandhi's notion of an ideal village, the Tibetan settlements also stressed on this dimension of settlement life. The Settlement Officer informed that the cooperative society has water purification plants. For a payment of just one rupee per litre, one can get access to purified drinking water. The settlement office also has a project concerning overhead tanks, wherein each camp has an overhead tank.

Whenever any camp member faces any difficulty pertaining to health, hygiene and sanitation, he contacts his *chupon*, who then with the help of the camp leader, tries to address the problem. If it cannot be handled at their level, the camp leader then informs the Settlement Office. Depending on the seriousness of the problem, the SO may even request the CTA to constitute a project to deal with the issue. In this way, from time to time, the settlement has had various small and big projects to deal with health and sanitation issues of the settlement.

Religion and Settlement

Mahatma Gandhi did not see religion as separate from politics. "My devotion to the truth has drawn me to the field of politics, and I can say without the slightest hesitation and yet with all humility that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not

know what religion is" (Gandhi cited in Ardley 2002: 68). Tibet's entire political process has always been based on the intricate link between politics and religion and this is seen in the settlement as well. Religion is a pervasive feature throughout the settlement. Prayer flags, stupas, small shrines dot the landscape. The four sects of Tibetan Buddhism, Kagyu, Nyigma, Sakya and Gelup, each have their monastery in the settlement. Apart from the prayers and religious rituals conducted regularly by individuals and families, the Settlement Office, on the directive from time to time organises community prayers. The SO explains the procedure, "whenever the directive comes from the CTA or His Holiness's Office, we just put it back in the envelope and along with some introductory letter we give to the camp people. So they will read out to the people. And they make timelines. So certain periods they put aside in a day to recite poojas." Thus in the settlement, a fine balance is maintained between religion, governance and democracy. The settlement also strictly practices Prohibition. Despite being a tourist destination, alcohol is not served in any of the restaurants in the settlement.

Conclusion

The preceding paragraphs elaborate how the Tibetan settlement at Bailakuppe tries to put into practice the various directives given in Gandhi's gram swaraj. The Tibetan administration sees this implementation of gram swaraj as an experiment in practicing Gandhism which they hope to repeat in Tibet once they return.

The experience of mankind testifies to the fact that collective life is more genial, varied and fruitful when it is concentrated in small units and simpler organisations (Vyas 1962: 7). Since her Independence, India has been trying to implement Gandhi's ideas on gram swaraj. But as we have noted, at the beginning of this paper, our implementation has fallen short of the ideal. The recent attempts to introduce the word gram swaraj in the Panchayati Raj Act, has given new hope. Yet, we have a long way to go, and the old challenges facing the full implementation of Gandhiji's ideals remain. The seriousness and success, with which a refugee community in India has adopted Gandhiji's ideas on gram swaraj, when we, the land of Gandhi, are still faltering, then makes an interesting irony. A further examination of the reasons for

this irony, would give us some insights into how we can ensure a better implementation of Gandhiji's ideas on gram swaraj in India.

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