

# ***Chaupal* As Multidimensional Public Space for Civil Society in India**

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*Chaupal* is a public place, fixed or changing, in the Indian villages where the villagers sit and discuss their problems, celebrate their pleasures, share the pains of an individual, family or a particular group, sort out their disputes with the consultation of the village elders and traditional *panches* (judges) and retain the communal harmony by maintaining tradition, norms, rituals etc., of village life. An attempt has been made in this paper to highlight the significance of *chaupal* as a public place for civil society in India. In order to trace the relationship between *chaupal* and the public space, the concepts of civil society, public space and public sphere are discussed in the first part of the paper; and in second part, deals with the role of *chaupal* as a platform of public space. As a sacred place with secular nature, *chaupal*, guarantees freedom of speech and expression to everybody in the Indian villages without any discrimination of his/her association with sex, religious affiliation, caste, rank, status, majority, minority etc. During the freedom movement and even after Indian became independent, this space and the concept of this space have been used by the freedom fighters, social animators, writers, filmmakers, politicians, planners of development, policy makers, change agents, local and central governments as platform or via for the dissemination of message for the benefit of the civil society.

## **Part - I: Concept of civil society and public space**

## **Part II: Chaupal as Multidimensional Public Space**

### **Part - I**

#### **Concept of civil society and public space**

##### **(I) Civil society**

What is civil society? Civil society has been universally seen as a necessary condition for modern liberal democracy (in Ernest Gellner's phrase, "no civil society, no democracy"). If a democracy is in fact liberal, it maintains a protected sphere of individual liberty where the state is constrained from interfering. If such a political system is not to degenerate into anarchy, the society that subsists in that protected sphere must be capable of organizing itself. Civil society serves to blame the power of the state and to protect individuals from the state's power.

In the absence of civil society, the state often needs to step into organize individuals who are incapable of organizing themselves. The result of excessive individualism is therefore not freedom, but rather the tyranny of what Tacqueville saw as large and benevolent state that hovered over society and, like a father, saw to all of its needs. In a nutshell, civil society can be described as interest groups trying to divert public resources to their favored causes, whether tribal development, women's and children's healthcare, or the protection of biodiversity.

Civil society, as declared by the **Universal Declaration of the Rights of People**, confirms a) right to existence for everybody; b) guarantees rights to the respect of its national and cultural identity for every individual; c) gives right to everybody to retain peaceful possession of its territory and to return to it if it is expelled; d) none shall be subjected because of his national or cultural identity, to massacre, torture, persecution, deportation, expulsion or living conditions such as may compromise the identity or integrity of the people to which he belongs; e) guarantees an imprescriptible and inalienable right to self-determination for everybody and it also confirms that an individual shall determine its political status freely and without any foreign interference; f) right is ensured for every individual to break free from any colonial or foreign domination, whether direct or indirect, and from any racist regime; g) every people is given right to have a democratic government representing all the citizens without distinction as to race, sex, belief or colour, and capable of ensuring effective respects for the human rights and fundamental freedoms for all; h) every individual is free to have exclusive right over its natural wealth and resources it has the right to recover them if they have been despoiled, as well as any unjustly paid indemnities; i) scientific and technical progress being part of the common heritage of mankind, every people has right to participate in it; and j) every individual has the right to a fair evaluation of its labour and to equal and just terms in international trade. Freedom and liberty to every individual without any discrimination, therefore, are the essential tools for a civil society.

What do we mean when we talk of freedom? First, there is a national freedom; that is, the ability of the citizens of a country to determine their own future, and to govern themselves without interference from outside power. Second, there is freedom from hunger, disease, and poverty. And third, there is personal freedom for the individual; that is, his right to live in dignity and equality with all others, his right to freedom of speech, freedom to participate in the making of all decisions which affect his life, and freedom from arbitrary arrest because he happens to annoy someone in authority - and so on.

## **(II) Indian society as civil society**

Is there a civil society in India? My answer to this question is yes. When we talk of civil society, an impression comes that it is a gift of the west to the east. This impression is a created impression. In the west, mainly in European countries, it is considered as a newborn baby of modernization and industrial revolution. The *Magna carta* (1215 AD), the *Westphalia Declaration*, *French Revolution* and *Freedom Movement in America* are considered to be the pillars of freedom of speech and expression and all individual freedoms that ensure an ideal civil society. Once developed, it diffused everywhere in the world from there including India. India is a wonderful country where the people of thousands of castes, all major religions and more than 427 odd Tribal communities have been living maintaining an exemplary communal harmony. It is rooted in its traditions. The thousands of years of Indian history confirms that we had civil society right from the Vedic period. Vedic hymns describe about egalitarian and democratic norms of their society. In this context some people's assemblies like *vidath*, *sabha* and *samiti* have been mentioned. *Vidath* was a general meeting of the *jana*[1] (whole community), which had redistributive functions. Vedic seers also described about *kilvis samprat* that means general consensus. In all the Vedic assemblies' decisions were taken on the basis of consensus only.

*Sabha* was a body of village elders and it assisted the *janasya gopah*. The etymological meaning of *janasya gopah* is the protector of the people or fellowmen as well as their cattle wealth. But in practice it was used for the *rajanya* i.e., ruler. *Samiti* was a general assembly in which all the members of the community participated. Its main function was to elect the ruler. The most remarkable fact about all these assemblies was that women also participated in it. *Sabha* and *samiti* had been depicted as the two daughters of Prajapati and especially *samiti* has been termed as *narista* that means a place where intellectual discourses or discussions can be made. *Sardh*, *vrat* and *gana* are the three other assemblies about them also we have a number of references. Mention can be made of *gosthi* that was like a modern days *Chaupal* in which discussions regarding day today socio-economic problems of village life were discussed. The Vedic seers used a fascinating term, *madhyamsiriv* i.e., in case of indecision or altercation in the assembly the elders should opt the middle path to maintain the harmony and solve the problems. So Vedic period assures a balanced and ordered civil society. Later also all rulers, political thinkers and seers tried hard to honor the individual as well as the group liberty.

According to Tocqueville, a modern democracy tends to wipe away most forms of social class or inherited status that bind people together in aristocratic societies. Men are equally free, but weak in their quality. Men are equally free, but weak in their equality since they are born with no conventional attachments. The vice of modern democracy is to promote excessive individualism, that is, a preoccupation with one's private life and family, and an unwillingness to engage in public affairs. Americans combated this tendency towards excessive individualism by their propensity of voluntary association, which led them to form groups both trivial and important for all aspects of their lives. This stood in sharp contrast to his native France, which was beset by a much more thoroughgoing individualism than the United States. As Tocqueville explained in *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, on the eve of the Revolution "there were not ten Frenchmen who could come together for a common cause." It was only by coming together in civil associations that weak individuals became strong; the associations they formed could either participate directly in political life (as in case of a political party or interest group) or could serve as "schools of citizenship" where individuals learned eventually carry over into public life.

The above description of civil society confirms the status of all Indians as the dignified members of a civil society.

### III. Habermas' contribution in public space and public sphere

Habermas, one of the principal exponents of the "second generation" Frankfurt School of critical theorists, predicated a great deal of his thinking on the nature of human rights with robust conception of the nature of rationality in the modern post-Enlightenment World. Jurgen Habermas' classic thesis *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962; trans. 1989) was that such a sphere emerged briefly among the bourgeoisie of 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe – in the coffee houses, salons, pizza huts etc., of London and Paris and informed by the emerging print media, the journals and periodicals of the day. Although it was in practice restricted to those qualified by property, education and leisure to engage in critical discourse, Habermas maintains that bourgeois public sphere embodied a more general principle of 'publicness': that rational debate in an open, critical and uncoerced context could produce public opinion as a democratic force, out of the personal views and opinions of private individuals.

Habermas maintains that it is not possible to return to classical rationality, but he is interested in extracting “emancipatory” element from modernity by means of the notion of “public space”. Habermas’ “theory of communicative action” is associated with a special segment of human rights jurisprudence pertaining to freedom from political domination with respect to normative argumentation. He wants to advance beyond the pessimistic views of rationality taken by the “first generation” critical theorists such as Adorno and Horkheimer. In their book, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer contend that reason, which was supposed to be an agent of human emancipation, became transformed in the philosophy of the Enlightenment into the antithesis of this. Reason became an agent of domination (e.g., the Nazi Holocaust). How did reason come to be associated with human emancipation at all? In ancient Greek thought, logos referred to human capacity for this “good life”. This might consist of Aristotelian virtue leading to eudaimonal, Platonic contemplation of the Form of Good, or Living in Stoic conformity to the Cosmos. Reason in the classical sense represented a way of reality human means to human ends. Yet during the Enlightenment, this association of reason with logos was abandoned. Rationality became characterized by instrumentalism... technical knowledge of how to attain ends but without the emancipatory knowledge of what the ingredients of a good life are. Reason was reduced to calculating about means, not philosophizing about ends. The intellectual project of the Enlightenment period, which held promise for bringing knowledge and enlightenment to humankind, yielded only the former. Habermas discusses how Max Weber, who recognized this “disenchantment” of the modern world, failed to solve the problem of what consequences would in fact result from the loss of reason qua enlightenment. For Weber, modernization represents not only loss of meaning, but also a loss of freedom. In this rationalized modern world, a “new polytheism” arises in which “different value orders of the world in insoluble conflict with each other”. The contemporary world faces a challenge. A unity not seen in the prevailing orders of the social world must be constructed. But how? In the ancient world, mythical polytheism solved the problem. Society’s competitive strife was personified as a divine struggle. Later on, religion hold out another answer by representing reality as it rationally organized hierarchy (“God’s in His heaven, all’s right with the world”). Weber relinquishes ‘such manifestations of naiveté, of course, seeing the legal system as rationalization of means end relations. Weber’s analysis leads him to conceive of disagreement about the proper ends for society as being a by-product of disillusionment. A plurality of irreconcilable value judgments about social goals leads law to become systematized by specialists who manipulate rules according to desired ends, whatever those ends happen to be. Habermas expresses his conception of law in the following words:

“Weber assimilates to the law an organized means applied in a purposive-rational manner, detaches the rationalization of law from the moral-practical complex of rationality, and reduces it to a rationalization of means-end relations.”

So, Weber’s theory of law provides no independent justification for the legal order as a whole. For Weber, bourgeois legal systems are characterized by positivity, legalism, and formality. Positivity is the expression of the sovereign’s will through law; legalism is sanctioning any behaviour which deviates from norms; and formality is the protection of private, free choice through law, plus the principle that what is not prohibited is permitted. Although these concepts express law’s function in facilitating bourgeois commerce, they fail to account for the normative dimension of law. Legal norms need justification independently of the particular conventional order out of which they arise. Habermas finds this post-conventional rational justification missing in Weber’s sheer “positivism”.

Habermas also observes that the separation of morality and legality effected in modern law brings with it the problem that the domain of legality as a whole stands in need of practical justification.

Habermas’ ideal “speech situation” supplies a device of legitimation for institutions that engender

unrepressed political discourse – through respect for the human rights of free speech, assembly, and expression – within a milieu of emancipatory rationality. Epistemologically, Habermas' analysis has a tripartite structure. Drawing from the notion that there are “anthropologically deep-seated interests”. Habermas distinguishes between human interests in prediction and technological control, practical political discourse (which produces individual and group understanding, and emancipation from the “illusion of necessity”. According to Thomas McCarthy, these cognitive interests have a “quasi-transcendental status”. Habermas' “theory of Communicative action “ is deeply democratic. It with this general political context that Habermas tries to account for the emancipatory faces of nationality in the modern world. This is done with the help of his concepts of public sphere and universal pragmatics, which form an integral part of his theory.

The “public Sphere” (*öffentlichkeit*) refers to a social space where consensus emerges on matters of political morality. Habermas notes that from the Renaissance period there evolved a public space, embodying the idea that normative statements must be argued and justified publicly, before an audience. According to one commentator, the public sphere is an area of society that arose during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Western Europe between the absolutist state and bourgeois society, in which discoursing private citizens could freely and critically discuss practical issues and note of the state. Institutionally the public sphere took the form of participatory democracy...

The public sphere presupposes an “ideal speech situation” (*ideale Sprechsituation*) in which each individual is recognized as a potential participant in public discourse. Thomas McCarthy, an expert of Habermas has summarized this notion brilliantly. According to Thomas McCarthy, structure is free from constraint only when for all participants there is a symmetrical distribution of chances to select and employ speech arts, when there is an effective equality of chances to assume dialogue roles. In particular, all participants must have the same chance to initiate and perpetuate discourse, to put forward, call into question, and give reasons for or against statements, explanations, interpretations and justifications... The condition of the ideal speech situation must insure not only unlimited discussion but also discussion which is free from all constraints of domination, whether their source be conscious strategic behaviour or communication barriers secured in ideology and neurosis.

Thus, Habermas argues that there is presupposed in every speech act an idealized communication liberated from domination. Although he concedes that the public space was the product of modern industrialized Western societies, he denies that it was the progeny of anyone particular culture. In this way, Habermas is able to sidestep the skeptical challenge of culture relativists that the public space lacks any claims to universalize

A further claim made by Habermas is that individual speakers in the ideal speech situation are held to a number of underline validity claims (*Geltungsansprüche*) that flow from what he terms universal pragmatics.

Habermas is of the opinion that the speaker must choose a comprehensible expression so that speaker and hearer can understand one another. So speaker must have the intention of communicating a true proposition.... so that the hearer can share the knowledge of the speaker. The speaker must want to express his intentions truthfully so that the hearer can believe the utterance of the speaker (can trust him). Finally, the speaker must choose an utterance that is right so that the hearer can accept the

utterance and speaker and hearer can agree with one another in the utterance with respect to a recognized normative background.

For Habermas the public sphere was mediator between the private concerns of individuals in their familial, economic and social life and the demands and concerns of social and public life. Habermas argues that the classical bourgeois public sphere as postulated by Kant understood itself as the structure that would wrench intellectuals and political exchange out from the limiting private confines of the academy and allow it to actively impact on public life. Habermas writes:

[A]lthough the center was the academy; the public sphere within which philosophers pursued their critical craft was not merely academic. Just as the discussion of the philosophers took place in full view of the government, to instruct it and give it things to consider, so too did it occur before the public of the “People”, to encourage it in the use of its own reason.

Access to the bourgeois public sphere was supposedly open to anyone who understood how to use his reason in public. The public sphere was thus intended as public forum within which, to use Habermas' Kantian language, informed and reasoning subjects could discuss matters of mutual concern and reach democratic concerns on issues that pertain to their community.

Even Habermas realizes that this was not how it worked. The public sphere through which public policy could be shaped was only theoretically open to ‘anyone who understood how to use his reason in public’, in practice, “only property-owning people were admitted to a public engaged in critical political debate’, the justification for this restriction, as Kant explains it through a logic that would be the envy of any contemporary conservative politician, is grounded in the assumption that the reasoning capacities property-owning people are somehow less likely to be burdened with special interests and agendas because they are “their own masters” in a way that property-less wage-earners are not. Habermas minutely explains:

“Only property-owning private people were admitted to a public engaged in critical political debate, for their autonomy was rooted in the sphere of commodity exchange...[for] while the wage-laborers were forced to exchange their labour power as their role commodity, the property-owning private people related to each other as owners of commodities through an exchange of goods. Only the latter were their own masters; only they should be enfranchised to vote—admitted to public use of reason....”  
Public propriety was thus linked to the possession of private property was thus linked to the possession of private property. The assumption is that property-less people could not (and must not) be trusted to have part in democratic process of forming rational consensus because they were in competition with one another for buyers of “their role commodity”, their labour power, while property-owners could “relate” to each other as owners of commodities unencumbered by any “special”, i.e., “private”, interests. Habermas continues:

“Consequently the property-less were excluded from the public or private people engaged in critical political debate.... In this sense, they were no citizens at all, but persons who with talent, industry and luck might someday be able to attain that status; until then they merely had the same claim to protection under the law as others, without being allowed to participate in legislation themselves.”

In this way, Kant excludes from politics and the public spheres all those sections of the population that do not participate in bourgeois politics because they cannot afford to. The bourgeois public sphere is thus from the onset a “mechanism of exclusion” that understands itself as precisely the opposite, a mechanism for democratic inclusion.

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[1] Rig Vedic literature elucidates about *panchjana* or *pachakrishtayah* (farmers)]

## ***Chaupal* as Multidimensional Public Space**

### **(I) Chaupal in Indian context in general and Mithila in particular**

What is chaupal? The chaupal is a common place, (constructed, semi-constructed, open space, the shadow of Banyan or peepal tree or a place in the orchard) owned by the all villagers. Even if the place belongs to some individual, he does not pose his authority to the panches. No individual or family can claim to have the individual ownership of the place identified as chaupal. It is place where villagers of all rank, age, castes, and faith sit together and discuss serious and non-serious issues. It is place where usually the village elders and traditional panches sit to solve the individual or communal disputes. Sometimes the chaupal has no fixed venue. The place where the village elders and panches sit to sort out some disputes or to take some collective decisions for the welfare of the villagers is called the chaupal. The chaupal is often identified with banyan tree.

As already discussed above, the concept of chaupal is not new to the Indian tradition; it has its root in the Vedic period. The Vedic administrators, perhaps, devised this universal system to maintain communal harmony and to ensure justice in every geographical and political area for every person with his satisfaction but within the limit of traditional as well as societal norms. Chaupal is place where all four doors or directions are open for everybody. Nobody, in its essentiality, can be denied the admittance of this place. It is a stage where everybody has the freedom irrespective of being associated with race, caste, religion, gender etc., to play the character without any fear and gets recognized by the jury members in a just and cordial atmosphere. I have substantiated my paper with the first hand examples of the villages of Mithila – a place located in the far away from the Indian big cities and modern world in eastern state of Bihar. The region is vast plane stretching north towards Nepal, south towards the Holly Ganga River and west towards Bengal. Present-day Mithila is covered by the districts of Champaran, Saharsa, Muzaffarpur, Vaishali, Darbhanga, Madhubani, Samastipur; parts of Munger, Begusarai, Bhagalpur and Purnea. In Maithili language a chaupal is called chaupari. The word chaupari has multiple meanings. It is used as seminary of scholars or students, as sacred place where some deities or other good spirits possesses a shaman or a diviner, a sacred place with the magical ability to cure the problems or diseases of the visitors. But one thing is common in all forms of the chaupari: it is open for everybody. It is a public place and anybody, male or female, young or old, member of high caste or lower caste, well educated or most illiterate, can visit in order to get his/her problem listened and also to get the justice (or reward) in a fear free atmosphere. I have observed a shaman behaving as a Chief Justice, Dharmadhikari in the chaupal when in trance during the dispute resolution. The disputants' come to him, touch the sacred soil of this place and as soon as the impersonator reaches into trance the disputants narrate their problem truthfully. Unlike modern courts they don't cook any story. The advocates, wearing black coats and white tie or any legal agent, has no role to play here. Cases or the causes of dispute are narrated in a very natural and realistic style. Both the involved parties keep doubtless faith on the judge – a person in trance, and the place. No unnecessary story or history of cause is cooked. Only truth is narrated before the deity. The shaman in trance listens to the truth of both the disputants in the open space in front of many people who are assembled their for various reasons and gives his judgement which is usually acceptable to the both the disputants. If required he takes the help of other people sitting there. In Mithila, chaupal is also called bramhaasthan, devasthan, gahwarasthan, mahankarasthan, devithan etc. People are associated with it culturally, socially and emotionally. It is secular because of its sacred characteristics. During my fieldwork I collected one Udasikirtan about Ramvanvas, banishment, episode in which a small reference of chaupari comes:

Hamra Rama lakhan dunu bhai



Banma ke bhejalak ge dai  
Kinka bina sunna rasoia  
Kinka binu chupadi  
Sita bina sunna rasoia  
Laxaman bina chapadi  
Banma ke bhejlak ge dai.

(We do not know who is responsible for awarding banishment to our dearest Rama and Luxmana. In whose absence the kitchen is looking empty; who has caused the deserted look of the chuapari (chaupal)! The kitchen room is having a deserted look in absence of Sita and people have stopped visiting the chaupal because Luixamana has to gone to the jungle with his brother Rama. Dear, do you know who has sent our Rama and Luxmana to the jungle?)

The place or seminaries where traditional gurus used to teach their disciples are also called chaupari in Maithili language. In early thirteenth century there was a great scholar of Indian philosophy in the village of Sarisabpahi in Madhubani, Bihar – Mahamhopadhyaya Bhavanath Mishra. He had a rare distinction of being a non-suppliant. Not only that he never asked for anything but he flatly refused the presents made by others, including the King of Mithila. Though a prey to the proverbial poverty of pandits, he was contented with what meager resources he had. It was therefore that he was better known in the public by an alias of his, Ayachi. He was a great philosopher gifted with originality of thought. People claim that there were over ten thousand students reading under his guidance in his native village, Sarisabpahi. He had a small piece of land; he was using it as his chaupari – seminary, locally known to the people as Ayachika chaupari. It was a real public space where the entry was open for all the bonafide, sincere and brilliant students of the region. The system of imparting education was a four-tier one. The great master gave lessons to ten selected extraordinary top ranking students, who, in their turn, trained ten students each and they taught ten students, who again taught ten students each. The King of Mithila never interfered in the academic activities, decision-making and selection of students in Ayachika chaupari and granted the autonomy of this seminary. The selection of students was democratic and it always took place without any bias. Is it not a wonderful example of public space in ancient Mithila? In order to choose the qualified grooms, the people of Mithila initiated a tradition of Vivah-sabha (marriage mart), probably in 14th century AD. The Maharaja of Mithila once again sanctioned this idea and accordingly 14 villages were identified to hold such sabhas: Saurath, Khamgadi, Partapur, Sheohar, Govindpur, Fattepur, Sajhaul, Sukhasaina, Akhrarhi, Hemnagar, Balua, Baruali, Samsaul, and Sahsula. While Saurath maintains the tradition, all other villages have discontinued holding the marriage mart. Almost every year, during suddha or auspicious days for the settling of marriages, thousands of Maithil Brahmans gather here. It is obligatory for every person desirous of marriage to get a certificate called asvajajanapatra (non-relationship) from a panjikara (genealogist), stating that there is no “blood relationship” (of course, fictitious blood relationship), as per the prescribed rules of prohibited degrees, between the two contracting parties. There is a fixed sitting place – dera – for every village in the sabha. The timing and number of days etc. are decided in a general meeting of the scholars and pandits of Mithila in a complete democratic atmosphere as according to the traditional astrological diary – pachanga. Usually it is held for seven to 15 days every year or sometimes twice in a year during the auspicious period (months). After reaching at the dera the father or guardian of a bride starts searching for a suitable groom with the help of his relatives and a ghatak (middleman). The negation takes place in a complete democratic manner. The grooms also arrive at their respective deras. Here everybody is treated equally and given opportunity to negotiate with the guardians of appropriate groom of the bride in a democratic style in the sabha, public space. It appears to be influenced with the concept of chaupal. As soon as we talk about chaupal it gives complete picture of traditional or conventional panchayat systems that have the capacity to keep real civil society in ordered or arranged style in Indian village.

## (II) *Chaupal* and Mahatma Gandhi

Mahatma Gandhi stands out in history as one of the greatest mobilizers of masses. It is one of the miracles to many of his biographers as to how he endeared himself to the millions of countrymen of various categories. His simple life, close association with the villagers, the sincerity with which he led them to social action, the idiom that he spoke, the loin cloth that he wore were genuine expressions of Gandhi's profound conviction to identify himself with the poorest of the poor. Mahatma Gandhi's own life became an exemplar of not only higher values of life but also the fountainhead of a new source of inspiration and passion for collective action. He decided to begin his journey of freedom struggle from the villages of India. His Gramaswaraj and Hindswarj are in fact rooted in Chaupal. He always wanted that power should be given to the local bodies of villages. In 1931 when he visited England in connection with the Second Round Table Conference, he was asked at Oxford, "what is the greatest obstacle in the way of Swaraj?" he replied, "It is the British officers' unwillingness to part with power and our incapacity to wrest power from unwilling hands." The whole concept of Panchayati Raj was evolved on the Gandhian principle of Gram Swaraj in which the village was made the centre for planning and implementation of development activities. In his ashrams and camps as well as in Khadi spinning and weaving centres his prayers and meetings and dining all held in a chaupal like atmosphere. The untouchables and the Brahmans all were eating together in a common place. All used to clean their toilets themselves. He opted to choose the conventional Indian measures for creating an atmosphere of civil society. He visioned Rama rajya instead of liberal society. Non-Hindus and a section among his admirers failed to understand what Gandhi meant by Ram Rajya. He said, "By Ram Rajya, I do not mean Hindu Raj, I mean by Ram Rajya, a Divine Raj, the Kingdom of God." His faith in God was unshakable. His God was not a personal god. Ram, for him, the almighty God which guides to noble action and whose presence can be felt everywhere. The Ram Rajya he was promoting was an ideal social order where an ideal king rules over his subjects without any distinction whatsoever. Truth, dharma and justice will be the dominant characteristics of such a society. Both the Pandit and the poorest of the poor will have equal say in the governance. Nobody will be discriminated against anybody. Gandhi's Ram Rajya was not a utopia where idealism alone will prevail. There was much in common, if one can stretch it, between Plato's Ideal Republic and Gandhiji's Ram Rajya though Tolstoy's influence on Gandhiji could also be discernible in formulating his vision of a new society. The major difference between the approaches of Gandhi and Plato is that while Plato is philosophical Gandhiji is pragmatic and down to earth a realist

For Mahatma Gandhi rights and duties are complementary and a citizen who is not conscious of his duties has no right to think of his rights. He believed, "There can be no Ram Raj in the present state of iniquitous inequalities in which only a few roll in riches, while the masses do not get even enough to eat." Does this Gandhian passion for social justice remain a far cry? No one knows. In the modern context a king like Ram, Gandhiji's ideal king, is the Custodian of not only the physical domain of the people but also the inspirer of his people of higher realms of spiritual attainments. To him, a real devotee of Ram is he who feels the pains and sufferings of the poor and the helpless. He rightly preferred to use Narsimha Mehta's devotional song, Vainav jana to tene kahiye jo pira parai jane re. He initiated changes that could really groomed the way for civil society in a conventional but innovative manner. Coming to his ashrams all people, mainly those with rural background felt to come in the native atmosphere and made themselves ready for freedom struggle in a peaceful manner. It was his connection with the rural setups that made truly the Father of the Nation, Rastrapita. He took three major initiatives: first, motivated people to fight for freedom struggle in a peaceful and non-violent way; second, created an atmosphere through his experiments for women's freedom and participation in all walks of life; third, fought for the evil practices of the traditional Indian society such as untouchability, child marriage etc. People liked his experiments. Men and women all became the committed members of his movements and swadeshi initiatives to get freedom from the colonial rule of India in peaceful and non-violent measures. Even non-literate Indians had no problem to understand his objectives of non-violence, satyagraha, civil-disobedience movement, self rule and spinning and weaving Khadi clothes. During my recent fieldwork in Mithila I collected a wonderful folksong from an octogenarian non-literate woman:

Ham nai pahirab meelak saari  
Ham ta charkha katbai na  
Baat karab gramswarajak  
Gandhi ke sunbai na  
Ham nahi pahirab meelak saari  
Hama ta charkha katbai naa  
Hamhu katbai piyo ji katthinha  
Dunu mile katabai na  
Ham....

(We will now never wear the mill-weaved saree, we would rather spin thread on spinning wheel. We will talk about the possibility of Gramsvaraj and listen to Gandhi. I will spin and request my dear husband also to spin; we will spin together.)

Naturally Gandhi was treated as the pradhan, mukhia or chief of the chaupal of India – a truly semi-global village. As early as 1936 he remarked, “I would say that if villages perish India would perish too. I believe and repeat times without number that India is to be found not in few cities but in its 7,00,000 villages.” His role was crucial in awakening the most dormant and stagnant sector of Indian society, i.e., villages of India.

Gandhi’s Gramsvaraj was not the resurrection of the old village but the formation of fresh independent units of villages having a self-sufficient economy. Self-sufficiency in basic needs was one of the fundamental conditions of Gandhian village reconstruction. Food, clothing and other basic necessities should be produced at the village itself, which would lead to full employment of almost each able-bodied person and would prevent the rural – urban migration in search of employment and better opportunities.

Illustrating the idea of Gramsvaraj Gandhi speaks:

“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 the 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 water works ensuring a clean water supply. This can be done through controlled wells or tanks. Education will be compulsory upto the final basic course. As far as possible, every activity will be conducted on cooperative basis. There will be no caste, such as we have today with their graded untouchability. Nonviolence with its technique of satyagraha and non-cooperation will be the sanction of the village community. There will 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. They will have all the authority and jurisdiction required. Since there will be no system of punishment in the accepted sense, this Panchayat will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate for its year of office. Any village can become such republic without much interference, even from the present Government whose sole effective connection with the villages is the exaction of village revenue. I have not examined here the question of relations with the neighbouring villages of the centre, if any. My purpose is to present an outline of village government. Here there is perfect democracy based upon individual freedom. The individual is the architect of his own government. The law of non-violence rules him and the government. He and his village are able to defy the might of a world. For the law governing every villager is that he will suffer death in the defence of his and his village’s honour.” His imagination of “Self Government” came to reality in 1992 when the Indian Parliaments gave rights, power and duties to the Gram Panchayats through 73rd amendment in the Constitution. Here the Panchayats are defined as “institutions of self- government.” The Act provides for a three-tier Panchayati Raj system at the village, block and district level with a fixed tenure of five years. Seats have been reserved in favour of SC/ST and women so as to enhance their participation. The Act

also provides for setting up a Finance Commission and an Election Commission.

### **(III) *Chaupal and Bhoodan/Gramdan movement***

As a true or the best disciple of Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave also tried to create an alternative agrarian civil society using the traditional system of India. He used the basic concept of Chaupal to begin his bhoodan (gift of land) movement in India in 1951. It was a very unique approach for alternative development. The major aim of this movement was to bring about a peaceful agrarian revolution in the country. The bhoodan movement consisted of collection of land from bog zamindars or landlords as gift and distribution of the same to the landless persons. According to him in a just and equitable order of society, the land must belong to all and that was why he did not beg for gifts but demanded a share to which the landless or poor are rightly entitled. For him the real owner of the entire land of this universe is nobody but almighty Gopala alone: Sabai bhumi Gopal ke. A therefore has no right according to Vinoba to get the ownership of the land. What they can do is to use or cultivate the pieces of land as per their requirement. It was an initiative to propagate the right thought, by which social and economic maladjustment could be corrected without serious conflict. Later, he went one step ahead and started motivating people to donate the entire village land as gramdan. This was a wonderful approach to create a real and just civil society in an alternative style. He gave his slogan of jai jagat: hail to the world. Like Mahatma Gandhi, Vinoba also decided to begin his journey from the village. And to get his entry into any village he took the help of chaupal and its panches.

In 1958 his followers came to know about a village in Munger district in North Bihar. This village, known as Berain, was a village of backward and underprivileged communities. The villagers did not have proper food and shelter. No job opportunity, no land to plough. Their economic condition was so wretched that many of them had to live on theft and robbery. Such behavior of people defamed it as a village of thieves and notorious people. Discussion and discord frequent quarrels, mutual jealousies marred the village, occasional conflicts permeated the social life of Berain. The villagers usually stole standing crops etc. There were 83 families before 1958. 36 families owned about 11 acres of land. Of these only one family had little over 4 acres and three had about 2 acres. People of Berain provided the necessary labor force for the big absentee zamindars. The favorites were given land on batai, share cropping. They were working as agents for the zamindars to manage cheap labor for cultivation and to help generate disharmony among people so that they might not unite. So long as there was discord among them, the zamindars were free to rule and control them. The rebel laborers were ill-treated. All of a sudden there was a famine-like situation in the village. It was difficult to manage even subhuman standard food one time a day. Some young men realized the grim situation of utter helplessness in Berain. Realizing the game plan of the zamindars they were collected in the village Chaupal and decided unanimously to approach the sarvodaya workers. In those days the bhoodan and gramdan movement was at its peak. The sarvodaya volunteers were moving from one village to other asking for land of one kattha in a bigha from the landowners for the landless people and organizing people for a change in the society to alleviate their pangs and to teach them how to stand against exploitation by peaceful means. On the request of the youths of the village they visited with Vinoba Bhave under the leadership of Laxmi Sahu, a sarvodaya leader and the Chairman of Khadi and Village Industries Commission of India on February 4th, 1958. The villagers warmly welcomed their visit with drums and other musical instruments. The next day i.e., on 5th February almost entire village: men and women, young and old, big castes and small castes, all gathered on a Chaupal and meeting took place under the banyan tree to listen to Vinoba and his associates. The lectures of Vinoba created a deep impression on them. It was finally decided to declare Berain as gramdan village. In a way Berain was declared first gramdan village in Bihar in 1958. A new beginning initiated to create a just, democratic and fearless civil society by the peaceful measures. The sarvodaya

workers, with the help of villagers created job opportunities in the form of charkha spinning, weaving, oil-pressing, collective farming; awareness on hygiene and sanitation, Basic school and other facilities and now within few months all starving villagers were able to eat their two meals and live in harmony without any fear. That took place because of the inspiration of Sarvodaya workers made it a model village. Many leaders and dignitaries of India and other countries visited this village to see the alternative model of development. Jayprakash Narayan, Sri Krishna Singh, the then Chief Minister of Bihar, Dr. Jakir Hussain, Vice President of India and many representatives of England, America Switzerland, Yugoslavia, Ghana and other countries visited and praised the efforts of villagers. Once I visited this village with my father who is a Gandhian in 1981.

Vinoba's experiment however did not work completely. It has many reasons. Emergency posed by Late Smt. Indira Gandhi compelled Jayprakash to join the active politics but Vinoba continued doing his experiments without any political intention. Many of his committed workers saw their disinterest in the Gramdan and Bhoodan movement. Government also did not take any serious step to patronize this great approach of alternative development. Vinoba was getting old. So it actually could not bloom the way Vinoba wanted it to grow but the concept was acknowledged and praised everywhere in the world.

#### **(IV) *Chaupal* and Hindi Literature**

In Hindi literature many writers have made attempts to make people aware about civil society using Chaupal as platform for conveying the message of change. Here I have taken three examples: two short stories – Pancha Parameshwar by Munshi Premchand, Panchalite by Phanishwarnath "Renu" and one novel Baba Bateshwarnath by Nagarjuna. The conventional panches are treated as god because in their decision both the disputants come with the hope to get their problem (dispute) solved. In most of the cases their hopes are fulfilled. Interestingly both the parties go back as friends after the decision given by the panches. Such situation is hardly seen or observed in constitutional courts in India or elsewhere in the world. All decisions are given in the Chaupal. The Indian villagers are emotionally as well as socially attached to it. Premchand has used this relationship in his story, Pancha Parameshwar very effectively. His intention is to propagate the message of egalitarian society through it in India. And the story was well received. Even today it is an integral part of school curriculum. That shows the significance of it. Phanishwarnath "Renu", known as anchalik kathakar, country writer, has tried to show how change, if required, is accepted in the conventional society in India through his well-known short story, Panchalite. Briefly speaking, it is a story about a low caste youth in a typical north Indian village who only knows how to operate and repair patro-max. This man falls in love with a village girl who does not belong to his caste and elopes with her to some unknown place. He comes back to his village after a few months but the panches sit in the Chaupal and do not sanction their marriage as social. They order him to live outskirt of the village. He abides by the decision and constructs his hut in the last boundary of the village. All of a sudden, the head of Gram Panchayat dies. The villagers and his family members decide to give a big feast in his memory. A huge number of people from the village and neighbouring villages are invited. Interestingly nobody knows how to operate panchalite. The village elders are now helpless because a feast of such time cannot be organized at night without proper arrangement of light. Now this man is summoned in the Chaupal before the panches. He is said to operate the panchalite but this man put a condition before them, "I will do this job if the panches are ready to accept my marriage as socially sanctioned and also permit me to once again construct my house in the village. " "I should also be permitted to dine with the village elders", he concluded. The panches finally take unanimous decision to admit him with his wife in the village. He is also allowed to dine with the villagers. This story shows, as has been stated earlier, how the conventional society accepts the change in its fold. The author tries to convey the message of unity, individual freedom to choose life partner without any caste prejudices etc., in a very convincing style. As the Indian people are rooted with the tradition of

panches and Chaupal, he uses it as a platform to reach to the audience.

Nagarjun in his novel, originally written in Maithili and later translated into Hindi, *Baba Batesharnatha*, tries to explain the cause of the lower castes and landless community of a particular village of Mithila. This village, however, is representative of almost all the villages of India. A small banyan tree is planted in a *gairmajarua aam*, common land in the village by a lower caste youth. This tree becomes a public space where everybody come and shares his pain and pleasure. It is also used a Chaupal. In the novel, this tree has been used as a grand old tree with a divine merit. It talks like an old man and tells the story of zamindars's exploitation of poor and lower caste people. It talks also about Gandhian approach and freedom struggle, it talks about creating a democratic society. This experiment of Nagarjuna liked by the readers in India.

#### (V) *Chaupal* and radio and television

Popularity of chaupal influenced the creative people to develop and transmit some programmes addressing development issues such as health, hygiene, community awareness drive on literacy, numeracy, untouchability, gender equality etc., through chaupal. Right from the very beginning, the All India Radio (AIR) has been airing such programmes. Most famous among them is called chaupal. Here, in this programme, men, women – of course from villages – participate and share the news and information with their fellow village brothers and sisters. This is even today one of the most interesting programmes of the AIR. Television has also been transmitting such programmes.

#### (VI) *Chaupal* in Indian cinemas

Many creative and intelligent directors and produces of Indian cinemas have very minutely read the psychology of the villagers of India and tried to used chaupal as a platform to convey their message of any form: gender equality, child labour, relationship, bad impact of caste system and untouchability jut to name a few. An innovative example of using chaupal as a platform to initiate change in order to create an atmosphere of women's freedom in a conventional society is seen in a well-known Hindi Cinema, *Ashta*. Mansi, a role played by Rekha, is a beautiful lady and a homely housewife of her Professor husband, Amar – a role played by Om Puri. She has a charming school going girl child. This family is a typical lower middle class urban family in India. The lady wants to buy many things for her husband, baby girl and for herself but the family income does not allow her to buy all that she desires to buy. Once she comes closure to a well-off neighbouring lady. She lives a very happy life and owns all possible luxuries – car, ornaments, costly clothes etc. Mansi admires her and dreams to have all that this lady owns. She repents on her poor economic status. The neighbouring lady is smart enough to read her psychology. Playing with the daughter of Mnasi, one day she comes to her house, enquires about them. Mansi likes her generosity and they are become very friendly.

One day she takes Mansi and her daughter in a market. Mansi's daughter selects a costly sandal. Mansi too likes it but she does not buy as it is beyond their imagination. The lady immediately buys that pair of sandal for her the baby girl. Initially Mansi opposes it to accept that gift from her but after a little persuasion the lady manages to convince her to accept this. Now, a new chapter begins.

With her behaviour and costly gifts, she creates a sense of guilty consciousness in Mansi's mind. She wants to have money so that she can live her life in a happy way. The neighbouring lady also buys some costly items for her. One day she takes her to a rich man who wants to have always-new women for his sexual urge, a role played by Naveen Nischal. This man reads her palms and creates a compulsive atmosphere and she ultimately surrenders herself before him, knowing that she is doing wrong. He develops physical relationship with her.

Mansi comes back to her house and repents for the entire episode. She does not want to repeat this incidence again but once trapped, it is hard to get rid off such trap. The neighbouring lady now takes her to the rich man regularly. She also threatens her if she does not go to the rich man she would let her husband know the entire episode. Helpless Mansi succumbs herself to her out of fear and societal prestige. Many times she thinks to confess all that she has done before her husband but social fear does not permit her to do so.

Poor Mansi gets an opportunity after her husband's journalist friend comes to their house from a remote village and shares his wonderful experience of how traditional justice given to a lady in a village chaupal by the elders and traditional panches. He narrates that in a remote tribal village a poor man with no means to cultivate and no opportunity to earn his livelihood decides to go to some urban city to earn but he has no money to travel. He goes to a village moneylender requesting him to lend a few hundred rupees loan on interest. The moneylender wants something, which can be mortgaged. The poor man has nothing to be mortgaged. The moneylender suggests if he can mortgage his wife he may take the loan and his wife would be returned as soon as he comes back and return the money, of course with interest. With little hesitation he agrees to his proposal and mortgages his wife. He goes to the urban city finds a job, earns and comes back to his village. On his return, he is informed that his wife is pregnant and the baby in her womb is moneylender's baby. He returns the money to the moneylender and says he is willing to accept his wife not the baby because the baby (in the womb) is not his baby it belongs to moneylender. The moneylender however is willing to wave off his entire loan and keeps the lady as his wife but for this also he is not agreed. Finally they go to the chaupal and request the panches for justice. It is a very hard issue to be settled. The meeting goes for many hours. The panches ultimately ask with whom she wants to live. Now she breaks her silence: "My husband has used me, say my body and mind, as a commodity. He has mortgaged me to get money. I am a human being; naturally I had gone to the house of moneylender with my emotion, flesh and womanhood. He has loved me, cared for me, which brought me much closer to him – mentally, physically and emotionally. We have shared our moments together and as a result I am now expecting a baby. The baby, I am expecting, belongs to the moneylender who is ready to accept me as his wife with my baby. My husband mortgaged me as ornament or a piece of land. Now once again he wants me to go to his house so that in future also he can use me as commodity. I, if allowed, would love to live with the moneylender as his wife because he has given me emotional healing, social recognition and worldly things."

Hearing her argument and getting it confirm from her first husband, the panches of chaupal give a historic decision and allowing her to live with the moneylender.

This story shows how the film media has used chaupal to initiate change in the society and honor the individual freedom of a woman, an essential element of civil society. This story encourages Mansi to confess the entire situation before her husband. She tells him the truth and as expected he forgives her as he knows Mansi has done this but her intention was not bad.

Similarly, in a recent Hindi Cinema, the GodMother, the young director has made a good attempt to use chaupal for propagating the role of women equal to men in all fields. He has tried to give the message that if need be an innocent and soft spoken housewife of a lower middle class family from a village can play all the tricks and weave good and bad plots to sustain her position and also very skillfully she can take revenge.

In the film, an honest village Sarpanch is killed brutally by his rival group with the help of professional killers and guns. The innocent wife of the slain Sarpanch now decides to jump in the politics. She does it. Knowingly, she develops her nexus with the professional killers, rowdy elements, and political guns and also begins smoking, drinking etc. She takes the help of anti-social elements in order to take revenge

from the killers of her husband and to create a position of woman in the politics.

The young director has perhaps taken the responsibility to paint the role of a female politician as a strong character who may take any tough, legal or anti-social, decision or direction to show her work in the society or the nation.

### **(VII) Use of *chaupal* in Indian judiciary: *Lok Adalat*:**

Delay in judgment, created, and it is still creating a sense of havoc, helplessness in the mind of common people, mainly poor and those living in the remote villages. In countless number of litigations both the parties were willing to sort out their problems, but because of lawyers vested interest and the unnecessary technicality of the official process of the courts they were not allowed to do so. In the states like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh many accused spent more than 20 years in jail without any judgment. And when final judgment came they were found innocent. Such situations compelled the social thinkers, judges, legal experts and specialists of our constitution to think for an attentive method by which the pending cases should be finalized immediately and chief Justice Bhagwati has rightly observed that courts in India should not be guided by any verbal or formalistic canons of construction but by the permanent object and purpose for which the Constitution has been enacted. He too has made law as a tool of social transformation for creating a new social order imbued with social justice. He made a prophetic observation, which has inspired the poor, the weak and the destitute to seek protection of the court against exploitation, injustice and tyranny. Chief Justice Bhagwati highlighted the new swing and significance of judicial process in these words:

“Today a vast revolution is taking place in the judicial process, the theatre of law is fast changing and the problems of the poor are coming to the forefront. The Court has to innovate new methods; and device new strategies for the purpose of providing access to the justice to large masses of the people who are denied their basic human rights and to whom, freedom and liberty has no meaning. (Quoted in Road of Justice, Public Interest Litigation and Media, p.2; 2001.)

And some other legal experts are of the opinion that too Indians need to resurrect the judicial conscience on the line of social philosophy envisaged in the Indian National Charter, rather than to the live of erstwhile British Colonial rulers. It has now become imperative for the Courts that their decisions are animated with the philosophy of human rights enshrined in the constitution. What is expected from the Courts is that Courts weave a home-spun jurisprudence shaking its link from Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence by making law and legal institutions the delivery system of human liberty, social equality and social justice. The harsh reality is that only privileged classes have been to approach the courts for protecting their vested interests. It is only for the moneyed who have so far had the golden key to unlock the doors of justice. To once again quote Justice Bhagwati:

“The time has come when the courts must become the courts of poor and struggling masses of this country. They must shed their character as upholders of the established order and status-quo. They must be sensitized to the need of doing justice to the large masses of the people to whom justice has been denied by cruel and heartless society for generations. The realization must come to them that social justice is the signature tune of the constitution and it is their solemn duty under the Constitution to enforce the basic human rights of the poor and the vulnerable sections of the community and actively help in the realization of the Constitutional goals. This new change has to come if the judicial system is to become an effective instrument of social justice, for without it can not survive for long.”(ibid).

And finally chief Justice Bhagwati worked seriously on the idea of Lok Adalat, and the result may magnetic. In a single day, I witnessed how he finalized more than 396 cases in a small mela like function in a small district town Giridih – of Jharkhand during his tenure as Chief Justice of India. The



idea, philosophy and mode of functioning of Lok Adalat is cent percent similar to traditional judiciary'. And the atmosphere in which decisions are taken before giving the judgment is very much similar to mahachaupal (the great chaupal).

**(VIII) Chaupal as a forum for the politicians to get public support**

Many politicians have used chaupal in last 55 years as a platform or catchword to get the public support. Famous among them are Choudhury Charan Singh and Choudhury Devilal. Choudhury Charan Singh always did his politics in a chaupal like atmosphere and behaved himself as the elder of chaupal. This practice worked well with him and he could always managed to maintain his political supremacy in his constituency and neighbouring regions. Choudhury Devilal also played the same politics. He was truly regarded as the Tau, big uncle, in Haryana, Punjab and western Uttar Pradesh. He used to run his chaupal during his tenure as Deputy Prime minister in a five star Hotel in Delhi.

Maheder Singh, the founder of Bhartiya Kisaan Union (BKU), developed his personality as a savior of the farmers of northern in India, and now when the famous south Indian leaders such as ex- Prime minister H.D. Devegoda has joined him, he has developed his image as a unique leader who represents the countless number of farmers of India. Very brilliantly he uses all the metaphors of the chaupal – the hookah, the safa, the dhoti, and the words spoken by him are the words of a village folk or a village elder that he speaks in the chaupal. Tikait is very successful in his mission and he has achieved many successes for himself and also for the group of people he has been working. In him farmer see their honest representative everywhere.

Very recently, Sheila Dixit, the Chief Minister of Delhi, has announced the achievements of her Government during the last four years. She listed the construction works that her Government did under her leadership in a heading, entitled, “Facts at a glance”, and claimed to have constructed following infrastructure for the common citizens of Delhi. In the details of development she claims to have constructed chaupals in various localities of Delhi. These chaupals are created mainly for rural poor and among the rural poor also attempts are made to construct the chaupals for the Harijans in order to create the atmosphere of social justice for them through their participation. The list of infrastructure is given in Table-A.

**Table-A (Facts at a glance)**

S.No.	Item	Number
1.	Flyovers	44
2.	Subways	18
3.	Buildings	80
4.	Chaupals	55
5.	Community Centres	24
6.	Socio Cultural Complexes	02
7.	Colonies provided roads/ drains	412
8.	Colonies provided piped water	416
9.	Colonies provided electrified	430

List giving the name of each *chaupal* would make it clear how political mileage is taken with this platform. Given below is the list indicating the names of all 55 *chaupals*, constructed by the ruling National Congress in the city of Delhi:

***Chaupals* in urbanized villages reconstructed/ renovated:**

1. Amberhai
2. Begaram *chaupal* (Chhoti), Bndapur
3. Tula Ram *chaupal* (Badi), Bindapur
4. Khayala *chaupal*
5. Harijan *chaupal*, Bagdola
6. Ghonda
7. Brahman *chaupal*, Tondkar, Narela
8. Balmiki *chaupal*, Pana Udyan, Narela
9. Harijan *chaupal*, Paposiyana, Narela
10. Harijan *chaupal*, Paposiyana II, Narela

***Chaupals* in progress:**

11. Kakrola
12. Palam
13. Harijan *chaupal*, Palam
14. Balmiki *chaupal*, Nawada
15. Ambedkar *chaupal*, Hastсал
16. Yadav *chaupal*, Hastсал
17. Tyagi *chaupal*, Hastсал
18. Balmiki *chaupal*, Hastсал
19. Harijan *chaupal*, Dabri-I
20. Dabri-II

21. Baghel *chaupal*, Basai Darapur
22. Bijwasan
23. Shadi Khampur
24. Bhagtan Mohalla, Ghonda
25. Harijan *chaupal*, Tahirpur
26. Khizarabad
27. Panchyat Ghar, Gokulpur Thakran
28. Harijan *chaupal*, Gokulpur
29. Harijan *chaupal*, Johripur
30. Malikpur
31. Dhaka
32. Harijan *chaupal*, Badarpur
33. Harijan *chaupal*, Jasola
34. Kotla Mubarakpur
35. Himayunpur Village
36. Masjid Mor
37. Kalusarai Village
38. Peera Garhi
39. Balmiki *chaupal*, Mahiapalpur
40. Harijan *chaupal*, Mahipalpur
41. Balmiki *chaupal*, Shahbad Mohammadpur
42. Jatav *chaupal*, Shahbad Mohammadpur
43. Harijan *chaupal*, Bijwasan
44. Tanwar Mohalla, Basai Darapur

45. Okhla Village
46. Village Samaspur Jagir
47. Mandoli
48. Balmiki *chaupal*, Sultanpur Majra
49. Harijan *chaupal*, Saboli
50. Tughlakabad
51. Jasola
52. Pochanpur-I
53. Pochanpur-II
54. Shiv Mandir Road, Kakrola
55. Harijan *chaupal*, Taimur Nagar

The list suggests the immense significance of *chaupal* for the survival of the politicians. With *chaupal* they can always approach the villagers and create their strong vote bank.

#### **(IX) Delhi Slums and *chaupal***

The people living in the slums and squatters of Delhi are the people of villages who have come here to get the job to sustain their livelihood. The politicians in Delhi have been using them as vote bank. In return they have also united and formed many small groups with a *pradhan* (head) of every group. These groups have been negotiating with the government functionaries and also with the politicians to get the infra structural and other benefits.

#### **(X) Others platforms**

Similarly, Mahila Mandals (Women's groups), Thrift and Credit Groups, Self Help Groups (SHGs), Milk Cooperatives etc., in rural and urban India have also been following the trend of *chaupal*. The spectacular success AMUL in the state of Gujarat tells the story of the concept of milk cooperative and grooming of Mahila Mandals in India and confirms that through this way women's development is possible.

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[1] Rig Vedic literature elucidates about *panchjana* or *pachakrishtayah* (farmers)]