‘The Great Soul in beggar’s garb’, the epithet really suits Gandhiji, ‘The Mahatma’. One among the humblest of God’s creatures, his speeches, writings, message and activities testify the same. It was a proven fact that the greatness of a great man cannot lie outside history and society. In the ethical sense, every man is ‘great’, who lays down his life for others. Hence Gandhiji was indeed ‘Great’, for he lived and sacrificed his life for the ‘lowliest of the low’ and the starving millions of India. He had a dream of India – an India of his dreams which consisted not of the few cities but of the innumerable villages. His mission was to reconstruct India from below upwards – a decentralized socio-political and economic order with India’s myriad villages as its base. His concept of rural construction and development were based on self-supporting, self-ruling and self-reliant village communities in which life will not be like that of a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom but like that of an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual, ready to perish for the circle of villages composed of individuals, never aggressive but
humble and sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.

Gandhi’s ideal social order or Sarvodaya was a significant step towards the realization of the decentralized socio-economic and political order. It cannot be established merely by freeing India from the foreign ‘yoke’ but from all yoke’s whatever. Gandhiji has devised an elaborate scheme of things based on his ‘Experiment s with Truth’ in the religio-moral, socio-economic and political sphere with the individual as the centre and at the same time without losing sight of Truth and Non-violence.

The concept of decentralization occupies paramount importance in Gandhian scheme of rebuilding India from below upwards. Gandhi’s concept of decentralization can be properly appreciated and understood within the framework of his general philosophy which was built on the solid foundation of Truth and Non-violence. Non-violence was understood to be the basic tenets of Gandhiji’s concept of decentralization. Centralization is a system is inconsistent with the non-violent structure of society. Centralization, as opposed to decentralization, means concentration of power and authority either in the hands of a few people or in an institution like the state. Then there will
always be the likelihood of its misuse. Gandhiji was totally against the centralization of power for obvious reasons. Gandhiji was of the considered view that ‘power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely’. Over and above, the more the centralization the less will be people’s participation and the less of democracy. Further violence and the exploitation of the poor will be in the increase. Gandhiji was against all kinds of violence and exploitation and to eliminate both, centralization should be avoided. Gandhiji stated that centralization cannot be sustained without adequate force. If India has to evolve along no-violent lines it will have to decentralize many things.

Gandhiji’s concept of decentralization was not an isolated concept but the outcome of his religio-ethical, socio-political and economic concepts and ideas. But he was of the view that life is a unity and hence cannot be compartmentalized into social, religious, political and so on. On the other hand all the different departments of life act and react upon one another. The ethics of society necessarily involve ethics of other fields. All these directly or indirectly flow from the theme of decentralization. This ethical outlook is the backbone of Gandhiji’s life and message. Gandhiji’s philosophy is nothing if
not religious and moral. Truth according to him is the substance of all morality.

Gandhiji stood for the decentralization of both political and economic power which he believed is possible only by beginning from bottom upwards and not vice-versa. Village Swaraj was an essential component of decentralized polity or decentralized governance. Swaraj is the best form of governance. It cannot be established by a few people sitting at the top but by sharing authority with the people. Gandhiji envisaged an ideal political order in which everybody is his own ruler and he rules himself in such a way that he is never a hindrance to other. Swaraj of Gandhiji’s dream is the poor man’s swaraj. It also meant Poorna Swaraj or complete independence. It signifies that the masses should become conscious of their capacity to regulate and control authority when it goes astray. It is not the government of the omnipotent state but the government of the people, by the people and for the people. It is democracy of the highest order for its guiding principle is equality and justice. Real Swaraj comes only by individual initiative and by one’s own effort. What others have done for me is not home-rule but foreign rule. Self-rule even if it is leads to anarchy is better than orderly
foreign rule. Gandhiji preferred self-rule over and above all forms of government.

Gandhiji conceived true democracy along non-violent lines in which non-violence becomes a creed, an article of faith rather than a matter of mere policy. Gandhiji believed that, true democracy is an outcome of un-adulterated non-violence. That government alone can be considered best which governs the largest number of happy and virtuous individuals. True democracy or the Swaraj of the masses can never come through non-violent and untruthful means. For democracy and violence seldom go together. In the non-violent democracy of Gandhiji’s conception, the basic unit is the villages which will always be abide by the ideals of truth and non-violence.

Every village is a self sufficient republic or panchayat. The government of the village will be the panchayat of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers both male and female. It is considered as the unit of local-self government. It is the original custodian of all authority. The panchayat system as viewed by Gandhiji represents a village community. It is an autonomous Indian political institution as far as the internal village administration is concerned. Panchayat Raj means a political structure with its base at the village level with
legislative, executive and judiciary powers. Gandhiji had evolved a three-tier system of Panchayat Raj linking up the village Panchayat with the Block and District levels. In Panchayat Raj system envisaged by Gandhiji, people’s independence begins from the village level.

In true democracy it is the individual who is the unit. In true democracy of Gandhiji’s dream the humblest and the lowest Indian is equally the ruler of India with the tallest in the country. The individual has complete freedom to manage his own affairs. The spirit of non-violence coupled with individual freedom and equality provide the solid foundation for Gandhiji’s concept of decentralization in the political sphere.

Gandhiji’s vision of rebuilding free India was a corollary to his larger vision to end exploitation and construction of a ‘Just’ social order with equality prevailing in every sphere of human life. In his conception of Sarvodaya social order, Gandhiji has assigned importance to economics founded on ethics. Economics, for Gandhiji, is a normative science. The moral economics of Gandhiji is essentially humanized and welfare-oriented. True economics never militates against human welfare. Gandhiji’s non-violent economy was a panacea for most of the economic ills. Gandhiji was in the look out for an
indigenous economy model based on agriculture. He was for an agrarian non-violent rural economy order, in which there is no scope for exploitation and competitions of man by man. He favoured decentralization in the economic field as well. Gandhiji’s non-violent economy model stood for production by the masses rather than mass production. He had dreamt of an ideal economic order based on indigenous culture and civilization and hence became a trenchant critic of western civilization, mechanization and industrialization. He pleaded for simplicity and reduction of wants rather than its multiplication. He pleaded for the use of less machinery and stressed the ideal of manual labour. Mechanized economy model is no longer a valid model for India for the individual will be a slave to machinery. What Gandhiji objected was not machinery as such but the craze for machinery. Economic decentralization is related to rural economy and cottage industries located in the rural areas.

True democracy and true economics are essentially man-centred. It is not meant for a select few but for all with a view to empower them in the different spheres of life. He gave utmost importance to the freedom of the individual. The individual is nucleus around which revolve the other institutions. Real
freedom is one’s own rule over himself. Gandhiji wrote in the Harijan..... we have to “learn to strike the mean between individual freedom and social restraint. Willing submission to social restraint for the sake of the well being of the whole society enriches both the individual and the society of which one is a member”

The main objective of the thesis is to explicate Gandhiji’s view on decentralization in all its dimensions which highlights democracy from the grass-root level and ensures people’s participation in the nation-building process. Gandhiji’s dream of rebuilding India from below upwards finds fruition through the evolution of Swaraj – that is complete or poorna swaraj signifying poor man’s swaraj and village swaraj r Panchayat Raj - a panacea for many of the political ills that India faces today.

Against this background the thesis has been designed with six chapters.

Chapter One is an introduction in which an attempt has been made to highlight Gandhiji’s mission to rebuild India from bottom upwards along non-violent and decentralized lines.

Chapter Two is an enquiry into elucidating the ethical foundations of Gandhiji’s socio-political and economic views
which play a crucial role in the nation building process. Gandhiji stood for principled politics and moralization of economics which he has extended to other departments of life as well.

Chapter Three gives an exposition of Gandhiji’s concept of political decentralization highlighting the evolution of the ideal political order along with the concept of non-violent state, non-violent democracy, swaraj and enlightened anarchy. Gandhiji’s conception of Participatory Democracy, Village Swaraj or Village Republic and Panchayat Raj has been considered for it is a corollary to true democracy.

Chapter Four attempts to study Gandhiji’s concept of Economic Decentralization highlighting the moralization and humanization of economics. The criterion of true economics lies in human welfare coupled with economic equality.

Chapter Five deals with the concept of people’s participation and empowerment. Gandhiji assigned man a supreme consideration and is treated as an end in himself. He is the Sovereign and therefore can never be treated as subordinate to any institution howsoever powerful it may be. Gandhiji’s considered view was that ‘the rule of all without rule of oneself’ is proved to be deceptive and fatal.
Chapterization

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