MAHATMA GANDHI’S CONCEPTION OF DECENTRALISATION AND PEOPLE’S EMPOWERMENT – AN ANALYSIS

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CHAPTER - ONE

INTRODUCTION
Gandhiji’s Talisman

“I will give a talisman whenever you are in doubt or when the self becomes too much with you apply the following test. Recall the five of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj for the hungry and spirituality starving millions? Thus you will find your doubts and yourself melting away.”

‘The Great soul in beggars garb’, the epithet really suits Gandhi - the Mahatma. Gandhi - ‘the half naked fakir’ was indeed a Mahatma for in the ethical sense, every man is great who lays down his life for others. Further, a great man is an individual of outstanding importance who has exerted considerable influence upon the people. A great man was of the people and amongst the people. It is a proved fact that the greatness of a great man cannot stand outside history and society. It was aptly remarked that, ‘A great man must be
motivated by the dynamics of a social purpose and must act as the scavenger of society’. Gandhiji was indeed great, for he lived and sacrificed his life for the noble cause of rebuilding India from bottom upwards coupled with the regeneration of man and the reconstruction of society. He was a man of the masses who has left an indelible mark on the life and thought of the people of India. He was one among the humblest of God’s creatures and his speeches and writings bear testimony to the same.

What is the secret of Gandhiji’s tremendous popularity and electrifying influence upon the Indian masses? The answer would be that he had so completely identified himself with the aspirations and the ideals of the Indian people that he could easily become their natural and legitimate leader. Moreover the people of India found in him a leader who practiced what he preached. He has a dream of the post-independent India which according to him, consist not in the few cities but in Her innumerable villages. He had no ambitious projects of his own but to free India from all ‘Yokes’ whatever. His mission was to reconstruct India from bottom upwards, a decentralized socio-political and economic order with India’s myriad villages at its base. His concept of rural
reconstruction and development are based on independent, self-contained, autonomous, self-supporting, self-ruling and self-reliant village communities in which life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom but 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.

Gandhiji had two main objectives to fulfill namely, to win the freedom of India through truthful and non-violent technique of direct action and to rebuild India with the village as its nucleus. The former Gandhiji achieved during his lifetime for his life was a constant struggle for freedom and the later he left unfinished. Freedom does not mean to free India merely from the English Yoke. Political freedom is only a part of the comprehensive meaning of the term freedom. Gandhiji pleaded for swaraj means self-rule or self-government. By ‘swaraj’, Gandhiji meant ‘poorna swaraj’ or ‘complete independence’. It signifies swaraj of the masses. It cannot be established merely by freeing India from foreign rule. Its establishment is possible only ‘by turning the search light inward’. So swaraj of Gandhiji’s dream “is the poor man’s
Gandhiji wrote, “It has been said that Indian swaraj will be the rule of the majority community, i.e., the Hindus. There could not be a greater mistake than that. If it were to be true, I for one would refuse to call it swaraj and would fight it with all the strength at my command, for to me Hind Swaraj is the rule of all people, is the rule of justice.”

In Gandhiji’s mission of rebuilding India, he has devised constructive programme with its eighteen items provide a graphic picture of his sincere efforts. He was in search of the soul of India which according to him lies in Her innumerable villages. Gandhiji proclaimed that if once the villages perish India too will perish, find its fullest expression in his conception of village or Grama Swaraj. Gandhiji said, “My idea of village swaraj is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its vital wants, and yet interdependent for, many others in which dependence is a necessity.” Village swaraj provides the key to understand the concept of decentralization.

Gandhiji’s concept of decentralization is radically different from decentralization and delegation of power as is being talked about nowadays. Decentralization, he believes is
possible only by beginning from the bottom upwards. Under the modern concept, power remains with the centralized authority. Decentralization as conceived by Gandhiji has the basic philosophy of giving strength to the small groups to be able to resist exploitation. Gandhiji was convinced that “the small communities can certainly act as forces for the stabilisation of personality by creating a nucleus of organic socio-psychological density. An intense civic and social participation is possible.”

Village swaraj is an essential component of decentralized polity. Gandhiji wrote, “…if there ever is to be a republic of everything in India, then I claim verity for my picture in which the last is equal to the first, or in other words none is to be the first and none the last.” In the ideal political order envisaged by Gandhiji everyone is his own ruler and he rules himself in such a way that he is never a hindrance to others. Values like non-violence, freedom and equality provide a solid base for Gandhiji’s concept of decentralization at all levels.

Gandhiji’s concept of decentralization was not an isolated concept but the outcome of ethico-religious, socio-political and economic concepts and ideas. But Gandhiji was of the view that life is a unity and hence it cannot be
compartmentalised into ethical, social, religious, political, economic and so on. All the different departments of life act and react upon each other. Hence, the ethics of society necessarily involve ethics of other fields. All these directly or indirectly flow from the main 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.

Gandhiji was opposed to systems and methods that result in centralization and the concentration of power and authority for obvious reasons. According to him, ‘power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely’. To him, swaraj or self-rule is the best form of rule for anarchy under home rule is better than orderly foreign rule. Swaraj is possible of attainment only by turning the search light inward, so as to generate ‘Soul-Force’ or ‘Love-Force’. Swaraj is to be realised through village self-rule or Grama Swaraj. Gandhiji repudiated the authority of the state for it represents violence in a concentrated and organised form. The state hinders the development of individuality and dignity of the individual. The state which is a coercive institution largely damages the moral will of the individual. The individuals are responsible moral individuals. Morality on the contrary, necessitates freedom of
the will. The compulsive nature of the authority of the state damages the moral nature of the individual. The state is vested with power and authority, which necessarily involves violence which is contradictory to the very conception of a non-violent state. Destroying individuality means exploitation which in turn leads to violence. The individual is with a soul whereas the state is a soulless machine. Hence Gandhiji pleaded for a progressively non-violent state founded on the principle of non-violence. Violence in any form should be avoided and in order to eliminate violence concentration of power should be avoided through decentralization. To avoid violence and to ensure facilities for the development of human personality, decentralization of political power must become a creed rather than a policy.

Real swaraj according to Gandhiji comes when the masses become conscious of their capacity to regulate and control authority when it is abused. Hind Swaraj is not rule by any one in particular but equally by all. It is government of the people, by the people and for the people. The non-violent state as conceived by Gandhiji is perfect democracy, in which non-violence became a creed, an article of faith rather than a matter of policy. These non-violent village communities are
the basis of political power. The law of non-violence rules him and his government with a view to advance the greatest good of all. What is important is not the external form of the government but the non-violence of the average individual as the basis of the decentralized polity.

The concept of decentralization has economic overtones as well. Gandhiji was indeed a true economist who can be considered as an economist of the masses. He has evolved an economic philosophy that is best suited for Indian soil. It provides a new and realistic approach to economic ills like poverty, exploitation, hunger and so on. He stood for both the moralisation and humanisation of economics. Economics that hurts the moral well being of an individual or a nation is immoral and therefore sinful. Gandhiji’s approach to economics was essentially constructive with the individual at its centre.

Gandhiji’s economic theory has aimed at bridging the gulf between the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ to the minimum and that there would be no exploitation of man by man. It also tried to obliterate completely the concentration of economic power by proposing economic decentralization at various
levels. He preferred production by the masses rather than mass production. His preference for labour saving machinery and emphasis on Khadi, village industries coupled with non-violent rural agrarian economy with a view to bring about an egalitarian socio-political and economic order were all significant milestones in the evolution of socio-economic and political decentralization.

Gandhiji’s indictment to modern western civilization with its corollary heavy industrialization, technology and mechanisation are detrimental to indigenous culture, for it is concerned only with material advancement and prosperity. Gandhiji suggested an alternate model with stress on moral and spiritual aspects of human life. Civilization, as conceived by Gandhiji, is a way of life, a mode of conduct. In true civilization, the basis of human relationship is morality and selfless love. Simplicity is the essence of civilization. It is, as he says, “that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty.”\(^6\) The malady of modern civilization is rooted in the technological civilization of the west.

Gandhiji preferred the use of labour-saving machinery rather than heavy machinery. Gandhiji was against the ‘craze’
for machinery for it enslaves mankind, making them idle and displacement of labour. Gandhiji suggested that small-scale industries with less machinery alone could increase the efficiency of rural production. He preferred non-violent rural economy with less exploitation, for exploitation is the essence of violence. Very often, the poor are exploited. He advocated that there is an urgent need to evolve a new way of life based on simplicity and reduction of wants. Civilization in the real sense of the term Gandhiji wrote, “Consist not in the multiplication but in the deliberate and voluntary restriction of wants. This alone promotes happiness.”

He found economic inequality in society and felt that non-violence could play a pivotal role in establishing economic equality. Economic equality is the master key to non-violent independence and a non-violent system of government which is clearly impossible as long as the gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persist. Rural economy can be strengthened only through the pursuit of decentralized economy. Gandhiji preached the gospel of rural mindedness. Gandhiji wrote, “You have therefore to be rural minded before you can be non-violent and to be rural minded you have to have faith in the spinning wheel.” Rural development is a
process of developing and utilizing natural and human resources, technologies, infrastructure facility, development policies and programmes to encourage economic growth in rural areas, to provide job and to improve the quality of rural life.

Gandhiji’s philosophy of decentralized economy has as its goal not the greatest good of the greatest number but the good and the welfare of all - even ‘Unto the Last’. Gandhiji visualized an ideal social order wherein man and machine together would promote the basic human values. The approach of Gandhiji based on decentralization with its corollary peoples empowerment opens up a new chapter in the socio-economic and political order. Gandhiji sought to revive villages for it is impossible to have non-violence on a factory civilization which is essentially materialistic. On the contrary, Gandhiji advocated Swadeshi. Swadeshi is the spirit in us which restricts us in the use and service of surrounding at the exclusion of the more remote signifying that service has to be rendered to our immediate neighbours as our first duty. From the economic stand, point Swadeshi meant economic self-reliance and economic independence. The Swadeshi Movement was indeed to organize the rural masses into
economically and socially self-dependent. Gandhiji measured the progress of a nation or of a society in terms of morality and welfare of human kind.

Gandhiji had the right perception of the Indian situation which helped him to work out his future plans for Indians. Gandhiji returned to India from South Africa in 1915 with a definite programme of action but due to ill health and also as per the advice of his political guru Gopala Krishna Gokhale he kept away from public life for one year. During this time, Gandhiji travelled the length and the breadth of India. He wrote, ‘I have not pictured a poverty-stricken India containing ignorant millions. I have pictured to myself an India continually progressing along the lines best suited to her genius. I do not, however, picture it as a third class or even a first class copy of the dying civilization of the west.’

According to Gandhiji, political power is not an end in itself but a means to enable the people to better their conditions in every department of life. His main objective was to secure human happiness coupled with mental and moral growth. Gandhiji maintained that such an end can be achieved only under decentralization for centralization as a system is
inconsistent with non-violent structure of society. He considered government, whatever is its external form, as merely an externalization of the moral level of the individual. That government alone can be considered as the best which governs the largest number of happy and virtuous individuals.

Gandhiji preferred democracy as the best form of government. Democracy should be disciplined and enlightened. Perfect democracy is possible only by perfect non-violence. Non-violent democracy has its basis in self-sufficient village republics. Every village has to become a republic or panchayat having full powers. The non-violent democratic state of Gandhiji’s conception will be a federation of more or less self-sufficient and self-governing village communities. The government of the village will be the panchayat of five persons - the unit of local self government - the original custodian of all authority. The village republic envisaged by Gandhiji there is perfect democracy based upon individual freedom. Gandhiji’s concept of Panchayat Raj is the only system which paves the way to real swaraj. Gandhiji’s understanding of swaraj includes political, economic and moral independence. It makes room for Sarvodaya and self-realization. It is swaraj for the individual and for the nation.
Panchayat as Gandhiji believed lead to individual and collective happiness.

Panchayat Raj as Gandhiji conceived it is supposed to serve two main purposes namely, economic and political decentralization. By political decentralization Gandhiji meant taking democracy to the grass-roots and preparing every individual in the process of achieving real swaraj. Gandhiji longed for village swaraj or Panchayat Raj or grass-root democracy for empowering the downtrodden millions of India. Gandhiji used the term self-rule and good governance for decentralized governance. Since majority of the people of our country live in villages, the unit of development in Gandhian programme was the village itself. Identifying himself with India’s poor, “he turned his thought of the nation to the needs for rural millions for whom ‘life was an eternal compulsory fast’ who ‘live because they cannot die at will’. Hence he visualized that, ‘the development of the country lies in the development of the rural masses and rural areas’. This is because; they are the backbone of the country.”\textsuperscript{10} Gandhiji’s ambition was to make village a ‘republic’. He said “if my dream is fulfilled, and every one of the seven lakhs of villages becomes a well-living republic in which there are no illiterates,
in which no one is idle for want or work, in which everyone is usefully occupied and has nourishing food, well-ventilated dwellings, and sufficient Khadi for covering the body...”

1.1 MAHATMA GANDHI’S FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS AND IDEAS

There was nothing extraordinary about Gandhiji’s life and message. Gandhiji was very much an ordinary man who was conscious of his own limitations and has admitted of having committed ‘Himalayan Blunders’. Gandhiji claimed to be a simple individual liable to err like any other ordinary human being. He had no ambitious projects of his own but had a definite mission, vision and programme of action. He had stressed some fundamental ideas which formed the foundation of his life and action.

Gandhiji was not a ‘heavy philosopher’ or a theoretical analyst of a high order. He was not the originator of any new principle or doctrine but the continuator of a great tradition - the Indian tradition. But he has not accepted the Indian tradition in toto but has simply applied some of the eternal principles in daily life and activities. He had no ‘isms’ of his own and hence there is nothing like ‘Gandhism’ as such. His
famous sayings ‘My life is my message’ and ‘My life is a series of Experiments with Truth’ provide the master key to Gandhiji’s life and message.

Gandhiji had drawn no distinction between theory and practice. He had even gone to the extent of saying that the most spiritual act is the most practical in the true sense of the term. He was not a visionary but a practical dreamer converting ideals into actualities. His dreams were not ‘airy nothings’. Gandhiji was of the view that, “If any action of mine claimed to be spiritual is proved to be impractical, it must be pronounced to be a failure. I do believe that the most spiritual art is the most practical in the true sense of the term.”¹² He was a true Karmayogin who had convinced of saying that even God can be realised through disinterested service to society. He was neither a saint nor a sinner, who never claimed Divinity or Prophetship but remained a humble seeker after Truth and bent upon finding it. He was not concerned with remaining to be consistent with what he said or wrote earlier. He was a man in the making and hence had grown from Truth to Truth. His words and deeds were the result of the necessities arising out of the then prevailing conditions. There has always been a gradual evolution in his environment and
he reacted to it. Hence Gandhiji cannot be circumscribed within the limits of any ‘isms’, principle or doctrine. Gandhiji wrote, “You cannot so circumscribe Truth even if you try. Every expression of Truth has in the seeds of propagation; even the sun cannot hide its light.”

Gandhiji had simply tried in his own way to apply the eternal truth to daily life and problems. He had conducted experiments on a vast scale and in doing so some times he had erred and learnt from his errors. To him life and its problems have become so many experiments in the practice of Truth and non-violence.

According to Gandhiji, the propagation of Truth can be done less by books than by actually living those principles. As a testimony to this Gandhiji had entitled his autobiography as ‘The Story of My Experiments with Truth’ and the concept of truth provides the key to understand the theoretical and practical dimensions of his philosophy. He may appear to be an inconsistent and unsystematic thinker but he always remained consistent with Truth. Truth is the pole-star of his life. Further he considered Truth as the sovereign principle which includes numerous other principles. It is in due course of his Experiments with Truth accidentally he came across non-violence. He had no doubt regarding the exact
relationship between Truth and Non-violence. Truth and Ahimsa are, “so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle or separate them.”

To Gandhiji, “Truth is the sovereign principle which is inclusive of numerous other moral principles. Since his childhood the passion for truth was innate in him. The Truth conceived by Gandhiji signifies truthfulness in word, thought and deed.”

Truth and Non-violence are the central principles of his life and faith. They are the life-giving eternal principles for they are like his ‘two lungs’ and hence cannot live without them.

Truth and non-violence have formed the twin pillars of Gandhiji’s entire philosophy. They are not mere ideal to be propagated but principles to be practiced in daily life. An ideal may be better than the actual state of affairs but in no way it can stand outside the domain of human life. Hence to Gandhiji, the spiritual law does not work in a field of its own but express itself in and through the ordinary activities of human life. Gandhiji wrote, “Human mind or human society is not divided in to water tight compartments called social, political and religious. All act and react upon one another.”

Further, it was his faith and conviction that, “the spiritual law works on a field of its own. On the contrary, it expresses itself
only through the ordinary activities of life. It thus affects the economic, the social and the political fields.”

Gandhiji has demonstrated through his own life the religion he preached and practised. The sum total of his daily activities amounts to his religion. For him, there is no religion higher than ethics and morality. And truth is the essence of all morality. The essence of religion is morality and non-violence is the essence of Gandhiji’s ethics. Non-violence is the most important and crucial concept in Gandhiji’s ethics just as Truth is in metaphysics. Gandhiji wrote, “For me non-violence, like Truth, is my eternal creed for every activity.” Further, Gandhiji wrote, “I have not seen Him, I have made the world’s faith in God my own and as faith is ineffaceable, I regard that faith as amounting to experience. However, as it may be said that to describe faith as experience is to tamper with truth, it may perhaps be more correct to say that I have no word for characterizing my belief in God.”

Man’s ultimate aim is self-realisation which is identified with God or Truth realisation. Self-realisation means coming face to face with Reality or God. Gandhiji pointed out that, “morality is the basis of things, and that truth is the substance
of all morality. Truth became my sole objective. It began to grow in magnitude every day, and my definition of it also has been ever widening."\(^{20}\) Self-realisation requires self-examination and self-purification. One cannot claim to be truthful so long as he is under the influence of what Gandhiji calls the six deadly enemies namely, “lust, anger, greed, infatuation, pride and falsehood of the ethics of the Indian tradition.”\(^{21}\) Truth is God for Gandhiji because Truth alone exists in reality and nothing else. Gandhiji pointed out that God is Truth but later he changed this version and stated that it is more appropriate and correct to say that Truth is God rather than to say God is Truth. He maintained that his uniform experience has convinced him to state that there is no God other than Truth. “To me God is Truth and love; God is ethics and morality. God is fearlessness. God is the source of light and life and yet above and beyond all these God is conscience. He is even the atheism of an atheist... He transcends speech and reason.”\(^{22}\)

The fundamental notion of Gandhiji’s thought is the metaphysical conception of an omnipresent spirituality an all-embracing Living Light which he called Truth or God. One of the basic metaphysical doctrines of Gandhiji is the “absolute
oneness of God and therefore also of humanity: what though we have many bodies? We have but one soul. The rays of the sun are many through diffraction. But they have the same source.”²³ But he knows that God cannot be found apart from the rest of creation. His creed was service of God and therefore also of humanity. Gandhiji said, “To see the universal and all-pervading spirit of truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to truth has drawn me in to the field of politics, and I can say without the slightest hesitation and yet in all humility that those, who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.”²⁴ Man becomes great exactly in proportion to one works for the welfare of his fellowmen. Gandhiji was of the considered view that, “an individual may gain spiritually and those that surround him suffer. I believe in Advaita. I believe in the essential unity of man and for that matter of all that lives. Therefore I believe that if one man gains spiritually, the whole world gains with him and if one man falls, the whole world falls to that extent.”²⁵
Gandhiji had enriched every aspect of life through his action-oriented and human-centred principles. Gandhiji had stated that, “There is not a single virtue which aims at, or in content with the welfare of the individual alone. Conversely, there is not a single moral offence which does not, directly or indirectly, affect many others besides the actual offender. Hence, whether an individual is good or bad is not merely his own concern, but really the concern of the whole community, nay, of the whole world.”

Gandhiji was of the opinion that the individual should order his life in unquestioning obedience to certain fundamental moral principles. It constitutes the realm of individual morality. The individual aspect is his private life where he was left alone. But the social life of an individual covers a wide field comprising of the family, society and state. But these two aspects are nothing but the two sides of the same coin. He has discovered that man is superior to the system he propounded and no institution howsoever powerful it may be cannot subordinate the individual. Gandhiji had faith in human nature. Man is not a mere psycho-chemical aggregation but a spiritual entity. Gandhiji was an optimist in upholding the view of the future possibility of man’s
Man has the innate capacity to strive after perfection.

Gandhiji had reconciled self-realisation with social service. He was of the view that self-realisation is impossible without social service and that service should be rendered to those who are in need of service in the spirit of disinterestedness. Gandhiji’s life and message is nothing but this ideal in action. He does not subscribe to the view that if the ideal is impossible of attainment its pursuit must be abandoned. The very attempt to strive for the ideal is itself a great thing. Gandhiji wrote, “Life is an aspiration. Its mission is to strive after perfection, which is self-realisation. The ideal must not be lowered because of our weakness or imperfections”.27 Thus Gandhiji fully concurs with the view that “our existence is meaningless if we never expect to realize the highest perfection that there is”.28

Gandhiji’s concept of non-violence is the outcome of his vast experiences and life long Experiments with Truth. Gandhiji gave utmost importance to non-violence as a virtue. Gandhiji gave a new interpretation to the concept of non-violence and redefined the meaning of non-violence. He
pointed out that non-violence in the past was made to appear crude. Non-violence is a crucial Gandhian principle. Its influence on his life was so great that it is called one of the twin pillars upon which rest the entire framework of his life and message. Non-violence is the practical application of the great truth of spiritual unity. In the words of Gandhiji, “The basic principle on which the practice of non-violence rests is that what holds good in respect of oneself equally applies to the whole universe”.  

Gandhiji used the concept of non-violence in its most comprehensive sense signifying the negative state of harmlessness or non-injury or non-killing coupled with the positive state of love - of doing well even to the evil doer. It means ‘Universal Love’ signifying love of God’s entire creation. It means ‘largest love’ and ‘greatest charity’. Ahimsa includes goodwill towards all life. Another aspect of ahimsa, in the positive sense is suffering - conscious suffering which marks the culmination of love. “Suffering is the condition as well as culmination of love. The test of love is Tapasya and Tapasya is self suffering.” Non-violence is the law of the human species which is infinitely superior and greater to brute force. As a moral virtue, it is the law of ‘our being’. He has
categorically stated that non-violence is not merely meant for saints but equally for all. As a virtue non-violence contributes to the highest good of mankind. Non-violence implies complete self-purification or cleansing as is humanly possible. Gandhiji was of the view that, “The ultimate end of non-violence is surest victory such a term may be used for non-violence. In reality where there is no sense of defeat, there is no sense of victor.”

He holds the view that non violence is not merely a personal virtue but social as well to be cultivated like other virtues. Violence is largely regulated by the expression of non-violence in its mutual dealings.

Gandhiji was convinced of the efficacy of non-violence as an ashram vow as a result of his life long experiments with them both in his personal and public life. Though the principal aim is individual betterment through moral and spiritual progress they do not exclude the possibility of a harmonious social life. When society is deliberately constructed in accordance with the law of non-violence, its structure will be different in material particulars from what it is today. But we cannot say in advance what the government based on non-violence will be like. Society based on non-violence can only consist of groups settled in villages in which voluntary co-
operation is the condition of dignified and peaceful existence. Gandhiji believed in the possibility of a predominantly non-violent society and was working for it. In the non-violent society, there will be no room for exploitation and ill-will and production will be for immediate use and not for profitable markets.

Non-violence is a fundamental tenet of Gandhian thought. He believed that violence in any form do not lead to a stable society. His conception of decentralization – socio-economic and political, spring from his view of non-violence. He stood for the moralisation not only of economics but of politics as well. He envisaged an ideal socio-economic and political order with the individual at its centre. Gandhiji’s economic and political ideas were founded on truth and non-violence, Sarvodaya, Swaraj and Swadeshi. It was Gandhiji’s dream that the welfare and good of all and not the greatest good of the greatest number should be realised through ‘antyodaya’ that is welfare and good of unto the last. That was the main objective of Sarvodaya.

Gandhiji thought of an economic order founded on concepts like non-exploitation, non-possession,
decentralization, trusteeship and bread labour formed the main pillars of Gandhiji’s economic ideas. Gandhiji had launched an elaborate programme for the upliftment of the Indian masses. Gandhiji’s moralised and humanised economic ideas provide an ample scope for opportunities for the good and welfare of all. Gandhiji was of the view that, “True economics never militates against the highest ethical standard, just as all true ethics to be worth its name must at the same time be also good economics. An economics that inculcates Mammon worship, and enables the strong to amass wealth at the expense of the weak is a false and dismal science. It spells death. True economics, on the other hand, stands for social justice; it promotes the good of all equally including the weakest, and is indispensable for decent life.”

Gandhiji’s Sarvodaya socio-political order provides the foundation for his economic thought. Gandhiji’s ideal social order stood for equality and justice - social, political and economic. It is equally non-violent and decentralised with emphasis on duty rather than on rights. Gandhiji’s insistence on non-violence, moralisation of every aspect of human life, insistence on freedom, equality, repudiation of state authority over the individual, swaraj, critique of technology,
industrialisation and machinery, Swadeshi and Khadi are the central theme of his economic ideas and reflect the central idea of decentralization. Gandhiji’s economic ideas provide a practical formula to eradicate the problems of poverty, hunger, exploitation and unemployment to a great extent. The remedy for the economic ills lies in decentralization at various levels. The capitalist order has caused inequalities and hence it was no longer a valid model for India. According to Gandhiji, “Economic equality is the master key to non-violent independence. Working for economic equality means abolishing the eternal conflict between capital and labour. It means the ‘leveling down’ of the few rich in whose hand is concentrated the bulk of the nation’s wealth on the one hand, and the leveling up of the semi-starved naked millions on the other....”\textsuperscript{33} A non-violent system of government is clearly an impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the poor persist.

Decentralization, in the economic sphere aims to create an unexploited and egalitarian society with emphasis on village and cottage industries so as to strengthen the rural and village life. He was much pained to see the ruin of Indian villages and for the reconstruction and upliftment of the
villages he has formulated the constructive programme. He was of the considered view that, “He who has no belief in the constructive programme has, in my opinions no concrete feeling for the living millions… In actual practice the expansion of my non-violence has kept exact pace with that of my identification with the starved humanity.”

A rural economy founded on self-contained villages alone can provide a solid basis for non-violent society of his conception. Gandhiji’s slogan, ‘back to the village’ led him to propound the concept of the village swaraj together with his idea of village self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency coupled with simplicity is the hall-mark of Gandhiji’s economic ideas. Gandhiji assigned rural industrialization and rural development top most priority in his scheme of things. The Gandhian strategy for rural development include development of village and small scale industries, a process of developing and utilizing natural and human resources to speed up economic growth in rural areas.

Decentralization as conceived by Gandhiji has political overtone as well. He was a practical political thinker in his own way. His political ideas are founded on certain assumptions.
First and foremost his firm faith in metaphysical and ethical idealism, sanctity of moral techniques in politics, moralization and spiritualization of politics testifies the same. According to him the supreme power of the State rest with the people. It is based on pure moral authority of the individual and on non-violence. He advocated decentralization of political power with a view to share power and authority with the people. The individual is the custodian of power and hence swaraj or self-rule is the best rule.

In Gandhian conception of decentralized polity, the unit is the village communities. Another feature of the decentralized political order is non-violence. Gandhiji’s repudiation of State authority is a standing testimony to the fact that the interference of the state damages the individuality and dignity of the individual. Gandhiji, foremost champion of non-violence in no way admits the centralizing of power and authority with the state. On the contrary, Gandhiji stood for its decentralization. Centralization and non-violence seldom go together. Thus Gandhiji stood against the increase of the power of the state. He advocated the limitation of State power rather than increase of the authority of the State. Gandhiji held that true democracy is based on non-violence.
State in the opinion of Gandhiji is nothing but the manifestation of violence and an organization based on force. Gandhiji disapproves such an institution founded on violence. The true test of democracy lies in the replacement of force and violence by social will. Perfect democracy is possible only when there is perfect non-violence. Gandhiji was of the view that, “true democracy or the swaraj of the masses can never come through untruthful and violent means, for the simple reason that the natural corollary to their use would remove all opposition, through the suppression or extermination of the antagonists. That does not make for individual freedom. Individual freedom can have the fullest play only under a regime of unadulterated ahimsa.”

Democracy in essence is the rule by the majority and it must be based on truth and non-violence. Otherwise, it will be deceptive and fatal. In perfect democracy the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest and this can never happen except through non-violence. Gandhiji in his various speeches and articles spoke of democratic decentralisation. In the 22\textsuperscript{nd} January 1946 issue of Harijan, Gandhiji stated that independence must begin at the bottom. Panchayat Raj is an Indian political institution and it is a part
of our ancient civilization. Panchayat Raj institution give ‘voice to voiceless’ ‘power to powerless’ people irrespective of caste, creed, sex, and religion living in the villages of India. Panchayat Raj institution provides power to the people and not power to a few people. Its main objective is to bring the government with the reach of the people.

Panchayat Raj system was an integral part of Gandhiji’s conception of decentralised polity in which every village is to be considered as little ‘Republics’. Gandhiji was in favour of a broad-based pyramidal structure of decentralized power with numerous village panchayats at the bottom. He subscribed to the view that village based governments and non-violent agrarian self-sufficient, autonomous village communities act as the custodian of power and authority exercising the legislative, judiciary and executive function of the authority of the state. Thus Gandhiji attached more importance to nationalism but his views are not exclusive. Nationalism does not means isolated independence but interdependence. Gandhiji wrote, “Isolated independence is not the goal of world states. It is voluntary inter-dependents.”

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Gandhiji’s mission is not merely freedom of India but through the realization of the freedom of India to carry out the notion of the brotherhood of man. Thus Gandhiji’s mission to serve India includes the service of humanity. It is impossible for one to be a nationalist without being an inter-nationalist. Nationalism and inter-nationalism in Gandhiji’s view always go hand-in-hand. Gandhiji wrote, “Patriotism is the same as humanity. I am patriotic because I am human and humane...... My love, therefore, of nationalism or my idea of nationalism is that my country may become free, that if need be the whole of the country may die, so that the human race may live. There is no room for race hatred there. Let that be our nationalism.”

1.2 MEANS AND END

The significance of Gandhian philosophy lies in the application of the moral principles namely, Truth and Non-violence in all sphere of human life. Gandhiji has demonstrated that only moral means as his primary consideration. His insistence on the purity of means indicates the recognition of the moral law which pervades the entire universe. The ultimate end of self-realization is possible only through self-
purification and self-discipline which signifies the disciplining of oneself through the observance of moral principles. Thus it forms an important means for reaching the ultimate end of self realization.

Now the question arises: what is the exact relationship between means and end: which is important, means or the end? Generally, one of them is given greater emphasis than the other. But Gandhiji held the view that the two are ‘convertible terms’. But the question still remains: does the end justify the means or the means justify the end. Some thinkers like Machiavelli hold the view that the end justifies the means which in no way is compatible with the purity of means. Machiavelli even sanctioned the use of immoral means to the rulers to gain their political ends. But Gandhiji is totally opposed to this view. He holds that the means must justify the end. He insisted on the moral purity of the means. The purity must be maintained both in the personal and public life. Gandhiji stated that: “For me, it is enough to know the means. Means and End are convertible terms in my philosophy of life.”

Even if the end is high, there is no justification for its attainment through evil or immoral means.
The exact relationship between the means and end was clearly brought out by Gandhiji through a comparison of the relationship between a seed and a tree. He said,“the means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree; and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and tree.” If the means adopted is not moral, the end cannot be moral. There has been an inseparable relation between the means and the end. Both are equally necessary and should be pure. Just as the seed is potentially a tree and the tree is the seed and that if the means are taken care of the end will take care of it. The end is not a forlorn end but grows out of the means. The means ultimately turns itself as the end. The means alone are within our control and not the end. If we take care of the means the end will take care of itself. Further if the means are taken care of the goal could be reached sooner or later. Means and end are inter-dependent. He stood for the moralization of both the means and the end. Gandhiji was convinced that, “Immoral means must ultimately have there effect on ends. If these desirable ends are necessary, moral means to achieve the ends are at least as necessary.” Gandhiji firmly asserted the continuity of means and end. He
stated that there is no wall of separation between the means and the end. Gandhiji has never recommended violent means to achieve a goal. He wrote, “If violence and untruth are necessary for the advancement of my country, let my country go under. I would not sacrifice these two for all world...... I do not seek to serve India at the sacrifice of Truth for I know that a man who forsakes Truth can forsake his country and his nearest and dearest one’s.”

For Gandhiji non-violence is the means and truth the end. Means to be means must be within our reach, and so ahimsa is one supreme duty. Without Ahimsa, it is impossible to realise truth. Ahimsa and truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle or separate them. They are but the two sides of the same coin. Nevertheless ahimsa is the means, truth is the end. The relationship between means and end was spoken of by Gandhiji as the means so the end, he fully concurs with the view that we have control only over the means and not the end. The means alone are within our control. Hence we have to perfect and moralise that which is within our control namely the means. He wrote, “They say, ‘means are after all means’. I would say, ‘means are after all everything’. As the means so the end.... There is no wall of
separation between the means and the end. Indeed, the Creator has given us control (and that, too, very limited) over means, none over the end. Realisation of the goal is in exact proportion to that of the means. This is a proposition that admits of no exception."

Gandhiji’s emphasis on the importance of means should not be misunderstood as implying that the end is with him only a secondary consideration. He believes that means and end are inseparably connected and that the means used should in no way detract from the moral character of our end. With regard to means he is very particular that we must take our stand on the firm solid ground of unadulterated good. Gandhiji laid stress on moral values and warned us never to subordinate means to end.

Gandhiji was never tired of talking about means and end and of laying stress on the importance of means. The end he believes is in a stage of progressive realization. As a natural course of development the means itself turns out to be the end through different stages. Thus there is a real unification between means and end. It harmonises the inner conflict of means and end on the basis of moral approximation. Thus in
the words of Aldous Huxley, “a good end which is a state of greatest possible unification, can be achieved only by the use of good, that is to say of intrinsically unifying means. Bad means -activities, in other words, that produce attachment and are intrinsically separative -cannot produce unification.” The opposite theory that the end justifies the means leads to the conclusion that violent means that are ethically unsound could be applied but this give way to violence, untruth and other evils. A victory won by violence will retain violence. So Gandhiji has enunciated the principle of the integrity of means and end that pre-supposes truth and non-violence as the solid foundation of human life and relationship.

The main objective of the thesis is to explicate Gandhiji’s views 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 or 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.

**The Last Chapter** is conclusion followed by a select bibliography.
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