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

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CHAPTER - TWO

ETHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MAHATMA GANDHI’S SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY
2.1 GANDHIAN ETHICAL RELIGION

Gandhiji’s philosophy is basically religious and he called religion as ‘Ethical Religion’. Religion, Gandhiji conceived as all-comprehensive dealing with every aspect of human life. Religion is essentially practical and hence finds its fullest expression in and through the ordinary activities of man. Gandhiji said, “You must watch my life, eat, sit, talk, behave in general. The sum total of those in me is my religion.”\(^1\) Gandhiji insisted that religion must satisfy the moral sense. Gandhiji wrote, “I reject to any religious doctrine that does not appeal to reason and is in conflict with morality. I tolerate unreasonable religious sentiment when it is not immoral.”\(^2\)

We generally make distinction between the moral and the spiritual. Morality provides a practical formula for the attainment of spiritual self-realization. But he has drawn no hard and fast distinction between the moral and the spiritual. Moral laws are also divine laws. God, says Gandhiji, “is ethics and morality”\(^3\) For Gandhiji Truth is God and Truth is the substance of all morality. Hence, there is nothing in calling morality a religion. Gandhiji attaches the greatest importance to leading a life of morality or righteousness which is possible only through what he calls ‘purified religion’- the criteria that
are used are the moral standards and ideals taken from religious tradition. Gandhiji said, “As soon as we lose the moral basis, we cease to be religious. There is no such thing as religion over riding morality. Man for instance cannot be untruthful and cruel and claim to have God on his side.”

Gandhiji defined religion as “a belief in the ordered the moral governance of the universe.” For Gandhiji religion is not sectarianism but provide moral basis to all activities. He never thinks of religion apart from human activity nor does he consider religion as simply “as one of the many activities of mankind”.

For Gandhiji true religion and true morality are inseparably bound up with each other. Religion is to morality what water is to the seed that is sown in the soil. Moral laws like spiritual laws come from within. Morality is possible without religion. But religion contributes greatly to the growth of morality. Gandhiji took every aspect of human life from the standpoint of morality. His main aim to identify religion with morality is to make religion operative in human life. Gandhiji was prepared to reject any religious sentiment if it is not moral. Gandhiji said that, “True religion is identical with
morality. There is no religion higher than Truth and righteousness.”

“True morality”, according to Gandhiji, “consists, not in following the beaten track, but in finding out the true path for ourselves and in fearlessly following it.” According to Gandhiji the highest moral law is that in which we should unremittingly work for the good of mankind. Gandhiji regarded only voluntary actions as moral. He maintained that “no action which is not voluntary can be called moral.” Religion has to integrate the various aspects of human life. Gandhiji synthesized religion and ethics. Gandhiji pointed out: “so long as we act like machines, there can be no question of morality. If we want to call an action moral, it should have been done consciously and a matter of duty. Any action that is dictated by fear, or by coercion of any kind, ceases to be moral. It also follows that all good deeds that are prompted by hope of happiness in the next world cease to be moral.” Gandhiji considered religion and morality as convertible terms. Gandhiji wrote, “For me, moral, ethics and religion are convertible terms. A moral life without reference to religion is like a house built upon sand. And religion divorced from morality is
‘sounding brass’ good only for making a noise and breaking heads.”\textsuperscript{11}
2.2 ETHICS AND POLITICS

Gandhiji had introduced religion into politics. It is a matter of great significance. The prevailing tendency is to separate religion from politics. Gandhiji conceived politics as closely connected with ethics and religion. By introducing religion into politics Gandhiji wanted to introduce morality into politics. For him religion and morality were closely inter-linked. Gandhiji’s very entry into active politics was to spiritualize it. Gandhiji wrote, “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 into 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.”

Politicians generally do not take religion seriously. But for Gandhiji human life is an integral whole. He was of the view that if a man as a politician is not successful it is because of the fact that he has kept religion and politics apart without a proper understanding of both. Gandhiji did not view religion apart from the rest of human activity. It is religion that
compels him to enter into politics. Gandhiji wrote, “Most religious men I have met are politicians in disguise: I, however, who wear the guise of a politician, am yet heart a religious man.”13 Gandhiji was of the view that the spirit of true religion should pervade politics through and through. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan correctly remarked that Gandhiji remains not as a politician or a reformer, not a philosopher or a moralist, but some one composed of them all an essentially religious person endowed with the highest and most human qualities. Gandhiji claimed to be a Sanathanist Hindu and he had given reasons for the same. Another remarkable trait was his courage to practice what he preached, the courage to live, nay die, for his convictions. He wrote, “I am trying to be the warrior of my description and, if God will, I may be that during this life.”14

Religion was the key to his thought - to his social philosophy and his political practice. Gandhiji wrote, “Whole of my life is sutured with the religious spirit. I could not live for a single second without religion. Many of my political friends despair of me, because they say that even my politics are derived from my religion. And they are right. My politics and all other activities are derived from my religion. I go further
and say that every activity of a man of religion must be derived from his religion, because religion means being bound to God, that is to say, God rules your every breath. If you recognize that truth naturally God regulates every activity of yours.”

Religion is an act of faith for God cannot be realized through the intellect. Gandhiji made a remark that the belief in God has to be based on faith which transcends reason. Faith in God must justify itself in action. There is no religion higher than ethics and morality. True religion means good thought and good conduct. Religion does not work in a field of its own but find its expression in and through the ordinary activities of man. Religion is a way of life. Religion is a basis of morality and morality is the yardstick for politics. The sphere of religion is essentially the sphere of morality and morality includes the sphere of politics as well. The link between religion, morality and politics is fundamental and are complementary in character.

Gandhiji was a Hindu for Hinduism is the most tolerant of all other faiths. Gandhiji was of the view that the universal element of all religions and creeds was ethical and the
universality of the ethical element made all religions one in spirit. Gandhiji considered the different religions as nothing but different roads converging to the same point. Religions are many but Religion is one - the Sovereign God of Love and Truth, the Creator of the Universe indwelling and immanent.

No aspects of human life remain untouched by Gandhiji. Politics is not an exception. Gandhiji’s ethico-religious approach to politics was mainly to invite a revolution in the field of politics and hence had an ennobling effect upon those who adopt it and also those who are against it. He had shown by example and percept that politics can be transformed and exercise of the coercive authority of the state and of political power can be minimized. Every activity of a man of religion must be derived from his religion. Religion here does not mean sectarianism. Gandhiji’s religion transcends every other religion but does not supersede them. On the contrary, it harmonizes them all and gives them reality. Gandhiji said, “Religion is not test of nationality, but a personal matter between man and his God. In the sense of nationality they are Indians first and Indians last, no matter what religion they posses.”16
Gandhiji was compelled to enter into political field because of his firm religious faith and conviction. He was basically a religious man, a Hindu, who had clear and infallible understanding of that religion. His political philosophy and political techniques are only corollaries of his basic religious faith and moral principles. Gandhiji was basically a religious man who entered into the political field to spiritualize and to moralize it. He said, “...... at the back of every word that I have uttered since I have known what public life is, and of every act that I have done, there has been a religious consciousness and a downright religious motive.”

According to Gandhiji, every human activity must be derived from religion and politics is no exception. Gandhiji’s love for humanity attracted him towards politics, for politics concerns nation and that which concerns the welfare of nation must be one of the concerns of a man who is religiously inclined, in other words a seeker after God and Truth. The principle of Truth and non-violence forms the central concept of Gandhiji’s political activity and these are basically religious principles. It was Gandhiji who brought down Truth and non-violence from spiritualism to the life of daily activities of man. He has showed by examples and percepts that politics is not
an evil but an unavoidable evil that encircles all of us like the coils of a snake from which one cannot escape easily. He himself has selected the path of politics as a means to realize the spiritual goal.

A man of true religion identifies himself with the whole of mankind and this necessarily involves taking part in politics because no fact of life is untouched by politics. He also felt that he could not do social service without entering into politics. According to him, political work must be looked upon in terms of social and moral progress. Gandhiji declared, “For me politics bereft of religion is absolute dirt ever to be shunned. Politics concerns nations and that which concerns the welfare of a nation must be one of the concerns of a man who is religiously inclined…… Therefore in politics also we have to establish the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Though politics as such is avoided, it still produces same kind of political effect. “There has been”, Gandhiji once remarked, “no religious movement in the world without its social, economic and political consequences.” Politics, to Gandhiji is not an end in itself but one of the means by which people can better their life in every sphere of human life. He was of the considered view that social and political programme for the
reconstruction of India should be founded on the solid basis of true religious and moral consciousness for religion is a force that binds man to God and man to man. Further Gandhiji declared that religion is a force that binds men together in the ‘Silken net of Love’.

Gandhiji stood for the purification of politics by laying utmost stress on moral and religious values to keep politics away from evils such as corruptions, injustice and so on. He stood for purified politics in which all religions were treated alike. He stood for religious tolerance and equality of faiths promoting inter-religious understanding and religious pluralism. Gandhiji wished to establish the ‘Kingdom Heaven’ on the world of politics. In field of politics too he remained true to his belief that means are as important as the end. Hence success in politics is the outcome only of just and truthful means. Thus Gandhiji introduced a revolution in the field of politics by introducing ethics and religion into it.

2.3 ETHICS AND ECONOMICS

Gandhiji’s main objective in the post-independent period was to rebuild India from below upwards. Though Gandhiji was not an economist in the generally accepted sense, he was a
true economist who can be termed as an economist of the masses. His approach to the economic problems and their solutions has been unparalleled and unique. In fact his economic thoughts were largely shaped by his own practical experiences and Experiments with Truth. Like other fields of human activities, Gandhiji felt that economics too could not be divorced from morality and religion. Gandhiji has viewed economic problems from the standpoint of both ethics and religion.

Gandhiji’s objective of the economic re-organization can be traced back to India’s spiritual tradition. The Advaitic maxim ‘the unity of everything that exists’ and the ‘all pervasiveness and immanence of God in every living being’ laid the foundation for Gandhiji’s new approach to economics. Gandhiji stood for the moralization of economics and hence he has never drawn any distinction between economics and ethics. Economics that hurt the moral well being of an individual or a nation is considered immoral and equally sinful. The moralized economics of Gandhiji was essentially humanistic. He has introduced the criteria of morality and human welfare as the yardstick of true economics. Gandhiji wrote, “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 equally including the weakest, and is indispensable for decent life.” Economic according to Gandhiji is a moral science rather than a mere positive and analytical science. Gandhiji provided an alternative economic order which instead of false, immoral and non-human economics, a man-centered, welfare-oriented economic theory. Thus the economics that permit one country to prey upon another are immoral.

One of the underline principles of Gandhiji’s economic thought is simplicity and minimizing of wants coupled with economic equality. This re-echoes Gandhiji’s basic belief that we all are created by the same God. Hence no line can ever be drawn between man and man. Further his fundamental belief in the ‘oneness of all that exists’ also provides the key to Gandhiji’s economic thought with its emphasis on plain living and high thinking. His economic ideas embody the idea of Swaraj, Swadeshi and Sarvodaya and he tented to strive for
the development of man centered localized village economy or non-violent rural economy founded on agriculture. The concept of Swaraj was in all aspects man centered and non-exploitative and decentralized with simple non-violent village economy providing employment to everyone on the basis of voluntary co-operation and equitable social relationship.
2.4 NON-VIOLENT SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ORDER

Gandhiji was a moral genius who has assigned man a supreme consideration. He was of the view that the individual should order his life in unquestioning obedience to certain fundamental moral principles. It constitutes the realm of individual morality. But man is usually described as a social animal, for apart and away from society man is considered either as a beast or a God. So to be social is an innate and inborn tendency in man. These two aspects, namely the individual and the social are but the two sides of the same coin. Morality involves social relations. Otherwise ‘why should I be moral’ itself becomes non-sensical. It is not for any selfish end that I should be moral; on the contrary, it must be for the good of the community. Perfection of the individual is closely related to social perfection, where society must provide opportunities for the full development of his personality. True morality consists in finding out true path for ourselves and in fearlessly following it. Thus Gandhiji’s mission in the social realm consist in the construction of an ideal social order which he calls ‘Sarvodaya’-an egalitarian socio-economic and political order which Gandhiji undertook as a remedy for the
ills of both individual and society which consist in the eradication of all the evil practices rampant in Indian social order.

Gandhi made a thorough examination and study of these social issues and tested them on rational and moral grounds. His mission was to construct an egalitarian socio-economic and political order with equality prevailing in every sphere of human life. The ideals of spiritual unity, equality of mankind and the ideal of common good are the off-shoots of his firm religious faith and convictions. For Gandhi, religion which takes no account of practical affairs and does not help to solve them is no religion. He put religion in a practical form. He has drawn no compartmentalization between the religious and the secular. Religion does not work in a field its own but find its fullest expression in and through the ordinary activities of the man. A man is but “the product of his thoughts, what he thinks, he becomes”.21

Gandhi’s emphasis on man does not mean the neglect of society. Gandhi observes, “I value individual freedom, but you must not forget that man is essentially a social being. He has risen to his present status by learning to adjust his
individualism to the requirements of social progress. Unrestricted individualism is the law of the beast of the jungle. 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.”

Sarvodaya, the ideal social order conceived by Gandhiji stands for the greatest good of all even Unto the Last. Sarvodaya includes ‘Antyodaya’ as well. The welfare of all includes the welfare of the last. Gandhiji a votary of Ahimsa cannot subscribe to the Utilitarian formula, namely the greatest good of the greatest number. On the contrary he will have to strive for the greatest good of all and die in the attempt to realize the ideal. He will be even willing to die so that others may live. “The greatest good of all”, said Gandhiji, “inevitably includes the good of the greatest number, and therefore, he and the Utilitarian will converge at many points in their career but does come a time when they must take part company, and even work in opposite directions. The utilitarian to be logical will never sacrifice himself. The absolutist will even sacrifice himself.”
In the ideal social order envisaged by Gandhiji all are knit together in the Silken net of Love. Love is not the mere exclusive love of a father to his child. It is Universal Love, which is non-violence. “Real Love”, said Gandhiji “is to love them that hate you, to love your neighbour even though you distressed him.”

Non-violence Gandhiji considered as the first article of his faith and the last article of his creed. It was his firm conviction that non-violence is a creed and a mere policy, for policies often change. Further, non-violence to be a creed has to be all-pervasive. It is universal in its application. Gandhiji wrote that, “It is a blasphemy to say that non-violence can only be practiced by individuals and never by nations which are composed of individuals.” Non-violence as a creed is the most potent weapon at the disposal of mankind. It is a dynamic weapon. In its active form it means good will towards all living beings. A non-violent man, in other words, is a man of self-suffering and self-sacrifice. He suffers himself till the evil-doer understands his mistake and repents for the same. Thus, “ahimsa consists in allowing others the maximum of convenience at the maximum of inconvenience to us”. The observance of non-violence in thought, word and deed is described as the supreme or highest dharma - ‘ahimsa.
paramodharma’. It is a weapon of matchless potency, is a special attribute of the soul. Gandhiji said, “The doctrine of non-violence is not for the weak and cowardly; it is meant for the brave and the strong. The bravest man allows himself to be killed without killing. And he resists from killing or injuring, because he knows that it is wrong to injure”27.

Gandhiji preferred the performance of duties rather than rights. Everybody must do his duty without arresting his rights. When once we perform our duties, rights accrue naturally. The true source of rights is duty. In short, rights flow from duties or duties confer rights. Gandhiji remarked, “The true source of rights is duty. If we all discharge our duties, rights will not be far to seek. If leaving duties unperformed we run after rights, they will escape us like a will-o’-the wisp. The more we pursue them, the farther will they fly. The same teaching has been embodied by Krishna. In the immortal word: ‘Action alone is thine. Leave thou the fruit severely alone’. Action is the duty: fruit is the right.”28

The Sarvodaya social ideal is founded on the ideal of spiritual oneness or unity. Hence the means used for its establishment must also be spiritual, for according to Gandhiji
as the means so the end. Ahimsa is the one and only means for attaining Truth. Happiness in Sarvodaya society is more moral and spiritual than material. A living and an unshakable faith in truth in the form of God is a necessary pre-condition for the practice of non-violence. Non-violence is not merely a personal virtue but equally social to be cultivated like other virtues. Society is largely regulated by the expression of non-violence in its mutual dealings. Gandhiji wrote, “All society held together by non-violence, even as the earth is held in her position by gravitation. But when the law of gravitation was discovered, the discovery yielded results of which our ancestors had no knowledge. Even so, 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 I cannot say in advance what the government based on non-violence will be like. What is happening today is disregard of the law of non-violence and entronement of violence as if it were an eternal law”

Sarvodaya social philosophy aims at the prevalence of equality in all spheres of life. But the individual should submit himself to the social restraint for the benefit of himself as well as of the society. In the economic sphere Sarvodaya society
stands for equality of income and decentralization. Economic equality signifies a non-violent economy in which the dignity of man and his labour will be given the highest consideration. He considers that country as the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings. Every human being has a right to live and therefore to find the wherewithal to feed, to cloth and house himself. The end to be achieved is human happiness along with full mental and moral growth. Economic equality does not mean the equalization of income on the contrary it may be taken to mean that all are entitled to have the basic necessities of life. Every labourer should be given a ‘just wage’ -- what is ‘due’ to them to fetch a square meal a day. Economic equality is the master key to decentralized economy. In the economic order he envisaged, the nature and extent of production will be determined by social necessity rather than by any profit motive on the part of the individual.

Another notable feature in respect of Sarvodaya is the idea of trusteeship. The rich must be the trustees of the poor. Private ownership of property is permitted only under certain conditions. Gandhiji recognized private ownership of property only to the extent that it may contribute to the welfare of
society. Gandhiji did not stand for the wholesale liquidation of
capitalism, he rather stood for its reformation. For Gandhiji,
labour is far superior to capital. It is immoral for the capitalist
to exploit the labourers. In short, Gandhiji was not against the
capitalist but only against the capitalism. He stood for the
obliteration of differences come between and man and man as
far as practicable. He wanted to bring about a total
transformation in the economic sphere through his non-violent
method. Gandhiji wrote, “By the non-violent method we seek
not to destroy the capitalist, we seek to destroy capitalism.
We invite the capitalist to regard himself as a trustee for those
on whom he depends for the making, the retention and the
increase of his capital. Nor need the worker wait for his
conversion. If capital is power, so is work. Either power can be
used destructively or creatively. Either is dependent on the
other. Immediately the worker realizes his strength, he is in a
position to become a co-sharer with the capitalist instead of
remaining his slave.”

Gandhiji’s regulated trusteeship aimed at transforming the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one.

The capitalist will act as trustees of the labouring classes
and that capital to should be utilized for their material and
moral welfare. So the wide gulf existing between capital and labour could be reduced to the minimum. Gandhiji even wanted the capitalist to come down to the level of labour who earns their daily bread by manual labour. The labourer has the power to work and he has to realize that, “he is a better owner of his own, than the wealthy man who is the owner of his wealth.” The equal distribution of the wealth could be brought about only through the weapon of non-violence which in turn effects necessary changes in one’s personal life. He has to reduce his wants to the minimum and observe simplicity in life. The rich man will have to make use of his riches to the extent reasonable that he requires for his personal needs and should act as trustees for his remaining riches. In the event of the rich refusing to become the trustees of the poor, even non-co-operation can be launched against them. It is equally correct to say that the poor too has to realize the fact that the rich cannot accumulate wealth without their co-operation in society. Gandhiji held the view that not merely wealth but even one’s physical strength too must be utilized for the service of all. The economic order envisaged by Gandhiji stood for economic equality, trusteeship, equitable distribution over and above a non-violent rural agrarian economic order village
as its centre. He stood for village economy, rural and village industries with emphasis on the economics of Khadi paving the way for non-violent rural economy and civilization.

Civilization in the real sense “consists not in the multiplication, but in the deliberate and voluntary restriction of wants. This alone promotes the real happiness and contentment, and increases the capacity for service.”

Such a society is essentially non-violent and decentralized for decentralization goes along with non-violence. Gandhiji wrote, “If India is to evolve along non-violent lines, it will have to decentralize many things. Centralization cannot be sustained and defended without adequate force. Simple homes from which there is nothing to take away require no policing; the palaces of the rich must have strong guards to protect them against the dacoity. ... rurally organized India will run less risk of foreign invasion than urbanized India well equipped with military naval and air forces. Centralization is a system is inconsistent with non-violent structure of society.”

It is well known that Gandhiji was not a political thinker or a academic philosopher in the literal sense. Generally, politics deals with the state, the pursuit and capture of power. Gandhiji, on the contrary, challenged the pre-suppositions of
the main stream of political theory. Joan V. Bondurant has correctly observed, “Gandhiji did not proceed from any specific political ideology and yet the significance for political theory of his action on the practical field of politics, is inestimable. The contribution has been not alone to the development of a social and political method. It extends further into the realm of political thought and challenges the substantial presupposition of the main stream of political theory.”

Politics as conceived by Gandhiji is closely connected with ethics and religion. He is of the view that the spirit of true religion should pervade politics through and through. It was Gandhiji’s firm religious faith and conviction due him into the field of politics. He wished to establish the ‘kingdom of Heaven’ on the world of politics. His aim in politics was to establish ‘kingdom of righteousness’ on earth which he calls Ramarajya. Gandhiji said, “By Ramarajya I do not mean Hindu Raj. I mean by Ramarajya Divine Raj, the Kingdom of God. For me Rama and Rahim are one and the same deity. I acknowledge no other God but one God of Truth and Righteousness.” Swaraj, non-violent state and Ramarajya were significant mile stones in the evolution of the political
philosophy of Gandhiji. Gandhiji wrote, “If national life becomes perfect as to become self-regulated, no representation become necessary. There is then a state of enlightened anarchy. In such a state every one is his own ruler. He rules himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbour.”

Gandhiji visualized the non-violent state as a means to ‘Ram Raj’ - Kingdom of righteousness on earth. Gandhiji considered politics not as an end in itself but only as a means to the betterment of human life. He was fully aware of the limitations in the realization of a perfectly non-violent state. Therefore he longed for a predominantly non-violent state.

Gandhiji is against the sovereignty of the state over the individuals. Gandhiji repudiated the coercive authority of the state for it represents violence in a concentrated and organized form. State represents an engine of violence. Gandhiji looked upon an increase in the power of the state with the greatest fear because it does the greatest harm by destroying individuality and the moral will of the individual which lies at the root of all progress. The compulsive nature of the authority of the state damages the moral nature of the individual. What Gandhiji disapproves of is an organization
based on force which a state essentially is. The primary function of the state is to redress the grievances and prevent conflicts. The state is considered to be a compulsory association but the interference of the state, according to Gandhiji, has to be minimal. Hence he considers the state as ‘a necessary evil’.

Further, the state is vested with power and authority. Which necessarily involves violence and which is contradictory to the very conception of a non-violent state. He has no objection against an organization which is voluntary and based on Truth and Non-violence. The non-violent state conceived by Gandhiji is a democracy in which non-violence becomes a creed, an article of faith, rather than a matter of mere policy. Gandhiji considers, whatever its external form may be, as merely an externalization of the moral level of the individual. Gandhiji wrote, “I do not today conceive of such golden age. But I do believe in the possibility of a predominantly non-violent society. And I am working for it.”

In the ideal state as visualized by Gandhiji there is no political power because there is no state. But such state has yet to be realized. Gandhiji repudiated the power of the state for the main reason that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts
absolutely. The pursuit of non-violence and truth find its expression in weakening the coercive role of the state. He was of the considered view that the greater the decentralization of power in any society, the greater would be the chances for the pursuit of non-violence and truth. He advocated the limitation of state power with emphasis on controlling rather than the increase of the authority of the state.

Gandhiji considers government as a necessary evil. That government alone can be considered as best which governs the largest number of virtuous individuals. Gandhiji gives a comprehensive definition of democracy which he says that “democracy must in essence...... Democracy in Gandhian sense is both disciplined and enlightened. Perfect democracy is possible only by perfect non-violence because no true democracy can prevail in an atmosphere of violence. Democracy and violence seldom go together. Perfect democracy is possible only when there is perfect non-violence. True democracy or the Swaraj of the masses never come through untruthful and violent means. Gandhiji pointed out that, “My notion of democracy is that under it the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest. That can be never happening except through non-violence.”

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Centralized type of democracy cannot be built on non-violent lines. Further centralization as a system is inconsistent with the non-violent structure of society. Gandhiji stated that centralization cannot be sustained and defended without the use of force. Decentralized democracy is consistent with non-violence as it governs least number of people. Gandhiji believed that government is the best which governs the least. Gandhiji advocated non-violent and decentralized democracy consisting of self-governing and self-sufficient village republics as the basic unit of political administration. It is only when democracy relies on the people and rule by the people and for the people without depending on military power, the government becomes truly decentralized. Gandhiji held the view that, “As a nation is truly democratic when it runs its affairs smoothly and effectively without much interference of the state.”

Gandhiji with his series of experiments with Truth and the experience gained there from made him suggest that government of the village will largely contribute to the progress of the people from the grass root level. Therefore in Gandhiji’s picture of independent India the unit is the village community. Every village has to become a republic or panchayat. And the, non-violent democratic state of Gandhiji’s
conception will be a federation of self-governing village communities always abide by the ideals of Truth and Non-violence.

The government of the village will be by the panchayat of five persons “annually elected by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. These will have all the authority and jurisdiction required. Since there will be no system of punishments in the accepted sense, this Panchayat will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate for its year of office.” It is considered as the unit of local self-government. It is the original custodian of all authority. Authority is decentralized and it begins from bottom upwards. It operates in a three-tier manner- the village level- the block level and district level panchayats. Thus in the village republic as envisaged by Gandhiji there is perfect democracy based upon individual freedom. It is the law of non-violence that rules him and his government.
Notes
3. *Ibid*, 05.03.1925, p. 81.
7. *Young India*, 24.11.1921, p. 365.
15. *Ibid*, 02.03.1934.
17. *Young India*, III, p. 350.
22. *Harijan*, 27.05.1939, p. 144.
24. *Harijan*, 03.03.1946, p. 28.
28 Young India, 08.01.1925, p. 15.
30 Young India, 26.03.1931, p. 49.
31 M.K. Gandhi, Yerveda Mandir, p. 36.
32 Young India, 18.01.1942, p. 5.
34 Young India, 19.09.1929, p. 305.
36 Harijan, 09.03.1940, p. 31.
37 Ibid, 18.05.1940, p. 129.