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

Thesis Submitted to the University of Calicut
for the Award of the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN PHILOSOPHY

By

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KERALA
2009
CHAPTER - IV

ECONOMIC DECENTRALISATION
4.1 ECONOMIC EQUALITY

The real meaning of economic equality is, “to each according to his need.”¹ Gandhiji wrote, “My ideal is equal distribution, but so far as I can see, is not being realized: I therefore work for equitable distribution.”² Gandhiji has suggested certain measures to bring about economic equality by the re-distribution of wealth. “What do you mean by economic equality” Gandhiji was asked at the Constructive Workers Conference during his recent tour of Madras, “and what is statutory trusteeship as conceived by you?” Gandhiji’s reply was that “economic equality of his conception did not mean that every one would literally have the same amount. It simply meant that everybody should have enough to his or her needs...”³ Hence the poor man too was entitled to get all the ordinary amenities of life that a rich man enjoys.

Gandhiji considered that it is our bounden duty to serve the poor to bring about economic equality. He has laid special attention to the use of indigenous methods of production such as spinning wheel, cottage and village industries, the revival of handicrafts, decentralization and rehabilitation of the villages to bring about economic equality and well-being of the semi-starved millions of India. He has admitted that there
are inequalities existing in the society but also held that the essential equality has not to be overlooked. His idea of society was based on the view that “while we are born equal meaning that we have a right to equal opportunity, all have not the same capacity. It is in nature of things, impossible.”

Sarvodaya as conceived by Gandhiji is an egalitarian socio-political and economic order with equality prevailing in every sphere of life. All are equal members of this ideal order and all sharing the produce of their labour. There is no scope for separation and exploitation of man by man. In the economic sphere Sarvodaya stands for equality of income and decentralization. Gandhiji pleaded for economic equality. It simply means that everybody should have enough to satisfy their basic needs namely dwelling place, food - at least a square meal a day and clothing – minimum Khadi to cover the body. By economic equality approximate but not absolute equality.

Gandhiji’s concept of decentralization is not an isolated phenomenon but largely shaped by the whole range of issues and problems in human life. Gandhiji has devised concrete measures for the realization of an ideal socio-political order.
The constructive programme with its eighteen items, Nai Talim or basic education, decentralized governance, Village Swaraj and Panchayat Raj are significant milestones in the evolution of a non-violent socio-political and economic order. There will be 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.

Gandhi stood for the obliteration of differences in income between man and man as far as possible. In the economic sphere the nature and extent of production will be largely determined by social necessity rather than by any profit motive. The economic order Gandhi envisaged, include within its scope along with economic equality, decentralization, swadeshi, trusteeship, stress on the rural industries – village and cottage industries with a view to transform the rural areas of our nation.

Since majority of the people of our country live in villages, the unit of development in Gandhian technique was the village itself. Gandhi wrote, “Identifying himself with India’s poor, he turned the thoughts 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.”

Even though not a true economist in the academic sense, Gandhiji can be considered as a true economist of the masses. Gandhiji has developed an economic theory fully based on the then prevailing situation in India. It provides a realistic approach with a warm human touch to problems of poverty, hunger and exploitation. Gandhiji builds up his economic ideas with a view to avoid exploitation of man by man. As a remedial measure, Gandhiji suggested to do away completely with the concentration of economic power by proposing economic decentralization.

In Gandhiji’s economic system, the production is to be largely determined by social necessity rather than personal greed. The approach of Gandhiji towards the economic order is essentially constructive and evolutionary. He felt that economic equality provides the way to non-violent independence. For Gandhiji working for economic equality means abolishing the eternal conflict between capital and
labour. He was of the considered opinion that the inequalities existing in societies cannot be removed unless the rich and the poor work in unity and are conscious of their own duties and the rights naturally following there from. He felt that non-violence can play a great role in the establishment of economic equalities.

Gandhiji was not against private property but acquisition of wealth could be allowed only under certain moral conditions of the society based on the attainability of honesty for practical purposes. Inequalities of wealth, “unjustly established, have assuredly injured the nation in which they exist during their establishment, and, unjustly directed, injure it yet more during their existence. But inequalities of wealth, justly established, benefit the national in the course of their establishment; and nobody used, aid it yet more by their existence.”

Unlike in modern capitalist economy Gandhiji has assigned labour superior to capital. Gandhiji was of the view that capital and labour should supplement each other. They are never antagonistic to each other rather living in unity and harmony. He wrote, “…capital not only looking to the material welfare of the labourers but their moral welfare also -
capitalist being trustees for the welfare of the labouring classes under them.”

Gandhiji was aiming at fundamental equality between the capitalist and the labourer. Exploitation of the poor can be extinguished not by effecting the destruction of a few millionaires. But rather it amounts to their own destruction. What is ultimately needed is the conversion leading to both being considered as equal partners. Capital as such is not an evil. It is the wrong use of it that is evil. Gandhiji considers capital in some form or other as essential. Gandhiji recognized that there is no line of distinction between capital and labour. Gandhiji was not opposed to organization of labour but wanted that its organization should be structured along Indian lines. Further Gandhiji said that, “I am not opposed to organization of labour, but as in every thing else, I want its organization along Indian lines, or if you will, my lines, I am doing it. The Indian labourer knows it instinctively. I do not regard capital to be the enemy of labour. I hold their co-ordination to be perfectly possible. The organization of labour that I undertook in South Africa, Champaran or Ahmedabad was in no spirit of hostility to the capitalists. The resistance in each case and the extent it was thought necessary was wholly successful.”

The
labourer has equally to realize that the labour is also capital and has its own strength and no amount of capital can ever subordinate it. Therefore Gandhiji thought that there is no need of any clash between capital and labour. Regarding the healthy relationship between capital and labour Gandhiji once wrote, “Each is dependent in the other. What is essential today is that the capitalist should not lord it over the labourer. In my opinion, the mill - hands are as much the proprietors of their mill as the share holders, and when the mill owners realize that the mill- hands are much mill- owners as they, there will be no quarrel between them.”

There is a conflict of interest between capital and labour which could be resolved by doing their own respective duty. Everything else will be added unto it. Gandhiji stood for the constructive use of labour and its power then, “they will become the real rulers and the employers will be their trustees and friends in need and deed. This happy state of things will come only when they know that labour is more real capital than the capital in the shape of gold and silver which labour extracts from the grounds of the earth.”

Gandhiji pleaded for the voluntary coming out of the rich people with their riches by laying in trust the excess wealth
for the benefit of the community. And if the rich people are not voluntarily coming out as trustees of the poor, the state has to intervene and that the ideal of state regulated trusteeship was found wanting. Gandhiji stated that, “Indeed at the root of this doctrine of equal distribution must lie that of the trusteeship of the wealthy for the superfluous wealth possessed by them... How is this brought about? Non-violently?... non-violent way is evidently superior. The rich man will be left in possession of his wealth, of which he will use what he reasonably requires for his personal needs and will act as a trustee for the remainder to be used for the society. In this argument, honesty on the part of trustee is assumed.”

Gandhiji pleaded to establish healthy relation between the capitalist and the labourers.

According to Gandhiji, “Economic equality is the master key to non-violent independence. It means the levelling down of the rich in whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation’s wealth on the one hand, and the levelling up of the semi-starved naked millions on the other.” A non-violent system of government is clearly an impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and poor persists. Gandhiji said, “I shall bring about economic equality through non-violence, by
converting the people to my point of view... I will not wait till I have converted the whole society to my view but will straight away make a beginning with myself... for that I have to reduce myself to the level of the poorest of the poor.”

The real implication of equal distribution is that each man shall have the wherewithal to supply all his natural wants and no more. To bring about this ideal it is suggested that the entire social order has to be re-constructed. A society based on non-violence cannot have any other ideal. Gandhiji enquired very seriously how equal distribution can be brought about through non-violence. He said, “The first step towards it is for him who has made this ideal part of his being to bring about the necessary changes in his personal life. He would reduce his wants to a minimum, bearing in mind the poverty of India.”

The ideal of Gandhiji - equal distribution cannot be realized. He therefore worked out for equitable distribution. What Gandhiji wanted was that “Everyone must have a balanced diet, a decent house to live in, facilities for the education of one’s children and adequate medical relief”.

4.2 TRUSTEESHIP
Gandhiji evolved the idea of trusteeship from the concept of the economic vow of non-possession. Private property was not denied. But Gandhiji has fixed certain limits for private property. The owners of property were asked to act as trustees of the property for the benefit of the community. Trusteeship means that the possessor of wealth should consider himself as a trustee and use the wealth for the good of others. Elimination of exploitation of man by man and inequalities in income are the goals of trusteeship. The basic assumptions of the doctrine of trusteeship are, “trusteeship provides capitalist order of society in to an egalitarian one. It does not recognize any right of private-ownership of property except in as much as it may be permitted by the society. It does not exclude legislative regulation of the ownership and use of wealth. Thus under state-regulated trusteeship an individual will not be free to hold on use his wealth for selfish satisfaction of in disregard of the interests of society. Just as it is proposed to fix a decent minimum living wage, even so a limit should be fixed for the maximum income that could be allowed to any person in society. The difference between such minimum and maximum incomes should be reasonable and equitable and variable from time to time so much. So that the
tendency would be towards obliteration of the difference. Under the Gandhian economic order, the character of production will be determined by social necessity and not by personal whim or greed.”

The concept of trusteeship was derived by Gandhiji from his legal studies in England, Snell’s Principle of Equity, Bhagvat Gita, Īśā Upanishad, Bible and Ruskin’s ‘Unto This Last’. The Īśā Upanishad particularly its first verse influenced him greatly.

“By the Lord (ĪŚĀ) enveloped must this all be –
Whatever moving thing there is in the moving world
With this renounced, thou mayest enjoy
Covet not the wealth of anyone at all.”

[(know that) all this, whatever moves in this moving world, is enveloped by God. Therefore find your enjoyment in renunciation; do not covet what belongs to others]

Of all the Upanishads, the Īśā Upanishad was a favourite Upanishad of Gandhiji and he has quoted its first verse more than once. According to Gandhiji the opening verse of the Īśā Upanishad ‘Īśā Vasyam Idam Sarvam’ gives the following teaching: (i) ‘All this that we see in this great universe is
pervaded by God’, (ii) Renounce it and enjoy it’, (iii) ‘Enjoy what he gives you’, (iv) ‘Don’t covet anybody’s wealth or possession’. The last three teachings follow directly from the first. “If you believe”, Gandhiji says, “that God pervades everything that he has created, you must believe that you cannot enjoy anything that is not given by Him (Enjoy what He gives you). And seeing that you cannot covet anybody’s possession. (Don’t covet anybody’s wealth or possession). If you think that you are one of His numerous creatures, it behoves you to renounce everything and lay it His feet. (Renounce it and enjoy it). And that means that the act of renunciation of everything is not mere physical renunciation but represents a second or new birth. It is a deliberate act, not done in ignorance. It is therefore, regeneration. We are, thus, called to withdraw from the world’s activities not in body but in mind. We have to renounce the sense of attachment.

The principle of non-stealing (asteya) and non-possession (aparigraha) which form two of the eleven vows in Gandhiji’s system of ethics are clearly implied in the verse. But Gandhiji discovers other implications too. They are “(i) ‘Universal brotherhood, not only brotherhood of all human
beings but all of the living being, (ii) ‘The doctrine of equality of all creatures on earth, (iii) ‘Service of fellow creatures’.”

Gandhiji thus finds in the first verse of the Īśā Upanishad not a statement of a metaphysical position – ‘whatever moves in this moving world is enveloped by God’ – but also some of the most important ethical principles: dedicated work, non-stealing and non-possession. Besides, it implies a complete philosophy of social life – fraternity, equality, and service to fellow beings.

The Upanishads, in the light of the aforesaid, have an immense impact on Gandhiji’s mind. His belief in the unity of everything and every being, his conception of the Ultimate Reality, his ethical and moral principles, and even some of his social ideas can be traced to the Upanishadic teachings. The Upanishads thus form one of the most important foundations of Gandhiji’s thought.

Gandhiji tried to apply this idea as a solution to the economic inequalities in society. Inequalities existing in the society cannot be removed unless the rich and the poor are morally conscious of their duties and realise their defects. An appeal to reason and love of humanity create an awareness.
and an atmosphere for self-purification. Trusteeship means that all property originally belongs to the society and those who are possessing it are only the trustees of the society. Gandhi was of the considered view that non-violence could play a pivotal role for establishing economic equality. Under the trusteeship theory, Gandhi admitted limited property rights. Trusteeship theory does not recognize absolute right of private property. Acquisition of wealth is permitted and possible only under moral condition of the society based on the principle of honesty for all practical purposes.

Gandhi held the view that labour is far superior to the capital. Gandhi was not against the capitalist but against capitalism. He was not for the wholesale liquidation of the capitalist but of capitalism. He wanted to bring about a total transformation – a heart change in the capitalists. Gandhi stood for their reformation through non-violent method. He wanted to affect a harmonious union between the capital and the labour. Gandhi 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 of his capital. Nor need the worker wait for his conversion. If capital is power, so is work. Either power can be
used distinctively 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 idea of regulated trusteeship does not accept the right of private property hereditary or otherwise. He aimed at transforming the present capitalist order of society in to an egalitarian one. Gandhiji held that a healthy relation between the capitalist and the labourer have to prevail and that the capitalist have to be the trustees for the welfare of the labourers working under them. The capital is meant for the moral and the material welfare of the labourers. Gandhiji said, “I am inviting those people who consider themselves as owners today to act as trustees, i.e., owners, not in their own right, but owners in the right of those whom they have exploited.”

Gandhiji gave the concept of trusteeship the sanction of both philosophy and religion. He was deeply influenced by Ruskin’s Unto This Last and was of the view that by nature all human beings were equal and that there should not be any discrimination among individuals in respect of income,
consumption and other bare necessities of life. This made him a believer in man’s capacity for goodness, altruism, moral consciousness, change of heart, love, etc. Further man can be happy only if they obey the moral law. Man should not run after greater and higher fortunes. Simple pleasure should be his objective instead. Freedom from want will usher in the Kingdom of God on Earth. Gandhiji in his theory of trusteeship has stated that, “my theory of trusteeship is no make-shift, certainly no camouflage. I am confident that it will survive all other theories. That the possessor of wealth has not acted in accordance with the spirit of the theory, it does not prove its falsity, but proves the weakness of the wealthy man. No other theory is compatible with non-violence. In the non-violent method the wrong-doer compasses his own end, if he does not undo the wrong. For, either through non-violent non-co-operation he is made to see the error, or he finds himself completely isolated.”

Gandhiji, with the passage of time, has added an economic content to the purely moralistic conception of trusteeship. He has provided a simple and practical formula of trusteeship drawn up by Kishore Lal Mashruwala and Narahari
Parikh, approved by Gandhiji with few modifications. The basic assumptions of the doctrine are:

1. “Trusteeship provides a means of transforming the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one. It gives no quarter to capitalism, but gives the present owning class a chance of reforming itself. It is based on the faith that human nature is never beyond redemption.

2. It does not recognize any right of private ownership of property except so far as it may be permitted by society for its own welfare.

3. It does not exclude legislative regulation of the ownership and use of wealth.

4. Thus, under state-regulated trusteeship an individual will not be free to hold or use his wealth for selfish satisfaction or in disregard of the interests of society.

5. Just as it is proposed to fix a decent minimum living wage, even so a limit should be fixed for the maximum income that could be allowed to any person in society. The difference between such minimum and maximum incomes should be reasonable and equitable and variable
from time to time so much so that the tendency would be
towards obliteration of the difference.

6. Under the Gandhian economic order, the character of
production will be determined by social necessity and not by personal whim or greed.”

Gandhiji held that not only wealth but one’s physical strength, talents and intelligence must be utilized for the service of all. “I would allow a man of intellect to earn more; I would not cramp his talent. But the bulk of his great earnings must be used for the good of the state, just as the incomes of all earnings of sons of the father go to the common family fund. They would have then earnings only as trustees.” The doctrine of trusteeship means the use of all one has, for the good of all. Trusteeship, as Gandhiji envisaged, does not exclude legislative regulation of the ownership and the use of wealth. According to Gandhiji, the transformation of the capitalists would not be left to the sweet will of the capitalists, pending necessary legislation if they proved impervious to the appeal of reason; the weapon of non-violent non-co-operation would be brought in to play. The theory of trusteeship was an integral part of Gandhiji’s scheme of the non-violent transformation of the society. But the theory of trusteeship
cannot become a reality without a thorough social awakening. It must also be pointed out that the absolute trusteeship is unattainable. Gandhiji himself said, “Only Jamnalalji came near, but only near it.”

Gandhiji says that “Absolute trusteeship is an abstraction like Euclid’s definition of a point and is equally unattainable. But if we strive for it, we shall be able to go further in realizing a state of equality on earth than by any other method.” He further said: “if only we could make people conscious of this power – the power of non-violent non-co-operation, the realization of the ideal of trusteeship would follow as surely as morning follows night.”

Thus Gandhiji’s theory of trusteeship stands for equitable distribution, economic equality, individual non-possession and also belief in the strength of people’s non-violent direct action.

4.3 NON-VIOLENT RURAL ECONOMY

Another notable idea in respect of Gandhian economics was decentralized development. This, according to Gandhiji was possible only by beginning from the bottom upward. He favoured the establishment of self-sufficient, self-supporting village republic with the individual at its centre who is ready to perish for the village. Since the times immemorial, India has been a land of villages. In the vedic age village was the basic
unit of administration. Gandhiji, the founder not of any system of philosophy, but the continuator of a great tradition has opined that any programme of socio-economic development that bypasses rural people is bound to be a failure. It has been aptly remarked that, “Rural development is a part of a larger process of development of national society. It is legitimate that it contribute to the over all goals of national development, growth, employment, equity, development of industries and services for self-reliance in defence, environmental conservation and so on.”

Gandhiji was very particular that village life should not become a copy of city life. Rather the cities have to adopt the village life. Gandhiji found in the villages the treasure of an age old culture and civilization. Gandhiji said, “It is only when the cities realized the duty of making an adequate return to the villages for the strength and sustenance which they derived from them instead of selfishly exploiting them that a healthy and moral relationship between the two will spring up. And if the city children are to play their part in this great and noble work of social reconstruction, the vocation through which they are to receive their education ought to be directly related to the requirements of the villages.”
Thus in Gandhiji’s picture of independent India the unit is the village. The emancipation of India lie in the reconstruction not of the towns but of her innumerable villages. Gandhiji has devised the twenty point constructive programme for the development of the village areas and its people. Gandhiji said, “he who has no belief in the constructive programme that has, in my opinion, no concrete feelings for the starved millions… In actual practice the expansion of my non-violence has kept pace with that of my identification with starved humanity.”

Gandhiji has stated in the Harijan, “you have therefore to be rural-minded before can be non-violent and to be rural-minded you have to have faith in the spinning wheel.” Hence Gandhiji has warned us to return to the village, return to a life of simplicity, serenity, innocence and purity.

Gandhiji’s economic ideas such as swadeshi, decentralization, trusteeship along with the twenty point constructive programme were the most effective means to rebuild the nation from the bottom upwards. It is the bounden duty of every educated Indian to go back to the village and undertake compulsory community service to build up a new India - the India of Gandhiji’s dream.
Gandhiji was very well aware of the deplorable condition of the Indian villages. He has described the Indian villages as “a collection of unsanitary dwelling constructed in a dunghill.”\(^{32}\) Gandhiji has gone to the extent of declaring that ‘if the villages perish India too will perish to that extent.’ Gandhiji has worked for the reformation of the Indian villages for the majority of the Indian population live in villages. He has a dream of an ideal village and has prescribed the following conditions for its establishment. The conditions include: “there should be orderliness in the structure of village, the lanes and road, should be orderly and must be kept absolutely clean so that nobody need hesitate to walk or even sleep in the street, the lanes should be macadamized and have gutters for draining off water, temples and mosques must be kept beautifully clean. So that visitors feel an air of tranquil holiness about them, the villages should be filled with shade and fruit trees, they should have Dharmasala and a small dispensary, washing and privy arrangements should be such as not to contaminate the air, water and roads of the village, every village should be self-sufficient so far as its food and clothing requirements are concerned, every village should be capable of defending itself from robbers or wild animals, it
should have recreation facilities and a playground for adults and children and a reserve for its cattle, if space is left over, the village should maintain a village theatre, school, public hall, it should have its own water works, ensuring a clean water supply, education should be made compulsory up to the final basic course, caste, with its graded untouchability should be practiced, as far as possible, all activities should be conducted on a co-operative basis, Non-violence with its technique of Satyagraha and Non-Cooperation should be the sanction of the village community, there should be a compulsory service of village guards, to be selected by rotation from the register maintained by the village, the government of the village should be conducted by a panchayat of five persons, annually elected by adult villages possessing minimum qualification, since there should be no system of punishment in the accepted sense of the term, the village panchayat would be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined, two panchayats should jointly elect one leader and they should form a working party. Fifty such working parties should elect a second grade leader. Parallel groups of two hundred panchayats should continue to be formed till they cover the whole of India, each succeeding
group of panchayats electing a second grade leader. All second grade leaders should jointly serve the whole of India and severally for their respective areas. The second grade leaders might elect a chief when ever they deem necessary, to regulate and command all the groups.”

Gandhiji visualized a decentralized non-violent agrarian economy for the progress and development of the rural areas. In Gandhiji’s village based economy, industry has to be small-scale and traditional based mainly on agriculture and indigenous technology which alone can guarantee human dignity. He became a severe critic of industrialization and technology for it enslaves man. On the contrary, he stood for the economic regeneration of India through decentralization. Gandhiji was of the opinion that India could lead an ennobled life by developing cottage and village industries. Gandhiji wrote, “If I can convert the country to my point of view, the social order of the future will be based predominantly on the charka and all that implies. It will include every thing that promotes the well- being of the villagers.”
4.4 CRITIQUE OF INDUSTRIALIZATION, TECHNOLOGY AND MECHANIZATION

Gandhiji visualized a decentralized economic order in favour of decentralized development of the country. Decentralization in the economic field assigns priority to small and cottage industries. Gandhiji preferred production by the masses rather than mass production. The development based on labour saving machines lead to mass production and distribution in a centralized way. It paved the way for the wide gulf between the haves and have nots. It also helped in the extensive use of machines which in turn resulted in displacing large number of people without job. Gandhiji had an altogether different idea on this matter. He was of the opinion that, “the problem with us is now how to find leisure for the toiling millions inhabiting in our villages but the problem is how to utilize their idle hours which are equal to the working days of six months in a year. It has been rightly pointed out that it is only when there is decentralization of the production of basic needs of people and limited reliance on centralized industry that all other postulates of Gandhian economic order can function.” 35
Gandhiji had drawn up the eighteen items constructive programme for the reconstruction of the villages. Indian planners totally ignored the need for the evolving any special approach to the problem of rural development. Progress and development have not reached the remote villages and the weaker sections of the society. The villages were denied of the basic necessities of life, like drinking water facilities, education, medical and health services and communication. In order to improve this situation a totally different approach to rural development is needed.

Gandhian strategy for rural development includes the development of village and cottage industries, development of agriculture, improvement of rural health, education, sanitation, betterment of Harijans and democratic decentralization at all levels. He laid special attention to the use of indigenous methods of production for bringing about economic equality. He also stood for village self-sufficiency which originated from the idea of non-exploitation. He became a critique of capitalist method of production. He tried to evolve a production system which altogether eliminates exploitative mechanism. Gandhiji advocated the principle of Swadeshi with its emphasis on indigenization of both production and distribution.
Gandhiji stood for the moralization and humanization of economics. The criteria he adopted to measure progress were moral values and real happiness. Real progress does not lie in the material progress. The industrial civilization is a disease as it is all evil. Gandhiji was a severe critic of modern scientific and technological civilization developed by the west. He even called it a “Satanic civilization.” His main objection against it is that it is concerned only with material advancement and prosperity. It totally ignores the moral and spiritual aspects of human life. In Hind Swaraj Gandhiji characterized modern civilization as a “disease” and “a nine days wonder” for it “takes not neither of morality nor of religion.”

Like Thoreau Gandhiji believes that this push-bottom civilization reduces man to a mere soulless automation. The modern civilization has reduced man to a mere cog atrophying his limbs. What Gandhiji wanted was that, “whilst this machine age aims at converting men into machines, I am aiming at reinstalling man turned machine into his original estate.” Modern civilization certainly provides us with many comforts and amenities, but they cannot be regarded as the index of a true civilization. In true civilization the basis of human relationship is morality and selfless love. Simplicity is the essence of true civilization. Civilization, as conceived by
Gandhiji is a way of life, a mode of conduct. It is, as he says, “that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty.”\textsuperscript{39} The Gujarathi equivalent to civilization is “good conduct.”

Gandhiji was not totally opposed to machinery as such. He was of the considered view that machinery has to promote the human welfare. He was all in for the utilization of the capacity of the nation which was going waste. He has categorically stated that, “Machinery has its place; it has come to stay. But it must not be allowed to displace human labour.”\textsuperscript{40} Further he opined, “How can I be against machinery when I know that even this body is the most delicate machine.”\textsuperscript{41,42} Gandhiji was ready to rule out all machinery just as he could reject this very body which is a hindrance to higher levels of realizations of the self’s identity with the Universal Self and the absolute liberation of the soul. But machines will remain like the bodies and therefore are found inevitable. “The body itself .... is the purest piece of mechanism, but if it is a hindrance to the highest flights of the soul, it has to be rejected.”\textsuperscript{43}

While making a reference to the evils of machinery, Gandhiji stated that, “machinery is like a snake-hole which may contain from one to hundred snakes. Where there is
machinery, there are large cities; where there are large cities, there are tram-cars and railways. And there only does one see electric light. Honest physician will tell you that where means of artificial locomotion have increased, the health of the people has suffered. I remember that when in a European town there was scarcity of money, the receipts of the tramway company, of the lawyers and of the doctors went down, and the people were less unhealthy. I cannot recall a single good point in connection with machinery.”

But Gandhiji was all in favour of every machine that reduces the burden of the cottage worker. “My machinery must be of the most elementary type which I can put in the home of the millions. He was for the limited use of machinery especially when machinery begin to encroach upon his individuality. The more of machinery the less of non-violence. it is only when machinery has been put into its proper place then only we can think of non-violence.”

Gandhiji further maintained that, “There should be ample scope for decentralization of industry, and economic and social power, under the non-violent pattern of economic planning.”

Gandhiji described that, “The fullest initiative must lie in the hands of the rural communities that they experience freedom through self-help and self-reliance.”
Machinery has to be chosen in accordance with need. Further it has to be non-exploitative and it has to benefit every human being along decentralized ways. There should evolve a non-violent technology, that is technology with a human face which alone could benefit life as a whole. The balance between ‘man’ and ‘machine’ is found wanting for permanent results. Gandhiji preferred appropriate technology for the rural sector to match with raw materials, social needs, and people’s skill to meet the actual situation instead of indiscriminate use of technology from the west. Gandhiji wrote, “When production and consumption both become localized, the temptation to speed up production, indefinitely and at any price, disappears. All the endless difficulties and problems that our present-day economic system presents, too, would then come to an end.”

Gandhiji believed that some key industries are necessary but they have to be state owned so as to benefit not the few but all. Gandhiji stated that, “what is the cause of the present chaos? It is exploitation, I will not say of the weaker nations by the stronger, but of sister nations by sister nations. And my fundamental objection to machinery rests on the fact that it is machinery that has enabled these nations to exploit others.”
In the modern times the revival of the rural industries is much sought after obvious reasons. It is non-exploitative and therefore essentially non-violent. Production by the masses rather than mass production is its desired goal. Gandhiji pleads for going back to the rural agricultural civilization. The rude plough is the symbol of true civilization wherein lies the salvation of the husbandman. A life at peace with itself, a life of serenity and calm, is better than the life of a modern man in relentless pursuit of these materials.

From these criticisms of modern civilization we should not come to the conclusion that Gandhiji is totally opposed to it. Gandhiji was opposed only to the ‘craze’ for machinery which enslaves man and not for machinery as such. Decentralization was one of the means to create an unexploited and egalitarian society. Decentralization in the economic sphere is related to rural economy as a whole. Khadi, village industries and Swadeshi stood for decentralization of production and utilization of locally available resources. Gandhiji was practical in realizing that machinery cannot be discarded totally. His aim was not the eradication of all machinery but its limited use. He stood for the most elementary type of machinery which can be installed in the homes of the millions without much expense. He
objected the use of machinery as an instrument for the satisfaction of man’s greed and not his need.

4.5 APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY

The Gandhian concept of decentralization is reflected in his views on production and distribution. He favoured participative growth with social justice to benefit the masses. Gandhiji favoured an appropriate or middle technology. According to Gandhiji, appropriate technology should be used for production. It is the method of production that offers the maximum satisfaction of human needs. Further he stated that it should not lead to violence and exploitation. It should not inflict pain to body, mind or soul.

Gandhiji’s economics emphasized the development of self-reliant economy. Self-reliance means independence. That is every village must be capable of satisfying the basic needs of its people without depending on external sources. It should rely on the use of indigenous resources and technology to the maximum without importing the technology of the west. That is we have to think in terms of reviving old technology or inventing a new one, or improving the traditional indigenous technology. Gandhiji preferred intermediate technology i.e., a
technology between the advanced and the backward. It was observed that, “intermediate technology would be vastly superior in productivity to their traditional technology while at the same time being vastly cheaper and simpler than the highly sophisticated and capital intensive technology of the west.

Gandhiji concedes that there are certain sectors and localities in every developing country which are irrevocably committed to the western technology, but, for the rest of the economy he suggested a technology that has to fulfill four requirements (i) the work place have to be created in areas where the people are living now; (ii) their work place must be, on the average, cheap enough so that they can be created in large numbers without making undue demands on savings and imports, (iii) the production method employed must be relatively simple so that the demands of high skills are minimized, not only in the production process itself but also in the matters of organization, raw material supply, financing, marketing, and so forth, and (iv) production should be largely for local use.”50
Another major objective of Gandhiji’s economics was the attainment of self-sufficiency at the village level itself. That is every village has to be self-sustained and self-sufficient, capable of managing its own affairs even to the extent of defending itself against foreign invasion. Development of a particular area can be achieved by the people of that area. Development without people’s participation is no development. The appropriate technology helps in meeting the local needs more effectively than any other mode of production and distribution.
The notable characteristics of appropriate technology include:

1. Low capital investment.
2. Usage of materials whenever possible.
3. Creates jobs, employing local skills and labour.
4. Small enough to be affordable to a small group.
5. Can be understood, controlled and maintained by villagers.
6. Can be produced in the village itself.
7. People work together collectively to improve their community.
8. Involves decentralized, renewable energy sources such as wind energy, solar energy, hydro power, methane gas, animal and manual labour.
9. Makes technology accessible to the people for further innovations.
10. Flexible so that they can be adapted to the changing circumstances.
11. Do not involve patents, royalties, consulting fees, import duties, shipping charges and financial obligations.

The concept of appropriate technology plays a crucial role in Gandhiji’s non-violent and decentralized economy model wherein the people are of supreme consideration with ample scope for the development of their skills. The technology must fit the prevalent culture and not vice-versa.

4.6 AGRARIAN CIVILIZATION

Gandhiji’s main objective was to rebuild India from below upwards. With this end in view he aimed at the creation of an egalitarian socio-political and economic order together with the ideals of simplicity and minimizing of wants. He has assigned supreme consideration to man and higher values of life than material or physical comforts. He preferred decentralized non-violent rural economy based on cottage and village industries. He stood for the revival of village or rural industries especially Charka and all that it implies – namely it includes everything that promotes the well-being of the villagers. The revival of rural industries strengthens the development of rural economy which in turn contributes to the development of agriculture. “Industrialization on a mass scale
will necessarily lead to passive or active exploitation of the villagers as the problems of competition and marketing come in. Therefore, we have to concentrate on the village being self-contained, manufacturing mainly for use.”

Gandhiji has formulated his famous ‘Constructive Programme’ for the economic relief of the villagers. Gandhiji’s emphasis on village industries largely help the villages to develop the spirit of self-reliance. Gandhiji himself like a farmer completely identified himself with wishes and aspirations of the starving millions of India. Gandhiji was a supporter of thorough agrarianism and wanted India to develop as an agricultural nation. For he thought that emancipation of India could never be brought about by the reform of the few towns and cities. Rural rehabilitation was an essential pre-requisite for raising the standard of lives of the people. Hence, Gandhiji turned his attention to the villages rather than the few cities.

According to Gandhiji India lives in her villages. Gandhiji wrote, “Under my scheme nothing will be allowed to be produced by cities which can be equally well produced by the villages. The proper function of cities is to serve as clearing
Gandhiji was of the definite opinion that non-violence could not be realized in a factory civilization but on that of self-contained villages. Hence his slogan was – ‘back to the village’. Economic centralization leads to political centralization. Centralization, in any field, support violence hence democratic decentralization in order to be a reality it was essential to promote self-sufficient small scale economy of the villages.

Towards the later part of his life, Gandhiji became more radical in his ideas regarding ownership of land. He advocated the revolutionary doctrine that ‘land belongs to him who tills it’ Gandhiji wrote, “Real socialism has been handed down to us by our ancestors who taught ‘all land belongs to’ Gopala, where then is the boundary line? Man is the maker of that, and he can therefore unmake it”

In a speech at the Federal Structure Committee of the Second Round Table Conference, in 1931, Gandhiji had said, “There is no desire on the part of the Congress, and there is no desire on the part of these dump paupers to disposses landlords of their possession, but they would have landlords to act as trustees for the tenants.” Further he said that “I would unhesitatingly advice tenants to evacuation the land belonging to a tyrant. That
would be like giving your cloak also when only the court is demanded. To take what is required may be profitable, to have more given to you is highly likely to be burden. To overload stomach is to court slow death. A Zamindar wants his rent, he does not want his land it would be a burden on him when he does not want it.”

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2. *Young India*, 17.03.1927, p. 86.


4. *Young India*, 26.03.1931, p. 49.


7. *Young India*, 20.08.1925, p. 285.

8. *Ibid*, 17.03.1927, p. 86.


13. *Harijan*, 31.03.1946, p. 64.


20. *Young India*, 26.03.1931, p. 49.


27 Pyarelal, Towards - New Horizon, p. 93.
28 S.C. Jain, Rural Development - Institutions and Strategies, p. XII
29 Harijan, 09.10.1937, p. 293.
30 Ibid, 1940.
31 Ibid, 04.11.1939, p. 331.
33 M.K.Gandhi, Village Swaraj, p. 32-34.
34 Harijan, 27.01.1940, p. 428.
36 Young India, 17.03.1927, p. 85.
37 M.K. Gandhi, Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule, p. 20-22 and 92.
38 Harijan, 29.08.1936, p. 228.
39 M.K. Gandhi, Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule, p.44.
40 Young India, 05.01.1921, p.377.
41 Ibid, 20.11.1924, p.386
42 Ibid.
45 . Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Harijan, 02.11.1934, p.302.
48 Young India, 22.10.1931, p.38.
49 E.F. Schumacher, Small is Beautiful, p. 140
51 Ibid, 28.01.1939.
Ibid, 16.05.1936.

Ibid, 31.03.1946.

Young India, 08.10.1931, p.128.

M.K.Gandhi, Sathyagraha, p.325,