CHAPTER – VI: Decentralization

6.1 Introduction:

According to Gandhi, the State represents violence in a concentrated and organized form. It cannot be weaned away from violence because it is soulless machinery.1 Thus, when the State represents violence and has no soul, the economic and political powers should not be concentrated but decentralised completely. Gandhi looked “upon an increase in the power of the state with the greatest fear because, although while apparently doing good by minimizing exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind destroying individuality, which lies at the root of all progress.”2 To Gandhi, decentralization is the only way to eliminate exploitation of the weaker section in society and to bring welfare and happiness to the millions. Hence, Gandhi advocated the decentralization of political power. The Gandhian decentralized political order is based on two considerations: First, the individual should prepare himself in order to rule over himself. Self rule (Swaraj) is one of the

prime ideals which the individual should aspire to achieve. Second, each village should be economically self-supporting and politically autonomous. Thus, political power is to be decentralized for self-governing individuals and villages.³

To Gandhi, concentration or centralization of power, is a danger to democracy. It distorts all democratic values. As a system, it is inconsistent with non-violent structure of society. It is essential for all round development of individuals including his self-realization, and his society at various levels. It provides a congenial condition and atmosphere to develop a sense of social responsibility, equality, love, fraternity, belonging and oneness in the minds of every citizen thereby helping the building up of a non-violent society.

6.2 General meaning and concept of decentralization:

The dictionary meaning of decentralization is the process of transferring the functions from a central government to local units. Thus, decentralization is intimately related to the transfer of government functions and powers from central to field level, political as well as

administrative agencies. Decentralization is also concerned with the delegation of powers and functions from the higher level official to lower ones within an organization.⁴

According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, decentralization means transfer of authority from central to local government. *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* defines decentralization as the effort in government to disperse or redistribute functions or powers from a central authority to regional and local organizations.⁵ Decentralization provides a mechanism for the relief on national legislation from a constantly increasing burden, promotes effectiveness equally in local, national and imperial spheres; promotion of citizen interest in government by means of wider popular participation; participation of citizens at different levels of administrative hierarchy; clear adaptation of legislative and administrative methods to the needs and opinions of a given area; enlargement of the opportunity for experimentation; and so far as the use of public

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corporations is concerned, protection against political interference in the conduct of administrative operations.

Decentralization is a faith; its core concept should be power-sharing and not power consuming. Power has two faces. One implies that the government is just and firm, and the people have the responsibility of enabling the government to govern by being amenable (responsive) to its discipline. The other face is the creation of a countervailing (counter balance) force in the form of people's institutions and organizations which can keep the government in check and provide the necessary feedback for imaginative and sympathetic governance.  

Again decentralization is a corollary of democracy when it penetrates corporate life. It provides a philosophy for the exercise of authority in a democratic way in an organization, public or private, commercial or non-commercial. It rejects all forms of domination on corporate life. According to The Encyclopedia Americana

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decentralization, in business and industry, "is the geographical and operational dispersement of a firm's operations." Generally, power is located at one single centre unless it is the case of a federation. In the interest of efficiency and effectiveness, power is dispersed among various local units, the size of which depends upon various local factors operating in a particular state. It is from those geographically scattered small centres that a part of the power is administered.

*The Encyclopedia Americana,* also says: "Decentralization, in government, is the distribution of authority among many organs of defined geographic or functional competence according to relatively permanent constitutional or legislative provisions. It is claimed that decentralization has the advantages of (1) relieving the central government of a constantly increasing burden of expanding services; (2) promoting citizen interest in government through wider popular participation; (3) retarding conditions favourable to bureaucracy or dictatorship; (4) more closely adapting legislative and administrative

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8 *The Encyclopedia Americana,* (New York: First Published 1829, Reprint 1973), p. 587
procedures to the needs of given areas; and (5) enlarging the opportunity for experimentation…”

6.3 Centralization and Decentralization:

Centralization and decentralization are best regarded as opposite tendencies on a single continuum whose polls are beyond the range of any real political system. Total decentralization would require the withering away of the state, whereas total centralization would imperil the states capacity to perform its functions. Decentralization is often taken to mean the distribution of power and control geographically all over the country in several centres while centralization means the centralization of power and control in one capital city. Centralization also means the concentration of decision making power in one person or group of persons in a large organization, whether it is concentrated in one large building or in a separate branches all over the country. Conversely, decentralization means distribution of decision making power in some suitable manner in several hands in the same organization regardless of its geographical

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distribution or location.\textsuperscript{11} It also applies to the systematic effort to
delegate to the lowest levels all authority except that which can only
exercise at central points. In other words, when delegation is consistently
and systematically practised, it constitutes decentralization.\textsuperscript{12}

The importance of decentralization lies in the fact that
centralization breeds bureaucratization which, in turn, stultifies the
initiative of the people, curbs people's participation and slows down the
rapid pace of economic growth.\textsuperscript{13} More decentralization would mean less
of bureaucratic control and, conversely, more centralization would mean
more bureaucracy, because in a decentralized situation, the need for
supervision, control and authority would be much less and hence
bureaucracy's hold also becomes less. The more there is centralization,
the more hierarchical structure becomes necessary in order to control,
communicate, direct and supervise and finally take punitive or preventive

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\item[12] M.A. Muttalib, op.cit., p. 705
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action as necessitated by the agencies of the central government agencies.\textsuperscript{14}

Neither centralization nor decentralization is a neutral term; instead, each is freighted with value connotations. In England and the United States, centralization is seldom treated as good in itself or as the bearer of other goods. Decentralization, on the other hand, is commonly advocated as a pre-condition for the achievement and prevention of the basic values of a free society.\textsuperscript{15}

The reason for favouring decentralization is prompted by the problem of degeneration of most political systems in the developing countries, and also of some even in the developed countries, into authoritarian or totalitarian political systems. An authoritarian system assumes a high degree of concentration of political power in the hands of a small oligarchy.\textsuperscript{16} Ramashray Roy has observed: "Even in such countries as England and the United States, the view is widely held that decentralization of political power is a necessary condition for the


\textsuperscript{15} W. James Fester, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 371

\textsuperscript{16} A.G. Noorani, \textit{The Indian Express}, English daily newspaper, 28.9.1984
survival of democracy just as it is a necessary instrument for mobilizing local resources for development... Even ordinary but active party members do not have any say in the decision-making except choosing their masters once in four or five years. A debate is going on all over the developed world about the participatory democracy which is another name for decentralization in the political arena.\footnote{17}

6.4 Gandhi's concept of decentralization:

Gandhi advocated decentralization of power both in the political as well as economic sphere because centralization curbs individual initiative and stands in the way of self-realization. According to him decentralization of political and economic power provides for the working of democracy based upon individual freedom and initiative and for the individual being allowed to participate in the government of his country. It would also regulate automatically both the production and distribution of the commodities necessary to human life; and both the production and the consumption of these would be in the same locality rather than having production concentrated in particular area only, thus necessitating

regulations for the distribution of products and wealth. He held the view that without economic decentralization, political decentralization would be meaningless.

In the political sphere he favoured curtailment of the authority of the state and grant of more autonomy to the village community. He said: "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."¹⁸ That is to say he insisted on the creation of self-sufficing autonomous village communities. Gandhi asserted that in a decentralized society the individuals shall enjoy complete freedom. Such a society shall be non-violent in nature and hence, there shall be no place for military, police or law courts in it.

Regarding decentralization in the economic field he favoured replacement of the large scale industry by cottage industry. He asserted that through cottage industries alone the spiritual values could be properly understood and appreciated. Thus Gandhi advocated both political and economic decentralization.

Gandhi’s concept of decentralization is also based on the principles that the rural people have the capacity to look after their own welfare and the village is an ideal unit for community development; decentralization is designed to transform government programme into people’s programme; realization of the maximum development potential on the basis of local manpower as co-operative self-help is the goal of decentralization and the system is expected to foster local and democratic leadership. According to Gandhi, “people under such decentralized economic and political system will be quite competent to run and manage their Panchayats and other local self-governing institutions.”19 Decentralization of Gandhi aims at associating the people with the administration at the grass root level. The people are required to execute/perform the responsibility of formulating and implementing their own plans. For him, it is also essential to make people free in all respects, to make them trustworthy, to develop their mind and capacity, to protect themselves from external attack, to make the people really cultured, develop fraternity among them and to make them

responsible citizens, and also for their overall development as human beings. In such a condition, there will be no suppression of opinion, no exploitation. Gandhi held the view that independence must mean that of the people, not of the rulers of the people. The ruler should depend on the will of those ruled. Thus, the rulers have to be servants of the people, ready to do the will of the ruled. Independence must begin at the bottom.

Gandhi’s concept of decentralization can be studied under three heads: social, political and economic.

(i). Social decentralization:

Gandhi firmly believed in decentralized social system. His view on social decentralization begins from the family. In the family life the relationship between husband and wife should be that of true friends and not that of master and servant. They have a joint responsibility in the maintenance and strengthening of home/family and thus supplementing each other’s labours. The custom of husbands regarding their wives as property was severely criticised by Gandhi. Gandhi lamented that in Hindu households husbands do not consult their wives. A husband regards his wife as his property. Gandhi was thus against their domination of the wife by her husband. This means that power is unrealized in the hands of
husband in the family. Instead, he wanted proper sharing of the responsibility of household management and family administration between the husband and wife and that women should have a role in making decision of the family. He was of the opinion that women should not be confined in the kitchen like a slave. He said that man had converted her into a domestic drudge and an instrument of his pleasure, instead of regarding her as his helpmate and better half. The result is a semi-paralysis of our society. Woman has rightly been called the mother of the race. Men owe it to her and to themselves to undo the great wrong that they have done her. He was also of the opinion that woman is not born merely to cook food; it should be done both by man and woman. To Gandhi domestic slavery of women is a symbol of man’s barbarism. According to him domestic work should not take the whole of a woman’s time. He wrote: “Of all the evils for which man has made himself responsible, none is so degrading, so shocking or so brutal as his abuse of the better half of humanity...”

Thus he was against the utter domination of the wife by the husband. He was in favour of women resisting their husbands on certain occasions. He said: “The wife has a perfect right to

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take her own course and meekly brave the consequences when she knows herself to be in the right and when her resistance is for a nobler purpose."\textsuperscript{21}

In the family, Gandhi not only advocated equal rights for the wife and the husband but also enjoined equal duties towards each other. He was quite uncompromising in the matter of women's rights and passionately pleaded for their freedom. He regarded man and woman as absolutely equal entitled to an equal rights of freedom and liberty irrespective of their physical strength and biological differences. He wrote: "Woman is the companion of man gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the very minutest detail in the activities of man and she has the same right of freedom and liberty with him. She is entitled to a supreme place in her own sphere of activity as man is in his. This ought to be the natural condition of things, and not as a result of learning to read and write."\textsuperscript{22}

Thus, Gandhi firmly believed that women who represent half of the society should be made equal to men. There should be no domination of women by men. She should be respected as mother and sister in the society. In other words, he admitted no distinction between man and woman except such as has been made by nature and can be seen with our eyes. For these reasons domination of women by men and concentration of power only in the hands of men is against the concept of Gandhi’s social decentralization.

Gandhi was also equally opposed to parents’ domination and concentration of power over their children. In his view when children are fully grown up, the parents can only exercise their nominal power of supervision over them. Parents should not treat children as their subordinate but as friends. They should make their children self-reliant and well able to earn an honest living by their works.\(^\text{23}\) Again in the opinion of Gandhi, sons and daughters who have attained marriageable age should be allowed to be free in the choice of their mates. All these, Gandhi believed, should bring complete decentralization in the family.

In Gandhi’s decentralized society, great emphasis is laid on individual. The individual comes first and foremost in the Gandhian scheme of social progress and development. According to him, the ideal social order cannot be built without the individual freedom. Thus, Gandhi attached greater significance to the individual which is the root of all social progress, and therefore, according to him, the individual must have the greatest possible freedom to develop his personality. As such, Gandhi was against centralized authority as it “does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality which is at the root of all progress and insists that individual should be the basic unit of the decentralized democratic political structure.”24 Thus he was of the view that a perfect social order must be free from all coercive authority; it must be congenial for the free will of the individuals. Also according to him, individuals should have proper share of authority with the state.

Gandhi advocated decentralized society on the basis of non-violence, truth, bread-labour, trusteeship, democracy, ideal state, sarvodaya etc. He aimed at the establishment of a new social order based

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24 The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, (New Delhi: Publications Division Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India), Vol. 59, p. 319 (To be referred hereinafter as CWMG)
on the twin foundations of truth and non-violence in which the exploitation of man by man will disappear in all its forms, inequality will be replaced by equality, competition by co-operation and hatred by good will and love.\textsuperscript{25} His ideal society is to be completely non-violent in which "there will be neither paupers nor beggars, high or low, neither millionaires nor half-starved employees, nor intoxicating drinks nor drugs."\textsuperscript{26}

Thus Gandhi contemplated a society in which all would have their rightful place and each would enjoy freedom and participation in the management of the affairs of the community. He wanted to rebuild the nation from the bottom upwards and establish a new social order on freedom, justice, equality and fraternity. Gandhi thus advocated sarvodaya society in which there will be freedom and equality for all; there will be no class and caste; no exploitation and injustice but equal opportunity for each for the fullest development of his/her personality.

\textsuperscript{26} V.D. Mahajan, \textit{Modern Indian Political Thought}, (New Delhi: S. Chand & Company Pvt. Ltd., 1987), p. 333
(ii). **Political decentralization:**

Gandhi was against the concentration of power in the hands of the state and pleaded for decentralization of power from it. The need for decentralization arises from the fact that centralization means concentration of power in the few people with the likelihood of its abuse. Hence, he wanted to establish political organisation of the country on non-violent basis through village communities. He said: “I suggest that 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.”

Ahimsa or Non-violence which has been one of the basic concepts of Gandhi will not be possible without decentralization of power because centralization leads to exploitation. Hence, he advocated decentralization of power: social, political and economic. To Gandhi political decentralization is essential for a non-violent social order as well as to bring individual moral development in the society. For spiritual and moral development of the individual there is need for decentralization of political power. Based on the principles of truth and non-violence in all

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27 *Harijan*, 30.12.1939, p.391
walks of life, Gandhi liked the classical statement of Thoreau – “That Government is best which governs least”. This is tantamount to say that there should be minimum laws to rule the people. Present governments give us entirely a different picture. They command more powers. They have more laws. The result is more force which in turn is yielding more and more violence. So as against concentrating power in the hands of the state Gandhi pleaded for decentralization of political power.

Gandhi was of the firm opinion that exploitation is the essence of violence and that it harms the personality of individuals. He believed that exploitation becomes a reality when power is concentrated in a single body like the state. He also said: “The state represents violence in a concentrated and organised form. The individual has a soul, but as the state is a soulless machine, it can never be weaned from violence to which it owes its very existence.”

According to Gandhi’s view, political power is just a means, not an end in itself. It is a means to regulate national life through national representatives. Gandhi reasoned that national life could become perfect if

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29 M.K. Gandhi, Modern Review, October, 1935, p. 413
it is self-regulated, wherein no representation becomes necessary. There is then a state of enlightened anarchy. In such a state the sovereignty vests in everyone who is his own ruler and governs himself in a manner that he respects the freedom of his neighbour and in all such activity there is no political power because there is no state.\textsuperscript{30}

Swaraj, a non-violent state and Ramraj are significant milestones in Gandhi's concept of decentralization in its comprehensive form. Village Swaraj is another crucial element of Gandhi's concept of decentralization. Gandhi in a consistent and articulate fashion pleaded for village swaraj. It means that every village must be an independent and self-contained until in itself. He 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."\textsuperscript{31}

In Gandhi's concept of village swaraj every village must have freedom to manage its affairs without external interference from above in its area of competence. It must have its own organisational structure in the

\textsuperscript{30} Young India, 2.7.1931, p. 162

form of government. Gandhi gave the picture of his village swaraj in the following words: “The government of the village will be conducted by the Panchayat of five members, annually elected by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. This 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. Any village can become such a republic today without much interference even from the present government.” In essence, the panchayat of every village republic is a key unit for decentralization of legislative, executive and judicial powers. Every village with its characteristic of self-rule and self-sufficiency is supposed to represent the values of a true democracy, wherein authority and power are shared and exercised by different functionaries. The individual will have complete freedom to shape his destiny according to his wishes. His thoughts and actions will be pervaded by the spirit of non-violence in an atmosphere of genuine freedom. The spirit of self-sacrifice and patriotism will be the spring for all constructive actions in such a village republic. Gandhi

argued that in such a setting it was possible to secure "perfect democracy … based upon individual freedom. The individual is the architect of his own government. The law of non-violence rules him and his government. … For the law governing every village is that he will suffer death in the defense of his and his village’s honour."33

According to Gandhi, centralization of power was a sin and violence. Hence, he wanted a democratic government based on non-violence and decentralization of power where man is supreme and the state is only a servant. He called his ideal State as Ram Rajya. He explained it thus: "It can religiously be translated as Kingdom of God on earth. Politically translated, it is perfect democracy in which inequality based on possession and non-possession, colour, race, creed or sex vanishes. In it, land and State belong to the people. Justice is prompt, perfect and cheap, and therefore, there is freedom of worship and of speech and of the press - all these because of the reign of the self-imposed law of moral restraint. Such a State must be based on truth and non-

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violence and must consist of prosperous, happy and self-contained villages and village communities.\textsuperscript{34}

Gandhi also believed that decentralization of political power constitutes a necessary basis for creating a balance among the individuals, the institutions of civil society and the state. Nonetheless, for him it is self actualisation of individual that was the ultimate objective and to that end both the state and civil institutions must act. He feared that the tendency of the state to acquire more power both against the civil society and the individual will frustrate that objective.\textsuperscript{35}

Gandhi also talked about democratic decentralization which is based on his passionate belief in non-violence, truth and individual freedom. He called it panchayat raj or village swaraj. He wanted to see each village becoming a little republic, self-sufficient in its vital wants, organically linked with the higher bodies and yet enjoying maximum freedom of deciding the affairs of the locality. He said: “Every village will be a Republic or Panchayat having full powers. It follows, therefore,


\textsuperscript{35} Ramashray Roy, op.cit., p.218
that every village be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the world. It will be trained and prepared to perish in the attempt to defend itself against any matters. Thus ultimately, it is the individual, which in the end matters. This does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbours or from the world in this structure composed of innumerable villages. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life, composed of individuals. The outermost circumference will not wield power to derive its own strength from it.”36

According to Gandhi, the real Indian lives in its villages and stressed that “India does not live in its towns but in its villages.”37 Thus villages held an important place in his scheme of life and social organization. He advocated for the development of rural life and hold that Indian villages were the backbone of India. It is in this context that Gandhi had expressed: “If the villages perish, India will perish too. It will

37 CWMG, Vol. 46, p. 12
be no more India. Her own mission in the world will get lost."38 Hence he strongly opposed the exploitation of villages, and termed it as an organised violence which is contrary to his plan of decentralization. He put forward his voice that "If we want Swaraj to be built on non-violence, we will have to give the villages their proper place."39 Gandhi’s concept of decentralization seeks to revive and revitalise the concept of self-sufficient village communities and set up ‘panchayat raj’ in place of the present mechanism of a top heavy structure of government.

To sum up, Gandhi’s approach to democratic decentralization starts from the bottom where the people are independent in making their policies and deciding and implementing them without any rigid and strict control of the higher authorities and their frequent interference in day-to-day working.40

(iii). Economic decentralization:

Gandhi’s economic theory provides a new and realistic approach to contemporary problems of poverty, hunger and degradation. Beginning with the position that exploitation is at the root of all violence, Gandhi

38 Harijan, 29.8.1936, p.226
39 Harijan 20.1.1940, p.423
40 M.L. Sharma, op. cit., p.146
built his economic ideas in such a manner that will stop exploitation of man by man. His panacea is to do away with concentration of economic power by proposing economic decentralization at various levels of the power hierarchy of the Indian society. He advocated for a highly decentralized rural economy as opposed to highly centralized competitive economy. As stated earlier, centralization is inconsistent with the non-violent set up of society, because it results in the concentration of wealth in the fewer hands with the possibility of the abuse of such power and gives rise to class antagonism.\(^4\) As a result, while only a few roll in luxury, many do not get even the bare necessities of life.\(^2\) According to Gandhi the moral aspects cannot be ignored in any economic activity. Any activity which has an adverse effect on the well-being of man and society does not deserve to exist. Even if the activity is economically viable and commercially beneficial, it is socially and morally undesirable. It cannot be taken up if it disregards the moral values.\(^3\) True economics stands for social justice and promotes the good of all.\(^4\) He asserted that:


\(^{42}\) M.L. Sharma, op. cit., p. 143

\(^{43}\) *Young India*, 26.11.1924, p.421

\(^{44}\) *Harijan*, 9.10.1937, p. 292
“An economics that includes Mammon worship, and enables the strong to amass wealth at the expense of the weak, is a false and dismal science.”

Gandhi was of the view that concentration of economic power creates the capitalist class which is exploitative of the talent and resources available in the society. It does not require much argument to assert that concentration of economic power creates a gulf between the privileged few and the underprivileged majority. In a traditional society the discrimination of individuals based on wealth made it more difficult for the development of a modern society. It must be observed that concentration of economic power goes hand in hand with concentration of political powers, leading to the development of a dictatorial or authoritarian system. In an under-developed country like India concentration of economic power in the hands of the few provides them with a great deal of privilege in the socio-political and economic milieus of the country. Taking into account all these obnoxious features Gandhi opted for decentralization of economic power.

45 Ibid.
Gandhi believed that decentralization of economic power could fruitfully serve the interest of the community by bringing about rapid development of small scale and cottage industries. And to achieve this end, Gandhi advocated for universal use of khadi. He believed that this will help not only in promoting self employment and self sufficiency to the poor masses and development of village economy but also in fostering patriotism among the masses. All these also at length will help in the realization of a communitarian village system that would look after food, clothing, shelter and educational needs of every individual in the rural area.\footnote{Harijan, 26.7.1942, p.238}

There is another consideration for which Gandhi stressed on Khadi. He believed that it will lead to decentralization of production and consumption. "Since \textit{Khadi} is produced by the common man in every village the economic power is distributed to every village and to every man. Localized production and consumption helps to relieve the temptation to merely speed up production for the sake of mass production."
There would be no unnatural accumulation of hoards in the pockets of the few, and want in the midst of plenty in regard to the rest.”

Gandhi’s concept of economic decentralization has been explained by M. Maharajan thus: “Decentralization is one of the means to create classless, unexploited and egalitarian society. The word decentralized sector in economics is used to refer to the cottage industries located in the rural areas. But in fact, the Gandhian concept of decentralization is related to the rural economy as a whole. It is pervasive to the Gandhian concept of economic philosophy technical progress, emphasis on agriculture and tiny sector, co-operatives, distributive justice, employment mixed economy, barter system, villagism and the doctrine of trusteeship and rural transformation of Indian economy etc. . . . When Gandhi used the terms Khadi, village industries, Swadeshi and the like he meant decentralization of production and direct co-relation between consumption, production and utilisation of locally available resources.”

Gandhi asserted for the revival of village industries and in 1934 he delivered a speech at Gandhi Seva Sangh meeting. There he said: “We

48 Harijan, 11.11.1934, p.301
must promote every industry that was existing a short while ago and the extinction of which has now resulted in unemployment."\textsuperscript{50} For him, without the revival of village industries, the increasing poverty and unemployment will be difficult to stop. He said: "Village economy cannot be complete without the essential village industries such as hand-grinding, hand-pounding, soap-making, paper-making, match-making, tanning, oil-pressing, etc."\textsuperscript{51} The other village industries cover cattle farming, dairying, farming and making of compost manure.

Gandhi was of the option that industrialization should be discouraged to minimise exploitation on the one hand, and developing full employment on the other. Industrialisation leads to passive or active exploitation of the villages and it encourages competition. Industrialisation replaces manpower and hence it adds to unemployment. In a country like India, where millions of labourers in the villages do not get work for even six months in a year, industrialization will not only increase unemployment but also will force labourers to migrate to urban areas. This will ruin villagers. Hence to avoid such a disaster, village and

\textsuperscript{50} CWMG, vol. 59, p.441

cottage industries should be revived. They provide unemployment to meet the needs of the villages and facilitate village self-sufficiency. Gandhians are not against machine if it meets two aims: self-sufficiency and full employment.\(^{52}\)

It may be remembered here that though Gandhi’s concept of economic decentralization implies the fundamental principle of self-sufficiency, it does not mean absolute self-sufficiency. It is mostly confined to the basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. I also does not mean self-containment and isolation. The village has to import certain things which it can not produce in the village. He said: “My idea of village swaraj is that it is a complete republic independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants, and yet dependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity.”\(^{53}\)

It must also be noted that though he was for decentralized system of production, Gandhi also conceded that what cannot be produced by the decentralized system may along have to be allowed for centralized production. He said: “There would be no objection to villagers using even


\(^{53}\) *Harijan*, 26.7.1942, p. 238
the most modern machines and tools that they can make and afford to use. . . . they should not be used as means of exploitation of others. . . . I do not visualize electricity, ship building, machine making and the like existing side by side with village crafts.”\(^{54}\) He was even willing to accept the use of heavy machinery, but “all that would be owned by the State and used entirely for the benefit of the people.”\(^{55}\) Hence it would be wrong to argue that Gandhi was against large-scale or mass production. He was not against big machines, but was against the use of machines to exploit individuals. He did not want the machine to cripple the life of man.\(^{56}\) Gandhi also did not oppose mass scale production as such. He opposed mass scale production by factories only as he wanted mass scale production by the masses which were meant for common use.\(^{57}\)

Therefore, his emphasis was on all-out endeavour for ‘production by masses’ in contrast to ‘mass production’. Direct involvement of the people would eliminate alienation. There would be no divorce between


\(^{57}\) V.T. Patil & I.A. Lokapur, “Gandhi’s Concept of Decentralization: Analysis,” op. cit., p.116
work and the ownership of means of production. Physical work has its advantages for the well-being of human beings as Gandhi believed in bread-labour. It is also required for the fuller development of man. For him, “Man cannot develop his mind by simply writing and reading or making speeches all day long.”

6.5 Decentralization and human nature:

Decentralization is a philosophical concept of Gandhi which is borne out of his understanding of human nature. According to Gandhi’s understanding of human nature, moral development is necessary as the foundation of life. But moral development of man requires not only knowledge. Certain conditions like non-violence, voluntary performance of good deeds and individual freedom are essential for the moral development of man. And all these things can be there only in a decentralized social set up. Because, in a centralized social set up, power will be concentrated in the hands of few which will endanger individual freedom and limit the scope of self development on their part. It will also lead to misuse of power by the few against many thereby leading to

exploitation of the people. In other words, a centralized social system will perpetuate violence or exploitation of man by man, and this will ultimately go against the interests of moral development of man. He rightly believed that exploitation becomes a reality when there is centralization of power. In other words, centralization is instrumental for exploitation which will lead to violence. Exploitation will also at length deny opportunities for personality development of the individuals. As he said: "The end to be achieved is human happiness combined with full mental and moral development. I use the adjective moral as synonymous with spiritual. This end can be achieved under decentralization."\(^59\) Thus he believed that without decentralization it was impossible to ensure individual freedom and mental and moral growth of man. Herein lie the correlation between his understanding human nature and his advocacy of decentralization of power.

Besides, moral development of man which according to Gandhi is one of the basic purposes of human existence requires that any action done should be done voluntarily, without coercion and with a good intention. For him, "It is not enough that an act done by us is in itself

\(^{59}\) *Harijan*, 18.1. 1942, p. 391
good; it should have been done with the intention to do good. That is to say, whether an act is moral or otherwise depends upon the intention of the doer."60 However, when there is centralization of power, subjugation of man to man also will follow which would mean that the possibility of man behaving under coercion or mechanically will be there. This will definitely be in contradiction with the interests of individual moral development because for him any action that is dictated by fear or by coercion of any kind ceases to be moral. He said: "No action which is not voluntary cannot be called moral. .... So long as we act like machines, there can be no question of morality."61 In other words, there will be no moral development when man acts under coercion. And it was with a view to counter this danger in the path of moral development that he advocated decentralization of power in all its comprehensiveness. Thus, his concept of decentralization of power is closely related with his understanding of human nature and his concern for the moral development of man.

61 Quoted by Gopinath Dhawan, The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, op.cit., p. 282