CHAPTER 3.
GANDHI'S CONCEPT OF DECENTRALISATION: AN ANALYSIS
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AN ANALYSIS

3.1. Introduction

The concept of decentralization has been much discussed and debated for a long time by economic thinkers, political scientists and social analysts. The concept of decentralization is not of recent origin. Writers, social reformers, political philosophers like the anarchists, early socialists, Rousseau, modern pluralists and liberal socialists emphasized the concept of decentralization of economic and political powers of the state.

An attempt has been made here to explain Gandhi’s concept of political and economic decentralization separately. But sometimes it has become inevitable to explain both simultaneously to sustain the flow of argument and to maintain academic objectivity and perspective in analysis.

Gandhi’s concept of decentralization does not stand in isolation but it is shaped by other concepts and ideas. Gandhi’s complex and dynamic personality was made up of an original mind that encompassed the whole range of issues and problems in human affairs. He preached non-violence, stressed on the moral aspects of life, he fought for freedom and equality for the poor, opposed state control over individuals, pleaded for swaraj, explained the concept of “trusteeship” for the welfare of all, opposed big industries and preached swadeshi and khadi. All these concepts,
directly or indirectly, flow from the theme of decentralization. My purpose is to establish a clear-cut linkage between these concepts and the theme of decentralization.

"Democracy must in essence mean the art and science of mobilizing the entire physical, economic and spiritual resources of all the various sections of the people in the service of the common good of all" (Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi). Gandhi had a clear and comprehensive idea as to how a good democracy should function. He believed that “a democracy enlightened and disciplined is the first thing in the world” (Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi). Gandhi also held that the basic unit of true democracy is the village. Democracy has to be worked out by the people from below at the village level. It is in this context that the notion of Panchayath Raj has added significance.

Gandhi attached utmost importance to the relationship between the structure of the Indian village and democracy at the grass root level. Gandhi wrote, “In the democracy of India the unit is the village … it has to be worked out from below by the people of the village” (Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi). Gandhi perceived an intimate relationship between democratic functions of the country and the socio-cultural and economic structure of the Indian village. The villages are populated by poverty stricken and downtrodden masses as we understand it and Gandhi wanted democracy to come to the help of these villages. He saw the Indian village as the basic democratic unit from where all socio-cultural, economic and political upsurges and developments should emanate.
Gandhi thought that the modern civilization had a depressing air of ‘futility’ and ‘madness’ about it and was likely to destroy itself before long. In Gandhi’s view, the exploitation of one’s fellow men was built into the very structure of modern civilization. For Gandhi imperialism was only an acute manifestation of the aggressive and exploitative impulse lying at the very heart of modern civilization and at work in all areas of human relationships (Parekh, 1989). Modern civilization involved violence against oneself. For Gandhi, modern civilization also involved violence against nature, which was largely seen as man’s property to do with it what he liked. Gandhi agreed that modern civilization was propelled by the two interrelated principles of greed and want. It was controlled by a few capitalist owners who had only one aim, to make profit and only one means to do so, to produce goods that satisfied people’s wants.

In Gandhi’s view every civilization had its own distinctive natural and social basis. Modern civilization was born and could only survive in the cities, and was naturally carried all over the world by the commercial classes. Indian civilization had, by contrast, been cradled and nurtured in the villages, and only the rural masses were its natural custodians. Modern urban civilization presented a deadly and unprecedented challenge and required a most discriminating and cautious response. For Gandhi, then, Indian civilization, although fundamentally sound had become degenerate and needed urgent attention. The national character had to be improved, the social structure made more just, religion reformed and its central values reinterpreted and related to the needs of the modern age.
Gandhi stressed, “India does not live in its town but in its villages” (Collected works) Gandhian perception of the Indian village system is all comprehensive, fundamental and important. Gandhi had become so absorbed about the significance of the village that he happened to see nothing else as comparable to it. The towns in India became quite insignificant before his eyes. This came to happen as an antithesis because of the undue and artificial importance modern times came to attach to the pompous development of the cities and towns. The village system of life and the villages at large came to be so neglected in India in the modern times with the establishment of the British Empire that misery and poverty became the catchword of the Indian rural scenario. The villages, which were not in the limelight had to be redeemed politically, socially and economically.

Gandhi wrote. “I would like to know how live in same such village. That is real India, my India” (Sharma, 1987). Gandhi wanted the people at large and government to become conscious about the presence and needs of these villages. Gandhi wrote voraciously in Young India and the Harijan regarding the emancipation and socio-economic reconstruction of these villages. Gandhi did not wish to transform the Indian villages to urban and industrial conglomerations, as many liberals would advocate, but decided to use villagism as resource to build his ideal polity. The Indian villages would retain the basic socio-economic structure and the geographic features characteristic of them. Villages always lay close to the lap of nature. Development would mean conflict with this nature.
3.2. Political Decentralization

Gandhi preached non-violence as a means and as an end in itself. Non-violence is the basic tenet of political and economic decentralization. To Gandhi non-violence was the kingdom of heaven and if we seek it first everything shall be added unto us. He also said that for him ahimsa comes before swaraj... ahimsa must be placed before everything else while it is professed. Ahimsa means not only refraining from killing any life out of anger or selfish purpose, but it means the avoidance of injury to anything in thought, word or deed. Gandhi was of firm opinion that exploitation was the essence of violence as it harmed the personality of individuals. He believed that exploitation became a reality when power was concentrated in a single body like the state.

The logical connection between decentralization of political power and his concept of ahimsa becomes very clear. On the one hand, Gandhi was the foremost champion of ahimsa, on the other hand, he held the view that the state represented violence in an undiluted and organized form. Hence perseverance of ahimsa or non-violence was of the utmost importance. Violence must be avoided and to eliminate violence concentration of power must be avoided, through decentralization of power from the state. 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 by destroying individuality, which lies at the root of all progress. Destroying individuality means exploitation and exploitation lead to violence. Therefore, to avoid violence and to ensure maximum flowering of the human personality, decentralization of political power must become
an end of a progressive and welfare oriented society. The question arises as to whether this kind of non-violence which Gandhi visualized could be secured in a reasonable manner in the modern state. Gandhi himself was not sure about it. He believed that “a government cannot succeed in becoming entirely non-violent, because it represent all the people. I do not today conceive of such a golden age. But I do believe in the possibility of a predominantly non-violent society. And I am working for it.

According to Gandhi, “political power of the state was not an end in itself, but one of the means enabling the people to better their condition in every department of life. Gandhi saw human progress in human happiness by combining all mental and moral growth, the greatest good of all rather than the greatest good of the greatest number. Gandhi was of the firm opinion that to the extent the ends were pure, to that extent the means would be pure. He always said that the means was proper the ends would take care of themselves. His objective in securing human happiness with full mental and moral growth with the greatest good of all, was a noble goal in itself.

Gandhi sincerely believed that the state represented an organization based on force. It manifested its coercive power through compulsion and exploitation of the individuals in the society. Gandhi held the view that any action of the state which was not voluntary in nature was immoral, since his scheme of thinking every action was judged from the touchstone of ethical propriety.

Political power was just a means, not an end in itself. It was a means to regulate national life through national representatives. Gandhi reasoned that national
life could become perfect if it was self-regulated, where in no representation where in 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. He 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.

Gandhi was an individualist par excellence and he argued in favour of a stateless society. His concept of enlightened anarchy will have to be viewed in such a context. He always felt that the state was an instrument of coercion, which undermined the freedom of individuals.

According to one scholar Gandhi visualized the goal of enlightened anarchy in three phases. In the initial stage of the goal was one of immediate swaraj based on nationalization and in the second stage the objective was to bring about a non-violent state through the evolution of village republics. In the final stage the purpose was to achieve Ramraj.

Swaraj, a non-violent state and Ramraj are significant milestones in Gandhi's concept of decentralization in its comprehensive form. Village Swaraj owes its origin to ancient Hindu Philosophy. Swaraj means self rule. Gandhi in a consistent and articulate fashion pleaded for village swaraj. It meant that every village must be an independent and self-contained unit in itself.

Gandhi visualized villages to be self-sustained and autonomous, so that village is capable of managing its affairs itself, even to the extend of defending itself against the onslaught of the environment. Swaraj is a comprehensive term and infinitely greater than the concept of independence.
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 organizational structure in the form of government. Gandhi held the view that “that Government of the village will be conducted by the Panchayath of five members, annually elected by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications… since there will be no system of punishment in the accepted sense, this panchayath 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 panchayath 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-efficiency is supposed to represent the values of a true democracy, where in 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 all atmosphere of genuine freedom. The spirit of it self-sacrifice and patriotism will be the mainspring for all constructive actions in such a village republic.

In Gandhi’s scheme of village swaraj, the pivotal element is the individual who comes into his own. After that comes the village and finally, the groups of villages. Decentralization of power is possible in a structure. Consisting of a large number of different villages encompassing each other in concentric circles. Gandhi believed that in such an oceanic circle the individual will rise to the occasion and be prepared to sacrifice everything for the cause of his village.
Gandhi took a wholesome picture of the socio-economic and political conditions in India. His insight into these problems was based on a close study, and understanding born out of practical wisdom. He began with village swaraj and ended up in proposing Ramraj or enlightened anarchy through the instrumentality of non-violence. Gandhi was in search of an ideal state where everyone was his own ruler without much interference by the state. As a realist Gandhi had his own doubts whether the ultimate goal of Ramraj would come about in India in his own lifetime.

In effect, the exalted values like non-violence, individual freedom and equality have given a solid base to Gandhi’s concept of decentralization of power at the political level. In addition to this consideration his concept of swaraj, in which the panchayath was to function as the basic unit of the government for bringing about self-sufficiency, constitutes an integral element of a purely decentralized democracy.

3.3. Economic Decentralisation

Gandhi was not a professional economist in the true sense of the term. But in a large and eventful life he had occasion to develop his economic ideas based on the situation in India. Gandhian 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 builds his economic ideas in such a manner that avoids exploitation of man by man. His panacea is to do away with concentration of economic power thought decentralization at various levels of the power hierarchy of the Indian society. Gandhi frequently asserted that “if India is to evolve along non-violent lines, it will have to decentralize many things.”
Gandhi took position that concentration of economic power created the capitalist class, which was exploitative of the talent and resources available in the society.

It does not require much argument to assert that concentration of economic power has created a gulf between the privileged few and the under privileged 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 power, 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 milieu of the country. Taking into account of all these obnoxious features Gandhi opted for decentralization of economic power.

In line with this reasoning of Gandhi the advocacy of cottage and small-scale industries for allround development of rural areas assumed great significance. Gandhi believed that decentralization of economic power could fruitfully serve the interest of the community by bringing about rapid development of industries. Gandhi’s advocacy of universal use of Khadi by fostering the patriotic spirit for swadeshi is part and parcel of his comprehensive understanding of decentralization through dispersal of economic power. Gandhi’s concept of village swaraj was co-equal with full self-sufficiency in economic matters of every village. He visualized a communitarian village that would look after food, clothing, shelter and educational
needs of very individual in the rural area. In such a village of Gandhi’s conception, consumption would be regulated through minimization on the basis of simplicity.

Gandhi gave a very liberal interpretation to the concept of swaraj. He made it applicable to all spheres of life-religious, spiritual, social, political and economic. In the economic sphere, it refers to self-sufficiency of the village as an economic unit. “The broad definition of swadeshi is the use of all home made articles to the exclusion of foreign things, in so far as such is necessary for the protection of home industries, more especially those industries without which India will become pauperized. The spirit of swadeshi is not contrary to anything that is alien. On the contrary a nation could import those goods that are needed for its growth of a nation. Gandhi was very eager to preserve and protect cottage and village industries through decentralization of economic power.

A corollary to Swadeshi was Gandhi’s stress on Khadi. In the nature of the thing, Khadi required decentralization of production and consumption. Since Khadi is produced by common man in every village, the economic power is distributed to every village and to every man. Localised 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 boards in the pockets of the few, and want in the midst of plenty in regard to the rest”. Gandhi says in unequivocal terms that khaddar was not meant “to destroy all machinery but it does regulate its use and check its speedy growth. It uses machinery for the poorest in their own cottages. The wheel is itself an exquisite piece of machinery.
It would be wrong to argue that Gandhi was against large-scale or mass production. He was not against big machines per se, but he was against the use of machines to exploit individuals. He did not want the machine to cripple the life of man.

The theme of trusteeship rests in the belief that capitalists and landlords would transfer the accumulated wealth into a trust for the common use of the society.

Non-possession meant not having food or anything beyond immediate need and bread-labour meant that every man should labour with his body for his food and clothing. These two concepts go a long way in bringing about dignity of labour in every human being. Gandhian economic thought is conceived in the belief that every person in the society should lead a simple life and his goals should be to acquire the basic necessities of life, where each person should work with his own body to fulfill his needs. In the novel theory of trusteeship of the community at large. The trusteeship theory may not be relevant in a society characterized by heavy emphasis on material aspects of life. However, if the trusteeship theory is put into practice it can become a major instrument for decentralization of economic power for the greatest welfare of the people in the society.

3.4. Gandhi’s ideas: Universal Applicability

Gandhi’s concept of decentralization is the product of his wide ranging mind which probed into the harsh realities of man’s social, political and economic life. And these concepts help us to find solutions to certain basics like arbitrary state power, unlimited violence, economic exploitation of man by man, removal of poverty and socio-economic inequalities.
World today is faced with a variety of difficult and intricate problems. The moral fibre of the people has been weakened. The only practical way to resolve these problems in a lasting manner is to turn once again to the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi study them in depth and find proper solutions for our ailments.

The relevance of Gandhian ideas, and their universal applicability is precisely because of fact that his ideas thoughts are not based on colonial dominations and exploitative attitudes, cut-throat competition, and some other material and worldly values. As against these, they are based on strong human values with moral and spiritual touching. He wanted to give a spiritual touch to all economic social, political and other problems, which he thought as the root cause of all prosperity and happiness. His ideas were always to the best interests and to the real solution of the problem of mankind.

Mahatma Gandhi stood for a simple and more or less, self-sufficient living in the rural surroundings, mainly because he could foresee that a highly sophisticated and centralized life in the cities would inescapably lead to the organization of an human violences and aggressive nationalism resulting in international tensions and wars of unprecedented devastation. Gandhiji therefore advocated the establishment of ideal villages where the people could pursue the ideal of "simple living and high thinking". Plain living and high thinking--this ideal is the foundation of Gandhian constructive work. The chief principle of Gandhian economy is simplicity of life. It means neither poverty nor asceticism. Gandhiji believed in simplicity of living, which does not mean living in poverty. He was against pauperism.
The indiscriminate use of technology and the pursuance of industrialization on competitive basis have led to serve economic and social consequences of new and different nature. The ever widening gap between rich and poor, worsening economic and political relations, economic imperialism, multinationals and technostructure are among the more important problems at both the internal and international levels, the solution of which is not becoming possible through the traditional and conventional methods of modern world. According to Gandhiji advancement, is not only economic or industrialist is the ethical and spiritual progress of man’s nobler pursuits for a higher and sublimer goal of life.

Gandhi favoured “production by the masses” opposed to “mass production”. But it is significant that he never opposed machinery as such that what he opposed as craze for machinery. He was realist because he knew that every country needs certain large scale industries to cater to vital needs-steel, cement and so on. He knew that even millions of blacksmiths cannot replace a steel plant. According to him, such industries should be controlled and managed by the state and should occupy “the least part of the vast national activities which will mainly be in the villages”.

Gandhiji’s views on the social responsibility of business and his trusteeship theory constitute a revolutionary step in the field of socio-economic reform. Under trusteeship there is no room for serving the personal interests either of the owners or of the workers alone or even of an enterprise as a whole at the cost of the rest of the society. Voluntary transformation of the socio-economic order is the essence of trusteeship.
Gandhiji conceived and wished the development of our society on the lines of ram-rajya where everyone enjoyed life full of happiness and devoid of any ailment-physical or otherwise. He thought of a society where everyone had equal opportunity to develop equal rights and benefits, as far as possible. Problems in regard to decentralized system of production restriction of wants, proper distribution, industrialism, mechanization of man, minimum wage, role of trade unionism, economic equality, relationship with landlord and peasant, capital and labour and allied economic problems—all these find a solution in the all comprehensive Gandhian principles of economics, viz., sarvodaya which aims at the welfare of all.

3.5. Basic characteristics of Panchayathi Raj

Gandhi wrote. “Independence of my conception means nothing less that the realization of the ‘kingdom of God within you and on this earth. I would rather work for and die in the pursuit of this dream though it may never be realized” (Prabhu and Rao, 1967). According to Gandhi independence that should exist in the individual and in society should not be valued and judged in terms of mere material qualities. Gandhi gave great importance to individual freedom. Individual freedom alone can make a man voluntarily surrender himself completely to the service of society. To Gandhi decentralization envisions and upholds the cultural or spiritual ideal of simple living and high thinking. He wants to raise the standard of life. Gandhi was of the opinion that society should be organized in such a manner that individual gets the maximum freedom and opportunity to develop his personality and character to the fullest extent.
Gandhi’s concept of democratic decentralization bears the stamp of his passionate belief in non-violence, truth, and individual freedom. He calls it Panchayathi Raj or village swaraj. He wants to see each village a little republic, self-sufficient in its vital wants, organically linked with the higher bodies and enjoying the maximum freedom of deciding the affairs of the locality. Gandhi wanted political power to be distributed among the villages in India. Gandhiji preferred the term ‘Swaraj’ to describe what he called true democracy. His democracy is based upon freedom. Individual freedom, in Gandhi’s view, could be maintained only in autonomous, self-reliant and self-managed local communities, which offer opportunities to the people for fullest participation (Roy, 1984). Their affairs are to be managed by Panchayaths consisting of five persons elected annually. Gandhi thought that the village community would, over time, build up a strong sense of local strength and solidarity, provide meaningful interpersonal relationships, encourage a sense of social responsibility and the spirit of cooperation, and act as a nursery of civic virtue. Gandhi aimed at making the individual the center of the local administration. People were supposed to take personal interest and turn up in large numbers at the meeting to deliberate problems of common interest such as village industries, agricultural production, irrigation, and planning (Sharma, 1987).

Decentralisation is the felt need everywhere. Despite this felt need, right kind of decentralization is becoming difficult for a variety of reasons, the most important being unwillingness of the power elites to share their power with those from whom they derive it. Gandhi’s concept of decentralization did not stand by its own bootstraps. Gandhi’s views on decentralization conform to or originate from his
methodology of perpetual dialectics. Gandhian decentralization is a process of limiting the power of the state as well as the creation of people’s institutions and processes.

For Gandhi, decentralization is related to the attainment of some noble objectives: (a) It is an instrument for building a non-violent society, (b) it is necessary to avoid exploitation, (c) it has a moral dimension, (d) it is a necessary step towards Gram Swaraj, and (e) it facilitates trusteeship (Roy, 1986). In what sense is decentralization an end in itself? The answer is that whereas the centralized institutions are not a necessary condition for improving the lot of the people, decentralized institutions became an end in themselves because they guarantee non-violent participation as well as institutions for self-improvement. Gandhi said “a government cannot succeed in becoming entirely non-violent, because it represents all the people. I do not today conceive of such a golden age. But I do believe in the possibility of a predominantly non-violent society. And I am working for it” (Roy, 1986). Gandhi viewed every increase in the power of the state with greatest fear because, although doing good by minimizing exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind in destroying individuality, which lies at the root of all progress.

Decentralisation of political power cannot be sustained without a similar decentralization of economic power. Gandhi made it very clear that if India is to evolve along non-violent lines it will have to decentralize many things in economic life. Concentration of either economic or political power would violate all the essential principles of participatory democracy. To check centralization, Gandhi suggested the institution of village republics both as institutions of parallel polity and
as units of economic autonomy. Village is the lowest unit of a decentralized system. Gandhi’s idea of village was not a mere conglomeration of a few huts and a few hundred people huddled together with inadequate infrastructural facilities or a small society ridden by direct exploitation and by social and caste conflicts. Gandhi thought, believed and argued about his concept of a village. For him, after family, village is the next higher unit for full-fledged socio-economic arrangement or formation. Politically a village has to be small enough in order to permit everyone to participate directly in the decision-making process. It is the basic institution of participatory democracy. On the economic side, given the art of production and the relevant technology which can optimize the use of local resources, the size of a village as an economic unit will be determined by the application of the basic needs and production by masses organized on the generalized cooperative principle. The technical skills of the villages will be fully developed; there will be no dearth of men with high degree of skill and artistic talent. There will be village poets, village artists, village architects, linguists and research workers (Gandhi, 1959).

There is a much-quoted statement of Gandhi regarding the organization of the village as political and economic units. “In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever-widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle, whose center will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, and the latter ready to perish for a circle of villages” (Roy, 1986).

Most significantly, the Gandhian concept of the village purports to serve as a valid example of the resolution of the inherent tension between individual values and
social values. Village is one institution in which the distance between human freedom and social obligation becomes the narrowest. In it the individual emerges as an architect of his own government, in which people are the roots and the state is the fruit. The Gandhian approach to politics provides an integrated model of decentralization that checks both centralization and ensures devolution of power. Gandhian decentralization means the creation of parallel politics in which people’s power is institutionalized to counter the centralizing and alienating forces of the modern state.

According to Mahatma Gandhi “the character of production will be determined by social necessity and not by personal whim or greed”(Prabhu and Rao, 1967). Agriculture and local industries have been considered two fundamental aspects of development of the village which comes under the full scope of Panchayathi Raj. Production, whether in agriculture or in industry, should never be controlled and in any way influenced by greed.

All aspects of production aiming at the development of the village should be based on the utilization of the local resources. According to Mahatma Gandhi, this aspect is quite fundamental to the development of the Panchayathi Raj system. The panchayaths with the Gram Sabhas should be so organized as to identify the resources locally available for development in the agricultural and industrial sectors. The present day India witnesses just the contrary. The agricultural, industrial and mineral resources of a particular region are thoroughly exploited by agents and middlemen. The raw materials like cotton or minerals are taken away at cheaper rates and industries run by those who do not have anything to do with the particular area.
as such. Such exploitation took place in areas like fishing, cow rearing and milk production where large-scale villagers are traditionally employed. Where Gram Panchayaths are instituted in the way that Gandhi had envisaged, these traditional employments and industries will be brought under the local administration and the cooperative system.

3.6. Rural Reconstruction and Panchayathi Raj

Panchayathi Raj system was conceived for rural development through local participation representing local aspirations and local expectations. The term rural development has been widely used to denote advancement of the Indian villages in terms of their agricultural and industrial progress resulting in the increase of per capita income as well as in the accumulation of the comforts of living. Gandhi was very conscious of the deteriorated conditions of Indian villages. Our villages were extremely backward in their method of agriculture did not fetch them the necessities of life. Gandhi wanted agriculture to become part of a larger planned programme, and contribute to rural development. By this he did not mean the use of advanced technology and machinery as in large scale agriculture, which led to a kind of an isolation of the farmer from the land. Instead he wanted the farmer to consider the land his own, procure good seed and manure, acquire the necessary technology for a considerably better yield and feel that the land was part and parcel of his rural existence.

During the pre-British days, it is believed, Indian villages had large number of cottage industries and goods produced by these industries were exported to the Middle East. With the British intervention our cottage industrial system suffered
heavy set back. Gandhi believed that this was the beginning of the destruction of the vitality of the village system of life in India.

In order to bring India back to the glorious days of the past when the greatness of this country lay in her villages, Gandhi envisaged the creation of Gram Panchayath. Gandhi found social stratification intensifying consequent upon the coming of the British and the attendant values of modern civilization. With the coming of the British there grew a fully divided social structure between the educated and the uneducated, the employed and the unemployed, and between the farmer and the higher cadre of society. The labourer, the farmer, the unemployed, etc., came to be looked upon as lower class citizens whose job was merely to be at the service of those who were educated, employed and had a higher social status. Gandhi bewailed this situation in India, Agrarian relationship of the majority of the people is being deprived of having any social interaction with the few landholding families which also control the interests of the larger sections of the people. In order to save the Indian villages from the system mentioned above Gandhi wanted a clear socio-economic restructuring of the villages including that of the landholding, which resulted largely from the British taxation system. In other words, the Indian villages largely lost the integrity that they had during the pre-British days.

The Gandhian notion of rural reconstruction or development thus amounts to accepting the basic rural structure as it is. The contrast is clearly drawn between sophisticated urbanized development and rural development. The agrarian background should necessarily become the focus of rural development instead of, as usual, converting all possible agricultural land into industrial or commercial centers.
for the enhancement of the growth rates of the economy. Accepting the rural structure as backward would again mean further social mobilization. The villagers have an inherent tendency to migrate to towns and cities especially for finding fresh and attractive employment. This attraction is intensified by the poverty of the villages and all the discomforts of rural life. What we are today witnessing as a result of this social mobility is the terrible expansion of India cities like Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai. The resulting measure of misery with the increase of slum areas and crimes have become a fundamental problem in our country.

Rural development for Gandhi would thus mean leaving the village in the lap of nature with all that nature has endowed upon the village. The importance given to appropriate technology is justified primarily on this ground. Appropriate technology has been accepted as a basic notion in the Gram Panchayath system and in rural development because this technology is developed from the natural resources the village ordinarily has. Since the rural technology, like the use of biogas and organic manure, helps the economy to obtain a basic balance and enable the villages to recycle the waste products of the village, this system has become widely recommended as a process based on nature and is now widely acclaimed as sustainable.

3.7. The Village as a Republic

Gandhi wrote, “democracy becomes an impossible thing until power is shared by all, but let not democracy degenerate into monocracy” (Sharma, 1987). Gandhi entertained a characteristic concept of freedom. Freedom for him was not the license to do whatever one wished. It meant the right and the feasibility as well as the
inherent power to do what one believes to be right. Freedom, both individual on the one hand and social on the other, lay at the very basis of the village republic. Gandhi developed a thoroughly democratic notion of the Indian village that he called it a republic. The concept of a republic is as old as the ages, especially dating back to the ancient Indians and the Greeks. Gandhi reminds us that once upon a time India had an advanced mode of village republics which happened to retain all possible administrative freedom. The notion of freedom at all levels is fundamental to the republic. The individual has to be harmonized with the socio-economic structure. Gandhian political and educational philosophy emphasizes the balance between individual and society as against communist countries where the individual is called on to sacrifice for social existence, and the capitalist countries where the individual has been given complete freedom of development in the socio-economic set up.

The village is a local community. Today, in the developed and developing worlds, the notion of the local community need not always have any direct bearing on development. But, as Gandhi envisaged it, the village is the grassroot political unit which is supposed to have an integrity of its own. The village is an integral unit because individuals who are like-minded and are dedicated to the same cause are brought together in the village. This like-mindedness is fundamental for development. The village should be an integrated local community. Those who are actually exercising franchise and are able to communicate among themselves on political issues live together in this small democratic community. If there is not present in this community an essential unity of understanding on a local basis, development becomes impossible. The people of the village are diversified with
respect to their occupations and several other involvements. This diversification means that they might have considerable differences of opinion and have a variety of interests. Because of these there arises a natural tendency to develop disintegrating attitudes that are harmful to the general interest of the village.

Local action is a very significant concept in the Gram Panchayath system. By local action we mean development-oriented activities of rural kinds in which local people will be intimately involved and from which they draw considerable benefits. The concept of the village as a republic is fundamentally Gandhian. Only in the set up of a republic can the individual be a free citizen to exercise the rights and the duties invested in him. The freedom of the individual, as we have seen, is quite fundamental because freedom and harmonious development are bound together.

3.8. Promotion of the Well-being of the People

Gandhi 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 it implies. It will include everything that promotes the well-being of the villagers" (Prabhu and Rao, 1967). So far as Gandhi was concerned there happened to be a single and unique dedication, i.e., the people, especially the people of rural India. What is fundamental to Gandhian thinking is the rural harmony and peace that he envisaged. Here too lies Gandhi’s attachment to the status of the individual in the community. He wanted basic harmony and peace as a result of the resolution of all the conflicts at the individual, social and national levels. Gandhi saw agriculture at the very base of this rural peace and harmony because agriculture was a uniting factor. Cotton was the product of agriculture in India and Gandhi, as mentioned above, saw the charka
with all its implications as the very symbol of rural development, peace and harmony. The charka has to be seen symbolically today with the dignity of labour attached to that.

The most fundamental aim of Gram Swaraj can be stated in terms of the attainment of the economic stability and balance at the village level. This aim can be restated in terms of the economic well-being of the people of the village. Gandhi said, “According to me the economic constitution of India and ... the world should be such that no one under it should suffer from want of food and clothing” (Majumdar, 1969). The mind and soul of Gandhi got so much preoccupied with this problem that this remained the most predominant issue in his entire approach to the attainment of the swaraj. The fundamental cause of economic disability and imbalance in the rural areas according to Gandhi was the absence of their participation in the rural administration and economy. Therefore Gandhi lit the age-old idea of rural autonomy through democratic decentralization as a prerequisite for the solution of rural economic problems.

The social well-being of the members of the village essentially includes also what we may call educational development. The village as a miniature society, becomes centre for holistic educational experiments. Gandhi wrote, “craft, art and health education should all be integrated into one scheme ... instead of regarding craft and industry as different from education. I will regard the former as a medium for the latter” (Rao and Prabhu, 1967). The educational well-being of the village, as Gandhi saw it, called for such integrated and holistic approach to education that combined the development of the individual’s body, mind and soul.
3.9. The Control of Production by the people

"Under the Gandhian economic order the character of production will be determined by social necessity and not by personal whim or greed" (Rao and Prabhu, 1967). Production thus becomes not an end itself but a means to and a part of overall social development. Production has a deep social character so far as Gandhi is concerned. Production in the industrialized society has become an end in itself and human agents have been largely made use of as means to productive ends. This is what happened under the British regime where nobody paid attention to the lakhs of Indian villages that were left to the exploitation of middle-men and industries.

In a country like India where workers all over the country live mostly below the poverty line, purely production-oriented labour has adverse influences over the peace and prosperity of these workers. When workers are considered as machines and as a means of production alone, no amount of worker-welfare orientations can be satisfactorily developed. Under the Gandhian scheme of Panchayathi Raj system, this production-orientation purely for profit without human considerations can be minimized.

It has to be kept in mind that production has to be organized in such a way as to attain social benefits. Decentralisation provides the necessary avenue to the individual citizens and the community for their genuine and maximum contribution to social good. Under the production-oriented industrial system it becomes impossible to the workers and members of the community to make satisfactory contribution to social benefit of any kind. In the decentralized set up the representatives of the people at the village level make the decisions regarding the
welfare programmes to be undertaken and socio-economic activities to be carried out at the village level.

Production and related activities at the village level are based on the principle of cooperation and creative contribution. Cooperative endeavours in modern times in selling agricultural products, milk products as well as fish have proved how effective this principle can be in linking people with production. This social basis for action at the grassroots level and interaction in various activities relating to the development of the village becomes the fundamental Gandhian character of the Panchayathi Raj system. When the social benefit of cooperation and economic production are taken into consideration we shall become increasingly aware of the contribution this makes to the overall well-being and development of the village. Production is no longer the sole economic end for which workers are squeezed and sacrificed. Production, under this system, remains and assumes the role of only a means to an end. The end is the socio-economic well-being of the people of the village.

The Gandhian vision of the Panchayathi Raj system is pure and unsullied in its fundamental principles because the entire thing is based on truth and non-violence. The present set up in which Panchayathi Raj is introduced does not make the basic contributions as envisaged by Gandhi because we have not based its working on truth and non-violence. Under this system the individuals in the village are expected to be Satyagrahis following the fundamental dictum of the Gandhian vision of life. The people are saved from exploitation because there happens to be nobody to exploit the worker in any section. The people enjoy basic freedom because the village becomes the focus of all kinds of decentralized activities, as higher
authorities do not exercise undue power over the village. Ultimately the socio-economic energy generated in the village from agricultural and industrial sectors is not laid waste but fully utilized for the welfare purposes of the people of the village. The raw materials and the environment too becomes part of this well-planned energy utilization. Under this system the Gandhian socio-economic vision becomes complete.

In sum Gandhian concept of Panchayathi Raj envisaged the generation of power from below. Decentralisation, in this scheme would not be dependent on the central and state governments. But Panchayathi Raj as has been conceived and implemented in the country, has made the local institution dependent on state governments in numerous ways. In other words, decentralization is seen as coming from the above, as a generosity of the state government.

Further, Gandhi had situated Panchyati Raj in the context of an alternative notion of development. According to this notion, the path of development best suited to the country is one based on providing the basic needs of people living in the village. In other words, Panchayathi Raj is the political order of the peasant community. This stands in contrast to the model of development adopted in India since independence with emphasis on industrialization. The new economic policies have pushed this model further forward with attendant tendencies towards centralization. Hence seen from a Gandhian angle, the efforts to introduce Panchayathi Raj carry a baggage of inherent contradiction. Furthermore, Gandhian approach to decentralization implies the creation of Panchayaths that can achieve
self-sufficiency and self-reliance as a bulwark against exploitation. However, there is no such thinking behind the system of Panchayathi Raj introduced in the country.

To conclude it can be said that Gandhi had seen Panchayathi Raj as not just a political arrangement but as a way of life, one in which the highest human qualities can be nurtured and attained. Therefore, it can conclude that Gandhian economic thought may be described as 'Pragmatic humanistic economy’ because it is based on realistic approach to life with emphasis on human value and human dignity. If we are able to live according to the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi, we may be sure that this country of ours will survive, as it has survived for centuries, for many more centuries and its philosophy will make a healing of nations and bringing of people together.
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