CHAPTER - IV

A GANDHIAN REMEDY FOR STRENGTHENING INDIAN DEMOCRACY

The search for the best possible form of government which will be able to solve the various problems the individual faces as a member of the civil society has been nagging the human mind ever since man thought of having stability and order in the civil society. Each thinker has tried to deal with this complex issue in his own way and prescribed his own alternative model of government which he believes will provide solutions to human problems. The thinkers and statesman have always debated on the form of government that is capable of tackling the demands of people and meet the challenges of the changing time. As a result of several models of government have been evolved and practiced throughout the world. Different countries have experimented with different forms of government at different times to manage the affairs of the people.

However, all the existing forms of democracy fail to satisfy the human needs of the changing time. The Capitalist form of democracy, which advocates for the majority rule, is unsuccessful to maintain social harmony. The dissatisfaction of the minorities and the violent eruptions in Western societies has disturbed order and stability of those societies. In the Capitalist form of democracy the vast majority rules, in other words, who so ever controls the majority, he enjoys political power. In the Communist form, the selected elite rule for the interest of the vast majority. However, the crumbling of the Soviet Union, the Communist monolith, which accepted that democracy stands for the welfare of the poor and in the Communist form
of democracy the interests of the poor are better protected, has proved the 
fact that the form of democracy practiced in the Communist countries is not 
to the best interest of all. Even the democracies adopted and followed in the 
third world countries have their own deficiencies. India, one of the third 
world countries, is no exception. Although it is the largest democracy in the 
world yet it is not devoid of crisis. Thus, an alternative model of democracy 
is needed to fulfill the desires of all and satisfy the sentiments of all. “We 
need a new theory of democracy that can comprehend the incapacity of 
existing institutional and ideological models, identify the reasons for this 
incapacity in a fast changing global historical setting and provide a 
framework of active interventions at different levels of world reality to deal 
with an altogether new human agenda.”

In this respect Gandhi provides an interesting counterpoint. If one 
studies Gandhi one can discern the fact that he has put forward the 
framework of a civil society which takes in account the involvement and 
interests of all while the state exercises political power. His form of 
democracy is different from all existing forms and it attempts for the 
betterment of all. In this respect his concepts of Swaraj and Sarvodaya, 
ethical and moral foundations of political means and non-violence construct 
the substructure of his political society.

It is worth to mention that Nature has been kind to India in one 
respect. It has endowed the country with the gift of producing great leaders 
in the darkest hour – leaders with the gift of grace who can arouse the 
trusting millions to great heights. Look at the galaxy of character and caliber 
India produced at the time of the struggle for independence.

When the hour was struck the man was found – Mahatma Gandhi – the 
greatest of our leaders. He lit the imagination of the entire nation. He

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Kothari, Rajni, State Against Democracy: In Search of Humane Governance,
created man out of dust. He taught the unforgettable lesson that cynicism corrupts and absolute cynicism corrupts absolutely. He made us realize the profound truth that single minded pursuit of money impoverishes the mind, shrivels the imagination and desiccates the heart.

At the time when our polity is groaning under the crushing burden of a number of miseries like decay of moral values of politicians, corruption, casteism, criminalisation, communal disharmony, defection, nepotism, lack of participation of people in decision making process and struggling with the nightmare of a terrifying future, the course indicated by the unerring fingers of the father of the nation should come as a solace to all those who seek happiness, peace and goodwill for all.

Although the roots of democracy have struck very deep yet the stem is getting rotten due to the spectacular spread of the cancerous germs of corruption, favouritism, nepotism, violence, poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment at every level. Thus on the one hand venality has made its presence felt at all levels, spreading from top to bottom of the political system involving, even the top bureaucrats and politicians, on the other hand, violence has assumed gigantic shape in political violence of the type of assassination of political adversaries, terrorizing voters, booth-capturing, rigging of election, violence in legislative chamber and even assassination of the Prime Minister. But what is most alarming, debasing and damaging of democracy is the nexus between politicians, businessmen, bureaucrats and criminals. Despite many laws, the whole electoral process and system in India is becoming less and less honest mirror of public opinion. The power is assuming more and more credible forms. The voters are bribed and often elections are rigged. The candidates are merchandised rather than elected. One of the saddest aspects of election times is that politics overrides all human considerations. Therefore, if the democracy is to survive, then the
remedy lies in Gandhi’s teachings and messages and his path to resolve conflicts. Arnold Toynbee has rightly observed: “At this supremely dangerous moment in human history, the only way of salvation for mankind is the Indian way emperor Ashoka’s and Mahatma Gandhi’s principles of nonviolence and Sri Ramakrishna’s testimony to the harmony of religions. Here we have an attitude and spirit that can make it possible for the human race to grow together into a single family, and in the Atomic Age this is the only alternative of destroying ourselves.”²

Gandhi claimed to be a convinced democrat. As he said, “I claim to be the greatest democrat of modern times.”³

However, he was not concerned with the form or the façade of democracy. If he was enamoured of democracy, it was because he considered it to be a form of government that promotes the welfare of the masses or at least aspires to attain common good. As an idealist he was concerned with largest good of the people and felt that such an objective is attainable only through democracy. But witnessing the working of modern democracies, he felt disillusioned. What he wanted was democracy in its pristine form and with real content. As he said, “True democracy is what promotes the welfare of the people.”⁴ According to Gandhi, real democracy should have meaning not for a few but for all including the poorest and even for the maimed, the blind and the deaf. He did not believe in mere lip sympathy for the ideal which comes so easily. The entire social order should be such that this ideal should be achieved in practice. A genuine democracy calls for a higher degree of seriousness of purpose and a sense of urgency. Gandhi realized that once people are awakened they would become a

revolutionary force. Their minimum expectations would have to be satisfied, otherwise they would explode. This explosion could take many unpleasant and ugly forms.

Gandhi was a votary of the doctrine of purity of means for the attainment of any noble end and he scrupulously adhered to the belief that a noble democracy is unattainable by upsurge of venality and violence. He asserted categorically, “Democratic government is a distant dream as long as non-violence is not recognised as a living force, an inviolable creed, not a mere polity.”

As far as venality is concerned, Gandhi desired to get democracy out of its sordid influence by keeping politics at a higher plane. Democracy he believed depends for its survival and proliferation on certain basic values, certain code of conduct and mode of living of its participants. It calls for noble character, higher sense of commitment and certain value oriented faith.

Gandhi all along emphasized the practice of self-restrain for the success of democracy. “Real rule” he said, “is self-rule or self-control.” It is by restraining the irrational desires and unsocial probivites that true freedom or Swaraj, that constitutes the essence of democracy, can be enjoyed.

Besides, Gandhi stressed on due performance of one’s duties rather than insistence on one’s rights in the interest of democracy and assured us, “All rights flowed from duties.” For the success of democracy, he reminded

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7. Ibid., p. 420.
us of our responsibilities. As he said, “Democracy requires that everyone, men or women, should realise his or her responsibility.”

By the year 1938, Gandhi had been aware how corruption was creeping into the political system and vitiating it, and how people in government and legislature had become power hungry and self-seeking. Left unchecked it may spell, in no time, the death of true democracy. He, therefore, said, “It is true that violence, untruth and corruption have made inroads enough to warrant drastic measures in order to prevent decay.” Accordingly, he prescribed code of conduct for public officials like legislators, Ministers and Governors etc. He expected them to accept different offices with a spirit of service and to as opportunities for self-aggrandizement. Hence he wrote in Harijan, “If India is to be free in the real sense of term, single eyed devotion to service without any desire for reward or lust for power, thought of our country rather than of us is needed.”

Gandhi realised that corruption in high places stemmed from offices and the paraphernalia attached to such offices. Besides, officers indulge in ostentious living, try to meet such expenses through corrupt method. Hence in order to ensure emergence of true democracy without corruption, he called upon people holding high offices to consider themselves as servants of the people rather than their master. To root out corrupt practices and financial dishonesty from public life, he urged upon those who held public offices to renounce ostentatious and stylistic living with glaze and glamour, because “Independence” is not synonymous with stylishness or pomp. We have to cut our clock according to our cloth. There is no merit in hiding our poverty. India’s status in the world depends upon her moral supremacy.” So he urged upon them to build up their “moral capital”. “The Leaders”, he said,

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12. Ibid., 01-02-1948, Vol. XII, No. 1, p. 12.
“have the reins of government and the disposal of millions of rupees in their hands. They have to be most vigilant.”

Gandhi expected Ministers to be “self-less and incorruptible”. They should not be wealth-hunters but be satisfied with minimum financial reward in return for the services rendered to the people. “The Ministers” he said cannot live as “Sahib Log.” On the other hand, “They should make all feel at every step that they are servants, not masters of the nation.” They must be men of flawless characters and shall so behave both in private and public life that people shall have faith in their honesty and integrity. “The Ministries have to be watchful of their own personal and public conduct. They have to be like Caesar’s Wife, above suspicion in everything.”

Further, the Minister must be above favouritism and nepotism. Their kith and kin, their friends and relatives shall not get any special favour from the government. “They may not make private gains either for themselves or for their relatives or friends.” The facilities provided to them for proper discharge of their official duties should not be misused for private purposes. “Ministers”, said Gandhi, “should not use for private work, facilities provided by Government for official duties.”

Gandhi missed no opportunity to expose corruption, just posing the extravagant ways of the rulers with the poverty of the mass of the people. He used to cite the corruption as one of the main causes of India’s backwardness. He waged a relentless battle against this evil, in fact the

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13 Ibid.
system which it was heir to, but he was not slow to realize that transfer of power from British to Indian hands would not automatically exercise the evil, especially when the old administrative system continued to prevail. He was aware that after assuming office his own followers might fall into the ways of their British predecessors. He made himself the watchdog of public behaviour of his followers even at the risk of offending many of them.

There is an interesting example of the Mahatma objecting to the Andhra leader, the late Sh. T. Prakasam becoming Chief Minister of Madras in 1946 because he had appropriated to himself a purse of Rs. 30,000 given to him by the people of Andhra. Gandhi contended that the money was given to Prakasam not for his personal use, but in capacity as a public man. He, therefore, argued that it should have been made over to the party. When Prakasam ultimately offered to do so, Gandhi pertinently asked him how he proposed to receive. Prakasam could have no doubt obtained the sum from any of his rich friends, but in Gandhi’s eyes it was tantamount to corruption, because in return for the money they would expect some favour from him when he became chief minister. The Mahatma took this stand inspite of the fact that T. Prakasam had thrown away a roaring practice at the bar when he plunged into the national struggle and had also given away to the party his entire property with some hundreds of thousands of rupees.20

Gandhi would not allow well-to-do people to accept any salary whatsoever for discharging their duties as Ministers. Besides, if Ministers had to accept any payment at all, it should be only enough to maintain themselves and, not to make a huge saving. As he said in this connection, “The British Scale of pay cannot be copied by them except at their cost. It will be ludicrous for a monied man to draw the full or any payment. The

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For members of legislature Gandhi has also prescribed very stringent code of conduct. Like the Ministers the Legislators should also be men of dedicated self-less service, without expecting any honour or reward. He said, “The attraction should never be the honour that a seat in the legislature is said to give. The desire and opportunity for service can be the only incentive.” As he further said, “It is altogether wrong to think that the election carries any honour with it. It is a post of service, if one is fit for the post as one for making a few rupees while the Assembly lasts.” The legislators shall, like the Ministers, consider themselves as servants of the people and accept for their public service the minimum from the state. Even the well-to-do among the legislators like the well-to-do Ministers shall not accept any payment for such public service, if they can afford to go without it.

Gandhi prescribed that only selfless, able and incorruptible people should contest for seats in the legislature. They need be free from craze for office, self-advertisement and running down of opponents. They shall be men of such transparent character and pure conduct that people shall voluntarily nominate them and elect them for the service rendered by them in the past.

To avoid extravagant expenditure incurred in election to legislatures leading to corruption and malpractice, Gandhi advocated indirect election to the legislatures with Panchayats as the base. Similarly, it has been pointed out: “By his attempt at purification of politics, Gandhi tried to wash out the

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idea of using politics for personal gains. Politics should not be used for sharing and exercising power. But political work must ever be looked upon in terms of social and moral progress.”

In Gandhi’s view political power should be used for the benefit of the humanity. To gain political power should not be an end but the means by which the lot of masses is improved.

Capacity to take political power should be in exact proportion to the ability to achieve success in the constructive efforts. He argued, “It is an illusion to think that M.L.As are the guides of the voters. Voters do not send representatives to the Assemblies in order to be guided by them. On the contrary, they are sent there to carry out people’s wishes. The people are, therefore, the guides, not the M.L.As. The latter are servants, the former masters.” Gandhi further stressed, “If we look around the world we shall find that the best guidance is given by those outside. If that were not so, a rot would set in all governments, because the fields for guidance is vast and the Assembly is a very small thing. Parliaments are, after all, a mere drop in the ocean of national life.”

When the Congress first decided to accept power in 1937, Gandhi’s initial reaction was that Congress should accept office only if it was found to be in larger interest of the nation. He was reluctant to advice the Congress to accept power as an end in itself. Gandhi also felt that once the Congress was in office, it might be tempted to abuse power. Therefore, in his last Testament on January 29, 1948, Gandhi warned the Congress about the dangers of the power politics and solemnly recommended its dissolution as a political party. He recommended the dissolution of Congress as political party and turned it into Lok Sevak Sangh because he was aware that after

26. Ibid.
assuming office his own followers might fall into the ways of their British predecessors. In May 1939, he told the Gandhi Seva Sangh Workers, “I would go to the length of giving the whole Congress Organization a decent burial, rather than put up with the corruption that is rampant.”

Deviations from the standards set by such an omnibus personality as Gandhi are inevitable. But in no sphere of political life deviation from the Gandhian legacy is as sharp and glaring as in the personal conduct and integrity of politicians. It is not really a deviation but a right reversal of the legacy.

The million crowds that witnessed the hoisting of the tricolour in the 15th August 1947 and the millions in all parts of the country who were a part of such exciting scenes elsewhere, did not aspire for the stars. They did not ask for milk and honey flowing through India after the British left. But they had not bargained for what they are living through today with layers and layers of corruption around. They did expect their country would be better, freer, cleaner and more decent place for them and their progeny to live in.”

It is high time for the country to change the chemistry of politics, and work for the promotion of constitutional democracy on Gandhian lines. Otherwise, if the present state of affairs is allowed to continue unabated, then India will soon be entering a Dark Age of her own making.

Gandhi saw clearly the moral degradation and cultural decay long back. His clear, firm and uncompromising stand on various issues should become guiding principle for us to save Indian democracy. Mahatma Gandhi’s noble idea of a society, based on the principles of truth and non-violence, which upholds ethical actions and moral conduct, is what one must

29 Sharma, Jai Narain, Power, Politics and Corruption, op. cit., pp. 82-83.
strive for the betterment of our country. Gandhi had once said that whenever there was difficulty in solving a problem he had prescribed a talisman, which is at that particular moment think of the poorest person in the country and now his problems can be solved. It means that the administration will be fair and just in its action so that the people can have faith and trust in it.30

In politics the use of ahimsa is based, in Gandhi’s view, upon the immutable maxim that government is possible only as long as the people consent, either consciously or unconsciously, to be governed. It is natural for those in authority to want to command and to use force, but those who obey commands are in a majority and could choose to express their will either by physical force or by “soul-force”. If they prefer physical force, then the rulers and ruled alike become like so many madmen, but if they choose to employ “soul-force” they could honourably disregard unjust commands.31

Gandhi believed that true democracy could not be established through violent means. “True democracy or the swaraj of the masses can never come through untruthful and violent means, for the simple reason that the natural corollary to their use would be to remove all opposition through the suppression or extermination of the antagonists. That does not make for individual freedom. Individual freedom can have the fullest play only under a regime of unadulterated ahimsa.”32 Non-violence must be used to influence power politics without succumbing to its corrupting influence, but the moment nonviolence assumes political power, it contradicts itself and becomes contaminated.”33 Gandhi recognised that it is not possible for a modern State, based, as it is on force, to resist, with no violence whatsoever,

31 Hind Swaraj, op.cit., p. 139.
33 Young India, 29th June 1921, Vol. III, No. 26, p. 205.
forces of disorder, external or internal.\textsuperscript{34} A man according to Gandhi, cannot serve God and Mammon, nor be temperate and furious at the same time.\textsuperscript{35}

But he believed that a state could be organised largely, on the basis of nonviolence, and cited Asoka’s example.\textsuperscript{36} “In nonviolent Swaraj, there can be no encroachment upon just rights and no one can possess unjust rights because of Gandhi’s assumption that non-violence in the very nature of things is of no assistance in the defence of ill-gotten gains and immoral acts.”\textsuperscript{37}

Similarly, he realised that no body could practice nonviolence, but he chose to regard the notions of nonviolent state, on violent society and a democracy as Euclidean models that could provide standards of assessment and incentives to alter existing situations.\textsuperscript{38} He also recognised that governments in power could not rule without legislation, but he believed that the coercive element in legislation could be reduced progressively in a real democracy. He stated, “Legislation imposed by people upon themselves is nonviolence to the extent it is possible in society. A society organised and run on the basis of complete non-violence would be the purest anarchy.”\textsuperscript{39} The nearest approach to purest anarchy would be a democracy based on nonviolence.

As a matter of fact “nonviolence was the first article of Gandhi’s faith and the last article of his creed and to him it was the greatest force at the disposal of mankind and mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction

\begin{footnotes}
\item[34] Harijan, 12-05-1946, Vol. XII, No. 14, p. 128.
\item[35] Ibid.
\item[36] Ibid.
\item[37] Iyer, Raghvan, N., The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi, op. cit., pp. 185-186.
\item[38] Ibid., p. 187.
\end{footnotes}
devised by the man. Gandhi had presented it to us in the course of his patent technique and science of non-violent resistance popularly known as “Satyagraha”. He not only revived our lost interest but also further enriched this concept by making it societal. The point here is that in independent India, the societal doctrine of non-violence emerging from Gandhian ideas, had to become the key to forge and sustain the new social and political order. However, his techniques of Satyagraha has not only been misused but also abused by the so-called leaders of the masses and individuals in their capacities ever since independence. For instance, in the name of satyagraha various agitations are launched by vested groups, associations employers’ union and individuals without knowing and understanding the meaning of satyagraha. In Gandhi’s Satyagraha, no doubt, a child, a woman and even an old man could participate in Satyagraha after a proper training otherwise it could result in a ‘Duragraha’.”

In fact, Gandhi had emphasised that Satyagraha was the weapon of the brave and the weak or coward was ignorant of it. Its main purpose was conversion and not coercion.

Satyagraha is such a state of physical and mental discipline that could move the chord of human heart and being a change of heart in the so-called adversaries by holding on to Truth. Gandhi had provided the technique of satyagraha to oppose each and every kind of violence. “If a state is corrupt and many of its laws governing the conduct of a person are positively inhuman, if its administrators are capricious and regulated by nothing but their own whims and fancies and forms an almost secret but extremely powerful corporation, if the system of government is based upon merciless

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exploitation of millions of people, then loyalty to a state so corrupt is a sin, disloyalty a virtue."\(^{42}\)

In this respect, a good man will, therefore, resist an evil system of administration with his soul. Disobedience of the laws of an evil state thus becomes a duty. Violent disobedience may remove or replace men but it leaves the evil itself untouched and often accentuates it unlike nonviolent disobedience. Thus a just and truly democratic state deserve active loyalty, while the citizen retains the right to disobey particular laws which are unjust or repressive, and a corrupt, undemocratic, tyrannical state is one in which sedition itself becomes a religion.\(^{43}\)

Here Gandhi emphasises that Satyagraha can prove to be an important means by which individuals and groups can be moulded to the ways of democratic process. By resorting to the techniques of satyagraha as taught by him, individuals and groups can organise the people and draw the attention of the Government and masses on issues of communalism, terrorism, nexus between politicians and criminals, poverty, population explosion, mal-practices in election, misuse of government machinery etc. for the revival of democratic institution. At personal level also lot of people can work and take up local issues along with national issues. To operationalise the Satyagraha for better party, it would be desirable to bring like – minded people and NGOs under one umbrella to fight against the wrong deeds of corrupt legislators and executives who are responsible for creating mess in Indian polity.

Today, when there is rapid criminalization and erosion of moral values in Politics, the message of Gandhi about Religion in Politics seems to be


\(^{43}\) Ibid.
more relevant. “We are proud of Gandhian political culture which gives specific importance to the moral aspects of politics, to intellectual and saintly orientation to political action, to purity of means for pure end, to the doctrine of truth and non-violence to the obedience to the dictates of inner conscience; and to the ideal of social justice and freedom.”

Gandhi like Gokhale wanted a spiritualization of politics. But Gandhi’s attachment to the concept of non-violence was for deeper and more extensive than that of Gokhale. He wanted to mix religion into politics for the service of his country and humanity as whole. To him “there is no politics devoid of religion. They subserve religion. Politics bereft of religion are a death trap because they kill the soul.” Therefore, to him, Religion means the assertion of unity with God. It is a dynamic force. So the incorporation of religion in politics means a progressive movement towards justice and truth, because a man of religion will never tolerate any kind of oppression and exploitation.

If the people want to root out the corrupt and the dishonest politicians then his concept of religion in politics cannot be separated. “Religious life means a purified and chastened life and such a life is bound to cast immense social and political impact. If politics does not bother about the ethics and morality it will certainly lead to such a state of affairs where humanity will be compelled to crush down and will be lost in the vacuum.”

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45. Varma, V. P., Modern Indian Political Thought, op. cit., p. 350.
46. Ibid.
according to Gandhi was not merely a means for personal purification but it was an immense powerful social bond and politics divorced from religion would be absolutely meaningless and we would fail to understand our national institutions.\textsuperscript{49} He was in favour of the very fundamentals of religion, which is morality and goodness. By the religious basis of politics Gandhi meant the concept of moral right in place of the divine right of rulers, princes and other ascendant groups.

Being a practical man and accepting that politics cannot simply be abolished, Gandhi sought to purify politics by showing that its sovereign principle is neither coercive nor manipulative power, but moral and social progress, leading to healthy growth and all-round development. Through Satyagraha he sought to introduce religious values into politics by extending the rule of domestic life into the political arena. Ascribing the underlying continuity of mankind to the sacrificial exercise of soul-force within family, he was convinced that the same energies could be brought to bear self consciously in the larger sphere of the life. For the Satyagrahi, committed to truth, the only power that can be legitimately exercised is the capacity to suffer for the errors of others and on behalf of the welfare of all - whether it is the family, the nation or even the world. Gandhi believes that the Satyagrahi should be active in politics if he can stand firmly for social justice and initiate constructive change. He further advocated voluntary poverty as an essential prerequisite for any social or political worker who wished to remain untainted by the wasteful greed of power politics. He even maintained that possessions could be anti-social. It is not enough to continue possessing goods in practice under the elusion that one has given them up in spirit. Possessions, he believed, should be held in trust at the disposal of those who need them in real sense.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., p. 3.
Today, we need men of character with all morality in politics if want to save the democratic quality of India. Everybody wants that there must be purity in every field of administration so that they may lead peaceful life but what we see, everywhere there is corruption, there is criminalization of politics. Therefore, the need of the day is to incorporate the values teaching given by Gandhi regarding religion in politics. If every individual who enters in politics follow the teachings of Gandhi regarding morality then we can have true democracy in India. Today, Indian politics requires good men with good intension in Gandhian mould having moral forces behind their thinking as well as deeds.

In a vast country like India inhabited by people following a variety of religions, speaking various languages and observing different cultures, customs and traditions, communal harmony is absolutely necessary for national integration, peace and prosperity. Besides, the Gandhi’s views on communal harmony especially in the face of the rising tide of the communalism and fundamentalism are quite relevant.

It is unfortunate that even after more than five decades of independence we are unable to root out the problem of communalism and the causes which promote the feeling of hatred of one community against the other. “The communalism has been a fallout of sectarian politics which is both a hangover of the British rule and the consequences of partition. Earlier it was a menace but now it threatens to be weapon of extermination of a minority. Its earlier outburst was more among Muslims then Hindus. It brought about, to start with, a kind of alienation of the Muslims from the Hindus. Latter, by the forties of the last century, this developed into a rage of Muslims against the Hindus. The communalism of Hindus was then not as virulent, Gandhi was able to contain it; it surfaced now and then but remained by and large ineffective. However, after partition this gained
strength and succeeded in widening the divide between the two communities.\textsuperscript{50}

Today, when the communal riots have become day-to-day phenomenon we cannot ignore the views of Mahatma Gandhi on communal harmony.

Mahatma Gandhi preached non-violence throughout his life and lived and died for communal harmony and unity. He was such a great man who never felt, thought and acted in terms of communalism or narrow Sectarianism. He fought for the safeguard of the rights and interests of the minorities. Therefore, we cannot forget the contribution of this great man of India for communal unity.

“He was the most unhappy man, upset and very much hurt with the violence and communal hatred all around him. It is a fact that his soul was restless until the last moment of his life and he wished that rather than he be a helpless witness to communal (Hindu-Muslim) atrocities, he should be removed from this earth.”\textsuperscript{51} His policy as well as intention always was to ask the Hindus to leave it to the Muslims not to do anything, which could hurt their religious feelings, and to ask the Hindus to see to it that nothing was done by them which could hurt the Muslims.

Gandhi believed that irrespective of one’s religion and faith one had to feel his identity with every one of the millions of the inhabitants of our motherland. He said, “In order to realise this every Congress man or anybody else would have to cultivate personal friendship with persons representing faiths other than his own. He should have the same regard for other faiths as he has for his own.”\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{50} Zakaria, Rafiq, Communal Rage in Secular India, op. cit., p. xiii.


\textsuperscript{52} Gandhi, M. K., Constructive Programme, op.cit., p. 8.
Similarly, he was not happy while listening to the disgraceful cry at the railway stations such as Hindu water and Muslim tea and separate rooms or pots for Hindus and non-Hindus in schools and colleges, communal schools, colleges and hospitals. In 1938, Gandhi elaborated: “My Hinduism is not sectarian. It includes all that I know to be best in Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism. I approach politics and everything else in religious spirit. Truth is my religion and Ahimsa is the only way of its realization. I have rejected for once and for all the doctrine of sword. The secret stabbings of innocent persons, and the speeches I read in the papers are hardly the thing leading to peace or an honourable settlements.”

According to him religious intolerance was one of the major reasons of hatred of one against other. Gandhi had admitted that religion was the personal affair of each individual but it must not be mixed up with politics for that matter. And the Hindus, the Muslims, the Sikhs, the Christian, the Parsees, the Jews should be Indians first and Indians last.

Mahatma Gandhi was totally opposed to destroying places of worship, temples, or Mosques as retaliation. He was firmly opposed to any such idea. He said, “Even though a thousand temples may be reduced to bits I would not touch a single mosque and expect thus to prove the superiority of my faith to the so called faith of fanatics...Hindus will not defend their religion or their temples of seeking to destroy mosques, and thus proving themselves as fanatical as the fanatics who have been desecrating temples.”

Gandhi’s these remarks are quite relevant to the Ramjanma-bhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy today. If he had been alive today, he would not...
have approved at all the entire Ramjanma-bhoomi controversy much less the demolition of Babri mosque which was an act of vandalism. Infact, if Mahatma Gandhi’s version of extremely tolerant Hinduism had prevailed, our country would not have undergone the communal disaster it faced after the demolition of Babri Masjid at the instance of the VHP-BJP. Infact, what the VHP is propagating is what Gandhi denounced as fanaticism. In such matters of fanaticism, Gandhi spares neither Hindus nor Muslims.

Thus, it is seen that Mahatma Gandhi’s way of promoting communal harmony was to emphasize tolerance of others’ ways of believing and worshiping. Gandhi advocated mutual tolerance by which not only conflict could be resolved but also the ground for cooperation between the Hindus and the Muslims could be prepared. Religious difference does not necessarily lead to conflict. It is only when people become conscious of their religious difference and think that their religion is true and other’s false then the trouble starts. It is because such consciousness leads to disrespect and contempt for other’s religion. Gandhi advocated that all religions are more or less true and therefore, one should not revile the other’s faith. “Each must respect the other religion, must refrain from even secretly thinking ill of the other. We must political dissuade members of all the communities indulging in bad language against one another. Only a serious endeavour in this direction can remove the estrangement between us.”

Similarly, “Differences of religious opinion will persist to the end of time, toleration is the only thing that will enable persons belonging to different religions to live as good neighbours and friends.”

It is true that communalists preach intolerance and hatred against people of other faiths and communities but there is more to communalism than mere hatred and intolerance. Above all,

there is struggle for power, and religion is used as a mobilizing force by the communalists. In order to create communal harmony, this factor has to be taken into account.

Gandhi pointed out that he was as much as idol-worshipper as an idol-breaker, and he believed that all Hindus and Muslims upheld the same views whether they admitted it or not. He said that mankind thirsted for symbolism. He questioned: were not Masjids or Churches or for that matter Gurudwaras in reality the same as Mandirs (temples)? He answered that God resided everywhere no less in stock or stone than in a single hair on the body of men. But men associated sacredness with particular places and things more than with others. Such a sentiment was working of respect when it did not mean restrictions on similar freedom for others. To every Hindu and Muslim Gandhi’s advice was that if there was compulsion anywhere, they should gently but firmly refuse to submit to it. Personally, he himself would hug an idol and lay down his life to protect it rather than brook any restriction upon his freedom of worship. That required courage of a higher order than was needed in violent resistance.\(^60\)

When we come to Gandhi’s approach to communal harmony, we find that Gandhi opposed communal virus of return blow for blow which is nothing but perpetuating our mental slavery and tearing up our motherland into bits, namely, Hindustan, Pakistan, Brahninistan, and Achhutistan\(^61\) and now one more such a name – Khalistan. He sacrificed himself so that a united India might live together.

It has been seen that we have grown more and more intolerant in recent years. We can learn a great deal about tolerance and non-violence

\(^60\) Harijan, 30-03-1947, Vol. XI, No. 8, p. 86.
\(^61\) Ibid.
from Gandhi. What is most inspiring in Gandhi’s life is his sense of dedication to peace and nonviolence even in the midst of communal frenzy during the days of the Partition. Be it Noakhali or Bihar or Delhi, he risked his life to restore sanity among people with great impartiality. And he laid down his life for saving the people who did not belong to his religious community. “Today, movements are launched with communal violence and quelled with more violence. Bloodshed continues unabated, communal riots erupt on the flimsiest of provocations. This is more important in the sense that we have been unable to overcome or stop violence by violence or forcible methods. It is the height of communal virus when we have a general rather wrong impression that while a person is being killed, in violent incidents in Delhi, we say he would be Sikh and if another killed in Punjab, he would be a Hindu. Whereas truth is that violence does not see a Hindu or a Muslim or a Sikh or anybody else. Such a thinking creates undesirable and unethical values such as anger, hatred, suspicion and spirit of revenge.”  

Therefore, there is confusion. Such confusion cannot be removed until and unless we all, irrespective of our caste, colour and creed cultivate in us higher values and virtues such as liberal attitude, “truthfulness, humility, compassion, tolerance and loving kindness,” which Gandhi preached throughout his life.

“Accordingly, Gandhi’s approach to communal harmony has a meaning, a worth and is meaningful step in the proper direction but this single step should not be considered as a panacea or a single pill or tablet course for the eradication of a serious disease of communalism. However, this one step of humility, tolerance, liberal attitude, self-restraint, self-purification, love, compassion and loving kindness can show us the proper

63 Harijan, 02-04-1938, Vol. VI, No. 8, p. 65.
way to go ahead for the second step to reach our destination - communal harmony, peace and amity.”64

Therefore, it is necessary to follow the values of Mahatma Gandhi to improve the present conditions which are responsible for hatred among the people of different religions.

Another significant issue in democracy is the question of development. Three-fourths of our countrymen live in rural areas; there can be no national development without development of rural India. India became independent at the midnight of August 15, 1947 and a Democratic Republic on November 26, 1949, when, the people of India gave to themselves the Constitution. Since then lot of development is seen all over the country, but its fruit is mostly being enjoyed by the upper classes of society. One of the reasons why progress has not reached the grassroots is that our system of planning is not people oriented. To avoid this, the Constitution was amended in 1992 and new chapters on panchayats and municipalities were added with power to make schemes for coordinated development of rural and urban areas upto district level. The state governments were directed to constitute district level development committees comprising elected representatives from panchayats and municipalities. Nowhere, in the country, the state governments have taken any steps to enact appropriate legislation in accordance with Article 243 ZD of the Constitution and the whole planning, even after 14 years of amendment of the constitution is being done by influential bureaucrats.

Article 243 ZD has clearly suggested democratization of planning with the consent and approval of people. No state is ready to decentralize

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power. Therefore, no democratic planning. Democracy has still to become our lifestyle. It is stated that no state in the country has implemented more than 6 out of 37 Articles of the 73rd and 74th amendments. Articles which are not implemented are those which transfer some powers and responsibilities of municipalities and panchayats and make them responsible for development up to district level.65

The introduction of the Panchayati Raj system in the country is no doubt a very ‘bold experiment’. However it cannot be said that mere mechanism of democratic decentralisation or transfer of certain powers to villages nominally would solve the awful socio-economic problems in the villages. The entire system no doubt contemplates the process of election and party politics even in petty elections of village Gram panchayat. Though the element of election in the system cannot be completely ruled out at least the outlook towards these institutions needs a fundamental change among the political parties that matter.66

The principle of democratic decentralisation, introduced in rural India in the form of Panchayati Raj System is a multiter administrative structure aiming at rural development through the participation of rural people. “One of the main aims of Panchayati Raj is to take the development in implementing those programmes and to do so with the support and cooperation of non-official leadership at the local level.”67 The Panchayati system under the Constitution was adopted to foster the involvement of individuals throughout the nation in the process of democratic government,

65. The Tribune, Chandigarh, Thursday, 16th June 2005, p. 11.
to gain participation of villages in national development from the village level upwards and thus promote improvements in the village conditions and to lessen the burden of state administration through decentralization but it is seen that people’s participation remains a myth to a large extent. It is the privileged ‘few’ who participate – that too mostly for amassing political power and money, others are either meek followers, or silent spectators. The people’s participation idea could not gather momentum even after the advent of Panchayati Raj except probably the political involvement of rural elite in the village and panchayat samiti level politics. The reasons are factionalism in the village as a weakening factor, gap between people’s sense of priorities, ignorance and poverty are also factors which contribute towards apathy of masses.

The villages have turned apathetic towards the Panchayati Raj, for there is no effort to really involve the people in the task of making progress. The common villager has developed a feeling that vested interests have developed which exploit him and his simplicity for petty gains. Corruption at the top has seeped in. The Gram Sabha – the real institution of direct democracy – remains dormant because no one is interested in arousing it from slumber. The Panchayat is neither responsible nor responsive to the Gram Sabha. The most vital element of the grass-roots democracy participation is missing.

The 73rd Amendment has been hailed as a major landmark in the history of local self-government in India. This Amendment, infact, aimed at enhancing the capabilities of the rural people to involve themselves in the planning process with respect to their priorities. It also envisaged decentralization of the execution of all types of development activities with the active participation of the rural masses.
Though the Amendment was regarded as welcome step yet its indepth analysis reveals some inherent ambiguities. “The most important one is the lack of clear cut demarcation of functions (29 included in the XI Schedule) amongst the three tiers of Panchayati Raj system. Further, it may also be pointed out that the powers and functions of Gram Sabha have not been specified.”  

Again, under the 73rd Amendment, an effort was made to revamp the Gram Sabha by according it a Constitutional status and it was considered as Lok Sabha of the village people. But it seems that it is still a non-functional body mainly because of lack of faith of the rural people in its effectiveness resulting into their indifferent attitude towards this body.

Although 73rd and 74th Amendments have been enacted to the Constitution but the functioning of these institutions still needs changes in terms of finance, devolution of authority etc. There is also a need for greater political decentralisation by empowering local institutions with authority and responsibilities in areas of local importance as wished by Mahatma Gandhi as for the decentralisation of power to rural areas and their overall development, his thoughts and his philosophy on the subject much reliable and relevant.

In fact, decentralization is the battle cry of modern democracies and Gandhi was perfectly convinced of the need and practicality of decentralisation. He was never tired of singing the praises of Panchayati Raj. He was so enamoured of this concept that he identified it with Ram Raj – a divine state. For him, revival of the Panchayats was a national aspiration and an unavoidable necessity. He termed it ‘Gram Swaraj’, implying true

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freedom for the villages which comprised over 70 per cent of the country’s population. “Gandhi’s love of rural life emerged from two sources, he romanticized India as a big village and that was his vision of the future; and he reacted against some negative features of western civilization, finding correctives of them in the simplicity, austerity and self-reliance of village life.”

Real India lives in its villages, he said, and he added that is here that the reconstruction of India will take.

Similarly, he had realised the fact that the development of India depends on the progress of her villages. He even went to the extent of saying, “we have to make a choice between India of the villages that are as ancient as herself, and India of the cities which are a creation of foreign domination.” He continued, “You must realise that it is not cities that make India but the villages and that you cannot reconstruct them unless you revive the village life with its defunct handicraft.” In his view, the restoration of village self-governance would ensure the best and the greatest in human values in personal, family, social and political life. The prevailing situation can be changed by the active participation and co-operation of the villagers themselves and only then the villages can become self-sufficient. Gandhi’s Gram Swaraj was not the reconstruction of the old village but the formation of independent units of villages having a self-sufficient economy. Self-sufficiency in basic needs was one of the fundamental conditions of Gandhian village reconstruction. Food, clothing and other basic necessities should be produced at the village itself, which would lead to full employment of almost each able-bodied person and would prevent the rural-urban migration in search of employment and better opportunities.

72 Hingorani, A. T. (ed.), The Village Reconstruction, op. cit., p. 44.
Describing his village swaraj 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 inter-dependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity. Thus, every village’s first concern will be to grow its own food crops and cotton for its cloth. It should have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and playground for adults and children. Then if there is more land available it will grow useful money crops, thus excluding ganja, tobacco, opium and the like. The village will maintain a village theatre, school and public Hall. It will have its own water works ensuring clean water supply. This can be done through controlled wells or tanks. Education will be compulsory upto the final basic course. As far as possible every activity will be conducted on the cooperative basis. There will be no castes such as we have today with their graded untouchability. Nonviolence with its technique of satyagraha and non-cooperation will be the sanction of village community. There will be a compulsory service of village guards who will be selected by rotation from the register maintained by village.”  

In the preservation and strengthening of village independence lay the solution of most of India’s socio-economic and political ills and the village independence can be maintained only when the Gandhian prescription of village swaraj is followed.

Gram Swaraj is not something that can be achieved in a short time. It is not just a change in the physical look of the village; it involves total transformation of the outlook of the people living there. It means self governance and self management of village communities wherein the dignity of the individuals is ensured, each one is involved in creative activities. Such communities will form the building blocks of a new world order wherein all have access to basic needs, no one is too rich and too poor, all have peace of

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73. Ibid., pp. 115-116.
mind. It is the only alternative and practicable alternative for us. And it is feasible too, provided that we are prepared to change our mindset, and incessantly work to achieve the goals of gram swaraj.

The concept of Gram Swaraj is not political; it touches all aspects of life: cultural, social, economic and ecological. Village life should be marked with fellow feeling, love and affection compassion and sense of sacrifice. Socially, it should be so organised that community interests override personal interests. It should be so managed that everyone gets justice and problems, if any, are resolved locally. Economically, it should be viable in the sense that it should be self-reliant and not dependent on others for the basic needs. Everyone should have access to natural resources of the community and everyone should have employment. Ecological dimension is of special importance because on it depends not only the health and wealth of community but also its future existence.

Throughout his life Gandhi used to emphasize the importance of village in India. To him, for the progress and improvement of India it was imperative to develop the condition of Indian villages. Therefore, he prescribed a Panchayati Raj System for rural administration and rural upliftment. The fact is that no one else contributed to the theme of Panchayati Raj as much as he did. And he was able to present a coherent view. He never claimed to be original or innovative, but he was representing Indian ingenuity in terms of an ideology and a way of life inherited from India’s antiquity. That is why he had an infallible appeal to both the elites and the masses in the country as a whole. He was only interpreting the Indian model of thought and practice in the light of modern challenges facing India, in particular, and other human societies on the globe in general. Now that decentralisation is the watchword of modern statecraft, Gandhi’s thought has acquired greater relevance.
Gandhi’s system of Panchayat Raj was based on the principle of democratic decentralisation. He believed that in India power must flow to the masses. He regarded the villages as the basic unit of administration and every village must have sufficient power to manage its own affairs. To Gandhi, democracy meant enjoyment of power by the common men. “In the true democracy of India, the unit is the village. Even if one village wants Panchayati Raj which is called republic in England, no one can stop it.”74 For him a decentralized democracy based on non-violence must consist of groups settled in small communities or villages in which voluntary cooperation is the condition of dignified and peaceful existence. For, it is the only way to realize the values of democracy from grassroots level as it will enable the people to participate in taking and implementing decisions without a rigid and strict control of any higher authority. Moreover, it is the only alternative to reduce the interference of the state in day-to-day affairs of the people.

Gandhi was opposed to all types of concentration of power, since to him, centralization was a menace and danger to democracy. Concentration of power, in his view distorts all democratic values. So he argues, “possession of power makes men blind and deaf; they cannot see things which are under their very nose, and cannot hear things which invade their ears.”75 He affirms that without decentralisation it is impossible to ensure individual liberty and mental and moral growth of man. Similarly it is equally essential for the realization of the ideal of democracy, for the rule of the people, which it stands for, is not possible without adequate opportunities to individuals to participate in the management of their own affairs.76

Further, Gandhi does not seek only the decentralisation of political power. He rather pleads for decentralisation of both economic and political power. For, the success of political decentralization, in his view, depends upon economic decentralization. He reiterated that if a new democratic equalitarian social-political order free from exploitation had to be established on firm foundations, decentralization in economics must go side by side with decentralisation in politics.\textsuperscript{77} The Manifesto of Congress Parliamentary Board, July 29, 1934 which was drafted by Gandhi declared: “In order to end the exploitation of the masses, political freedom must include real economic freedom of the starving millions.”\textsuperscript{78}

He indicated that Western mechanism of democracy was not suitable for India. Therefore, he favoured India’s own institutional framework to realize the values of democracy. The conception of every village as a small republic was for him a workable ideal in the Indian situation. He was in favour of a broad – based pyramidal structure of decentralized power, with numerous village Panchayats at the bottom as the vibrant sources of power, economic and political, and the National Panchayat at the apex. He envisaged intermediary levels of district and state panchayats, with the ultimate power vested in the village Panchayats. While the village Panchayats would be elected directly by the people, the Panchayats would elect the intermediary bodies that, in turn, would elect the National Panchayat. He subscribed to village-based government with a self-sufficient, autonomous, village economy. Gandhi’s faith on Universal Adult Franchise, gender equality, and participatory democracy can be known from his concept of Panchayat Raj. The Panchayat of Gandhi’s model would be sovereign, legally and politically, and would be subordinate to none. It would hold

\textsuperscript{78} CWMG, Vol. LVIII (May 18 – September 15, 1934), op. cit., March 1974, p. 257.
legislative, executive and judicial power – a perfect village government where perfect grass-roots democracy would function to ensure individual freedom, social security and common welfare.

To the Mahatma, independence was priceless. All must have freedom. All must be able to take their own decision. In his philosophy the villages and villagers must have self-rule. He thought that to have perfect swaraj all the villages and all the villagers must be enjoying freedom. So he opined, “Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus every village will be republic or panchayat having full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained, capable of managing its affairs, even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world – it will be trained and prepared to perish in the attempt to defend itself against any onslaught from without. Thus, ultimately, it is the individual who is the unit. This does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbours or from the world... 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 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, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of oceanic circle of which they are integral units...”

He felt that the small communities moulding their lives on the basis of voluntary co-operation would be the best environment for the extinction of exploitation. The regeneration of India he felt to be impossible without village reconstruction. Hence, he gave us a slogan ‘back to villages’. He gave a call to everybody to go and work in villages develop rural economy,

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rural industry and rural skill. Thus, Gandhi worked out meticulously the
details of a wide variety of practical things, which are vital to build a
graceful village life.

To realise the dreams of the father of the Nation, India launched its
first programme of rural reconstruction, the Community Development
Programme, in 1952 but it remained a programme run by the bureaucracy
without popular participation at the local level. Due to failure of the
Community Development Programme, the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee
was appointed in 1957. The Committee felt that development couldn’t
progress without responsibility and power being given to the community. It
was with this objective that the team recommended an early establishment of
statutory elective local bodies and devolution to them of the necessary
resources, power and authority. However, in due course the strains in
Panchayati Raj Institutions functioning were visible and the desired results
were not forthcoming. As a result, concentration of power and wealth was
visible, while Gandhi advocated for distributive justice. Consequently in
1977, the Asoka Mehta Committee was appointed to review the existing
system. It favoured a two-tier model of Panchayati Raj. But even this did not
help to revive the Panchayats and the lopsided development of rural areas
continued. In fact to a large extent both these committees only tried to imbibe
Gandhian value into their model which was distant dream from the Gandhian
model of development and Gram Swaraj. After it, the 73rd Constitutional
Amendment Act was passed in 1992 conferring Constitutional status to the
Panchayats.

But the question is: do mere legislations bring about reforms? Gram
Sabhas in most of the states have not become a true democratic grass root
level institution and the Panchayats cannot be successful unless the Gram
Sabha is strengthened. The Government of India declared the year 1999 as
the year of Gram Sabha but without much effect. Peoples’ mobilisation remains a distant dream. The Panchayati Raj Institutions are vested with powers to plan and execute development schemes but they do not have the capacity and capability to do so. Financially they are weak, they do not receive the approved grants in time and whatever is received is inadequate. The panchayats are not able to generate any resources, shramdan is an alien concept now. The bureaucracy continues to enjoy its dominant role, which is again alien to the Gandhian concept of Gram Swaraj. The mechanism of conflict resolution as advocated by Gandhi aimed for incorruptible impartial and able judiciary from the bottom in which the panchayats would occupy a central place. Community involvement in dispute redress is of prime importance. Local problems need and should have local solutions.

Indian government has been engaged in rural development for the last several years but it has achieved very little. Nothing can be achieved unless the people themselves organise themselves to light the lamp. Even the elected government do things for getting votes and those who implement the projects have their eyes on the amount of money they can corner. Right thing to do will be to give the money to the community and let them use it the way they like. But we know that even this solution is not viable. The men and women who get elected to the gram panchayats are no better than the government officials. They connive with local government official to siphon off the money meant for community development. So there is little if any hope from the gram panchayats unless the Gram Sabha i.e. the whole village stands up and questions their representatives on what they ought to do and what they really do. The panchayat elections are fought like state and national elections. Position of Gram Pradhan especially is considered to be lucrative and hence people spend lot of money to get elected. The same is
the case with other elected positions in the three-tier panchayat system. Voters are openly bought and sold.

People often point to the flaw of in the electoral system, which allows criminals and antisocial elements to enter electoral politics. There are others who point to prevailing rampant corruption in government offices. Nothing substantial can be done unless we have people of high moral stature like Mahatma Gandhi in the system. Moreover, the people themselves can change the village if they follow the footsteps of Mahatma Gandhi. “Anna Hajarae a retired army man changed Rale Goan Siddhi, a very backward village into a modern one... Anna Hazarae followed the Gandhian model and created a miracle. Why can’t each village of India follow that model and become a miracle village?”

Gandhi’s Gram Swaraj in fact aimed at individual’s development, character building and adherence to basic human values. But our Panchayati Raj system has not become successful to solve the basic problems of the individual. It is in this context that the Gandhian approach to rural development should be understood. In the Gandhian model village is the central and not the peripheral source that would generate forces of social transformation. The goal of Gandhian action is attainment of a truthful human society and not the creation of a powerful, albeit just state. Unless people participate in the development and the instruments of development are such that people realise that these institutions are for their betterment no development can take place.

If the Panchayati Raj problem is to work in the spirit that it worked in ancient India to conform to the Gandhian idea of Gram Swaraj, some

decisions on the policy front, based upon the principles of Gandhi, have to be taken:

1. The Constitution has to be suitably amended in order to give the Panchayats an independent status. Their dependence on the state and the Centre has to go.

2. The Panchayati Raj should be left free to plan for themselves. The system of planning from above should be replaced by one from below. The panchayat should be empowered to take decisions and implement them. Except for coordination of activities of the Panchayats, the whole area of socio-economic development should be left to them, unfettered. This kind of model, Gandhi wanted o build. He wanted that the villages should be economic self-sufficient. To him, this was the only way to eliminate exploitation of the weaker sections in society and to bring happiness to millions.

3. The Panchayati Raj should be allowed to raise their own resources. This should include taxation of income, property and so on, as well as levying of duties on goods and merchandise. Without economic independence and revenues, the Panchayats remain hampered in their functions.

4. The Centre or the State should also extend financial support to the Panchayats. This support should not result in their dependence on the Centre or the State, but should be aimed at creating self-reliance.

5. The Gram Sabha, as the legislative and deliberative body, should be made functional. The Panchayat should be both
responsible and responsive to the Gram Sabha. For that, it is imperative that an institute for the training of villagers in the task of socio-economic development in its various dimensions should be set up to cater to the needs of a cluster of villages. The institute should provide training in administrative, financial, legislative, planning, execution and other matters related to democratic functioning and problems arising out of decentralisation.

Perhaps, if these steps are taken by the state or the central governments, the Gandhian model of Panchayati Raj may be realized.

Efforts are being done at several places in India to realise the dream of Gandhi’s village swaraj. A small band of people have joined hands to work for gram swaraj under the banner of the Panch Parmeshwar Movement… The movement is covering all aspects of life: cultural, social, ecological and economic. The objective of the movement is to prepare the people to initiate auto development from within so that each village stands on its own feet. It has been on in five districts of Central UP, Allahabad, Fatehpur, Jaunpur, Pratapgarh and Sultanpur with inbuilt plan to extend it to other districts of UP and other States.81

In recent years, decentralisation in planning has been emphasised at various levels; administrative, political and executive. Necessity of directional change in planning process is widely felt. An attempt has been made in Kerala to put the idea in practice within the framework of the existing panchayati raj institutions. The year 1996 witnessed novel

experiment in panchayat planning by the Kerala State Planning Board. Prior to that panchayats in Kerala were functional as rituals. Initiation of people’s campaign plan opened up many few possibilities. Gram Sabha initiated the planning process by listing felt needs of the people and their development perception and took participation in various activities like collection of secondary data, review of ongoing schemes, survey of local history etc.  

Thus, it can be said that effective people’s participation can be ensured only through Panchayats. Inspite of its shortcomings Panchayat is the best institution to initiate and carry out local level development. All efforts should be directed to make Panchayats capable and function properly.

The ongoing analysis confirms that Gandhi was a moral and spiritual genius and had a rare combination of both thought and action in him. He had become as a new hope for humanity, an advocate for the downtrodden all over the world. His championship of the oppressed, in his peculiar way, made him the symbol of spirit fighting against matter of soul force fighting against brute force. Gandhi’s call to each and everyone is a call for incessant effort and for comprehensive and integral developments body, mind and soul.

Gandhi envisioned the emergence of a Sarvodaya Samaj, a social order free from all forms of violence, exploitation and sectarianism based on class, caste or creed. In such a social order, continuous attention will be given to the weakest sections and this would be the ultimate yardstick of the soundness of the social order. Decentralization and voluntarism would be the guiding principles of social organisation and functioning. Gandhi believed in human labour power supplemented by appropriate machines to produce the wherewithal for the minimum comforts of all members of society, not for a  

82 Ibid., p. 16.
few alone. The vital force in such a society would be a body of dedicated social servants who will render help to the people in education, organisation and leadership in fighting against injustice, exploitation and tyranny and in undertaking constructive tasks. For Gandhi, the force of the people’s power, duly awakened and organised for constructive tasks, was the major force of social regulation. So he believed in minimum government and maximum of self-governing individuals and groups.

Gandhi had faith in social, economic, political democratic order in society. In the social sphere, Gandhi upholds the Varnashramdharma, though not the caste-system as it exists today. Varna in its real meaning, Gandhi thinks, is extinct today. In its ideal sense, Varna is not only for Hindus but for the whole humanity. He defines the law of Varna thus, “The law of Varna means that everyone shall follow as a matter of dharma duty – the hereditary calling of his forefathers in so far as it is not inconsistent with fundamental ethics. He will earn his livelihood by following that calling. He may not hoard riches but devote the balance for the good of the people.”

Gandhi lays stress on functions being hereditary because hereditary is the law of nature. But he is not for rigid divisions. Thus Varna is intimately connected with birth. Varnaashramdharma defines man’s mission on earth. He is not born day after day to explore avenues for amassing riches to explore different means of livelihood, on the contrary, man is born in order that he may utilize every atom of his energy for the purpose of knowing his Maker. Gandhi pleaded for the restoration of the essential principle on which the original Varna was based – the elimination of competition and the realization of common good through duties done in proposition to one’s attainments and faculties. In varnaahsrma there was and there should be no prohibition of intermarriage or interdining. Gandhi observes: “people of

different varnas may intermarry and interdine.... a brahman who marries a shudra girl, or vice versa, commits no offence against the law of varna.84 Thus he accepted no discrimination of high or low.

Just as Gandhi made no distinction between man and man, he did not make any distinction between man and woman. He did much to raise the status of women in society and held them in higher esteem because they exhibited a great spirit of non-violence. He regarded men and women as complementary to each other. He desired the utmost freedom for women. He neither wanted to maintain blind orthodoxy and the purdah, nor to foster shameless and self-indulgence. He liked to accord women equal legal rights with men. He considered man to be cause of woman’s fall but felt that the remedy lay in her own hands. She should cease to consider herself the object of man’s lust.

For just economic order, he laid emphasis on village oriented economy and a simple way of life. He said that simplicity of life means neither poverty nor asceticism. Craze for multiplicity of goods is destructive for contentment, peace and tranquility. It results in exploitation, enormous waste of nature’s material and human labour. In Gandhi’s view, superfluous property is violent acquisition. The realization of personality is possible not through accumulation but by willful renunciation of property. He pleaded for simplicity in life and decried the propensity towards acquisition of riches. Gandhi wanted the rich men to realize the immanence of God in all creatures and take initiative towards voluntary dispossession for diffusing universal contentment. Being influenced by the idealism of the Isopanishad which inculcated that things of the world should be enjoyed by renunciation, Gandhi wanted the rich men to hold their wealth in trust for the poor. He

84. Young India, 4-6-1931, Vol. XIII, No. 23, p. 129.
wanted that rich should become the trustees of their surplus wealth for the good of society. This is the doctrine of Trusteeship. Gandhi holds, trusteeship is an attempt to secure the best use of property for the people. Gandhi’s basic belief was that “everything belonged to God and was from God. Therefore, it was for his people as a whole, not for a particular individual. When the individual had more than his proportionate production he became a trustee of that portion for God’s people.” Gandhi hoped that the ideal of Trusteeship would become a gift from India to the people of the world. Trusteeship can be said the first step towards the realization of decentralized economic order. Decentralization is the technique of non-violent democracy.

Sarvodaya is the most efficient weapon to fight against poverty and unemployment. Gandhi gave full importance to manual works. In his opinion, every work is always of equal importance, whether it is of a shoemaker or of a lawyer. Where everyone does his or her job with full care and sincerity, there is no poverty. He gave the concept of Bread labour which means every body should labour to earn his livelihood. Although intellectual work is important but physical is no way inferior to it, so far as the doing of work is concerned. Gandhi said, “Compulsory obedience to master is a state of slavery, willing obedience to one’s father is the glory of son ship. Similarly, compulsory obedience to the law of bread-labour breeds poverty, disease and discontent. It is a state of slavery. Willing obedience to it must bring contentment and health. And it is health which is real wealth, not pieces of silver and gold. The village industries association is an experiment in willing Bread Labour.” For establishing peace and harmony in society Bread Labour is essential. It would remove ills of the society.

85 Harijan, 8-3-1942, Vol. IX, No. 8, p. 67.
The Gandhian solution for the present state of confusion in the internal and international politics and economic life of today is to work out a synthesis between the individual and group, between social and economic and political life. This synthesis, Gandhi believed can be achieved only on the basis of morality. Gandhi strove to substitute ethical politics in the place of political ethics. This means moralizing politics.

Today, the Indian democracy seems better equipped to impart legitimacy to elected regimes than to fulfill the basic aspirations of the people. The democracy is being conceptualized as a movement that simply work as a framework of governance which then, failing to deliver the goods, leads to a variety of problems and call for a more comprehensive and socially widespread movement. What we need on the present time, a new political process through which all round development of an individual and a nation can be done. And this political process can be established if we adopt the Gandhian Principle of Sarvodaya Movement. If we want to realize the goal of true democratic social order then we have to start the movement on the footsteps of the Mahatma through which whole of the society can be uplifted and emancipated. The movement should work towards a truly radical and transformative orientation of the whole of civil society, as well as the polity. The movement should reach out to both individuals and communities, and grassroots and regional structure of governance.

To quote Rajni Kothari, “In my view emancipation needs to be conceived in holistic terms, reaching out from each individual (including individuals in the established social strata), to wider and wider circles of classes and communities. Emancipation should be a deeply rooted process of change, mobilization and transformation. Emancipation is not a subject – object relationship in which some are emancipators and others are being
emancipated. Either the whole society is emancipated, and with it every human being in it, or no one is."\textsuperscript{87}

Emancipation or Sarvodaya is a state of being, which applies to all. This means the idea of Swaraj need to be conceived along with the social dimensions. The conception should be of an egalitarian restructuring of civil society, the uplifting of the daridranarayan, and thereby moving towards a comprehensive model of equity, justice and emancipation.

We live in an unemancipated society consisting of diverse social segments, increasingly polarized social order. The polarisation consists of a minority of the privileged and a vast majority of the deprived and the destitute. It is a polarisation with respect to maintaining minimum standards of living – health, shelter, education, access to the environment and other such basics. Larger and larger numbers of people are excluded from the mainstream of the society. There cannot be genuine emancipation without a just and egalitarian state of existence. There can be no real democracy without an emancipated social order. Much of what is desired has not yet been realised, not at any rate in full measure. Even seemingly symbolic measures like reservations for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, later extended to other backward castes and sought after for women. This has produced a great deal of resistance from established elites, quite often leading to outbursts of violence and repression.

When the Indian democratic order is under strain there is need to have an elite of moral stature like Gandhi, committed to the new doctrine of sevadharma, Sarvodaya. Once such an elite committed to joining grassroots politics with national politics, emerges and makes itself felt as a political force, call for a radical restructuring of the constitutional order can be given.

\textsuperscript{87} Kothari, Rajni, Rethinking Democracy, op. cit., p. 155.
Besides, if we want to establish an egalitarian society true democratic social order then it must be the duty of capitalist class to become trustees of their wealth and ameliorate the down-trodden people.

The democracy ought not be merely conceived in constitutional-cum-political terms, pertaining only to governance. It involves wider dimensions-achievement of justice, assertion of freedom, high degree of tolerance and acceptance of diversity. And in each of these dimensions, apart from the political aspect, the social aspect should also be considered. Democracy needs to be conceived within a holistic framework of reference as conceived and envisaged by Gandhi which is free from exploitation, injustice, discrimination, intrigues and corruption.