Gandhi, who struggled for the uplift of the masses throughout his life, firmly believed that if India was to be a genuine democracy, people must be associated with the decision-making at every step. He wanted that the present centralised governmental set-up, which affords but little chance for the common man to have even a peep into its internal working, be discarded and in its place there may be created a system of concentric circles wherein the outer-most unit, comprising the autonomous village panchayats, should give strength to and draw support from the next circle (consisting of block panchayats) and that way the governmental structure should go on converging to its inner-most circle — the central government. The latter, like the kernel of a fruit should present the essence of the whole without bothering itself with the minor details. As he visualised, this democratic set-up would ensure full freedom to the people to influence the decision-making process at every level of the government. He, therefore, wished that the post-independence democratic structure be modelled preferably on the lines of the legendary rule of 'Ram Rajya'.

When the Independence came and the restructuring process of the governmental set-up was undertaken, the new rulers of the country, too, realised the importance of decentralisation in democracy. They claim to have drawn upon
the vision of Gandhi. However, many have found a wide gap between what Gandhi had visualised and what was actually provided. Thus, the irony of the situation is that the basic decisions taken by those who swore in the name of Gandhi day in and day out present a structure which totally belied the philosophy of the guide and the leader of the masses.

This research project was undertaken with a view, first, to examining Gandhi's concept of democratic decentralisation and then its impact on the present structure of democratic decentralisation as affected in the rural areas of the country. Further, an effort was also made to find out the possible causes of the deviations, first, from the original Gandhian model and then from the original Balwantray Mehta pattern of democratic decentralisation. (It may be mentioned here that the panchayati raj has undergone over the years numerous changes, most of which manifest ugly distortions of the basic system as introduced in the country in the late fifties and early sixties).

This field has so far remained somewhat unexplored in the sense that no one seems to have worked out the nature and causes of deviation from the lofty principles of Gandhi. It may also be mentioned that most of the concepts which had been set afloat by him (such as 'Ram Rajya', 'Gram Swaraj', 'Grass-root democracy', etc.) have not been properly comprehended by the common man as also by the
decision-makers. A good deal of confusion about their exact connotation and meaning prevails. The need to suitably clarify these concepts further made the researcher to undertake this philosophic-sum-empirical study of democratic decentralization.

I am indebted to late Shri Rameshwar Lal Gaur, my first teacher and mentor, who guided me onto the path of education when I was working as a farmhand, and opened up new vistas of life for me.

For this work, it has been an honour for me to have had the invaluable guidance and assistance of my supervisor Dr. S. L. Malhotra, Chairman of the Department of Gandhian Studies, Panjab University. I am grateful to Dr. S. Bhatnagar, Reader, Department of Political Science, Directorate of Correspondence Courses, Panjab University. In his capacity as one of my supervisors he has been a source of inspiration to me and his tireless efforts and constructive criticism have been major factors in helping me reach my goal.

My deeply grateful thanks are due to my mother, late Smt. Rukmani Devi and my father Shri Dharam Chand, who constantly encouraged me on to higher goals and to my elder brother, Shri Moti Lal, without whose selfless zeal I would not have been where I am today.

I would be failing in my duty if I did not acknowledge with gratitude the patience with which my wife Santosh, and my children, Mita and Manish, have borne my long periods
of absence. Their deep understanding has always been a source of strength to me.

I am specially thankful to Prof. M.M. Puri, Dr. (Mrs.) Rashmi-Sudha Puri, Professor Iqbal Nath Chaudhary and Mrs. Pushpa Chaudhary for their unfailing encouragement and valuable advice. I also thank Mrs. Sunita Ghosh, Research Fellow in the Department of Gandhian Studies, Panjab University who has helped me in the completion of my work.

My sincere gratitude also goes out to the Staff and Librarians of Panjab University Library, Dwarkadas Library, Central Library, Chandigarh and Neki Ram Government Library, Bhiwani for extending their fullest cooperation in making all relevant material available to me. I am equally grateful to the Staff of the Department of Gandhian Studies, Panjab University, for their assistance at each stage of my work. My thanks are also due to the Panjab University for awarding me Research Fellowship.

I acknowledge with gratitude all those writers and scholars whose works I have consulted in the course of my research.

Finally, I thank Mr. B.K. Kaushal and Mr. B.B. Talwar for typing this thesis.

( MANOHAR LAL SHARMA )