Chapter IV

Conception of Political Decentralization

Introduction

The world with the modern advancement is getting wide range of changes in our time. In these circumstances individuals and groups in various bases, institutions like governmental and non-governmental and other organizations are moving towards more power in their hands. The attitude towards centralization is mainly due to the socio-economic and political motivations; these are domination and exploitation. The domination and exploitation has various levels; these are between the individuals, between the groups (caste, class, religion, ethnicity, language, etc) and over the nations. Through the analysis we can say that the attitude of the luxurious life, possessing more than our needs, our egoistic societal status and its preservation leads to the power centralization. Through the centralized power, the nation or any other institutions or individuals dominate and exploit the other for their fulfillment. It is a fact that “The rationale of decentralized governance is also derived from the known drawbacks of centralized decision-making at the macro governmental levels.”129 In the present day context we are approaching the globalization. It is not a new thought or ideology but it is another name or form of the concept of power centralization. Globalization is as same as centralization and having all the dominative, exploitative and oppressive characters as its own. As an alternative to centralization and globalization, the philosophy of decentralization is a prime motive to distribute the equal powers

to all. So there will be equality in access of power and through the power sharing, the people are encouraging to participate in the public life and also in decision making process.

**Decentralization**

Decentralization is the power sharing process in it authority. It is restructured between government institutions at the central, regional and local levels with the transfer of power, responsibilities, functions and also with the public participation and representation in decision making and implementation from the lower level. The literal meaning of the decentralization is away from the centre. The classical definition of decentralization is “the extent to which power is held by autonomous elected sub national government capable of taking binding decisions in at least some policy areas.”  

According to Webster’s Student Dictionary, decentralize means to reorganize a government by distributing authority to smaller or local units. Herman Finer explains that “decentralization is a system in which there are many centres of government, local and central, each with a recognized right of independent existence and functions.” The process by which all kinds of powers like legislative, judicial and administrative are transferred from a higher to lower levels is called decentralization. It is the transfer of responsibilities, competencies and decision-making power to administrative bodies at middle (territory, districts, regions) and lower levels (urban, municipalities, villages). Allen said that decentralization passes on to the methodical efforts to delegate to the lowest levels with authority except that which can only be worked out at central position. Balwantray Mehta study team defined decentralization as a process whereby the government divests itself completely of certain duties, responsibilities and devolves them in to some other authority. Though the central idea of decentralization is

---

distribution of the decision making power with lower levels in the organization, power should be distributed within the system, at a lower level, or by creating new mechanisms in the system.

**Types of Decentralization**

Decentralization is a power sharing mechanism; it has special characteristics, policy implementations and conditions for accomplishment. The types of decentralization consist of political, administrative, fiscal and economic. Drawing distinctions among these types is useful for highlighting many dimensions for successful decentralization and also creating coordination among them. These types are correlative and act as components in the process of decentralizing power. The process of decentralization is classified broadly as four types.

**Political Decentralization:** Focuses on the transfer of the responsibility and power by participating in the decision making, political self-determination and representation from the central government to subordinate levels of government, in particular for formulation and execution of policies.

**Administrative Decentralization:** It tries to find the redeployment among different levels of government; the decision-making power, authority, responsibility and financial resources for providing public services. It has additionally classified as three more forms as de-concentration, delegation, devolution for the successful decentralized administration.

**(a) De-concentration:** It is the weakest form of decentralization, which consists of redistribution of decision-making authority, financial and management responsibilities among different levels of the central government.
(b) Delegation: Through the delegation of central government and administration of public functions to semi-autonomous organizations that are not wholly controlled by the central government, but ultimately accountable to it.

(c) Devolution: In this type, local government has clear and legally recognized geographical boundaries over which they exercise authority and within which they perform public functions. This type of administrative decentralization underlies the perfect political decentralization.

Market Decentralization: It seeks to create a free market in which the government and industry cooperate and provide public services or infrastructure; privatization and deregulation are the core elements of market decentralization. The market decentralization further classified as two:

(a) Privatization: It is a process, that transfers all the responsibilities and power for its functions to the private sector or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or private enterprises, these are independent of the government.

(b) Deregulation: It is the process that the government gets back its particular rules and regulations of the industries and other institutions in order improve its outcome.

Fiscal Decentralization: It focuses on the transfer of revenues by the national government to subordinate levels of government, or allowing lower levels of government to raise their own funds; fiscal decentralization is the core component of decentralization.

Political Decentralization

Political decentralization is the process that delegates the power to all levels of its constitutional parts. It helps to reduce, control the interference of the central governments over its citizens in socio-economic, political and cultural life. It has aims to provide more power in public decision-
making to the public or their elected representatives. It is often connected with pluralistic politics and representative government, giving more influences to its citizens, or to their representatives in drawing and execution of policies. According to Richard Crook and James Manor (2000): decentralization is a general term to transfer the power and resources from higher to lower levels in a political system. The advocates of political decentralization assume that the decisions made with greater participation will be better informed and more relevant to diverse interests in society than those made only by national political authorities. It is the concept of power sharing that entails the selection of representatives from local electoral jurisdiction and permits the citizens to know better about their political representatives and also allows elected officials to aware about the needs and desires of their constituents. Political decentralization often requires constitutional or statutory reforms, the development of pluralistic political parties, strengthening of legislatures, creation of local political units along with the encouragement of effective public interest groups. The disadvantage of centralized decision making at the macro governmental levels is the basic cause to drive the political decentralization. Being away from the basic spatial units such as hamlets and villages with power concentration at the top like a pyramidal power base. The state and the union government power structures draw representatives from well endowed sub-regions. The sections of the community are the factors that lead to political decentralization. The fact that decentralized decision making ensures the well being of all of those who are likely to be affected by such decision is now well known. The rationale of this premise is derived from the political (democratic) imperative that their interests are interfered in the decision making process. When everybody takes part in the decision making process, self-interest will guide them while taking decisions that are consistent with everybody’s good. This logic provides the
theoretical basis for the evolution of decentralized political institutions which are looked into the institutions that promote decentralized decision making.

**Reasons to Endorsing Decentralization**

There are large numbers of governmental forms that are existing for a longer period in accordance with the socio-economic, political and religious situation of that country or place around the world. Most of them are ruling with the centralized forms of governance like autocracy, aristocracy, monarchy, dictatorship and oligarchy etc. The levels of centralization of their power may be differing among them. In the earlier part I mentioned the drawbacks of the centralized form of the government. They support decentralized governance. That fact is validating by the following causes:

**(A) Limitations of Centralized Governance:**

There are many evidences around the world for the failure of the centralized form in respect of planning, implementation, developments activities of the government to reach the lower and rural communities. Because of this type of government the powers are concentrated in the central point or one or few hands. The power holders are the decision-makers who live in the urban areas, they do not know about local conditions and needs so they cannot mobilize the resources and cannot promote the equitable growth by bringing the poor into the mainstream of development. The centralized form of government does not have even a single representation or participation of officials from the side of lower, deprived and rural. By nature, in the centralized governance the powers in all kinds are concentrated in the urban and metropolitan cities so there is no chance for local and poor people to enjoy the benefits and development of the government. Decentralization is a way of mobilizing support for national development by interacting with people at the local level and taking their feedback. It affects a lot in the centralization of political
power with hierarchical social and political structure, which leads to the domination, exploitation and in turn they lead to the corruption and corruption ends with wide range of poverty in the society. The emergence of the poverty leads to conflicts. Conflicts cannot be resolved with the centralized governance. The decentralized governance ensures equal power sharing, participation, autonomy, liberty against domination, exploitation and corruption over all by few. According to Meenakshisundaram. S.S “it is possible to argue that ethics and other factors which result in a society make decentralization all the more necessary if the unity and integrity of the country are to be maintained. A share in decision-making strengthens the bond between the different ethnic communities living within a nation, instead of breaking it up. Further, even within the administration, any official can quote examples of centralized decision-making that was wasteful or ineffective: the funds and supplies that never arrived; the projects that remained paper proposal; the approvals that could not be obtained unless one had a friend or a relative in the central ministry. The experience gained in working a centralized system makes one realize the importance of decentralization.”

(B) Diversities of the State

Diversities are the important factors that lead to political decentralization. The states or nations around the world diversified in various bases like ethnicity, religion, territory, class, race, caste and gender. In these circumstances people with varied culture and tradition have different needs, demands, interests and ideologies. The centralized system of governance can not fulfill the demands of the various sects of the peoples. For that reason in the last few decades’ decentralization has emerged as an effective trend of politics. Decentralization is also advocated

---

with reference to the size and socio-economic complexity of the country. A large territory is not easy to administer from one end. It explains why states with large territories like Canada, China, USA, Australia and India have adopted federal forms of government. Local institutions can be the effective channels of communication between the central government and local communities. Due to the over concentration of power, the demands of greater political autonomy based on ethnicity and religion has risen in the regions such as Punjab, Kashmir and Assam in India. In Sri Lanka similar demand of the political autonomy raised on the bases of linguistic, the Tamil nationalist movement strives towards the political autonomy of their own. During the period of independence in India religious based partition was made between India and Pakistan. According to this partition most of the Hindu’s resident regions will be India and the most Muslim’s resident regions will be Pakistan. These are the political evidences for the contradiction between power centralization and diversities on any basis. The only and best option for diversified regions is: political decentralization. Because the decentralized government give all the possible rights to the minorities for their well being, “People’s initiative is necessary for grassroots struggle, for justice and for self-determination by ethnic groups. Regional groups are more basic to decentralization of power. Local committees should be responsive to the urges of the people. People should fight for justice and against the structure of domination.”

(C) Public Participation

The prolonged experience with the authoritarian governments and its effects like domination, exploitation, interference in individual’s autonomy and liberty results the demand on decentralized democracy for its emergense. There is no scope for people’s participation in the authoritarian governance, on the other hand the decentralized democracy ensures the people’s participation. That is to say “The essence of political participation in a democracy appears to be beguilingly simple—it is about ‘taking part in the process of formulation, passage and implementation of public policies’.” Public participation is important because controlling the government is only possible through the decentralized governing process that encourages the local government and public participation in the decision-making and implementation and also in promoting the public representation in the mechanism of the governance. The most important thing is even the marginalized and minorities also can participate in it so that each and every one have equal power and they can able to know the local situation, conditions and claim their needs and can have better access towards the benefits and development of the government. “Political participation involves actions through which ordinary citizens influence or attempt to influence political outcomes.” Decentralized democracy seems to be the democracy with in democracy; because, it has the local governing body within it. Greater people’s participation in local development planning and management promotes national integration. The people of different regions of a country help in participating in the decision-making and their community development and also to have their support for political stability. The political participation brings the three fold potential benefits to the citizens. They are:

1. The first one is instrumental or utilitarian: James Mill and Bentham said that political participation provides a specific function. It should ensure maximization of the utility or welfare of the citizens in that government. It has got some instrumental value.

2. The second one is educative or developmental: the thinkers like Aristotle, Rousseau, J.S. Mill, De Tocqueville and other contemporary thinkers like Dewey and Pateman supported that, the political participation brings the educative function also. The public can take the lesson about how the interest of the individual linked with the interest of the society in politics by participating in the process of politics. Through this knowledge the individuals will be willing to give the importance to the common good of the society instead of their own interests. Thereby we can promote the development of the society along with justice and equality.

3. Sometimes in special cases, political participation brings intrinsic or consumptive benefits to the participants of the politics. Some of the participants may perceive the sound of their influence or by controlling others. Those who get the real fulfillment by contributing to a reason definitely will have a personal consumption benefits.

The aforementioned reasons revealed decentralized governance as the political necessity to resolve the conflicts rose by the centralized governance. The changing world with the advancement of the science and information technologies creates awareness in day today affairs among people and in these circumstances they are emerging with new political and other ideologies. So in the modern period people are moving towards the individual or ethnic, religion, linguistic, caste and class autonomy of their own. It is evidenced from both developed and developing countries like USA, Canada, China, India, Philippines and so on. Like these countries the political demands on self-rule and self-sustenance are raising in the era of globalization. It is a fact that the life in the present world is the process of moving towards the centralized power in
a single or particular point, on the other hand it is aimed at achieving the liberty and autonomy through the power sharing or decentralization. These are the two contrary and just opposite points in the governing process in the politics. But the above reasons of the impossibility of the centralized form to confirm the local needs, necessaries and the claims based on various diversities to their self-rule or autonomy and the political demand of the public participation and their representation lead to the philosophy of political decentralization.

**Pre-Requisites for the Success of Political Decentralization**

Generally any programme or activity will be successful depending upon the condition of the place and time. Favorable circumstances are the pre-condition for the success. In case of political decentralization there are some pre-conditions for its application and governing. The awareness about powers holding and power losses, interests on accessing power and its uses, demand on freedom from exploitation and domination over others are the first step. It applies to the powerless people also. The second step is willingness for power sharing in order to make peace with the understanding of the centralization of power that leads to the conflicts at any level and the gulf of haves and have nots is the root of the restless social situation, for the power holders. The third step is the most important one to engender the first two. This is done by the volunteers, whether it is political organization or party or non-governmental organizations or group of individual or individuals. They can work with the power losers to bring awareness and consciousness on socio-political affairs. In the same way they can generate moral and mental maturity to share the power with the losers, power holders and can teach about the equality and its features. The volunteers have the responsibilities to choose the right path that leads to the decentralized political order and also suitable form of government to create decentralized power structure such as political, economic and administrative etc. According to Manor, “Environment
building: suitable behavioural and psychological factors, Sufficient powers to exercise substantial influence within the political system and over significant development activities, sufficient financial resources to accomplish important tasks, adequate administrative capacity to accomplish those tasks; and reliable accountability mechanisms to ensure both the accountability of elected members to citizens and the accountability of government officials to elected members.”

The advantageous environment is the necessary condition to bring out the people in participatory decision making. Meantime the decision-making authority should have autonomy, that means one should not interfere in the decision-making process then only it will be successful. The success of political decentralization depends on its core element of economic decentralization. The decentralized small forms of government like local government such as Panchayat’s cannot depend upon the central government for the sake of financial needs. If it is not worked out properly it will demolish the value of decentralized government.

Intrinsic Values in Political Decentralization

The philosophy of political decentralization is having the inherent values of its own. These are the equality in power sharing, political participation and representation, self-rule, self-reliance and autonomy at various levels, liberty of the individual, local governments and immediacy between individual with government. Power sharing is the most crucial value of political decentralization in common, although maintaining the equality without any kind of variation based on the caste, class, religion, linguistic, ethnic and sex in its power sharing process is the milestones of that philosophy. Because of the unequal distribution, power will knock down the value of political decentralization. Political participation and representation is the value of decentralization that encourages the participation and representation more from the lower level in the system of policy making and implementation. That is to say “The most immediate and less

---

doubtable outcome and value of decentralization is the promotion of participation of local people or their representative in the process of decision-making and implementation. In structuring decentralized governance this should always be adequately taken into account in order to avoid putting in place structures of decentralization that can easily facilitate the development of local dictatorship or centralized decentralization. Vertical decentralization should always be accompanied by horizontal decentralization to empower local people to participate in local governance and counter the tendencies of local dictatorship. 

The political participation is the activity through which the average people of the state influence or strive to influence the political results. When political decentralization is associated with democracy, it has two prized values: the first one is the small government and the second is proximity of public to their own government. The small governments like village, town and state can follow the philosophy of political decentralization because these small governments are the parts of the country. The small governments aimed at the best arrangements for knowing, understanding and resolving the lower level situations, demands, needs and local conflicts. Nearness of the people to their government seems to be another important value of political decentralization. In the democratic form of government through the equal power sharing each and every citizen has equal power in their hands, by that they can participate in most of the activities of that government and can control by their power. The values of decentralization are the freedom gained from the ability to participate in the basic societal decisions that affect one’s life, the creativity generated by the capacity to experiment in solving public problems and tailor the possible solutions to face the local needs. Political decentralization promotes two of the most appreciated values associated with democracy: small government with in that the proximity of citizens to their government.

Decentralization of political power begins from the above mentioned drawbacks of political power centralization. Decentralization distributes equal power to all. So there is no possibility for exploitation, domination, hierarchy and inequalities. These problems are solved by political decentralization. In a politically decentralized society there won’t be any cause to raise these problems. Because the people enjoy equal quality of life. Unfortunately, if any problem arises, they can manage the problems through political powers. Here we can reduce army force; we can ensure individual freedom and empowerment. Here all people are having equal duties and responsibilities.

**Western Conception of Political Decentralization**

The philosophy of political decentralization has deep roots in Western tradition; it is evidenced from the great philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and extending to Rousseau, Alexis de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill, Montesquieu and Jefferson. They were talking about the requirements of small governments and their values. Inman and Rubinfeld 1997: said that small government in the form of small territories has been admired since Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau and Montesquieu. These small unites of territory are regarded as appropriate to defend the individual rights against tyranny of the majority and encourage political participation. More or less on same lines, the civic virtues of local democracy are emphasized by liberal authors as Alexis de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill. According to Plato decentralization is the necessary condition to make the city better able to achieve the rule of law. During 17th and 18th centuries, the western political philosophers like Rousseau, Mill, Tocqueville, Montesquieu and Madison have suggested the small democratic units of the government to preserve the liberties of free men by the distrust of the autocratic central government. Thereby Tocqueville reminded us that “Municipal institutions constitute the strength of free nations. Town meetings are to liberty what
primary schools are to science: they bring it within the people’s reach they teach men how to use and enjoy it. A nation may establish a free government, but without municipal institutions it cannot have the spirit of liberty.""\textsuperscript{138} Mill corroborates this argument by pointing out that ‘free and popular municipal institutions’ are part of the ‘peculiar teaching of a national, the realistic part of the political education of a free people.’

Rousseau and Montesquieu thought in terms of the problem of security in small political dominions. They become a subject of study in conjunction with the susceptibility of small political units to subjugation. Rousseau repeats the question as it was formulated in the Spirit of the Laws: how to combine the external power of a large people with the easy policy and good order of a little state? Earlier in Emile, Rousseau argued the dangers of despotism and battle. The difficulties of the small republic can be conquered by forming leagues and confederations leaving each state its internal master, arms them externally against any unjust aggression. Prof.C.E.M. Joad also visioned the decentralized state for the existence of democracy. He said: “if men’s faith in social action is to be revivified the state must be cut up and its functions distributed. It must be made possible for the individual to belong to a variety of small bodies possessing executive powers, dealing both with production and with local administration, as a member of which he can once again feel that he counts politically, that his will matters, and that his work is really done for society …it would seem, then, that the machinery of government must be reduced in scale, it must be made manageable by being made local, so that, in seeing the concrete results of their political labours before them, men can be brought to realize that where self-government is a fact, society is malleable to their wills because society is themselves.”\textsuperscript{139} To Aldous Huxley, decentralization and self-government is the only way for the enhanced society in

politics. According to James Mill (1773-1836), for both the individual and the government there is a possibility to misuse their power in attaining their selfish ends because by nature human beings attempt to secure their maximum pleasure. Since the government also consists of the human beings, necessary checks are to be made to avoid the danger of the misusing the power by the individual and also by the government. He saw that “English governmental system was open to abuses and thus was not ideal. The ideal system is a representative form of government in which the people have authority to check the actions of legislators and keep an eye on their activities. Individual interest must conform to those of community and both must go hand in hand. People’s representatives in the House of Commons should be vested with more power. There should be frequent appeals to the electorates.”  

In this quotation we can find the root of the concept of political decentralization. He thought about representative government, role of the people and the power control and also other things related to the philosophy of political decentralization.

J.S. Mill (1806-1873) is the best supporter of the representative government. To him it should be based on the principle of liberty. According to him the representative government is the best in which controlling power or the sovereignty must rest in the hands of the least. To him the sovereign which is the expression of voice is not sufficient they must have the will power to discharge some public functions. He said that “… that the whole people, or some numerous portion of them, exercise, through deputies periodically elected by themselves, the ultimate controlling power, which, in every constitution, must reside somewhere. This ultimate power they must possess in all its completeness. They must be masters, whenever they please, of all the

operations of government.” He supported the proportional representation for the success of the democratic government. In his thought the absolute authority of power will be in the hands of the individual or in the hands of the society. It is inconsistent with the rational liberty thereby he wants to work as the collective authority over the individual. These are the basic ideas of the decentralized democracy in my study. The American third president Tamos Jefferson (1743-1826) supported the decentralized agrarian republic. According to him the strong central government is valuable for foreign relations, but it is not a necessary condition to uphold the other aspects of the national affairs. He had the fear on the tyranny. Jefferson’s concept of decentralization is the vertical type of decentralization, he called the Americans to divide and subdivide their republic into smaller units. He said that “It is by dividing and subdividing these republics from the great national one down through all its subordinations, until it ends in the administration of every man’s farm by himself; by placing under every one what his own eye may superintend, that all will be done for the best.” Thomas Jefferson wanted to generate both political and economical equality among all individuals of the society. For that he took the concept of decentralization, it is very much ensured in localizing the political resources of the government. In his view the people who are interested and represented in democracy based on the decentralization, promote the individual liberty and economic equality in the broad base of the society.

Bertrand Russell (1872-1969), was very much supportive to self-government industries, individual freedom and decentralization. He believed that, decentralization creates new opportunities for the individual activities. He said that “Unless you are one of a very small number of powerful individuals, you are likely to feel that you cannot do much about these great

issues. But in relation to smaller problems - those of your town or your trade union, or the local branch of your political party, for example – you can hope to have a successful influence.”143

According to him to build the new world order, greater participation of the worker in the industry and a greater decentralization of the function of the state are more important. According to Harold J. Laski (1893-1950) ‘All Authority is Federal’, he attacked the state’s sovereignty theory. He said that “The state is not itself an end, but merely the means to an end, which is realized only in the enrichment of human lives. Its power and the allegiance it can win depend always upon what it achieves for that enrichment…. Realizable good means always some happiness won for the lives of persons, or it means nothing. Power, therefore, must seek the widest possible distribution of such happiness.”144 That is to say that the state can not have control over the individuals but it can exercise the partial control over the lives of the individuals. He was fully against the power centralization, in his vision “to see power spilt up, divided, set against itself and thrown widespread among men by various devices of decentralization and he wants to be certain that the civil, economic, and social rights of individuals and groups are insured against the encroachments of those who exercise power.”145

So he had the desire to prevent the power centralization in the single point or in the hands of the state. In western tradition many philosophers talked about the small governments, its inter-relations with one Another and the needs of the unity among them from Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Smith, Mill and so on. Here it can be understood that, they all affirmed the local and small governments and they praised the public participation in the political process.

145. ibid, p. 357. cited
**Gandhian Philosophy of Political Decentralization**

Mahatma Gandhi was one of the greatest mighty figures of the modern world. His approaches towards socio-economic, religious and political were quite contrast theories and won’t represent others. He has practiced the principles or theories whatever he suggested. That is why he was called as Mahatma (the great soul). He was the practical idealist. He was the special humanist; he devoted his life in the realization of the ideal of non-violent society with equality, liberty, decentralization of power of all kinds, peace and justice free from the exploitation, domination, depression, variations, poverty and violence. As a political visionary and leader, he suggested many more concepts to the empowerment of the society. Among them the concept of political decentralization is the most important one in bringing the egalitarian society around world. Political decentralization according him is based on human nature and also on ethical grounds. It is aimed to bring the individual autonomy, village self-rule and enlightened anarchy. That is to say that it is the Sarvodaya (the rise of all in all aspects) world order; there is no scope for any kind of evil’s such as domination, exploitation and other kinds of violence like depression and oppression.

**The Conceptual Frame Work of Political Decentralization**

The term decentralization is the most confusing and volatile term. It has various dimensions and approaches. So it has to be understood in a different ways. The common understanding of decentralization is: the process of power sharing or devolution of the authority, decision-making and implementing power. The political decentralization is the process, which transfers the powers and resources from the higher levels to lower levels (sub-national levels) in a political system. According to Gandhi political decentralization, means sharing the political power with the people without any kind of variation. It is an integrated political process by incorporating the
economic and moral principles. Through that the individuals can protect their lives and rights. It is the condition in which equality in sharing and non-violent means are necessary. Dambarudhar Pattanaik said that, “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.” In this process it simultaneously acts to create the local or public institutions and control the state power. Because he thought that the higher degree of state power is the threatening force of citizens and their autonomy.

**Methodology of Political Decentralization**

Gandhian philosophy of political decentralization is based on the methodology of perpetual dialectics. The perpetual dialectics is the process that continuously moving with two or more differing forces or ideas. According to him, it is not only dialectically related to political power centralization, it is more relative to other kinds of contradictions and resolutions. For example: it is ever inclusive principle against centralization. By nature it includes ethical, religious, social and economic problems of social life. As a system of politics, it starts and ends with the concepts of truth. It is one of the major differences between Gandhi and Marx. Because Marx used the method of dialectics based on material; it is known as the dialectical materialism. According to him, economics is the only basic thing to the world of affairs and politics. But to Gandhi there are many things and these are inter-related and co-operative with one another. So he combined moral, economics, spiritual and cultural aspects with politics. In his vision, there is no difference between religion and politics in the way of realization. He considered that all political activities are related to religious activities. So his philosophy of political decentralization is based on the ultimate aim of realization of truth. This inclusive method of political decentralization is known  

---

as perpetual dialectics. It is the political process between centralization and decentralization of political power along with economic and administrative powers. He made clear cut distinctions and relationships among those who gain the end as truth. His concept of political decentralization is closely related to the economic and administrative decentralizations. It is always supportive to economic and administrative powers sharing by political power.

**Parallel Politics**

Gandhism is the philosophy of inclusive and never excluded a single issue from the world empowerment process. The philosophy of political decentralization has the important parallel political process; that is limiting the state power and creates the local institutions. In this process it is simultaneously working as the means and ends. The political decentralization as a system of politics, first it is going to limit the state power in one hand. The increasing state power, according to Gandhi is dangerous to civil society. When the power is concentrated in the well organized form either in the hands of the state or private, it will be more violent and coercive. So Gandhi conceived that the control of the state power is the necessary condition to the well being of all. That means centralization of political power may be suitable to few and their luxurious life and empowerment but not for all. It is a form of political power not for the good of all. To avoid the pathetic condition of the people in the centralized system and create better enlightenment in their life, Gandhi suggested the philosophy of political decentralization; it is the political process that demands the devolution of the growing state power against centralization. Through this process the state power will be controlled or limited and shares with its citizens. On the other hand it strives simultaneously to create the people’s institutions. It is the institution very close to the people and maintained, established and controlled by the people.
Limiting state power

According to Gandhi, political power is one of the best tools to run the national life, he said that, “The power to control national life through national representatives is called political power. Representatives will become unnecessary if the national life becomes so perfect as to be self-controlled. It will then be a state of enlightened anarchy in which each person will become his own ruler. He will conduct in such a way that his behavior will not hamper the well being of his neighbours. In an ideal state, there will be no political institution and therefore no political power. That is why Thoreau has said in his classic statement that the government is the best which govern by the least.”\(^{147}\) To him, the increase in state power is the greatest harm to the humankind and it destroys the individuality. The absolute authority of state on the political power compels its people to obey its laws as their duty unquestionably. It is the alternate instrument of coercion and violence and an inevitable concomitant of the state. Characteristically the state is the organization of the social process that sacrifices the individuals for its enhancement through the interference over individuals, domination and exploitation. The Gandhian scholar P. Dayal, said that “Gandhi disfavors the institution of state for, according to him, it is a concentrated and organized form of violence. Rather it is the source of coercion and violence to which it owes its very existence. It could never be weaned from it. It is a soul-less machine not liable to distinguish good from evil. Beside this, as state is based on force and violence, it hinders the development human personality.”\(^{148}\) There by Gandhi convinced that the centralization of political power in the hands of the state has lesser good than the individuals. Because it suppresses the individual’s liberty and it has more possibilities to emerge as hierarchical structure of the social order, known as the pyramidal structure. Most of the power


holders will be the toppers of the hierarchy others will be reduced according to their level of power holdings and the most lower will be the power looser. For example the ruler, politicians, the state administrators, officials and the public respectively get decrease in power holding. According to P. Dayal “He opposed the vesting of more powers in the state because, in that case, the state will hinder the economic and political freedom of the people. It must serve the people and not master them or repress them.”\textsuperscript{149} It is the system of politics that is liable to marginalize the sect of people who pushed away from the main stream of political activity of the state such as participation in decision-making and implementation, political representation and others. According to Gandhi “a man owes only a limited and relative loyalty to the state. This loyalty is conditioned by the justness of the state laws. If the state law is unjust and does not appeal to the conscience of the individual, it becomes his moral duty to oppose it. This may appear to be a threat to the stability of the state, but this is the only safeguard against the absolute power of the state.”\textsuperscript{150} That is to say that, the centralization of political power of the state is dangerous to the justice, equality and liberty of the citizen in the state. It is the necessary condition that limits the state power for the sake of individual’s empowerment and non-exploitative and non-dominative state. With the limited power, the state would become the one of the best means to achieve the Gandhian goal of Sarvodaya, greatest good of all. The limiting or controlling the state is only possible by the philosophy of decentralization. It is the process that distributes the power to all, here all will be powerful as well as powerless, that means there will be equality in power access. So, the state automatically becomes the powerless at the same time the powers will be rested on the hands of the people. It is the normative level of Gandhian philosophy of political decentralization that aimed at decentralizing the political system. The drawbacks of the

\textsuperscript{149} ibid, p. 237.
\textsuperscript{150} ibid, p. 234.
centralization of the political power of the state and the intension to create peaceful and egalitarian society are the instruments in his philosophy of political decentralization. It starts with the question of how should we decentralize the political system. This is a very important thing because, it is related to the method or mode of action. According to Gandhi the selection of the means is more important than the ends. First of all we have to decide which form of government is suitable to decentralize the political power. Gandhi handled this question in two angles, the first one is the ideal and the second one is practical. There is no segregation between ideal and practical states in Gandhism, these are co-relative and co-operative with each other. The practical state will by bass the ideal state. Some critics criticized that Gandhi was a utopian, it will practically possible when his practical state gets full of its extent. That means the full extent of Gandhian practical state will be his ideal state.

**Ideal State**

Gandhi’s ideal state is known as anarchy, it is the enlightened form of government. According to Gandhi the state is the superfluous and inimical to human progress. Anarchy eradicates hierarchy, it is the political order in which there is no separation between people and ruler and it is self-managed, non-violent and non-hierarchal in its nature. Gandhi said that in the ideal, therefore, there is no political power because there is no state. This means he was not fully opposed to the state, he only opposed evil activities and nature of the state. He wants to build the state without interference in the individuals life and with minimum level of power practice. Gandhi said that “I am not anti-Government but I am anti-untruth, anti-humbug and anti-injustice.”\(^{151}\) The influences of Henry David Thoreau, John Ruskin, Leo Tolstoy acted on Gandhi for the development of the idea of enlightened anarchy. According to these philosophers

the state was to suspect. He said that, this state less society is the pre-condition for the non-violent society. The individuals will be superior to the laws of the state. Gandhi opined that, state is a symbol of violence and force and in an ideal society, there is no room for such an institution which is based on violence, force and compulsion. According to Dhawan, “Gandhi was a philosophical Anarchist because he believed that the (greatest good of all) can be realilzed only in the classless, stateless democracy.”

Gandhi was the foremost champion and practitioner of non-violence. He wanted to establish the non-violent, non-exploitative, casteless and classless society. He struggled to reduce the interference of the state in the individual’s life and tried to create utmost freedom to the individuals.

**Practical State**

It is the place to choose what type of government is suitable to practice according his ideals, aims and goals. To Gandhi in democracy people are liable to participate in policy making and implementation process and represent its governance body. He wanted to establish the decentralized democracy that means, Gandhian concept of democracy seems to be the practical form in his ideal political order. He did not believe in western mechanism of democracy, which is based on violence and force. But Gandhi’s concept of democracy is inconsistent with violence and force. He believed that there is no possibility to the government which is purely non-violent because of the human imperfection. According to him, it is possible to reduce the violence to the maximum level when the power will be decentralized with in the system of democracy besides the moral practices. Gandhi defined democracy as “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.” In his definition on democracy the important thing expressed is the mobilization or transformation of the resource or power which is the essence of the democratic system of government. So the decentralized democracy can be Gandhi’s concept of democracy that is known as the democracy with in democracy. Gandhi’s ideal state of enlightened anarchy aims at preaching the relationship of the state and the people. As a practical idealist he knew that the ideal state of enlightened anarchy is not attainable now. Thereby he suggested the minimum level of political power in the hands of the state is necessary to regulate the socio-economic and political life of the people. Gandhi recurrently stated that “real Swaraj will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when abused… my notion of democracy is that under it the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest.” The decentralized democracy ensures equal opportunity and access. It is one of the most important goals of Gandhi’s ideal state. That’s why he said that “True democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village.” The goals of greatest good of all, egalitarian society, individual participation and liberty are attainable only in decentralized democratic political system.

**Decentralized Democracy**

Decentralized democracy means within the democratic state the power should be shared equally by all. Gandhi accepted the state as a means to promote the good of the people. The promotion of good is not only for few or maximum, but it is for the greatest good of all the citizens of the state. On the basis of people’s participation and representation, Gandhi suggested the form of

---

democratic state to practice his ideal plans and goals. S. Bhatnagar rightly pointed out on the objective of the decentralized democracy that, the objective behind democratic decentralization is the establishment of a decentralized and participatory democracy instead of centralized democracy. According to him, the democracy should not be power oriented but it should be oriented on the welfare of the people. At the same time he realized that power is an unavoidable fact in the state’s function. Thus he was conscious on the power corruption and the dangers of the absolute power of the state. That’s why he suggested decentralized form of democratic state. It is the system of government that is nearest to Gandhi’s ideal state of non-violent society. It reduces the gap between the rulers and the ruled. There is a great opportunity to the people to change the ruler, when they are not satisfied with the functions of the ruler. The concept of decentralization gives sufficient power to the people to make alternation. According to Gandhi, the decentralized democracy is not only for the political freedom or self-rule of the people, it can also make the Sarvodaya society: the all round development of all. That means it is for the socio-economic, spiritual and moral empowerment of the people. Shriman Narayan rightly said “It must be clearly understood that Gandhiji does not advocate decentralization only because of its economic and political advantages. To Gandhiji decentralization envisions and upholds the cultural or spiritual ideal of ‘simple living and high thinking’. He does not hanker after raising merely the ‘standard of living’, he wants to raise the standard life.”\textsuperscript{156} Decentralized democracy is the most crucial political tool in limiting the state’s power. According to Gandhi, centralization of political power is danger to democracy. It demolishes the value of democracy. So Gandhi envisioned the philosophy of political decentralization with the application of democracy for people’s independence in the greatest possible level, satisfying their needs and promotes the

democratic egalitarian socio-political order which is free from exploitation. Mean time the important thing is: political decentralization not only sufficient for the success of decentralized democracy, the economic decentralization must go along with it. That means in his words self-rule rule is not attainable without self-reliance, so that the economic freedom is one of the most necessary conditions to attain political freedom. Economic freedom means equal opportunity to hold land and making the business without any restriction. Jaganath Pathy said that “To achieve the objective of decentralization, there is the foremost need of a transformation of land relations. It requires organized peasant movements. Restructuring of land alone is inadequate; it must further be followed by cooperative farming which can assure development of productivity and rural industrialization for greater employment. Under such a situation, democratic decentralization can have real meaning and value.”

Economic empowerment is the crucial factor that supports the people’s participation in political activities. When political and economic decentralization join together; they reduce the state power and create the people’s institution like the system of Panchayat Raj. It is the system of grassroot level governing body. It is the fundamental unit of decentralized democracy that satisfies the local needs and necessities and ensures the individual freedom. The deep discussion on panchayat raj will be made in the next part of the chapter.

**Construction of People’s Institutions**

People’s institution can also be considered as the parallel politics of decentralization. It is a fact that the formation of people’s institution, Gandhian vision of panchyat raj system is necessary to maintain and practice the shared political power among the people. First of all I would like to define the meaning of people’s institution; it is the system of politics, which is very nearest to the

---

people and self-managed and self-regulated local organization. The decision-making and implementation are done by the people, so that they will be the authoritative of this institution. It is run through the collective will of all the individuals. The philosophy of political decentralization is a creation of people’s institution with parallel politics. It starts with the devolution of the power of government at the lower institutions. It is the necessary condition to perform its duty of the people institutions. Gandhi said that “Decentralization of political power, therefore, constituted a necessary basis for creating a balance among the individual, the intuitions of civil society, and the state.”\(^{158}\) The balance among the individuals, civil society and state is the first and foremost aim of the people’s institutions. According to Gandhi, that is possible through the decentralization of political power. Because it assures the equality in power access, people’s participation and representation. Panchayat Raj system was the people’s institution in Gandhian political insight. That’s why he strived to set up the Panchayat Raj system to make new world order.

**Panchayat Raj**

Panchayat raj system is the experimental level of Gandhian philosophy of political decentralization. It has pivotal role in making decentralized democracy and village swaraj. To him it is the government of the people. Gram Panchayats are rooted in a tradition that goes back many centuries. They are the basic institutional forms of rural India and have been largely responsible in providing stability and continuity to rural life through all vicissitudes—wars, conquests and natural calamities etc. Even the British recognized the important role of village panchayats in expanding their administrative control to the interior rural areas. This is evident from the fact that the Government enacted the United Provinces Village Panchayat Act in 1920

---

to assist in the administration of civil and criminal justice in the rural areas and also to the 
effective improvement in the sanitation and other common concerns of the villagers. During the 
freedom struggle, Mahatma Gandhi emphasized the role of panchayats as the basic institutional 
forms of rural India, which fit in with his concept of self-sufficient village societies. The 
government of the village will be conducted by the Panchayat of five persons, annually elected 
by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. They 
have the authority and jurisdiction required. Since there will be no system of punishments in the 
accepted sense, this Panchayat will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to 
operate for its year of office. Any village can become such a republic today without much 
interference, even from the present Government whose sole effective connection with the 
villages is the extraction of the village revenue. I have not examined here about the relations with 
the neighboring villages and the centre. I restricted my study to present an outline of village 
government. Here there is perfect democracy based upon individual freedom. The individual is 
the architect of his own government. The law of non-violence rules him and his government. He 
and his village are able to defy the might of a world. For governing the law every villager must 
suffer to death in the defense of his sake and also for his village’s honour. Gandhi said that “The 
best, quickest and most efficient way is to build up from the bottom..... Every village has to 
become a self-sufficient republic. This does not require brave resolutions. It requires brave, 
corporate, intelligent work.”

According to the Gandhian constitution of decentralized democracy, there would be three tire setup. These are village panchayats, municipal panchayats and district panchayats. Village panchayat is the basic and primary political unit of the governing 
process of the state, whose members are elected by the adult villagers. The municipal and district

159. Gandhi, M. K., Harijan, 18.01.1922, p. 4.
panchayats are organized by the next lower panchayat leaders. They are having only advisory power over them; they cannot control and interfere their decision-making and implementation process. The members of the municipal and district panchayats would make the provincial panchayat, which would elect the president to serve as the head of the provincial government. Thereafter the provincial panchayat president would comprise all national panchayats. The president of the national panchayat will be the head of the national government. This is the Gandhian method of decentralized democratic form of government, in which each and every one will be the ruler of this system of government. It is assumed by Gandhi that the government is the best which governs the least. In his plan of decentralized democracy the people are placed in centre in the governing process. He said that, “when there are one hundred such panchayts, the fifty first grade leaders shall elect from among themselves a second grade leaders and so on, the first grade leaders meanwhile working under the second grade leader. Parallel groups of two hundred panchayats shall continue to be formed till they cover the whole of India, each succeeding group of panchayats electing second grade leaders after the manner of the first. All second grade leaders shall serve jointly for the whole of India and severally for their respective areas. The second grade leaders may elect, whenever they deem necessary, from among themselves a chief who will, during pleasure, regulate and command all the groups.”

Gandhi said that there is no segregation among the groups these are interrelated and cooperated with one another and there is no lower and higher among village, municipal, district and other levels or grades representatives because they do not have any power, the powers are rested in the hands of the people.

---

According to Gandhi, Independence has to start from below. As a result, every village Panchayats has to be changed as republic by holding complete powers. He opined that “The voice of the people may be said to be God's voice, the voice of the Panchayat. But how can there be the voice of God where the people themselves are the exploiters…? It is the voice of the people is the voice of God, they will be above party. His scales will be ever evenly weighted with truth and non-violence.”

Consequently all panchayats have to be self-sustained and competent of managing its dealings without belonging to others. It will be skilled and ready 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 and the willingness to help from neighbours or from the world. It will be free and charitable play of mutual forces. Such a society is highly cultured in which the people both male and female know what they want and what is more etc. It is the kind of social arrangement which consists of countless villages. There will be ever-widening, never-ascending circles. It is based on the Gandhi’s concept of oceanic circle structure of the society. It is not possible for the people placed at the top continued by the people at bottom like pyramid nature in it. The social life appears to be just like an oceanic circle, there the individuals will be the centre of the system, they always prepared to loose anything for the welfare of the village, the individuals life become the collective life of the village. There will be less scope to violence and also to the other feelings of superiority and inferiority. There will be ever modest, sharing the majesty and benevolence in the oceanic circle. The people will be the integral units of it. Hence, the conflicts or clashes cannot take place in this circle. At that same time, it strengthens all from inside the circle. It may be criticized that this is all Utopian thought. If Euclid's point, though incapable of being drawn by human agency has an imperishable value, then Gandhi’s concept has its own validity for mankind to live. Gandhi

aspired to establish the co-operation of the villagers in order to eradicate the domination and exploitation. The village Panchayats should be organized by the government and grant sufficient powers and authority to function as the self-government unit.

**Functions of the Panchayat**

Gandhi was not a system builder in the academic sense. So the systematic frame and function of Panchayat is inevitable. He talked about the functions of panchayats and their modality on various occasions. According to him the panchayats must have sufficient power in their hands to manage the affairs. He said that “It is the function of the Panchayat to revive honesty and industry…. It is the function of the panchayats to teach the villagers to avoid disputes, if they have to settle them. This will ensure speedy justice without any expenditure. You will need neither the police nor the military… Then the Panchayat should see to cattle improvement. They should show steady increase in the mild yield….. The Panchayat should also see to an increase in the quantity of foodstuff grown in their village. This is to be accomplished by properly maturing the soil. You have your indigenous games. You should banish intoxicating drinks and drugs from your midst. I hope you will eradicate untouchability if there is any trace of it still in you village. The Hindus, the Muslims, the Sikhs, the Parsees and the Christians should all live as brothers and sisters. If you achieve all I have mentioned, you will demonstrate real independence, and people from all over India will come to see your model village and take inspiration from it.”  

---

Gandhi agriculture empowerment is one of the basic functions of the panchayat system. Intoxication is the dangerous social evil of the society, it will disturb peace and also the life of the villagers so that the eradication of the intoxication and prohibition of the intoxicative things is the necessary function. Untouchability is the immoral practice of India, according to him it leads to disparities among people and it is the biggest hurdle to the co-operation among the villagers. He realized that the removal of untouchability is the necessary condition to the success of the panchayat system of village government. Communal harmony among different religions of the village also ensures the co-operation among various religious people. On occasion of the Belgaum Congress, in his presidential address Gandhi said that, the administration of justice should be cheapened and with that end in view the final court of appeal should be not in London but in Delhi. Parties to civil suits must be compelled to settle the disputes without any arbitration the decisions of these panchayats to be the final except in cases of corruption or obvious misapplication of law. The Municipality of intermediate courts should be avoided. Under the Panchayat raj jurisdiction the settlement of the disputes will be done among the individuals. To him the justice must be available to the villagers without incurring much cost and inconvenience. So justice will be accessible to all the villagers. It is a fact that Gandhi may talk and wrote more about the functions of the panchayats but he did not systemize these things and they are varied from time to time and place to place. So the real Gandhian follower Shriman Narayan with the approval of Gandhi made the following classification on the panchayat functions. They are:

(a) Education

Education is the most important factor that brings new social order. That is why it is constituted in Gandhi’s constructive program. The panchayats compel to give the basic or primary education through the medium of productive graft which is united with the cultural and technical education.
For the successful function, it must run the library with good reading hall. As far as Indian social conditions are concerned, the villagers are mostly workers. For the sake of the aged workers it is suggested to run the night schools. It will be the best means to empower the villagers themselves.

(b) Recreation

Amongst the Indian villagers the habit of recreation is very poor because there is no time to think about these things to them. But it is a necessary thing for their wellbeing. So Gandhi suggested to provide the opportunities like gymnasium, playground and their own games and sports. In addition to these, the arrangements of the art and craft exhibition, the collective celebration of common festivals of the village, folklore art forms and other things are the functions of the panchayats.

(c) Security

Each and every panchayat system owe to protect the village against the thieves, dacoits and wild animals. The panchayats should maintain the guardians for the general protection of the village. They must perform the function of the regular practice of satyagraha and self-defense to all the villagers. The training of Satyagraha will be useful to the citizens to protect themselves from the violence and other coercive form of struggles or disputes. So it has important role in keeping the peace in the panchayats.

(d) Agriculture

Agriculture is the most important factor, that brings self-reliance amongst the villagers. Perhaps it is the crucial function of the panchayats to encourage agriculture and its workers. Thereby the panchayats should encourage land holdings and co-operative farming, proper arrangements for irrigation, promote the production for all necessary food grains in the village, organize the joint
efforts of the villagers to get back the waste lands to cultivation, maintain co-operative banks with possible lower interest rates and fix the tax of the agricultural land and collection.

(e) Industries

Panchayat Raj as the system of village government should encourage the small scale production through the cottage industries such as Khadi, co-operative dairy, village tannery for using the hides of dead animals and others. According to Gandhi, the production should be in accordance with the genuine necessary needs otherwise the mass production will lead to economic power concentration, corruption and exploitation. He was very much in favor of the village industries.

(f) Trade and Commerce

The panchayat raj system is responsible to organize the co-operative marketing for agricultural and industrial products. In trade and commerce the consumer’s society plays the crucial role to control it. Thereby organizing the co-operative consumer’s society is one of the major functions of the panchayats. The panchayats have to control the import and export. It means excess article of trade only allow exporting. At that same time the things which can not be produced in the village only allow to import. It has to maintain the co-operative godowns for storage.

(g) Sanitation and Medical Relief

For the sake the villagers sanitation and good health the panchayats have to take measures. They should properly maintain the drainage system, ensure the healthy drinking water, check the spread of epidemics and preserve the people from the nuisances. They should run the village hospital and maternity home. They should encourage the free treatment to the villagers.
(h) Justice

The Gandhian decentralized democratic system of panchayat raj has wide legal power. It can provide cheap and speedy justice. It is the important function of the panchayats. It is the best arrangement to resolve the conflicts of the villagers. There is no need to spend more money and time in getting judgment through the town or high courts. Gandhi said that, village panchayats should be entrusted with the provision of justice; no separate judicial panchayats are necessary. There is no need to go out of his village for the villagers and they can save their hard-earned money and time instead of spending in towns of litigation. There is no scope for exploitation by lawyers and false witness. In case of the complicated cases, sub-judge from the taluka or district can handle the village cases in order to reconcile and assist the panchayat. The sub-judge should also act as guide, friend and philosopher to the ignorant villagers by acquainting them with the laws of the state. Such a judicial system would not only be simple, punctual and cheap but also just because the details of civil and criminal cases will be, more or less, open secrets in the village and there should be hardly any scope for fraud and legal juggleries.

(i) Finance and Taxation

According to Gandhi the village should be self-sufficient. The self-sufficient village can expect any financial resource from outside the village. The financial resources must be necessary for proper functioning of the panchayats. So the panchayats have the rights to collect the taxes from its citizens. It is the basic requirement for proper functioning of the panchayat functions. Meantime the accounts should be maintained properly in respect of the income and expenditures. In addition to these there are some important functions of village Panchayat. They are:
1. All matured villagers both male and female have the right of speaking in the village administration in order to maintain truly participatory democracy, as well as the community.

2. The village panchayats should take the decisions based upon consensus and they should avoid divisive approach in decision making because it gives scope to the favoritism based on party politics, religion, caste, creed, class or culture.

3. The administration of panchayats should follow the philosophy of ‘Antodaya’ or unto the last, which states that, equal consideration to the least. So equitable distribution of scarce resources and other rights should be ensured.

4. It is very common in the collective life of village for raising the conflicts, but they should be settled within the four boarders of certain village. Taking the cases out of the village lead to the curse, litigations and destroys the rural economy.

5. The protection of the people specifically disabled, helpless and the natives of the village and their resources should be protected. In fact it is one of the functions of the Panchayats.

**Nature of Panchayat Raj or Decentralized Political System**

Panchayat Raj is a government in Gandhian view. It is the blueprint of the decentralized democracy. It has various levels such as village panchayat, intermediate panchayat and district panchayat. According to Gandhi, in this system of government the political power should be decentralized to the extent of possible levels along with economic power. As a government at the lower level, it must have some characters of its own. Its nature and characters should express the following questions like what are the factors that really make a government of panchayat? What
are the essential characters and features of the decentralized government? The first one is self-rule. It is very much liable to the devolution of political power to all equally. In this system each individual possesses the power to decide his representatives of that government. Everyone should rule over themselves and never by others in the same manner every village should be self-rulled Gram Swaraj was self-rulled by the villagers themselves. Village is the lowest unit in a decentralized system. He called it as village republic; according to which each village would be self-sufficient and self-contained republic. He comprehended that, the Hind Swaraj would be a confederation of village republics. In seven lakh villages the form of government would be direct and participatory, and at the federal and confederation levels it would be representative and parliamentary along with the representatives elected on the basis of adults franchise. To regulate its functions and other activities some kind of powers are necessary. They are:

i) Taxing power

ii) Police power and

iii) The power of the eminent domain.

Through the taxation of power, it would mean that the authority termed as government should have the right to increase the revenue in the course of necessary extraction to defray the operating expense of its compulsory functions. Through the police power the government has the right to regulate the behavior pattern of the people living within the governmental jurisdiction in such a manner that the individual voluntarily sub-judge his interests for the sake of community interest since the ‘Good of individual is contained in the good of all’. The power of the renowned area vests the authority termed as government, to resort to the foregoing of the achievement of land, water, sub soil rights, ambient air, mines and mineral deposits etc. as well as the power to
escheat. It is on these touchstones one has to decide whether an authority is really clad with governmental power or not.

The Panchayat Raj system as the decentralized system of government has the following unique characters. They are the horizontal, ever inclusive, spiritual and moral in their natures. It may be said that the system which is leveled in all the aspects of socio-economic and political life of the country or the concerned village. There won’t be any kind of disparities. The professions of the people will be treated with equal status and dignity. Each of the individual or groups or sects are scattered in the society, thereby it is not possible to think and teach about the superiority and inferiority among them. It is the part and parcel of the Gandhi’s philosophy of Sarvodaya. So it is applied for all aspects of social as well as personal life. No one can exclude from the process of this power sharing, either rich or poor, higher caste or lower caste, male or female etc. It is considered as the process to incorporate the people in a common platform of the common wealth of the society. The spirituality of the Gandhian philosophy brings the moral nature to the concept of political decentralization. It aims at sharing the power for the sake of the social welfare because the individuals are the constituents of the society. So the welfare of the society inherently related to individuals welfare. It can be concluded that the Panchayat Raj system of government is the welfare oriented settlement for all this issues.

Analysis

Gandhian philosophy of political decentralization is not only for India, it can be applied for the common good of the world. Through political decentralization, Gandhi visualized nationalism towards internationalism based on village settlement. Here village settlement does not mean the village isolation; it means mutually co-operative and inter-dependent settlement. In this context
the critics of Gandhi raised many questions on politically decentralized government and also on the structure of village government (Panchayat Raj). There must be a centralized state for the development and needs of the country. This means that the social, economic and political developments necessarily depend upon the centralized nation. According to Gandhi, the natural development of the nation only possible in the decentralized political system, this development will be for all and by all. Because, his philosophy of political decentralization provides greater possibility to all in participating the developmental process of the nation and share the fruits to all. In a centralized system there may be the development, but the fruits will be enjoyed by the few of the dominants. That is to say “The centralized institutions are not a necessary condition for improving the lot of the people. The non-violent character of a society is guaranteed only by decentralized institutions and not by centralization of political power. Decentralized institutions become an end in themselves because they guarantee non-violent participation as well as institutions for self-improvement.” Specifically Gandhian concept of political decentralization is fully moral based; it is non-violent as its basic tenet. There by the force or coercion cannot be taken place in its institutions of the Panchayat Raj. His political decentralization works to create local institutions in the lower level. The individual as well as the national development is more important in it. As the nation is nothing but the collectivity of the individuals in certain manner, so the individual development implies the national development but here the individual must mean all the individuals of the nation. Gandhian concept of decentralization ensures equality in power sharing thereby it will ensure the equal development of all.

The national development does not mean only the political empowerment, it also implies economic and social developments. According to Gandhi, political decentralization must go hand in hand with economic decentralization. It is the institution that ensures the self-sufficient

village republics, which produce their own vital wants of the food, clothing and shelter based on the needs independently. These village institutions will be inter-dependent, mutually co-operative with their neighbors for the needs. Shriman Narayan says that ‘in fact the idea of maximum self-sufficiency is the outcome of Gandhiji’s doctrine of swadeshi which has been defined by him as that spirit in us which restricts the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote. Gandhiji advocated such swadeshi spirit mainly from the view point of humanism; he preferred to serve the country through the service of his neighbors by patronizing their goods and establishing the socio-economic ties for the mutual benefits’. Gandhian concept of economy ensures the decentralization of the material power equally among all. According to Gandhi in order to maintain the stability at the village level self-reliance is the essential condition. Thereby he suggested the following economic principles of Khadi, Village industries, Trusteeship and so on. Khadi preached by Gandhi is for the self-sustenance of the individual as well as the village. He said that “Charkha is the symbol of the nation’s prosperity and therefore freedom. It is a symbol not of commercial war but of commercial peace. It bears not a message of ill-will towards the nations of the earth but of goodwill and self-help. It will not need the production of a navy threatening a world’s peace and exploiting its resources, but it needs the religious determination of millions to spin their yarn in their homes as today they cook their food in their homes. I may deserve the curse of posterity for many mistakes of omission and commission, but I am confident of earning its blessing for suggesting a revival of the Charkha. I take my all on it. For revolution of the wheel spins peace, goodwill and love. And with all that, inasmuch as the loss of it brought about India’s slavery, its voluntary revival with all its implications must mean India’s freedom.”

commodities. It will promote self-sustenance of the individuals, village and nation. The village industries are based on the hypothesis of ‘production by the mass instead of mass production by few’. This hypothesis ensures the employment opportunity to all that leads to poverty reduction and eradicates unemployment and underemployment. The village industries have full scope to achieve economic decentralization in the non-violent manner. Gandhi’s concept of decentralized economy is supportive to decentralized industries which consist of handicrafts, cottage industries and village industries. When people involve in production to fulfill their own needs, they put more concentration and care in its quality thereby the efficiency of production will be increased. There production and distribution should equally decentralized. So there is no scope to centralize the economic power. The decentralized industries are consistent with local needs and necessities, they reduce unnecessary expenditure of the money power by the transporting the commodities from one place to another. The national growth should be the growth of all citizens. Actual meaning of the national development according to Gandhi is only the development of all instead of our present governments showing eight and nine percent of growths while crore’s of people are lying under poverty and hunger. The growth rates rested on hundreds of people, they occupy place in record of the world richest people. But in the contemporary period, crore’s of the poor do not have the basic necessities. Gandhi did not like this development. He aspired for the decentralized development and the development must be equal to all. Thereby he suggested the theory of trusteeship to share the equal economic value in the society. This economic theory aims at eradicating the wider gap between the have’s and have not’s. It is a social process that transfers the private property towards the community ownership, where no one can exploit others the labour and peasants are the co-partners with capitalists and landlords. According to this concept the owners having excess money are expected to spend some portion for the sake of the
genuine community development so that the economic power automatically transfers from the have’s to have not’s. Gandhian method of the national development will be ever inclusive with socio-economic, moral and political developments.

Some of the Gandhian critics raised the question on the national security and our protection from the foreign aggression. They said that “the international events of the post world War, where militarism is a necessary ingredient to national political survival which is mainly a function of centralized administrative political system.”165 Their views revealed that the democratic decentralization and the small local governments will reduce the national strength thereby we cannot protect the country from foreign aggression and other attacks. Here the important fact is, Gandhi was basically an internationalist, we cannot limit him in any decline on the basis of religion, caste and nationality. He seeks the common wealth of the world, he was the seeker of Sorvodaya and he aspired for the non-violent new world order. Individual freedom is important to Gandhi. He said that “The spirit of political and international liberty is universal and, it may even be said, instinctive…. The attainment of freedom, whether for a man, a nation or the world, must be in exact proportion to the attainment of non-violence by each … there is no such thing as slow freedom. Till we are fully free we are all slaves… I want freedom for the full expression of my personality. I must be free to build a staircase to Sirius if I want to… no action which is not voluntary can be called moral. So long as we act like machines there can be no question of morality… morality… freedom is like birth. Till we are fully free, we are slaves… no charter of freedom will be worth looking at which does not ensure the same measure of freedom for the minorities as for the majority…. True nonviolence should mean a complete freedom from ill-will and anger and hate and an overflowing love for all…. Complete independence does not

mean arrogant isolation or a superior disdain for all help… if it is man’s (sic) privilege to be independent, it is equally his duty to be inter-dependent… Any action that is dictated by fear or by coercion of any kind ceases to be moral… freedom of the individual is at the root of all progress.”

Gandhi favored to democratic decentralization and small village government in order to ensure the freedom and autonomy of the village which is attained through the means of non-violence. The village governments are not isolated from one another. In the common causes and the national affairs, they should be mutually co-operative and inter-dependent. For national security and strength, the village government should give its support and always be the part of the country. Finally Gandhi’s concept of internationalism and stateless society are the final attainments. The national welfare implies the welfare of the village and individual. This is the Gandhian approach towards the internationalism through nationalism. This kind of politically decentralized village government is very much useful to strengthen the nation towards the international peace. The centralized political system doesn’t strengthen the national security and peaceful life because peace and power centralization is inconsistent with each other. It is a fact that by nature power centralization always rises to competition, conflicts and quarrels.

Due to the misunderstanding of Gandhian ideas on political decentralization; there are doubts on its practical possibility. It doubts that present world is changing with the advancement of the science and technology and it is moving towards capturing the other world. It seems to be complex that in these circumstances is it possible to simplify the small government and power decentralization? The purpose of the scientific and technological advancement is only to simplify our life, instead it becomes more complex and it is mainly due to the misuse of the advancement. Gandhi therefore preferred to concentrate his energies on building up the courage and organized strength of the victims in the firm belief that when once they realize the hidden mechanism of

166. http://www.carolmoore.net/articles/gandhi-quotes.html
their oppression and gained a sense of power, it would not last even a day. He also thought that “much of the violence and oppression of the modern age sprang from the dominant ‘materialistic’ view of man and could only be ended by creating a civilization based on the spiritual conception of man.”167 That’s why Gandhi suggested the moral teachings of self-control, non-possession and the utilization of the things should be based on our needs instead of greed. With these moral endorses political decentralization is very much suitable to practice in our present day situation. Here simplicity within complexity is possible when the political powers are decentralized because it is very much supportive to the other factors of decentralization such as economic, social, the power of artificial intelligence, science and technology. In a decentralized system of government all the above mentioned aspects will be distributed equally to all. So there can be no village isolated from the other, all are instinctively unite themselves in a certain way. Gandhi was not totally against scientific and technological development and their utilization. He desired that man should have control over these advancements. He also said that we can use all the modern technological advancements in its possible extent, if it satisfies certain principles such as the production in the non-violent manner, non-exploitation, non-alienation and other evil effects. Gandhi thought that “When our villages are fully developed, there will be no dearth in them of men with high degree of skill and artistic talent. There will be village poets, village architects, linguists and research workers. In short there will be nothing in life worth having, which will not be had in villages.”168 The Gandhian appraisal on the drawbacks of the scientific advancements is mainly on the centralized utilization and in its immoral approaches. Through Gandhian way, we can share the technological power in

the village level and can have control over that. The most important thing is: human beings should be the masters of the technology and science and they should not be the slaves of these things.

Misuse of the power

Our past experiences provide lot of evidences for misusing the power of the village institutions by the head of the village. The remarkable change took place during the British rule in India. During their regime, the village head has the power to collect the land revenue from the peasants but they used to pay part of it to the government and keep the remaining for their own purposes. So they gradually became the richer and landlords (Zamindars). These land lords are supposed to be the upper class or caste there by the social evil of the caste dispute, nepotism and favoritism can be witnessed within the village institution. This condition ultimately leads to social divisions as haves and have not’s and also leads to caste clashes within the village institution. The divisions, domination and exploitation are the social factors, these all are not new things, they are existing since long back in human history around the world. The misuse of power in the case of nepotism and favoritism with the community welfare and other things are fully prohibited in Gandhian method of politically decentralized village institutions. The concepts of economic decentralization, trusteeship, non-possession and non-stealing are the instruments of moral enlightenment. According to Gandhi political decentralization and economic decentralization are the two sides of the same coin; they must join together in the process of non-exploited egalitarian society. In order to attain economic decentralization in the non-violent manner he suggested the principle of trusteeship. It suggests that the property of excess over the needs of the person should be spent for the social welfare not for their own luxuries life. So the property holding in this structure is a meaningless there by we can gradually reduce the economic divides in the
society because the concept of trusteeship has the full scope for economic distribution in the society.

The caste favoritism has been practicing in the village institutions in India, this leads to the unstable participation of the lower caste people. It is one of the unavoidable questions while talking about political decentralization; can we combine decentralization and participatory government? Participatory government means not only few can participate in the governing process. To Gandhi it is the participation of all in the region of the government. According to him people’s participation is a must in proposing political decentralization. He believed that it is possible to attain his aim of the classless or the egalitarian society through it. To him decentralization is the one of the best means to promote the people’s participation in governmental affairs. The power transformation without accountable participation is useless, at the same time the promotion of people’s participation without adequate power is empty. There by we can conclude that the concept of political decentralization and participation are very relevant and co-operative to each other. Gandhi’s concept of democratic decentralization especially the village government (Panchayat raj) brings adequate power to the people by their participation. That’s why it is called as the democracy within democracy. But there are some hurdles for its success in India. As I have already said that, India is the multifaceted country, it’s most crucial and dangerous complexity is rested in the Indian caste system. It is the biggest obstacle against his aim of classless and decentralized society.

Classless society is the society where there is no scope for the any kind of disparities and variations. In the phenomenal world there are lot of natural as well as artificial variations and disparities. The artificial distinction of the Indian caste system is the biggest hurdle to the classless society. Initially Karl Marx visualized such a kind of classless society in a systematic
manner. Classless society is the cornerstone to attain the egalitarian society thereby he suggested the violent means to attain that. The goal of Mahatma Gandhi has been similar with Marx, he wanted to establish the same egalitarian and classless society. But Gandhi thought that violent means cannot bring the permanent solution to any problem. So he differed from Marx and suggested non-violence as the means to bring the solution. Gandhi formulated the theory of Satyagraha based on non-violence and applied to eradicate all the socio-economic and political evils. In India there are many more obstacles to attain the classless society. They are untouchability, Hindu caste system, sex, religion and the problem of have and have nots. He strived for the removal of untouchability. It is the foremost step to attain his goal. To him it is the social evil, inhuman attitude, he said that “The attack on untouchability is thus an attack upon this ‘high and low’ ness. The moment untouchabilitygoes, the caste system itself will be purified….. It will resolve itself into true Varnadharma, the four division of society, each complementary of the other, and none inferior or superior to any other, each as necessary for the whole body of Hinduism as any other.”\textsuperscript{169} This quotation is exploring Gandhi’s mind on untouchability and Varna Dharma. He wanted to eradicate untouchability and also purify the Varna dharma. Gandhi thought that “people to take Varnadharma in its true spirit of its four fold divisions of universal occupation-importing knowledge, defending the defenceless, carrying on agricultural and commerce and performing service through the labour.”\textsuperscript{170} He opposed the unequal status in the name of caste, for him caste, implies difference in rank is a wickedness. In addition to this he had the opinion that “Arrogation of a superior status by any of the Varna over another is a denial of the law. And there is nothing in the law of varna to warrant a belief in

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\end{thebibliography}
untouchability.” According to him Varna Dharma would thus help to create a non-violent society in which one and all would work for the promotion of social good by making his living by following that ancestral calling. To Gandhi, there should not be any restriction to inter-marriage and inter-dining in Varna Dharma and also it provides the option to different Varnas. When Gandhi was making Harijan tour, “Gandhi was attacking an age-old tyranny and long-established vested interests which did not stick at anything to preserve themselves. The orthodox Hindus accused him of a dangerous heresy: they organized black-flag demonstration: they heckled him and tried to disrupt his meetings. On 25th June 1934, while he was on his way to the municipal hall in Poona, a bomb was thrown at his party: seven persons were injured, though Gandhi was unhurt. He expressed his deep pity for martyrdom: he said, but if it come in my way in the prosecution of, what I consider to be, the supreme duty in defence of the faith I hold in common with millions of Hindus, I shall have well earned it.”

According to Gandhi untouchability is cruel and also an inhuman institution. It always violates the dignity of the marginalized people’s lives and forced them to do the works of unclean and degrading. In India, they were restricted from temples and the public institutions like schools and hostels etc. They will remain as Hindus and worship Hindu gods. The socio-economic and political opportunities were exploited by higher caste Hindus. Gandhi considered untouchability as the social evil and also the biggest hurdle of the national unity and empowerment. He realized that the attainment of ‘Poorna Swaraj’ is not possible without the removal of untouchability. To him Sawraj means freedom for the meanest of our countrymen. The removal of untouchability was the necessary condition to self-rule and self-reliance. As the true Vedantin, he loves Hinduism dearer than life and opined that the taint of untouchability as an intolerable burden. He said that, “Hinduism will

certainly never deserve the freedom nor get it if they allow their noble religion to be disgraced by the retention of the taint of untouchability.”\textsuperscript{173} According to Gandhi, “The idea of superiority and inferiority is repugnant to the most elementary principles of morality. A Brahmana who considers himself superior to any single creature of god ceases to be Brahmana. If we are the children of the same God, how can there be any rank among us? ….. What will happen to the body, if these members begin to quarrel about rank? ….. The verses in the Smritis about Sutras deserve to be summarily rejected as being contrary to the spirit of humanity.”\textsuperscript{174} To eradicate untouchability, he suggested inter-marriage, inter-dining and he started the HarijanSevakSangh in the year 1932 based on the following principles:

1. To promote socio, economic and cultural welfare of the underprivileged and weaker sections including Harijans, Adivasis, Dalits and help them to live a dignified life.

2. To secure human development irrespective of caste, creed, sex and religion.

3. To bring growth and development of the children basing on holistic approach.

4. To disseminate popular education in lieu of elitist education of the present day, so as to ensure education for all.

5. To promote vocational education and training leading to income generation.

Many Harijan Sevak Sanghs were started in most of the parts of India to develop an integrated health care system and sanitation on community based sustainable development programmes. The strategies were formulated on the basis of specific aims and objectives. The central strategy is to concentrate on the child welfare and development with the belief that

\textsuperscript{173} Gandhi, M. K., \textit{Young India}, 06.10.1921.
childhood is the segment of life when mind, body and personalities are formed and even the slightest deprivation during this period can lead to life-long impairment that result in the fundamental distortion in human development. Gandhiji founded the Harijan Sevasangh and laid emphasis on basic education, sanitation and Gram Swaraj. It is the critical situation to find Gandhi’s true thought on these problems. These are co-operatively disturbing the egalitarian society. Untouchability is the product of Varna Dharma and the success of political decentralization is not possible because the Indian four fold caste system and untouchability are persisting in India. The caste system is always making the big divide in society with domination and exploitation. Dr. Ambedkar said that “Varnadharma has greatly damaged Hindu society by degenerating itself in casteism and untouchability.”

Gandhi accepted varnadharma in accordance with socio-economic, political condition of his time. During that period the Indian political sphere was fully dominated and controlled by the upper caste people. For the sake of the Indian freedom movement, he favored Varna Dharma, meanwhile he opposed the depression, domination and other effects of caste system. He organized lot of satyagraha movements towards the eradication of the untouchability. But in practice our present day society provides numerous evidences for disturbance by the caste system in the process of political decentralization. Though, Gandhi perfectly conceived of a stateless and classless society which was consistent with decentralized economy and polity.

In this context, I wish to quote the recent issue happened in Tamilnadu and other parts of India. With respect to the caste oppression on June 30th 1997, the scheduled caste candidate stood for the election to the village panchayat of the Melavalavu in Tamilnadu, which is reserved constituency. There by the higher caste people of the village brutally murdered six persons,

including the president and the vice president of the panchayat. This incident was happened because of the caste domination. The upper caste people of the village could not accept the advancement of the lower caste people. They threatened the lower caste people to reprisal of their nomination. They brunt the houses of the Dalits, injured them and murdered for contesting in the election of the panchayat. Regarding the harassments they are facing, N. Thalayan of the Dalit Panchayat presidents Federation, said that, “In many villages, dalit presidents are still not allow to sit on chairs during panchayat meetings. The harassment meted out to women is more. I’ve known of women dalit president who were driven out of the village. They now reside in another village and visit their own village for purpose of administration.” These are the few evidences out of the numerous incidents. It is a fact that from the phenomenological point of view, Gandhian philosophy of political decentralization and its practical form of democratic decentralization (Panchayat raj system) has some difficulties with the Indian caste system in its nature of the oppression and depression, domination and exploitation. So it is necessary to eradicate the caste system in India and all the form of oppressive and depressive, dominative and exploitative hierarchical society aimed for the success of political decentralization. It is biggest contradiction in Gandhian philosophy simultaneously accepting the varnadharma and moving towards the removal of untouchability and decentralizes the political power. It is a fact that Gandhi’s attitude on Indian caste system has progressively become settled with situation of the time and needs. It is realized in his deep study. In December 1920, he wrote, “I consider the four divisions alone to be fundamental, natural and essential. The innumerable sub-castes are sometimes a convenience, often a hindrance. The sooner there is fusion, the better.” Gandhi’s mind on the Indian caste system and its practical experiences with the decentralized local

177. Gandhi, M. K., Young India, 08.12-.1920, p. 3.
government through the deep analysis revealed that they are in contradiction with each other. So Gandhian Philosophy has to reconstruct with the reduction of caste system in his ideology.

**Nature of Decentralized Political System**

Political decentralization is the system of governance that is practiced through the Panchayat raj system. In India it is called as democratic decentralization. According to Gandhi, it is the system consistent with the people’s participation and their representation in decision making and also implementation process of the government. It has many characters and features. These are the Horizontal structure of the society, all inclusive and spiritual and moral. In his words “if we would see our dream of Panchayat Raj, i.e., true democracy realized, we would regard the humblest and lowest Indian being equally the ruler of India with the tallest in the land. This presupposes that all are pure or will become pure if they are not. And purity must go hand-in-hand with wisdom. No one would then harbor any distinction between community, caste and out-caste. Everybody would regard all as equal with oneself and hold them together in the silken net of love. No one would regard another as untouchable. We would hold as equal on par with the toiling labourer and the rich capitalist. Everybody would know how to earn and honest living by the sweat of one’s brow and make no distinction between intellectual and physical labour. To hasten this consummation, we would voluntarily turn ourselves into scavengers. No one who has wisdom will ever touch opium, liquor or any intoxicants. Everybody would observe Swedeshi as the rule of life and man would regard every woman, not being his wife, as his mother, sister or daughter according to her age, never lust after her in his heart. He would be ready to lay down his life when occasion demands it, never want to take another’s life…”

According to Gandhi decentralized political system is an oceanic circle; it is ever enlarging and never climbing. In his scheme of decentralized polity, the balanced life on power utilization will be ensured. There will

---

be no scope for apex sustained by the bottom. The individual will be the centre of this oceanic circle. There are two types of decentralized structures: one is vertical and another one is horizontal. In vertical decentralization, the power devolution will be in the ascending order and the distribution of power will be from the top to bottom. Here, most of the important decisions will be taken by the toppers. It is the hierarchal structure, the toppers will have more power than the lower group. But in the horizontal decentralization the power distribution will be without limitations, it will flow from outside the line of the authority. It has the full scope in the participation of lower groups in decision making and implementation process of the government.

The American third president Thomas Jefferson, he said that “It is by dividing and subdividing these republics from the great national one down through all its subordinations, until it ends in the administration of every man’s farm by himself; by placing under everyone what his own eye may superintend, that all will be done for the best.”179 In vertical type of decentralization there will be one or two or many tires, there is a possibility to higher tires handling more power than the lower groups that lead to the hierarchical power structure, but in Gandhian political decentralization the power will be distributed among the people in the equal manner, it is people centered and more horizontal. The powers of the decision making and implementation will be scattered among the individuals in it. According to Gandhi the village government was a society which was fundamentally sound in a learned way, the seats of power being filled by scholars not military commanders. The central government should deal upon the automatic performance of the village communities with least intrusion. In Gandhian model, actual power is rested in the hands of individuals thereby he said if we wish to attain self-rule in gradual but steady building up from the bottom upwards, by constructive effort, is the only method. The Horizontal type of

political decentralization has the crucial role in self-governing process of the people with the minimization of the central interference in their political as well as the social life.

**Decision Making Authority**

With regard to the decision making in decentralization who will decide? If the central government decides all questions in respect of governance and public welfare of the state, it will be more centralized in its level on the other hand if the local government decides all the questions on the same respect, there will be more decentralized society. In Gandhian analysis, the decision making power should be decentralized and must be in the hands of the people, because they only know better than others about their needs and the conditions. In a multifaceted country like India, the people are varied in many ways such as caste, religion, ethnicity, language, and culture. So the central government cannot decide or cannot mind all the diversified needs while deciding the policies of the country. So it is the necessary condition to undertake the local governments and also individual’s participation to frame the better policy and its implementation. Here the local government will be acted as the instrument of the individuals to fulfill their necessary needs and empower themselves. That is to say, “The greater the power of the Panchayats, the better for the people.”\(^{180}\)

At the same time the competitive situation of the modern world compels to undertake the centralized system of government as necessary like foreign relations, education policy and health care systems etc. To resolve the practical implication of political decentralization; the application of Gandhian principles is the necessary condition because of his wider vision of seeking towards the internationalism through nationalism. He stressed on mutual co-operation among the village governments. In the debate between individual autonomy and national sovereignty: to Gandhi each of these includes the other, the national sovereignty must be based on the individual autonomy through the village

autonomy towards the internationalism. This internationalism is his ultimate aim of the welfare of all. In the Sarvodaya society based on power decentralization in the non-violent manner the individuals are always ready to perish for the sake of village and the nation. So decision making power in the hands of the people rather than the central government is the most important thing in Gandhian philosophy of political decentralization to attain his ultimate aim of the egalitarian society.

**Realistic Utopia**

It is a long standing debate that Gandhi’s philosophy of political decentralization is an utopian or realistic among the scholars, critics, thinkers and writers. They have been arguing to highlight the practical possibilities of this philosophy. In Gandhian philosophy of political decentralization, the problem is rested on the grounds of the equal power sharing without any distinction and in a non-violent means. The critics criticize that; how is it possible to decentralize the political power? Because the world is diversified in many ways apart from the unity as human beings, the present day situation is not same as the past, now the world is moving towards the centralized form of the globalization. And they argue that it is not possible without adequate violent force because the history of the revolution of the world reveals the same. But for Gandhi it was not a mere utopian, it is realistic. Gandhi showed the path of the revolution and destination and we have the responsibility to follow the path towards attaining the destination. In the present context his path and destination is considered as impracticable that means utopia. But it is a realistic utopia, it is the prospective programme of action for the social revolution and for the better future. According to the American political philosopher John Rawls the realistic utopia means, it is the phenomenon of the critical intension to break the existing conditions and bring the better future. His notion of realistic utopia has the specific conditions. They are:
1. Reasonable: pluralism and its limitations.

2. Liberal conception of justice that is realistic (taking people as they are; well-ordered).

3. Workable, applicable as principles and policies. Eg; primary social virtues like liberty, opportunities, rights, income, wealth, health, vigor, intelligence and imagination.

4. Political ideas, principles and concepts that specify a reasonable just society.

5. Justice satisfies the criterion of reciprocity (reasonable for others to accept as free and equal citizens.)

6. Political category is having all essential elements of a conception of justice e.g., free citizen is determined by a liberal political conception.

7. Because of reasonable pluralism, political and social institutions effectively lead its citizens to acquire the appropriate sense of justice, apply them and produce stability.

8. Does not require religious unity (rather unity within diversity).

9. Toleration (reasonable pluralism) must follow.

Gandhian philosophy of political decentralization and its practical form of Panchayat raj is very much applicable to the Rawls notion of the realistic utopia. Gandhi’s political decentralization was not just a dream to be enjoyed, but a vision to be pursued and it is the vision of the perfect political system. In the realistic utopian political society, equality will be prevailed among all, it will be self-ruled and self-sustained, duties and rights are equally shared by all, it will provide place to the moral and spiritual developments and finally leading to the egalitarian society. The social life around the world has diversities and divides specifically; country like India is very much pluralistic in its nature with many bases like religion, caste, class, language, ethnicity, gender, geographical and so on. On Gandhian notion of political decentralization, there
is no scope for such a social gulf and human beings are the equal members of the worldly life and also equal citizens of the respective country. It reveals that there is a power sharing process that ensures the equal approach in decision-making and implementation by the people. So it is very much reasonable in the pluralistic society. The limitations of the pluralistic society are conflicts, clashes and wars above all the instability of the institution. While all of the members of the society or institution have equal power, rights and duties, there is no scope for raising conflicts, clashes and there must be stability ensured. Gandhi called it as the democratic decentralization. He suggested it as the alternative to the centralized political system. According to Gandhi, Panchayat Raj system is not only a political unit, it is a well disciplined socio-economic system with moral enrichment. Each and every one can raise their voice against injustice in it. Because they have adequate power and rights and there is no hierarchy in power access. So the individuals will be liberal in gaining easiest and quickest justice in the Panchayat Raj system. Its workability of the economic principle will ensure its core principles of trusteeship, small scale and village industries, because these concepts assure economic decentralization. It is supportive to the natural resource utilization in the decentralized manner by all people. There by their self-reliance will be found in the democratic decentralization. The central idea or the principle or the concept of political decentralization of Gandhi is non-dominative, non-exploitative, non-violent egalitarian society. It’s reasonability and possibility is revealed in the present day society. Gandhian principles are still followed. Because political decentralization is not an isolated principle to Gandhi, it is the byproduct of his other principles of socio-economic and moral. Political ideas cannot be developed suddenly in a just society, it prevails along with social, economical and moral factors. It is necessary condition to uphold the other principles of Gandhi to achieve the just society. In democratic decentralization, the
democratization of society and culture are also the important milestones. In a decentralized society, religion does not have any important role because it cannot influence and affect the social life in any manner. In normative and implementation level it does not have any place while all religious people treated as the same constituent parts of the country. So the religions should not interfere. They must show toleration among the individuals and neighbours. There by we can say Gandhian philosophy of political decentralization is the realistic utopia and it is the picture of the perfect society that can be realized through his principles. Its practical steps moving towards controlling the power of central governments, establishment of the local governments, co-operation among these local governments, exercise the constant moral pressure on society to change the condition of the country and also the individual’s willingness towards the peaceful society. Thomas Vettickal rightly pointed out about Gandhi’s parallel nature of political decentralization; he said that “Gandhi had a concrete agenda for implementing decentralization of power. On a political level, it means taking power from the centre and bringing it to the village”\textsuperscript{181} Gandhi said that “would there be state power in an ideal society or world such a society be stateless? I think the question is futile. If we continue to work towards the building of such a society, to some extent it is bound to be realized and to that extent people will benefit by it. Euclid has defined a straight line as having no breadth, but no one has yet succeeded in drawing such a line and no one ever will. Still we can progress in geometry only by postulating such a line. This is true of every ideal.”\textsuperscript{182} John Rawls said that “my idea of a realistic utopia doesn’t settle for a compromise between power and political right and justice, but sets limits to the reasonable exercise of power.”\textsuperscript{183} Gandhi has similar ideas like Rawls in

attaining the decentralized society; he suggested constraining the power in the hands of few with the moral fortification. That’s why Gandhi laid more emphasis on the local government during the freedom struggle. He said that “it is certainly an omission calling for immediate attention, if our independence is to reflect people’s voice. The greater the power of panchayats the better for the people.”

Under his influence the Panchayat raj system got the place in Indian constitution in the article of 40 under the title of “Directive Principle of State Policy” which says that ‘the state shall take steps to organize village Panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self government’. In this context Gandhi’s co politician Jawaharlal Nehru has taken the first step in this direction. He introduced the Community Development Programme and National Extension Service. But these brought very poor results, thereby he framed the committee headed by the BalwantRai Mehta in 1957 study and also for the analysis of these two programmes. Nehru pointed out “I have no doubt in my mind that the experiment of democratic decentralization is a revolutionary change in India. It has changed, it is changing and it will change the whole texture of our society, of our thinking and of our actions. It is an exciting thing to sit among the panchas and sarpanchas who have been charged with new responsibilities, listen to their questions and criticism. You find a mind grappling with new problems, a mind which has never before given thought to any problem. It is the biggest revolution one can imagine, a peaceful revolution though. One cannot but be surprised at the new receptiveness which is coming to the Indian farmer. It is the basic change which is important because out of it comes a changeover to better techniques of food production and really means changing rural society.”

In 1958 BalwantRai Mehta committee

---

submitted their report and suggested the recommendations. It reports that, local government should be three tire structure; the district, intermediate and village levels and there should be the close relation among these. It says that ‘the constitution of Panchayat should be purely an elective basis with the provision for co-option of two women members and one from the scheduled caste and scheduled tribes. No other special groups need to be given special representation. The power transformation should come from the other levels to the village Panchayats. Financial and other resources must be transferred adequately and the developmental and welfare plans must be routed through the local government only. The Panchayats can fix various taxes. It may take the important steps towards realizing the Gandhian ideal of political decentralization. It’s report and recommendations are based on Gandhi’s suggestions. Another important event was establishment of Panchayat Raj system basing on the report of Ashok Mehta Committee in 1977 to study the possible ways for the betterment of the local government. It has submitted its recommendations on 1978 and suggested the two tire set up. They are Zilla Parishad or the District Panchayat and Mandal Panchayats with population of 15,000 to 20,000. The representation of the scheduled caste and scheduled tribes should be based on their population in all the Panchayats. In 1988 Thoungon Committee was established, it has recommended the constitutional recognition of the Panchayat Raj, three tire structures with village Panchayat, Mandal Pachanyat and District Panchayat. It also recommended giving the judicial power to Panchayats to resolve the simple disputes at the village level, it is recommended that the system of reservation for all the three tires of Panchayat Raj bodies should be as per population. In case of the areas with more tribal population i.e. more than 30 per cent, the chairman of the body should be the member from the scheduled tribes. Vice-chairmanship of all the Panchayat bodies should be reserved for SC and ST member.
The political decentralization provides the local unit of administration, through which the basic needs of the public like food, housing and water can be ensured in the simplest manner. The concept of Democratic decentralization was the practical form of Panchayat Raj to discover the local needs and interests and also stimulate the local inventiveness in the fields of development. Gandhi said that “In the village the means of production of the elementary necessities of life are to be freely available to all as God’s air and water” and are not to be a vehicle of traffic for the exploitation of others.”186 It is the best arrangement to bridge the link between local to central. The diversified situation on the basis of sociological, economical, religious and political: it is making use in the best possible way to devaluate the responsibilities, rights and authority equally to all. It is used as the most important settlement to utilize the resources without any kind of distinctions as local and regional. It has the political as well as the economic values of its own. Gandhi wanted to establish the equality and justice in common to all as John Rawls stated that “political theory begins with the idea of society as a fair system of cooperation between free and equal persons. The principle of justice for such a society characterize its fair terms of cooperation by specifying its citizens basic rights and duties and by regulating the distribution of its economic benefits.”187 Gandhi emphasized more on the cooperation among the individuals as well as among villages of the country. Justice and equality in all the respects of national life can be attained by practicing his Philosophy of political decentralization through its functioning form of Panchayat Raj system. There not only the power but also the duties and rights to be distributed equally among the nationals. As result, the development of the nation can be identified with the development of the individuals.

The understanding on the conception of political decentralization in Gandhi’s views shows that it is the best path leading process of the present day society towards the welfare oriented society of all. The mechanism of power sharing in the field of politics has deep roots in both western and eastern traditions. The great visionary and activist, Gandhi gave clear functional picture about political decentralization. In its normative level Gandhi gave theoretical frame for political decentralization. Followed by the perpetual dialectics, he suggested the parallel function of limiting the state power as well as creates the people institutions at all levels. In experimental level he suggested the panchayat raj system for the successful function. His other principles of socio-economic and moral are very relevant to the present day context and these are co-relative to the concept of political decentralization. That’s why Gandhi’s philosophy of political decentralization can also be as the democratic decentralization. It is very supportive and ensures the public participation and representation in national life. It ensures the individual liberty, autonomy, village self-rule, self-sustenance, alliance among the villages for national sovereignty and co-ordination among the countries for welfare of the world.