

**MAHATMA GANDHI'S CONCEPTION OF
DECENTRALISATION AND PEOPLE'S
EMPOWERMENT - AN ANALYSIS**

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for the Award of the Degree of*

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CHAPTER - ONE

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Gandhiji's Talisman

“I will give a talisman whenever you are in doubt or when the self becomes too much with you apply the following test.

Recall the five of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny?

In other words, will it lead to swaraj for the hungry and spirituality starving millions?

Thus you will find your doubts and yourself melting away.”

‘The Great soul in beggars garb’, the epithet really suits Gandhi - the Mahatma. Gandhi - ‘the half naked fakir’ was indeed a Mahatma for in the ethical sense, every man is great who lays down his life for others. Further, a great man is an individual of outstanding importance who has exerted considerable influence upon the people. A great man was of the people and amongst the people. It is a proved fact that the greatness of a great man cannot stand outside history and society. It was aptly remarked that, ‘A great man must be

motivated by the dynamics of a social purpose and must act as the scavenger of society'. Gandhiji was indeed great, for he lived and sacrificed his life for the noble cause of rebuilding India from bottom upwards coupled with the regeneration of man and the reconstruction of society. He was a man of the masses who has left an indelible mark on the life and thought of the people of India. He was one among the humblest of God's creatures and his speeches and writings bear testimony to the same.

What is the secret of Gandhiji's tremendous popularity and electrifying influence upon the Indian masses? The answer would be that he had so completely identified himself with the aspirations and the ideals of the Indian people that he could easily become their natural and legitimate leader. Moreover the people of India found in him a leader who practiced what he preached. He has a dream of the post-independent India which according to him, consist not in the few cities but in Her innumerable villages. He had no ambitious projects of his own but to free India from all 'Yokes' whatever. His mission was to reconstruct India from bottom upwards, a decentralized socio-political and economic order with India's myriad villages at its base. His concept of rural

reconstruction and development are based on independent, self-contained, autonomous, self-supporting, self-ruling and self-reliant village communities in which life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom but an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual, ready to perish for the circle of villages composed of individuals never aggressive but humble and sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.

Gandhiji had two main objectives to fulfill namely, to win the freedom of India through truthful and non-violent technique of direct action and to rebuild India with the village as its nucleus. The former Gandhiji achieved during his lifetime for his life was a constant struggle for freedom and the later he left unfinished. Freedom does not mean to free India merely from the English Yoke. Political freedom is only a part of the comprehensive meaning of the term freedom. Gandhiji pleaded for swaraj means self-rule or self-government. By 'swaraj', Gandhiji meant 'poorna swaraj' or 'complete independence'. It signifies swaraj of the masses. It cannot be established merely by freeing India from foreign rule. Its establishment is possible only 'by turning the search light inward'. So swaraj of Gandhiji's dream "is the poor man's

swaraj.”¹ Gandhiji wrote, “It has been said that Indian swaraj will be the rule of the majority community, i.e., the Hindus. There could not be a greater mistake than that. If it were to be true, I for one would refuse to call it swaraj and would fight it with all the strength at my command, for to me Hind Swaraj is the rule of all people, is the rule of justice.”²

In Gandhiji’s mission of rebuilding India, he has devised constructive programme with its eighteen items provide a graphic picture of his sincere efforts. He was in search of the soul of India which according to him lies in Her innumerable villages. Gandhiji proclaimed that if once the villages perish India too will perish, find its fullest expression in his conception of village or Grama Swaraj. Gandhiji said, “My idea of village swaraj is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its vital wants, and yet interdependent for, many others in which dependence is a necessity.”³ Village swaraj provides the key to understand the concept of decentralization.

Gandhiji’s concept of decentralization is radically different from decentralization and delegation of power as is being talked about nowadays. Decentralization, he believes is

possible only by beginning from the bottom upwards. Under the modern concept, power remains with the centralized authority. Decentralization as conceived by Gandhiji has the basic philosophy of giving strength to the small groups to be able to resist exploitation. Gandhiji was convinced that “the small communities can certainly act as forces for the stabilisation of personality by creating a nucleus of organic socio-psychological density. An intense civic and social participation is possible.”⁴ Village swaraj is an essential component of decentralized polity. Gandhiji wrote, “...if there ever is to be a republic of everything in India, then I claim verity for my picture in which the last is equal to the first, or in other words none is to be the first and none the last.”⁵ In the ideal political order envisaged by Gandhiji everyone is his own ruler and he rules himself in such a way that he is never a hindrance to others. Values like non-violence, freedom and equality provide a solid base for Gandhiji’s concept of decentralization at all levels.

Gandhiji’s concept of decentralization was not an isolated concept but the outcome of ethico-religious, socio-political and economic concepts and ideas. But Gandhiji was of the view that life is a unity and hence it cannot be

compartmentalised into ethical, social, religious, political, economic and so on. All the different departments of life act and react upon each other. Hence, the ethics of society necessarily involve ethics of other fields. All these directly or indirectly flow from the main theme of decentralization. This ethical outlook is the backbone of Gandhiji's life and message. Gandhiji's philosophy is nothing if not religious and moral.

Gandhiji was opposed to systems and methods that result in centralization and the concentration of power and authority for obvious reasons. According to him, 'power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely'. To him, swaraj or self-rule is the best form of rule for anarchy under home rule is better than orderly foreign rule. Swaraj is possible of attainment only by turning the search light inward, so as to generate 'Soul-Force' or 'Love-Force'. Swaraj is to be realised through village self-rule or Grama Swaraj. Gandhiji repudiated the authority of the state for it represents violence in a concentrated and organised form. The state hinders the development of individuality and dignity of the individual. The state which is a coercive institution largely damages the moral will of the individual. The individuals are responsible moral individuals. Morality on the contrary, necessitates freedom of

the will. The compulsive nature of the authority of the state damages the moral nature of the individual. The state is vested with power and authority, which necessarily involves violence which is contradictory to the very conception of a non-violent state. Destroying individuality means exploitation which in turn leads to violence. The individual is with a soul whereas the state is a soulless machine. Hence Gandhiji pleaded for a progressively non-violent state founded on the principle of non-violence. Violence in any form should be avoided and in order to eliminate violence concentration of power should be avoided through decentralization. To avoid violence and to ensure facilities for the development of human personality, decentralization of political power must become a creed rather than a policy.

Real swaraj according to Gandhiji comes when the masses become conscious of their capacity to regulate and control authority when it is abused. Hind Swaraj is not rule by any one in particular but equally by all. It is government of the people, by the people and for the people. The non-violent state as conceived by Gandhiji is perfect democracy, in which non-violence became a creed, an article of faith rather than a matter of policy. These non-violent village communities are

the basis of political power. The law of non-violence rules him and his government with a view to advance the greatest good of all. What is important is not the external form of the government but the non-violence of the average individual as the basis of the decentralized polity.

The concept of decentralization has economic overtones as well. Gandhiji was indeed a true economist who can be considered as an economist of the masses. He has evolved an economic philosophy that is best suited for Indian soil. It provides a new and realistic approach to economic ills like poverty, exploitation, hunger and so on. He stood for both the moralisation and humanisation of economics. Economics that hurts the moral well being of an individual or a nation is immoral and therefore sinful. Gandhiji's approach to economics was essentially constructive with the individual at its centre.

Gandhiji's economic theory has aimed at bridging the gulf between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' to the minimum and that there would be no exploitation of man by man. It also tried to obliterate completely the concentration of economic power by proposing economic decentralization at various

levels. He preferred production by the masses rather than mass production. His preference for labour saving machinery and emphasis on Khadi, village industries coupled with non-violent rural agrarian economy with a view to bring about an egalitarian socio-political and economic order were all significant milestones in the evolution of socio-economic and political decentralization.

Gandhiji's indictment to modern western civilization with its corollary heavy industrialization, technology and mechanisation are detrimental to indigenous culture, for it is concerned only with material advancement and prosperity. Gandhiji suggested an alternate model with stress on moral and spiritual aspects of human life. Civilization, as conceived by Gandhiji, is a way of life, a mode of conduct. In true civilization, the basis of human relationship is morality and selfless love. Simplicity is the essence of civilization. It is, as he says, "that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty."⁶ The malady of modern civilization is rooted in the technological civilization of the west.

Gandhiji preferred the use of labour-saving machinery rather than heavy machinery. Gandhiji was against the 'craze'

for machinery for it enslaves mankind, making them idle and displacement of labour. Gandhiji suggested that small-scale industries with less machinery alone could increase the efficiency of rural production. He preferred non-violent rural economy with less exploitation, for exploitation is the essence of violence. Very often, the poor are exploited. He advocated that there is an urgent need to evolve a new way of life based on simplicity and reduction of wants. Civilization in the real sense of the term Gandhiji wrote, "Consist not in the multiplication but in the deliberate and voluntary restriction of wants. This alone promotes happiness."⁷

He found economic inequality in society and felt that non-violence could play a pivotal role in establishing economic equality. Economic equality is the master key to non-violent independence and a non-violent system of government which is clearly impossible as long as the gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persist. Rural economy can be strengthened only through the pursuit of decentralized economy. Gandhiji preached the gospel of rural mindedness. Gandhiji wrote, "You have therefore to be rural minded before you can be non-violent and to be rural minded you have to have faith in the spinning wheel."⁸ Rural development is a

process of developing and utilizing natural and human resources, technologies, infrastructure facility, development policies and programmes to encourage economic growth in rural areas, to provide job and to improve the quality of rural life.

Gandhiji's philosophy of decentralized economy has as its goal not the greatest good of the greatest number but the good and the welfare of all - even 'Unto the Last'. Gandhiji visualized an ideal social order wherein man and machine together would promote the basic human values. The approach of Gandhiji based on decentralization with its corollary peoples empowerment opens up a new chapter in the socio-economic and political order. Gandhiji sought to revive villages for it is impossible to have non-violence on a factory civilization which is essentially materialistic. On the contrary, Gandhiji advocated Swadeshi. Swadeshi is the spirit in us which restricts us in the use and service of surrounding at the exclusion of the more remote signifying that service has to be rendered to our immediate neighbours as our first duty. From the economic stand, point Swadeshi meant economic self-reliance and economic independence. The Swadeshi Movement was indeed to organize the rural masses into

economically and socially self-dependent. Gandhiji measured the progress of a nation or of a society in terms of morality and welfare of human kind.

Gandhiji had the right perception of the Indian situation which helped him to work out his future plans for Indians. Gandhiji returned to India from South Africa in 1915 with a definite programme of action but due to ill health and also as per the advice of his political guru Gopala Krishna Gokhale he kept away from public life for one year. During this time, Gandhiji travelled the length and the breadth of India. He wrote, "I have not pictured a poverty - stricken India containing ignorant millions. I have pictured to myself an India continually progressing along the lines best suited to her genius. I do not, however, picture it as a third class or even a first class copy of the dying civilization of the west."⁹

According to Gandhiji, political power is not an end in itself but a means to enable the people to better their conditions in every department of life. His main objective was to secure human happiness coupled with mental and moral growth. Gandhiji maintained that such an end can be achieved only under decentralization for centralization as a system is

inconsistent with non-violent structure of society. He considered government, whatever is its external form, as merely an externalization of the moral level of the individual. That government alone can be considered as the best which governs the largest number of happy and virtuous individuals.

Gandhiji preferred democracy as the best form of government. Democracy should be disciplined and enlightened. Perfect democracy is possible only by perfect non-violence. Non-violent democracy has its basis in self-sufficient village republics. Every village has to become a republic or panchayat having full powers. The non-violent democratic state of Gandhiji's conception will be a federation of more or less self-sufficient and self-governing village communities. The government of the village will be the panchayat of five persons - the unit of local self government - the original custodian of all authority. The village republic envisaged by Gandhiji there is perfect democracy based upon individual freedom. Gandhiji's concept of Panchayat Raj is the only system which paves the way to real swaraj. Gandhiji's understanding of swaraj includes political, economic and moral independence. It makes room for Sarvodaya and self-realization. It is swaraj for the individual and for the nation.

Panchayat as Gandhiji believed lead to individual and collective happiness.

Panchayat Raj as Gandhiji conceived it is supposed to serve two main purposes namely, economic and political decentralization. By political decentralization Gandhiji meant taking democracy to the grass - roots and preparing every individual in the process of achieving real swaraj. Gandhiji longed for village swaraj or Panchayat Raj or grass-root democracy for empowering the downtrodden millions of India. Gandhiji used the term self-rule and good governance for decentralized governance. Since majority of the people of our country live in villages, the unit of development in Gandhian programme was the village itself. Identifying himself with India's poor, "he turned his thought of the nation to the needs for rural millions for whom 'life was an eternal compulsory fast' who 'live because they cannot die at will'. Hence he visualized that, 'the development of the country lies in the development of the rural masses and rural areas'. This is because; they are the backbone of the country."¹⁰ Gandhiji's ambition was to make village a 'republic'. He said "if my dream is fulfilled, and every one of the seven lakhs of villages becomes a well-living republic in which there are no illiterates,

in which no one is idle for want or work, in which everyone is usefully occupied and has nourishing food, well-ventilated dwellings, and sufficient Khadi for covering the body...”¹¹

1.1 MAHATMA GANDHI'S FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS AND IDEAS

There was nothing extraordinary about Gandhiji's life and message. Gandhiji was very much an ordinary man who was conscious of his own limitations and has admitted of having committed 'Himalayan Blunders'. Gandhiji claimed to be a simple individual liable to err like any other ordinary human being. He had no ambitious projects of his own but had a definite mission, vision and programme of action. He had stressed some fundamental ideas which formed the foundation of his life and action.

Gandhiji was not a 'heavy philosopher' or a theoretical analyst of a high order. He was not the originator of any new principle or doctrine but the continuator of a great tradition - the Indian tradition. But he has not accepted the Indian tradition in toto but has simply applied some of the eternal principles in daily life and activities. He had no 'isms' of his own and hence there is nothing like 'Gandhism' as such. His

famous sayings 'My life is my message' and 'My life is a series of Experiments with Truth' provide the master key to Gandhiji's life and message.

Gandhiji had drawn no distinction between theory and practice. He had even gone to the extent of saying that the most spiritual act is the most practical in the true sense of the term. He was not a visionary but a practical dreamer converting ideals into actualities. His dreams were not 'airy nothings'. Gandhiji was of the view that, "If any action of mine claimed to be spiritual is proved to be impractical, it must be pronounced to be a failure. I do believe that the most spiritual art is the most practical in the true sense of the term."¹² He was a true Karmayogin who had convinced of saying that even God can be realised through disinterested service to society. He was neither a saint nor a sinner, who never claimed Divinity or Prophetship but remained a humble seeker after Truth and bent upon finding it. He was not concerned with remaining to be consistent with what he said or wrote earlier. He was a man in the making and hence had grown from Truth to Truth. His words and deeds were the result of the necessities arising out of the then prevailing conditions. There has always been a gradual evolution in his environment and

he reacted to it. Hence Gandhiji cannot be circumscribed within the limits of any 'isms', principle or doctrine. Gandhiji wrote, "You cannot so circumscribe Truth even if you try. Every expression of Truth has in the seeds of propagation; even the sun cannot hide its light."¹³ Gandhiji had simply tried in his own way to apply the eternal truth to daily life and problems. He had conducted experiments on a vast scale and in doing so some times he had erred and learnt from his errors. To him life and its problems have become so many experiments in the practice of Truth and non-violence.

According to Gandhiji, the propagation of Truth can be done less by books than by actually living those principles. As a testimony to this Gandhiji had entitled his autobiography as 'The Story of My Experiments with Truth' and the concept of truth provides the key to understand the theoretical and practical dimensions of his philosophy. He may appear to be an inconsistent and unsystematic thinker but he always remained consistent with Truth. Truth is the pole-star of his life. Further he considered Truth as the sovereign principle which includes numerous other principles. It is in due course of his Experiments with Truth accidentally he came across non-violence. He had no doubt regarding the exact

relationship between Truth and Non-violence. Truth and Ahimsa are, “so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle or separate them.”¹⁴ To Gandhiji, “Truth is the sovereign principle which is inclusive of numerous other moral principles. Since his childhood the passion for truth was innate in him. The Truth conceived by Gandhiji signifies truthfulness in word, thought and deed.”¹⁵ Truth and Non-violence are the central principles of his life and faith. They are the life-giving eternal principles for they are like his ‘two lungs’ and hence cannot live without them.

Truth and non-violence have formed the twin pillars of Gandhiji’s entire philosophy. They are not mere ideal to be propagated but principles to be practiced in daily life. An ideal may be better than the actual state of affairs but in no way it can stand outside the domain of human life. Hence to Gandhiji, the spiritual law does not work in a field of its own but express itself in and through the ordinary activities of human life. Gandhiji wrote, “Human mind or human society is not divided in to water tight compartments called social, political and religious. All act and react upon one another.”¹⁶ Further, it was his faith and conviction that, “the spiritual law works on a field of its own. On the contrary, it expresses itself

only through the ordinary activities of life. It thus affects the economic, the social and the political fields.”¹⁷

Gandhiji has demonstrated through his own life the religion he preached and practised. The sum total of his daily activities amounts to his religion. For him, there is no religion higher than ethics and morality. And truth is the essence of all morality. The essence of religion is morality and non-violence is the essence of Gandhiji’s ethics. Non-violence is the most important and crucial concept in Gandhiji’s ethics just as Truth is in metaphysics. Gandhiji wrote, “For me non-violence, like Truth, is my eternal creed for every activity.”¹⁸ Further, Gandhiji wrote, “I have not seen Him, I have made the world’s faith in God my own and as faith is ineffaceable, I regard that faith as amounting to experience. However, as it may be said that to describe faith as experience is to tamper with truth, it may perhaps be more correct to say that I have no word for characterizing my belief in God.”¹⁹

Man’s ultimate aim is self-realisation which is identified with God or Truth realisation. Self-realisation means coming face to face with Reality or God. Gandhiji pointed out that, “morality is the basis of things, and that truth is the substance

of all morality. Truth became my sole objective. It began to grow in magnitude every day, and my definition of it also has been ever widening."²⁰ Self-realisation requires self-examination and self-purification. One cannot claim to be truthful so long as he is under the influence of what Gandhiji calls the six deadly enemies namely, "lust, anger, greed, infatuation, pride and falsehood of the ethics of the Indian tradition."²¹ Truth is God for Gandhiji because Truth alone exists in reality and nothing else. Gandhiji pointed out that God is Truth but later he changed this version and stated that it is more appropriate and correct to say that Truth is God rather than to say God is Truth. He maintained that his uniform experience has convinced him to state that there is no God other than Truth. "To me God is Truth and love; God is ethics and morality. God is fearlessness. God is the source of light and life and yet above and beyond all these God is conscience. He is even the atheism of an atheist... He transcends speech and reason."²²

The fundamental notion of Gandhiji's thought is the metaphysical conception of an omnipresent spirituality an all-embracing Living Light which he called Truth or God. One of the basic metaphysical doctrines of Gandhiji is the "absolute

oneness of God and therefore also of humanity: what though we have many bodies? We have but one soul. The rays of the sun are many through diffraction. But they have the same source.”²³ But he knows that God cannot be found apart from the rest of creation. His creed was service of God and therefore also of humanity. Gandhiji said, “To see the universal and all-pervading spirit of truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to truth has drawn me in to the field of politics, and I can say without the slightest hesitation and yet in all humility that those, who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.”²⁴ Man becomes great exactly in proportion to one works for the welfare of his fellowmen. Gandhiji was of the considered view that, “an individual may gain spiritually and those that surround him suffer. I believe in Advaita. I believe in the essential unity of man and for that matter of all that lives. Therefore I believe that if one man gains spiritually, the whole world gains with him and if one man falls, the whole world falls to that extent.”²⁵

Gandhiji had enriched every aspect of life through his action-oriented and human-centred principles. Gandhiji had stated that, "There is not a single virtue which aims at, or in content with the welfare of the individual alone. Conversely, there is not a single moral offence which does not, directly or indirectly, affect many others besides the actual offender. Hence, whether an individual is good or bad is not merely his own concern, but really the concern of the whole community, nay, of the whole world."²⁶

Gandhiji was of the opinion that the individual should order his life in unquestioning obedience to certain fundamental moral principles. It constitutes the realm of individual morality. The individual aspect is his private life where he was left alone. But the social life of an individual covers a wide field comprising of the family, society and state. But these two aspects are nothing but the two sides of the same coin. He has discovered that man is superior to the system he propounded and no institution howsoever powerful it may be cannot subordinate the individual. Gandhiji had faith in human nature. Man is not a mere psycho-chemical aggregation but a spiritual entity. Gandhiji was an optimist in upholding the view of the future possibility of man's

perfection. Man has the innate capacity to strive after perfection.

Gandhiji had reconciled self-realisation with social service. He was of the view that self-realisation is impossible without social service and that service should be rendered to those who are in need of service in the spirit of disinterestedness. Gandhiji's life and message is nothing but this ideal in action. He does not subscribe to the view that if the ideal is impossible of attainment its pursuit must be abandoned. The very attempt to strive for the ideal is itself a great thing. Gandhiji wrote, "Life is an aspiration. Its mission is to strive after perfection, which is self-realisation. The ideal must not be lowered because of our weakness or imperfections".²⁷ Thus Gandhiji fully concurs with the view that "our existence is meaningless if we never expect to realize the highest perfection that there is".²⁸

Gandhiji's concept of non-violence is the outcome of his vast experiences and life long Experiments with Truth. Gandhiji gave utmost importance to non-violence as a virtue. Gandhiji gave a new interpretation to the concept of non-violence and redefined the meaning of non-violence. He

pointed out that non-violence in the past was made to appear crude. Non-violence is a crucial Gandhian principle. Its influence on his life was so great that it is called one of the twin pillars upon which rest the entire framework of his life and message. Non-violence is the practical application of the great truth of spiritual unity. In the words of Gandhiji, “The basic principle on which the practice of non-violence rests is that what holds good in respect of oneself equally applies to the whole universe”.²⁹

Gandhiji used the concept of non-violence in its most comprehensive sense signifying the negative state of harmlessness or non-injury or non-killing coupled with the positive state of love - of doing well even to the evil doer. It means ‘Universal Love’ signifying love of God’s entire creation. It means ‘largest love’ and ‘greatest charity’. Ahimsa includes goodwill towards all life. Another aspect of ahimsa, in the positive sense is suffering - conscious suffering which marks the culmination of love. “Suffering is the condition as well as culmination of love. The test of love is Tapasya and Tapasya is self suffering.”³⁰ Non-violence is the law of the human species which is infinitely superior and greater to brute force. As a moral virtue, it is the law of ‘our being’. He has

categorically stated that non-violence is not merely meant for saints but equally for all. As a virtue non-violence contributes to the highest good of mankind. Non-violence implies complete self-purification or cleansing as is humanly possible. Gandhiji was of the view that, "The ultimate end of non-violence is surest victory such a term may be used for non-violence. In reality where there is no sense of defeat, there is no sense of victor."³¹ He holds the view that non violence is not merely a personal virtue but social as well to be cultivated like other virtues. Violence is largely regulated by the expression of non-violence in its mutual dealings.

Gandhiji was convinced of the efficacy of non-violence as an ashram vow as a result of his life long experiments with them both in his personal and public life. Though the principal aim is individual betterment through moral and spiritual progress they do not exclude the possibility of a harmonious social life. When society is deliberately constructed in accordance with the law of non-violence, its structure will be different in material particulars from what it is today. But we cannot say in advance what the government based on non-violence will be like. Society based on non-violence can only consist of groups settled in villages in which voluntary co-

operation is the condition of dignified and peaceful existence. Gandhiji believed in the possibility of a predominantly non-violent society and was working for it. In the non-violent society, there will be no room for exploitation and ill-will and production will be for immediate use and not for profitable markets.

Non-violence is a fundamental tenet of Gandhian thought. He believed that violence in any form do not lead to a stable society. His conception of decentralization - socio-economic and political, spring from his view of non-violence. He stood for the moralisation not only of economics but of politics as well. He envisaged an ideal socio-economic and political order with the individual at its centre. Gandhiji's economic and political ideas were founded on truth and non-violence, Sarvodaya, Swaraj and Swadeshi. It was Gandhiji's dream that the welfare and good of all and not the greatest good of the greatest number should be realised through 'antyodaya' that is welfare and good of unto the last. That was the main objective of Sarvodaya.

Gandhiji thought of an economic order founded on concepts like non-exploitation, non-possession,

decentralization, trusteeship and bread labour formed the main pillars of Gandhiji's economic ideas. Gandhiji had launched an elaborate programme for the upliftment of the Indian masses. Gandhiji's moralised and humanised economic ideas provide an ample scope for opportunities for the good and welfare of all. Gandhiji was of the view that, "True economics never militates against the highest ethical standard, just as all true ethics to be worth its name must at the same time be also good economics. An economics that inculcates Mammon worship, and enables the strong to amass wealth at the expense of the weak is a false and dismal science. It spells death. True economics, on the other hand, stands for social justice; it promotes the good of all equally including the weakest, and is indispensable for decent life."³²

Gandhiji's Sarvodaya socio-political order provides the foundation for his economic thought. Gandhiji's ideal social order stood for equality and justice - social, political and economic. It is equally non-violent and decentralised with emphasis on duty rather than on rights. Gandhiji's insistence on non-violence, moralisation of every aspect of human life, insistence on freedom, equality, repudiation of state authority over the individual, swaraj, critique of technology,

industrialisation and machinery, Swadeshi and Khadi are the central theme of his economic ideas and reflect the central idea of decentralization. Gandhiji's economic ideas provide a practical formula to eradicate the problems of poverty, hunger, exploitation and unemployment to a great extent. The remedy for the economic ills lies in decentralization at various levels. The capitalist order has caused inequalities and hence it was no longer a valid model for India. According to Gandhiji, "Economic equality is the master key to non-violent independence. Working for economic equality means abolishing the eternal conflict between capital and labour. It means the 'leveling down' of the few rich in whose hand is concentrated the bulk of the nation's wealth on the one hand, and the leveling up of the semi-starved naked millions on the other...."³³ A non-violent system of government is clearly an impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the poor persist.

Decentralization, in the economic sphere aims to create an unexploited and egalitarian society with emphasis on village and cottage industries so as to strengthen the rural and village life. He was much pained to see the ruin of Indian villages and for the reconstruction and upliftment of the

villages he has formulated the constructive programme. He was of the considered view that, "He who has no belief in the constructive programme has, in my opinions no concrete feeling for the living millions... In actual practice the expansion of my non-violence has kept exact pace with that of my identification with the starved humanity."³⁴

A rural economy founded on self-contained villages alone can provide a solid basis for non-violent society of his conception. Gandhiji's slogan, 'back to the village' led him to propound the concept of the village swaraj together with his idea of village self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency coupled with simplicity is the hall-mark of Gandhiji's economic ideas. Gandhiji assigned rural industrialization and rural development top most priority in his scheme of things. The Gandhian strategy for rural development include development of village and small scale industries, a process of developing and utilizing natural and human resources to speed up economic growth in rural areas.

Decentralization as conceived by Gandhiji has political overtone as well. He was a practical political thinker in his own way. His political ideas are founded on certain assumptions.

First and foremost his firm faith in metaphysical and ethical idealism, sanctity of moral techniques in politics, moralization and spiritualization of politics testifies the same. According to him the supreme power of the State rest with the people. It is based on pure moral authority of the individual and on non-violence. He advocated decentralization of political power with a view to share power and authority with the people. The individual is the custodian of power and hence swaraj or self-rule is the best rule.

In Gandhian conception of decentralized polity, the unit is the village communities. Another feature of the decentralized political order is non-violence. Gandhiji's repudiation of State authority is a standing testimony to the fact that the interference of the state damages the individuality and dignity of the individual. Gandhiji, foremost champion of non-violence in no way admits the centralizing of power and authority with the state. On the contrary, Gandhiji stood for its decentralization. Centralization and non-violence seldom go together. Thus Gandhiji stood against the increase of the power of the state. He advocated the limitation of State power rather than increase of the authority of the State. Gandhiji held that true democracy is based on non-violence.

State in the opinion of Gandhiji is nothing but the manifestation of violence and an organization based on force. Gandhiji disapproves such an institution founded on violence. The true test of democracy lies in the replacement of force and violence by social will. Perfect democracy is possible only when there is perfect non-violence. Gandhiji was of the view that, "true democracy or the swaraj of the masses can never come through untruthful and violent means, for the simple reason that the natural corollary to their use would remove all opposition, through the suppression or extermination of the antagonists. That does not make for individual freedom. Individual freedom can have the fullest play only under a regime of unadulterated ahimsa."³⁵

Democracy in essence is the rule by the majority and it must be based on truth and non-violence. Otherwise, it will be deceptive and fatal. In perfect democracy the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest and this can never happen except through non-violence. Gandhiji in his various speeches and articles spoke of democratic decentralisation. In the 22nd January 1946 issue of Harijan, Gandhiji stated that independence must begin at the bottom. Panchayat Raj is an Indian political institution and it is a part

of our ancient civilization. Panchayat Raj institution give 'voice to voiceless' 'power to powerless' people irrespective of caste, creed, sex, and religion living in the villages of India. Panchayat Raj institution provides power to the people and not power to a few people. Its main objective is to bring the government with the reach of the people.

Panchayat Raj system was an integral part of Gandhiji's conception of decentralised polity in which every village is to be considered as little 'Republics'. Gandhiji was in favour of a broad-based pyramidal structure of decentralized power with numerous village panchayats at the bottom. He subscribed to the view that village based governments and non-violent agrarian self-sufficient, autonomous village communities act as the custodian of power and authority exercising the legislative, judiciary and executive function of the authority of the state. Thus Gandhiji attached more importance to nationalism but his views are not exclusive. Nationalism does not means isolated independence but interdependence. Gandhiji wrote, "Isolated independence is not the goal of world states. It is voluntary inter-dependents."³⁶

Gandhiji's mission is not merely freedom of India but through the realization of the freedom of India to carry out the notion of the brotherhood of man. Thus Gandhiji's mission to serve India includes the service of humanity. It is impossible for one to be a nationalist without being an inter-nationalist. Nationalism and inter-nationalism in Gandhiji's view always go hand-in-hand. Gandhiji wrote, "Patriotism is the same as humanity. I am patriotic because I am human and humane..... My love, therefore, of nationalism or my idea of nationalism is that my country may become free, that if need be the whole of the country may die, so that the human race may live. There is no room for race hatred there. Let that be our nationalism."³⁷

1.2 MEANS AND END

The significance of Gandhian philosophy lies in the application of the moral principles namely, Truth and Non-violence in all sphere of human life. Gandhiji has demonstrated that only moral means as his primary consideration. His insistence on the purity of means indicates the recognition of the moral law which pervades the entire universe. The ultimate end of self-realization is possible only through self-

purification and self-discipline which signifies the disciplining of oneself through the observance of moral principles. Thus it forms an important means for reaching the ultimate end of self realization.

Now the question arises: what is the exact relationship between means and end: which is important, means or the end? Generally, one of them is given greater emphasis than the other. But Gandhiji held the view that the two are 'convertible terms'. But the question still remains: does the end justify the means or the means justify the end. Some thinkers like Machiavelli hold the view that the end justifies the means which in no way is compatible with the purity of means. Machiavelli even sanctioned the use of immoral means to the rulers to gain their political ends. But Gandhiji is totally opposed to this view. He holds that the means must justify the end. He insisted on the moral purity of the means. The purity must be maintained both in the personal and public life. Gandhiji stated that: "For me, it is enough to know the means. Means and End are convertible terms in my philosophy of life."³⁸ Even if the end is high, there is no justification for its attainment through evil or immoral means.

The exact relationship between the means and end was clearly brought out by Gandhiji through a comparison of the relationship between a seed and a tree. He said, "the means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree; and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and tree."³⁹ If the means adopted is not moral, the end cannot be moral. There has been an inseparable relation between the means and the end. Both are equally necessary and should be pure. Just as the seed is potentially a tree and the tree is the seed and that if the means are taken care of the end will take care of it. The end is not a forlorn end but grows out of the means. The means ultimately turns itself as the end. The means alone are within our control and not the end. If we take care of the means the end will take care of itself. Further if the means are taken care of the goal could be reached sooner or later. Means and end are inter-dependent. He stood for the moralization of both the means and the end. Gandhiji was convinced that, "Immoral means must ultimately have their effect on ends. If these desirable ends are necessary, moral means to achieve the ends are at least as necessary."⁴⁰ Gandhiji firmly asserted the continuity of means and end. He

stated that there is no wall of separation between the means and the end. Gandhiji has never recommended violent means to achieve a goal. He wrote, "If violence and untruth are necessary for the advancement of my country, let my country go under. I would not sacrifice these two for all world..... I do not seek to serve India at the sacrifice of Truth for I know that a man who forsakes Truth can forsake his country and his nearest and dearest one's."⁴¹

For Gandhiji non-violence is the means and truth the end. Means to be means must be within our reach, and so ahimsa is one supreme duty. Without Ahimsa, it is impossible to realise truth. Ahimsa and truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle or separate them. They are but the two sides of the same coin. Nevertheless ahimsa is the means, truth is the end. The relationship between means and end was spoken of by Gandhiji as the means so the end, he fully concurs with the view that we have control only over the means and not the end. The means alone are within our control. Hence we have to perfect and moralise that which is within our control namely the means. He wrote, "They say, 'means are after all means'. I would say, 'means are after all everything'. As the means so the end.... There is no wall of

separation between the means and the end. Indeed, the Creator has given us control (and that, too, very limited) over means, none over the end. Realisation of the goal is in exact proportion to that of the means. This is a proposition that admits of no exception.”⁴²

Gandhiji’s emphasis on the importance of means should not be misunderstood as implying that the end is with him only a secondary consideration. He believes that means and end are inseparably connected and that the means used should in no way detract from the moral character of our end. With regard to means he is very particular that we must take our stand on the firm solid ground of unadulterated good. Gandhiji laid stress on moral values and warned us never to subordinate means to end.

Gandhiji was never tired of talking about means and end and of laying stress on the importance of means. The end he believes is in a stage of progressive realization. As a natural course of development the means itself turns out to be the end through different stages. Thus there is a real unification between means and end. It harmonises the inner conflict of means and end on the basis of moral approximation. Thus in

the words of Aldous Huxley, “a good end which is a state of greatest possible unification, can be achieved only by the use of good, that is to say of intrinsically unifying means. Bad means -activities, in other words, that produce attachment and are intrinsically separative -cannot produce unification.”⁴³ The opposite theory that the end justifies the means leads to the conclusion that violent means that are ethically unsound could be applied but this give way to violence, untruth and other evils. A victory won by violence will retain violence. So Gandhiji has enunciated the principle of the integrity of means and end that pre-supposes truth and non-violence as the solid foundation of human life and relationship.

The main objective of the thesis is to explicate Gandhiji’s views on decentralization in all its dimensions which highlights democracy from the grass-root level, and ensures people’s participation in the nation building process. Gandhiji’s dream of rebuilding India from below upwards finds fruition through the evolution of Swaraj - that is complete or poorna swaraj signifying poor man’s swaraj and village swaraj or Panchayat Raj - a panacea for many of the political ills that India faces today.

Against this background, the thesis has been designed with six chapters.

Chapter One is an introduction in which an attempt has been made to highlight Gandhiji's mission to rebuild India from bottom upwards along non-violent and decentralized lines.

Chapter Two is an enquiry into elucidating the ethical foundations of Gandhiji's socio-political and economic views which play a crucial role in the nation building process. Gandhiji stood for principled politics and moralization of economics which he has extended to other departments of life as well.

Chapter Three gives an exposition of Gandhiji's concept of political decentralization highlighting the evolution of the ideal political order along with the concept of non-violent state, non-violent democracy, swaraj and enlightened anarchy. Gandhiji's conception of Participatory Democracy, Village Swaraj or Village Republic and Panchayat Raj has been considered for it is a corollary to true democracy.

Chapter Four attempts to study Gandhiji's concept of Economic Decentralization highlighting the moralization and

humanization of economics. The criterion of true economics lies in human welfare coupled with economic equality.

Chapter Five deals with the concept of people's participation and empowerment. Gandhiji assigned man a supreme consideration and is treated as an end in himself. He is the Sovereign and therefore can never be treated as subordinate to any institution howsoever powerful it may be. Gandhiji's considered view was that 'the rule of all without rule of oneself' is proved to be deceptive and fatal.

The Last Chapter is conclusion followed by a select bibliography.

Notes

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- 32 *Ibid*, 09.07.1938, p. 176.
- 33 *Ibid*, 25.03.1940, p. 31.
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- 41 Tendulkar, D.G. *Mahatma*, Vol. II, p. 32.
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2.1 GANDHIAN ETHICAL RELIGION

Gandhiji's philosophy is basically religious and he called religion as 'Ethical Religion'. Religion, Gandhiji conceived as all - comprehensive dealing with every aspect of human life. Religion is essentially practical and hence finds its fullest expression in and through the ordinary activities of man. Gandhiji said, "You must watch my life, eat, sit, talk, behave in general. The sum total of those in me is my religion."¹ Gandhiji insisted that religion must satisfy the moral sense. Gandhiji wrote, "I reject to any religious doctrine that does not appeal to reason and is in conflict with morality. I tolerate unreasonable religious sentiment when it is not immoral."²

We generally make distinction between the moral and the spiritual. Morality provides a practical formula for the attainment of spiritual self-realization. But he has drawn no hard and fast distinction between the moral and the spiritual. Moral laws are also divine laws. God, says Gandhiji, "is ethics and morality "³ For Gandhiji Truth is God and Truth is the substance of all morality. Hence, there is nothing in calling morality a religion. Gandhiji attaches the greatest importance to leading a life of morality or righteousness which is possible only through what he calls 'purified religion'- the criteria that

are used are the moral standards and ideals taken from religious tradition. Gandhiji said, "As soon as we lose the moral basis, we cease to be religious. There is no such thing as religion over riding morality. Man for instance cannot be untruthful and cruel and claim to have God on his side."⁴ Gandhiji defined religion as "a belief in the ordered the moral governance of the universe."⁵ For Gandhiji religion is not sectarianism but provide moral basis to all activities. He never thinks of religion apart from human activity nor does he consider religion as simply "as one of the many activities of mankind"⁶.

For Gandhiji true religion and true morality are inseparably bound up with each other. Religion is to morality what water is to the seed that is sown in the soil. Moral laws like spiritual laws come from within. Morality is possible without religion. But religion contributes greatly to the growth of morality. Gandhiji took every aspect of human life from the standpoint of morality. His main aim to identify religion with morality is to make religion operative in human life. Gandhiji was prepared to reject any religious sentiment if it is not moral. Gandhiji said that, "True religion is identical with

morality. There is no religion higher than Truth and righteousness.”⁷

“True morality”, according to Gandhiji, “consists, not in following the beaten track, but in finding out the true path for ourselves and in fearlessly following it.”⁸ According to Gandhiji the highest moral law is that in which we should unremittingly work for the good of mankind. Gandhiji regarded only voluntary actions as moral. He maintained that “no action which is not voluntary can be called moral.”⁹ Religion has to integrate the various aspects of human life. Gandhiji synthesized religion and ethics. Gandhiji pointed out: “so long as we act like machines, there can be no question of morality. If we want to call an action moral, it should have been done consciously and a matter of duty. Any action that is dictated by fear, or by coercion of any kind, ceases to be moral. It also follows that all good deeds that are prompted by hope of happiness in the next world cease to be moral”¹⁰. Gandhiji considered religion and morality as convertible terms. Gandhiji wrote, “For me, moral, ethics and religion are convertible terms. A moral life without reference to religion is like a house built upon sand. And religion divorced from morality is

'sounding brass' good only for making a noise and breaking heads."¹¹

2.2 ETHICS AND POLITICS

Gandhiji had introduced religion into politics. It is a matter of great significance. The prevailing tendency is to separate religion from politics. Gandhiji conceived politics as closely connected with ethics and religion. By introducing religion into politics Gandhiji wanted to introduce morality into politics. For him religion and morality were closely inter-linked. Gandhiji's very entry into active politics was to spiritualize it. Gandhiji wrote, "To see the universal and all pervading Spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself and a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to truth has drawn me into the field of politics; and I can say without the slightest hesitation and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means."¹²

Politicians generally do not take religion seriously. But for Gandhiji human life is an integral whole. He was of the view that if a man as a politician is not successful it is because of the fact that he has kept religion and politics apart without a proper understanding of both. Gandhiji did not view religion apart from the rest of human activity. It is religion that

compels him to enter into politics. Gandhiji wrote, "Most religious men I have met are politicians in disguise: I, however, who wear the guise of a politician, am yet heart a religious man."¹³ Gandhiji was of the view that the spirit of true religion should pervade politics through and through. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan correctly remarked that Gandhiji remains not as a politician or a reformer, not a philosopher or a moralist, but some one composed of them all an essentially religious person endowed with the highest and most human qualities. Gandhiji claimed to be a Sanathanist Hindu and he had given reasons for the same. Another remarkable trait was his courage to practice what he preached, the courage to live, nay die, for his convictions. He wrote, "I am trying to be the warrior of my description and, if God will, I may be that during this life."¹⁴

Religion was the key to his thought - to his social philosophy and his political practice. Gandhiji wrote, " Whole of my life is sutured with the religious spirit. I could not live for a single second without religion. Many of my political friends despair of me, because they say that even my politics are derived from my religion. And they are right. My politics and all other activities are derived from my religion. I go further

and say that every activity of a man of religion must be derived from his religion, because religion means being bound to God, that is to say, God rules your every breath. If you recognize that truth naturally God regulates every activity of yours.”¹⁵

Religion is an act of faith for God cannot be realized through the intellect. Gandhiji made a remark that the belief in God has to be based on faith which transcends reason. Faith in God must justify itself in action. There is no religion higher than ethics and morality. True religion means good thought and good conduct. Religion does not work in a field of its own but find its expression in and through the ordinary activities of man. Religion is a way of life. Religion is a basis of morality and morality is the yardstick for politics. The sphere of religion is essentially the sphere of morality and morality includes the sphere of politics as well. The link between religion, morality and politics is fundamental and are complementary in character.

Gandhiji was a Hindu for Hinduism is the most tolerant of all other faiths. Gandhiji was of the view that the universal element of all religions and creeds was ethical and the

universality of the ethical element made all religions one in spirit. Gandhiji considered the different religions as nothing but different roads converging to the same point. Religions are many but Religion is one - the Sovereign God of Love and Truth, the Creator of the Universe indwelling and immanent.

No aspects of human life remain untouched by Gandhiji. Politics is not an exception. Gandhiji's ethico-religious approach to politics was mainly to invite a revolution in the field of politics and hence had an ennobling effect upon those who adopt it and also those who are against it. He had shown by example and percept that politics can be transformed and exercise of the coercive authority of the state and of political power can be minimized. Every activity of a man of religion must be derived from his religion. Religion here does not mean sectarianism. Gandhiji's religion transcends every other religion but does not supersede them. On the contrary, it harmonizes them all and gives them reality. Gandhiji said, "Religion is not test of nationality, but a personal matter between man and his God. In the sense of nationality they are Indians first and Indians last, no matter what religion they possess."¹⁶

Gandhiji was compelled to enter into political field because of his firm religious faith and conviction. He was basically a religious man, a Hindu, who had clear and infallible understanding of that religion. His political philosophy and political techniques are only corollaries of his basic religious faith and moral principles. Gandhiji was basically a religious man who entered into the political field to spiritualize and to moralize it. He said, “..... at the back of every word that I have uttered since I have known what public life is, and of every act that I have done, there has been a religious consciousness and a downright religious motive.”¹⁷

According to Gandhiji, every human activity must be derived from religion and politics is no exception. Gandhiji's love for humanity attracted him towards politics, for politics concerns nation and that which concerns the welfare of nation must be one of the concerns of a man who is religiously inclined, in other words a seeker after God and Truth. The principle of Truth and non-violence forms the central concept of Gandhiji's political activity and these are basically religious principles. It was Gandhiji who brought down Truth and non-violence from spiritualism to the life of daily activities of man. He has showed by examples and percepts that politics is not

an evil but an unavoidable evil that encircles all of us like the coils of a snake from which one cannot escape easily. He himself has selected the path of politics as a means to realize the spiritual goal.

A man of true religion identifies himself with the whole of mankind and this necessarily involves taking part in politics because no fact of life is untouched by politics. He also felt that he could not do social service without entering into politics. According to him, political work must be looked upon in terms of social and moral progress. Gandhiji declared, "For me politics bereft of religion is absolute dirt ever to be shunned. Politics concerns nations and that which concerns the welfare of a nation must be one of the concerns of a man who is religiously inclined..... Therefore in politics also we have to establish the Kingdom of Heaven."¹⁸ Though politics as such is avoided, it still produces same kind of political effect. "There has been", Gandhiji once remarked, "no religious movement in the world without its social, economic and political consequences."¹⁹ Politics, to Gandhiji is not an end in itself but one of the means by which people can better their life in every sphere of human life. He was of the considered view that social and political programme for the

reconstruction of India should be founded on the solid basis of true religious and moral consciousness for religion is a force that binds man to God and man to man. Further Gandhiji declared that religion is a force that binds men together in the 'Silken net of Love'.

Gandhiji stood for the purification of politics by laying utmost stress on moral and religious values to keep politics away from evils such as corruptions, injustice and so on. He stood for purified politics in which all religions were treated alike. He stood for religious tolerance and equality of faiths promoting inter-religious understanding and religious pluralism. Gandhiji wished to establish the 'Kingdom Heaven' on the world of politics. In field of politics too he remained true to his belief that means are as important as the end. Hence success in politics is the outcome only of just and truthful means. Thus Gandhiji introduced a revolution in the field of politics by introducing ethics and religion into it.

2.3 ETHICS AND ECONOMICS

Gandhiji's main objective in the post-independent period was to rebuild India from below upwards. Though Gandhiji was not an economist in the generally accepted sense, he was a

true economist who can be termed as an economist of the masses. His approach to the economic problems and their solutions has been unparalleled and unique. In fact his economic thoughts were largely shaped by his own practical experiences and Experiments with Truth. Like other fields of human activities, Gandhiji felt that economics too could not be divorced from morality and religion. Gandhiji has viewed economic problems from the stand point of both ethics and religion.

Gandhiji's objective of the economic re-organization can be traced back to India's spiritual tradition. The Advaitic maxim 'the unity of everything that exists' and the 'all pervasiveness and immanence of God in every living being' laid the foundation for Gandhiji's new approach to economics. Gandhiji stood for the moralization of economics and hence he has never drawn any distinction between economics and ethics. Economics that hurt the moral well being of an individual or a nation is considered immoral and equally sinful. The moralized economics of Gandhiji was essentially humanistic. He has introduced the criteria of morality and human welfare as the yardstick of true economics. Gandhiji wrote, "True economics never militates against the highest

ethical standard, just as all true ethics to be worth its name must at the same time be also good economics. An economics that inculcates Mammon Worship, and enables the strong to amass wealth at the expense of the weak, is a false and dismal science. It spells death. True economics, on the other hand, stands for social justice; it promotes the good of equally including the weakest, and is indispensable for decent life.”²⁰ Economics according to Gandhiji is a moral science rather than a mere positive and analytical science. Gandhiji provided an alternative economic order which instead of false, immoral and non-human economics, a man-centered, welfare-oriented economic theory. Thus the economics that permit one country to prey upon another are immoral.

One of the underline principles of Gandhiji’s economic thought is simplicity and minimizing of wants coupled with economic equality. This re-echoes Gandhiji’s basic belief that we all are created by the same God. Hence no line can ever be drawn between man and man. Further his fundamental belief in the ‘oneness of all that exists’ also provides the key to Gandhiji’s economic thought with its emphasis on plain living and high thinking. His economic ideas embody the idea of Swaraj, Swadeshi and Sarvodaya and he tented to strive for

the development of man centered localized village economy or non-violent rural economy founded on agriculture. The concept of Swaraj was in all aspects man centered and non-exploitative and decentralized with simple non-violent village economy providing employment to everyone on the basis of voluntary co-operation and equitable social relationship.

2.4 NON-VIOLENT SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ORDER

Gandhiji was a moral genius who has assigned man a supreme consideration. He was of the view that the individual should order his life in unquestioning obedience to certain fundamental moral principles. It constitutes the realm of individual morality. But man is usually described as a social animal, for apart and away from society man is considered either as a beast or a God. So to be social is an innate and inborn tendency in man. These two aspects, namely the individual and the social are but the two sides of the same coin. Morality involves social relations. Otherwise 'why should I be moral' itself becomes non-sensical. It is not for any selfish end that I should be moral; on the contrary, it must be for the good of the community. Perfection of the individual is closely related to social perfection, where society must provide opportunities for the full development of his personality. True morality consists in finding out true path for ourselves and in fearlessly following it. Thus Gandhiji's mission in the social realm consist in the construction of an ideal social order which he calls 'Sarvodaya'-an egalitarian socio-economic and political order which Gandhiji undertook as a remedy for the

ills of both individual and society which consist in the eradication of all the evil practices rampant in Indian social order.

Gandhiji made a thorough examination and study of these social issues and tested them on rational and moral grounds. His mission was to construct an egalitarian socio-economic and political order with equality prevailing in every sphere of human life. The ideals of spiritual unity, equality of mankind and the ideal of common good are the off-shoots of his firm religious faith and convictions. For Gandhiji, religion which takes no account of practical affairs and does not help to solve them is no religion. He put religion in a practical form. He has drawn no compartmentalization between the religious and the secular. Religion does not work in a field its own but find its fullest expression in and through the ordinary activities of the man. A man is but “the product of his thoughts, what he thinks, he becomes”.²¹

Gandhiji’s emphasis on man does not mean the neglect of society. Gandhiji observes, “I value individual freedom, but you must not forget that man is essentially a social being. He has risen to his present status by learning to adjust his

individualism to the requirements of social progress. Unrestricted individualism is the law of the beast of the jungle. We have to learn to strike the mean between individual freedom and social restraint. Willing submission to social restraint for the sake of the well - being of the whole society enriches both the individual and the society of which one is a member."²² Sarvodaya, the ideal social order conceived by Gandhiji stands for the greatest good of all even Unto the Last. Sarvodaya includes 'Antyodaya' as well. The welfare of all includes the welfare of the last. Gandhiji a votary of Ahimsa cannot subscribe to the Utilitarian formula, namely the greatest good of the greatest number. On the contrary he will have to strive for the greatest good of all and die in the attempt to realize the ideal. He will be even willing to die so that others may live. "The greatest good of all", said Gandhiji, "inevitably includes the good of the greatest number, and therefore, he and the Utilitarian will converge at many points in their career but does come a time when they must take part company, and even work in opposite directions. The utilitarian to be logical will never sacrifice himself. The absolutist will even sacrifice himself."²³

In the ideal social order envisaged by Gandhiji all are knit together in the Silken net of Love. Love is not the mere exclusive love of a father to his child. It is Universal Love, which is non-violence. "Real Love", said Gandhiji "is to love them that hate you, to love your neighbour even though you distressed him."²⁴ Non-violence Gandhiji considered as the first article of his faith and the last article of his creed. It was his firm conviction that non-violence is a creed and a mere policy, for policies often change. Further, non-violence to be a creed has to be all-pervasive. It is universal in its application. Gandhiji wrote that, "It is a blasphemy to say that non-violence can only be practiced by individuals and never by nations which are composed of individuals."²⁵ Non-violence as a creed is the most potent weapon at the disposal of mankind. It is a dynamic weapon. In its active form it means good will towards all living beings. A non-violent man, in other words, is a man of self-suffering and self-sacrifice. He suffers himself till the evil-doer understands his mistake and repents for the same. Thus, "ahimsa consists in allowing others the maximum of convenience at the maximum of inconvenience to us".²⁶ The observance of non-violence in thought, word and deed is described as the supreme or highest dharma - 'ahimsa

paramodharma'. It is a weapon of matchless potency, is a special attribute of the soul. Gandhiji said, "The doctrine of non-violence is not for the weak and cowardly; it is meant for the brave and the strong. The bravest man allows himself to be killed without killing. And he resists from killing or injuring, because he knows that it is wrong to injure"²⁷.

Gandhiji preferred the performance of duties rather than rights. Everybody must do his duty without arresting his rights. When once we perform our duties, rights accrue naturally. The true source of rights is duty. In short, rights flow from duties or duties confer rights. Gandhiji remarked, "The true source of rights is duty. If we all discharge our duties, rights will not be far to seek. If leaving duties unperformed we run after rights, they will escape us like a will-o'-the-wisp. The more we pursue them, the farther will they fly. The same teaching has been embodied by Krishna. In the immortal word: 'Action alone is thine. Leave thou the fruit severely alone'. Action is the duty: fruit is the right."²⁸

The Sarvodaya social ideal is founded on the ideal of spiritual oneness or unity. Hence the means used for its establishment must also be spiritual, for according to Gandhiji

as the means so the end. Ahimsa is the one and only means for attaining Truth. Happiness in Sarvodaya society is more moral and spiritual than material. A living and an unshakable faith in truth in the form of God is a necessary pre-condition for the practice of non-violence. Non-violence is not merely a personal virtue but equally social to be cultivated like other virtues. Society is largely regulated by the expression of non-violence in its mutual dealings. Gandhiji wrote, "All society held together by non-violence, even as the earth is held in her position by gravitation. But when the law of gravitation was discovered, the discovery yielded results of which our ancestors had no knowledge. Even so, when society is deliberately constructed in accordance with the law of non-violence, its structure will be different in material particulars from what it is today. But I cannot say in advance what the government based on non-violence will be like. What is happening today is disregard of the law of non-violence and enthronement of violence as if it were an eternal law"²⁹

Sarvodaya social philosophy aims at the prevalence of equality in all spheres of life. But the individual should submit himself to the social restraint for the benefit of himself as well as of the society. In the economic sphere Sarvodaya society

stands for equality of income and decentralization. Economic equality signifies a non-violent economy in which the dignity of man and his labour will be given the highest consideration. He considers that country as the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings. Every human being has a right to live and therefore to find the wherewithal to feed, to cloth and house himself. The end to be achieved is human happiness along with full mental and moral growth. Economic equality does not mean the equalization of income on the contrary it may be taken to mean that all are entitled to have the basic necessities of life. Every labourer should be given a 'just wage' -- what is 'due' to them to fetch a square meal a day. Economic equality is the master key to decentralized economy. In the economic order he envisaged, the nature and extent of production will be determined by social necessity rather than by any profit motive on the part of the individual.

Another notable feature in respect of Sarvodaya is the idea of trusteeship. The rich must be the trustees of the poor. Private ownership of property is permitted only under certain conditions. Gandhiji recognized private ownership of property only to the extent that it may contribute to the welfare of

society. Gandhiji did not stand for the wholesale liquidation of capitalism, he rather stood for its reformation. For Gandhiji, labour is far superior to capital. It is immoral for the capitalist to exploit the labourers. In short, Gandhiji was not against the capitalist but only against the capitalism. He stood for the obliteration of differences come between and man and man as far as practicable. He wanted to bring about a total transformation in the economic sphere through his non-violent method. Gandhiji wrote, "By the non-violent method we seek not to destroy the capitalist, we seek to destroy capitalism. We invite the capitalist to regard himself as a trustee for those on whom he depends for the making, the retention and the increase of his capital. Nor need the worker wait for his conversion. If capital is power, so is work. Either power can be used destructively or creatively. Either is dependent on the other. Immediately the worker realizes his strength, he is in a position to become a co-sharer with the capitalist instead of remaining his slave."³⁰ Gandhiji's regulated trusteeship aimed at transforming the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one.

The capitalist will act as trustees of the labouring classes and that capital to should be utilized for their material and

moral welfare. So the wide gulf existing between capital and labour could be reduced to the minimum. Gandhiji even wanted the capitalist to come down to the level of labour who earns their daily bread by manual labour. The labourer has the power to work and he has to realize that, "he is a better owner of his own, than the wealthy man who is the owner of his wealth." The equal distribution of the wealth could be brought about only through the weapon of non-violence which in turn effects necessary changes in one's personal life. He has to reduce his wants to the minimum and observe simplicity in life. The rich man will have to make use of his riches to the extent reasonable that he requires for his personal needs and should act as trustees for his remaining riches. In the event of the rich refusing to become the trustees of the poor, even non-co-operation can be launched against them. It is equally correct to say that the poor too has to realize the fact that the rich cannot accumulate wealth without their co-operation in society. Gandhiji held the view that not merely wealth but even one's physical strength too must be utilized for the service of all. The economic order envisaged by Gandhiji stood for economic equality, trusteeship, equitable distribution over and above a non-violent rural agrarian economic order village

as its centre. He stood for village economy, rural and village industries with emphasis on the economics of Khadi paving the way for non-violent rural economy and civilization.

Civilization in the real sense “consists not in the multiplication, but in the deliberate and voluntary restriction of wants. This alone promotes the real happiness and contentment, and increases the capacity for service.”³¹ Such a society is essentially non-violent and decentralized for decentralization goes along with non-violence. Gandhiji wrote, “If India is to evolve along non-violent lines, it will have to decentralize many things. Centralization cannot be sustained and defended without adequate force. Simple homes from which there is nothing to take away require no policing; the palaces of the rich must have strong guards to protect them against the dacoity..... rurally organized India will run less risk of foreign invasion than urbanized India well equipped with military naval and air forces. Centralization is a system is inconsistent with non-violent structure of society.”³²

It is well known that Gandhiji was not a political thinker or a academic philosopher in the literal sense. Generally, politics deals with the state, the pursuit and capture of power. Gandhiji, on the contrary, challenged the pre-suppositions of

the main stream of political theory. Joan V. Bondurant has correctly observed, "Gandhiji did not proceed from any specific political ideology and yet the significance for political theory of his action on the practical field of politics, is inestimable. The contribution has been not alone to the development of a social and political method. It extends further into the realm of political thought and challenges the substantial presupposition of the main stream of political theory."³³

Politics as conceived by Gandhiji is closely connected with ethics and religion. He is of the view that the spirit of true religion should pervade politics through and through. It was Gandhiji's firm religious faith and conviction due him into the field of politics. He wished to establish the 'kingdom of Heaven' on the world of politics. His aim in politics was to establish 'kingdom of righteousness' on earth which he calls Ramarajya. Gandhiji said, "By Ramarajya I do not mean Hindu Raj. I mean by Ramarajya Divine Raj, the Kingdom of God. For me Rama and Rahim are one and the same deity. I acknowledge no other God but one God of Truth and Righteousness."³⁴ Swaraj, non-violent state and Ramarajya were significant mile stones in the evolution of the political

philosophy of Gandhiji. Gandhiji wrote, "If national life becomes perfect as to become self-regulated, no representation become necessary. There is then a state of enlightened anarchy. In such a state every one is his own ruler. He rules himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbour."³⁵ Gandhiji visualized the non-violent state as a means to 'Ram Raj' - Kingdom of righteousness on earth. Gandhiji considered politics not as an end in itself but only as a means to the betterment of human life. He was fully aware of the limitations in the realization of a perfectly non-violent state. Therefore he longed for a predominantly non-violent state.

Gandhiji is against the sovereignty of the state over the individuals. Gandhiji repudiated the coercive authority of the state for it represents violence in a concentrated and organized form. State represents an engine of violence. Gandhiji looked upon an increase in the power of the state with the greatest fear because it does the greatest harm by destroying individuality and the moral will of the individual which lies at the root of all progress. The compulsive nature of the authority of the state damages the moral nature of the individual. What Gandhiji disapproves of is an organization

based on force which a state essentially is. The primary function of the state is to redress the grievances and prevent conflicts. The state is considered to be a compulsory association but the interference of the state, according to Gandhiji, has to be minimal. Hence he considers the state as 'a necessary evil'.

Further, the state is vested with power and authority. Which necessarily involves violence and which is contradictory to the very conception of a non-violent state. He has no objection against an organization which is voluntary and based on Truth and Non-violence. The non-violent state conceived by Gandhiji is a democracy in which non-violence becomes a creed, an article of faith, rather than a matter of mere policy. Gandhiji considers, whatever its external form may be, as merely an externalization of the moral level of the individual. Gandhiji wrote, "I do not today conceive of such a golden age. But I do believe in the possibility of a predominantly non-violent society. And I am working for it."³⁶ In the ideal state as visualized by Gandhiji there is no political power because there is no state. But such state has yet to be realized. Gandhiji repudiated the power of the state for the main reason that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts

absolutely. The pursuit of non-violence and truth find its expression in weakening the coercive role of the state. He was of the considered view that the greater the decentralization of power in any society, the greater would be the chances for the pursuit of non-violence and truth. He advocated the limitation of state power with emphasis on controlling rather than the increase of the authority of the state.

Gandhiji considers government as a necessary evil. That government alone can be considered as best which governs the largest number of virtuous individuals. Gandhiji gives a comprehensive definition of democracy which he says that "democracy must in essence..... Democracy in Gandhian sense is both disciplined and enlightened. Perfect democracy is possible only by perfect non-violence because no true democracy can prevail in an atmosphere of violence. Democracy and violence seldom go together. Perfect democracy is possible only when there is perfect non-violence. True democracy or the Swaraj of the masses never come through untruthful and violent means. Gandhiji pointed out that, "My notion of democracy is that under it the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest. That can be never happening except through non-violence."³⁷

Centralized type of democracy cannot be built on non-violent lines. Further centralization as a system is inconsistent with the non-violent structure of society. Gandhiji stated that centralization cannot be sustained and defended without the use of force. Decentralized democracy is consistent with non-violence as it governs least number of people. Gandhiji believed that government is the best which governs the least. Gandhiji advocated non-violent and decentralized democracy consisting of self-governing and self-sufficient village republics as the basic unit of political administration. It is only when democracy relies on the people and rule by the people and for the people without depending on military power, the government becomes truly decentralized. Gandhiji held the view that, "As a nation is truly democratic when it runs its affairs smoothly and effectively without much interference of the state."³⁸ Gandhiji with his series of experiments with Truth and the experience gained there from made him suggest that government of the village will largely contribute to the progress of the people from the grass root level. Therefore in Gandhiji's picture of independent India the unit is the village community. Every village has to become a republic or panchayat. And the, non-violent democratic state of Gandhiji's

conception will be a federation of self-governing village communities always abide by the ideals of Truth and Non-violence.

The government of the village will be by the panchayat of five persons “annually elected by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. These will have all the authority and jurisdiction required. Since there will be no system of punishments in the accepted sense, this Panchayat will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate for its year of office.”³⁹ It is considered as the unit of local self-government. It is the original custodian of all authority. Authority is decentralized and it begins from bottom upwards. It operates in a three-tier manner- the village level- the block level and district level panchayats. Thus in the village republic as envisaged by Gandhiji there is perfect democracy based upon individual freedom. It is the law of non-violence that rules him and his government.

Notes

- 1 *Harijan*, 22.09.1946, p. 321.
- 2 *Young India*, 21.07.1920, p. 173.
- 3 *Ibid*, 05.03.1925, p. 81.
- 4 *Ibid*, 24.11.1921, p. 385.
- 5 *Harijan*, 10.02.1940, p. 445.
- 6 *Ibid*, 24.12.1938, p. 393.
- 7 *Young India*, 24.11.1921, p. 365.
- 8 M.K. Gandhi, *Ethical Religion*, p. 38.
- 9 *Ibid*, p. 22.
- 10 *Ibid*, p. 43.
- 11 *Harijan*, 03.10.1936, p. 268.
- 12 Gandhi, M.K., *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, p. 383.
- 13 *Speeches*, Appendix II, p. 40.
- 14 *Harijan*, 24.06.1939.
- 15 *Ibid*, 02.03.1934.
- 16 *Ibid*, 29.06.1947, p. 215.
- 17 *Young India*, III, p. 350.
- 18 *Ibid*, 18.06.1925, p. 214.
- 19 C. Sukla, *Conversations of Gandhi*, p. 53.
- 20 *Harijan*, 09.10.1937, p. 292.
- 21 M.K. Gandhi, *Ethical religion*, p. 60.
- 22 *Harijan*, 27.05.1939, p. 144.
- 23 *Young India*, 09.12.1926, p. 446.
- 24 *Harijan*, 03.03.1946, p. 28.
- 25 *Ibid*, 12.11.1938, p. 328.
- 26 *Young India*, 02.12.1926, p. 422.

27 *Harijan*, 20.07.1937, p. 1418.

28 *Young India*, 08.01.1925, p. 15.

29 *Harijan*, 11.12.1939, p. 8.

30 *Young India*, 26.03.1931, p. 49.

31 M.K. Gandhi, *Yurveda Mandir*, p. 36.

32 *Young India*, 18.01.1942, p. 5.

33 Joan V. Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence, The Gandhian Philosophy of conflict*,
p. 189.

34 *Young India*, 19.09.1929, p. 305.

35 *Ibid*, 02.07.1931, p. 162.

36 *Harijan*, 09.03.1940, p. 31.

37 *Ibid*, 18.05.1940, p. 129.

38 *Ibid*, 11.01.1936, p. 380.

39 *Ibid*, 26.07.1942, p. 38.

Gandhiji's political philosophy and political techniques were the outcome of his life long Experiments with Truth. His main aim was to invite a revolution by extending religion and ethics in to the field of politics. He was not a theoriser in the field of politics. He endorsed the view that 'theory is all gray - ever green is life'. In his scheme of things, theory was subordinate to that of life which is an organic unity. Life is understood as an organic whole, and that the different departments of life act and react upon one another and influence one another.

Gandhiji took a religious and moral approach to politics. There is no distinct department called 'political' in Gandhiji's scheme. It is only a phase and an aspect of life. The 'political' has to be viewed in the context of life itself. The purified will is the source of all kinds of action - social, political and moral. The synthesis of the political and the moral is seen at work in his analysis of the dominant concepts of political theory. There is no watertight compartmentalization between the secular and the sacred. Gandhiji's 'Ethical Religion' stands outside the domain of both supernaturalism and theocracy. He was of the view that the spirit of Ethical Religion should pervade politics through and through. It was Gandhiji's living and unshakable

faith in God in the form of Truth that drew him in to the field of politics. According to Gandhiji a man of true religion identifies himself completely with the whole of mankind and this necessarily involves taking part in politics because no fact of life remains untouched by politics. Gandhiji's very conception of religion as belief in the ordered moral government of the universe largely depends on human activity. For him there is no religion higher than 'Truth and Righteousness'.

Gandhiji has invited a revolution in the field of politics. Unlike the political theories of the modern times which deals with the pursuit and capture of power, Gandhiji moralized and humanized politics. According to Gandhiji politics should be founded on 'principles' and he challenged the substantial pre-supposition of political theory. Gandhiji said, "If I seen to take part in politics it is only because politics encircles us today like the coils of a snake from which one cannot get out no matter how much one tries. I wish, therefore to wrestle with the snake as I have been doing with more or less success."¹ So it is religion that compelled him to enter into the field of politics. Gandhiji was basically a religious man and even his love for his own nation counts only secondarily. He turned to the field of politics because he was religious unlike many

other religious men. He wrote, “Most religious men I have met are politician in disguise. I however who wear the guise of a politician, am at heart a religious man”.²

Politics meant the rule of all. Rule of all without rule of oneself is proved to be deceptive and fatal. Ethical Religion provides the solid foundation for Gandhiji’s political technique and action. Political power is not an end in itself but one of the means for the realisation of the greatest good of all for which Sarvodaya stands for. Sarvodaya is understood in the sense of an egalitarian socio-political economic order with the individual as its centre. Hence Gandhiji’s main objective was to win Swaraj for India. Swaraj meant self-rule. To Gandhi Swaraj signifies ‘poorna’ or ‘complete independence’. Swaraj stands for the poor man’s swaraj. In such a state sovereignty vests in the people. He becomes his own ruler and he ruled in such a way he is never a hindrance to others. He respects the like freedom of others. It provides opportunity for individual growth and developments. Gandhiji’s concept of Ramarajya stood for the sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority. The moral authority of the individual must reign supreme. This ethical outlook is the back born of the political philosophy of Gandhiji. The individual is essentially spiritual

and moral. The individual should be self-disciplined, truthful, non-violent and pure hearted. They must be self ruling individuals who need no external agency howsoever powerful they may be either in the form of a state or a government to rule over them. So in Gandhiji's dream of independent India, if the people are competent there is no need of the state.

Political freedom, according to Gandhiji is only a part of the longer connotation of freedom. The outward freedom will be in exact proportion to the inward freedom. Political freedom did not mean isolated independence. Gandhiji said, "I do not want India to rise on the ruins of other nations I want the freedom of my country. But not at the expense or exploitation of others."³

3.1 DECENTRALISATION VERSUS CENTRALISATION

Gandhiji's concept of decentralization is not an isolated concept but largely shaped by his general philosophy of life. Gandhiji's insistence on faith in good coupled with the law of non-violence provides the key to understand the concept of decentralization. The concept of decentralization has both political and economic overtones. Further his insistence on the moralization of every aspect of human life, insistence on

freedom and equality, opposition to state authority over the individual, Swaraj, Trusteeship, critique of industrialization and technology, Swadeshi and Khadi largely reflect the central idea of decentralization. Gandhiji advocated decentralization of political power rather than its centralization. Gandhiji viewed centralization with the greatest fear that though it does well to the people it largely damages the moral will of the individual. Hence he longed for decentralization in which power and authority will be shared among the people. The individual is the custodian of power and hence Swaraj is the best rule.

Centralization of power leads to violence. Gandhiji a humble seeker after truth was against all forms of violence. The more the centralization the more the violence. In Gandhiji's view centralization perpetrates exploitation of the individual materially and intellectually and exploitation is treated by Gandhiji as part and parcel of violence. Decentralization and violence seldom go together. So they cannot be reconciled. He said that, "Ahimsa comes before Swaraj... Ahimsa must be placed before everything else while it is professed."⁴ Ahimsa means not only the avoidance of physical injury or killing any life out of anger but it means

avoidance of injury to anything in thought, word and deed. Hence Gandhiji the foremost champion of Ahimsa could not admit the centralization of political power.

The positive aspect of non-violence is the largest love and the greatest charity. Perfect democracy is possible only when there is perfect non-violence. Individual freedom can have the fullest play only under a regime of unadulterated ahimsa. Centralization of power and authority in any form is a hindrance to the moral development of the individual, as morality necessitates the freedom of the will of the individual. In true test of democracy, it attempts to replace force and violence by social will. In order to facilitate the full growth and progress of the individual a democratic society must have its basis in rational understanding, mutual co-operation and concern for the well-being of all. For this Gandhiji advocated decentralized type of democracy followed by the self-governing and self-sufficient village republics.

According to Gandhiji, "Swaraj of a people means the sum total of swaraj of individuals. Swaraj will come not by the acquisition of the authority by a few, but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused"⁵

Gandhiji stood for decentralization of political power for obvious reasons. Violence too must be avoided for which concentration of power must be avoided through decentralization. Therefore to avoid violence; Gandhiji recommended decentralization which is founded on non-violence. Gandhiji suggested that, "If India is to evolve along non-violent lines it will have to decentralize many things. Centralization cannot be sustained and defended without adequate force."⁶ Centralization of power naturally leads to exploitation. Always the poor are the exploited. Further centralization leads to the misuse of power and hence it could not be maintained without adequate force. Gandhiji recommended decentralization as a necessary political measure to safeguard individual initiative and freedom. Regulation imposed by people upon themselves is non-violence to the extent that it is possible in society. A society organized on the basis of complete non-violence would be the purest anarchy. That state is perfect and non-violent where the people are governed in the minimal level by an external agency in the form of state or government. The nearest approach to purest anarchy would be a democracy based on non-violence.

3.2 NON-VIOLENT DEMOCRACY

Gandhiji regarded the people as the custodian of political power. Unlike other forms of government which promote the interest of a select few, democracy aims at the promotion of the interest of the majority. Democracy is that form of government in which people are in power. Gandhiji wrote, "In democracy the people's will must rule."⁷ In other words power resides in the people. Even the parliament has no power or even existence independently of the people. Popular sovereignty based on pure moral authority is vested with the people. In the words of Gandhiji, "A 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."⁸ A true democrat has to be a born disciplinarian. He has to yield willing obedience to all laws whether human or divine. He has to be selfless. Political power is completely decentralized. Democracy must work at the grass root level and has to be guided by the Sarvodaya Ideal, a system in which the weakest should have the same opportunities as the strongest.

Gandhiji followed both the negative and the positive approaches in explaining the concept of democracy. In the negative approach, Gandhiji has stated what democracy is not? Democracy is not dictatorship. Democracy is not a state in which the people act like a sheep. Under democracy individual liberty of opinion and action is guarded. Democracy is not mobocracy. Democracy is an impossible thing until the power is shared by all. But democracy should not generate into mobocracy. Democracy is neither slavery nor mastery over others. In the positive approach Gandhiji has stated what democracy is. In his notion of democracy 'the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest'. This can never happen except through non-violence. The necessities of life should be shared and enjoyed by everyone. In true democracy every man and woman is taught to think for himself or herself. In democracy the individual will is governed and limited by the social will namely the state which is governed by and for democracy. True democracy is essentially non-violent and decentralized. Decentralization of political power represents true democracy based on individual freedom. The science of non-violence alone can lead to pure democracy. Democracy and violence can ill go together. Gandhiji stated that, "The

states that are today nominally democratic have either to become frankly totalitarian, or if they are to become truly democratic, they must become courageously non-violent.”⁹ The recognition of non-violence on a national scale ensures true democratic government. For non-violence as the law of our life includes individual, social, political, national and international spheres. The spirit of democracy cannot be imposed from without. It has to come from within. Gandhiji said, “A democracy established by non-violence, there will be equal freedom for all. Everybody will be his own master.”¹⁰

Non-violence, Gandhiji considered as the means, the end is complete independence. Gandhiji wrote, “If one takes care of the means, the end will take care of itself. Non-violence is the means; the end for every one is complete independence. There will be an international league only when all the nations, big or small, composing it are fully independent. The nature of that independence will correspond to the extent of non-violence assimilated by the nations concerned. One thing is certain that in a society based on non-violence, the smallest nation will feel as tall as the tallest. The idea of superiority and inferiority will be wholly obliterated... The conclusion is irresistible that for one like me, wedded to non-violence,

constitutional or democratic government is a distant dream so long as non-violence is not recognized as a living force, an inviolable creed, not mere policy. While I prate about universal non-violence, my experiment is confined to India. If it succeeds, the world will accept it without afford. This is however a bit But. The pause does not worry me. My faith brightest in the midst of impenetrable darkness.”¹¹

3.3 SWARAJ, VILLAGE SWARAJ

The concept of 'swaraj' was developed by Gandhiji during the Indian freedom struggle. Gandhiji considered Swaraj as the best form of government. Swaraj meant 'self-rule' or 'self-government'. It cannot be established merely by freeing India from British rule. Its establishment is possible only by 'turning the search light inward' so as to generate 'soul force' or 'love'. Gandhiji said that, "swaraj for me means freedom for the meanest of our country men..... I am not interested in freeing India from any yoke whatsoever, I have no desire to exchange 'King log for king stork'."¹² Real Swaraj comes only when the masses become conscious of their capacity to regulate authority when it goes astray. "It will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused. In other words, Swaraj is to be obtained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority."¹³

Gandhiji's aim was to win swaraj for the masses. So the swaraj of Gandhiji's dream "is the poor man's swaraj."¹⁴ Gandhiji wrote, "It has been said that Indian swaraj will be the rule of the majority community, i.e., the Hindus. There could

not be a greater mistake than that. If it were to be true, I for one would refuse to call it Swaraj and would fight it with all the strength at my command, for to me Hind Swaraj is the rule of all people, is the rule of justice.”¹⁵ Generally, we used the term swaraj to describe political and economic independence. In this generic sense it denotes a people or a group being able to exercise all of the necessary function of power without intervention from any authority which they cannot themselves alter. Gandhiji wrote, “Swaraj means self-rule and self-restraint which ‘independence’ often means.”¹⁶

Swaraj, thus, is not rule by any one in particular but equally by all. It is not the government of the omnipotent state but the government of the people, by the people and for the people. Its guiding principle is the principle of equity and justice. It is the rule of the individuals who give precedence for duties over rights and who have nothing but the welfare of the people at heart. “Swaraj of a people”, wrote Gandhiji “means the sum total of the Swaraj [self-rule] of individuals. And such swaraj comes only from performance by individuals of their duty as citizens. In it none thinks of his rights. They come when they are needed, for better performance of duty.”¹⁷

Swaraj, whether it is political or economic should be exercised and shared equally by all. It should never be a monopoly of anybody. Gandhiji wrote, "Swaraj of my-our-dream recognises no race or religious distinction. Not it is to be the monopoly of the lettered person or yet of moneyed men. Swaraj is to be for all, including the former, but emphatically including the maimed, the blind, the starving, toiling millions."¹⁸ Gandhiji stood for the swaraj of the toiling millions who find it difficult to get one square meal a day. Real swaraj must be felt by all-man, woman and child. Until and unless all the ordinary amenities of life that a rich man enjoys are guaranteed to the last man, surely there is no poorna swaraj in its actual sense. Gandhiji used the prefix 'Poorna' meaning complete, before the term swaraj because it denotes as much for prince as for the peasant, as much for the rich landowner as for the landless tiller of the soil.

By Swaraj Gandhiji never meant majority rule. Swaraj for Gandhiji is rule of all people. It is the rule of justice. Self-discipline or rule over self - is the first condition of self-rule or swaraj. Swaraj can be won only by one's own efforts. What others get for me is not home rule but foreign rule. Self-rule even if it leads to anarchy is better than foreign rule. "Anarchy

under Home-Rule were better than orderly foreign rule.”¹⁹ In the following passage Gandhiji gives the nature and characteristics of real home-rule: “(i) Real Home-Rule is self-rule or self-control. (ii) The way to it is passive resistance: that is soul-force or love-force. (iii) To exert this force, swadeshi in every sense is necessary. (iv) What we want to do should be done, because it is our duty to do so.”²⁰ Then will be it becomes poorna swaraj. By poorna swaraj Gandhiji meant “an awakening among the masses, a knowledge among them of their true interest and ability to serve that interest against the whole world,”²¹ Through poorna swaraj Gandhiji wished to establish harmony, freedom from aggression from within or without, and a progressive improvement in the economic condition of the masses.

Freedom of expression is, according to Gandhiji, one of the fact of life and, therefore of swaraj as well. Gandhiji wrote, “freedom of speech and expression is the foundation of swaraj. If the foundation stone is in danger, you have to exert the whole of your might in order to defend that single stone.”²² This understanding made Gandhiji to work for freeing India from foreign rule. It was his conviction that freedom and liberty alone pave the way for progress. Self-rule will alone

bring the freedom. The only training in swaraj we need is the ability to defend ourselves against the whole world and to live our natural life in perfect freedom. Good government is no substitute for self government. Swaraj as conceived by Gandhiji can be maintained only if the nation has a large number of selfless workers who are ready to sacrifice even their lives for the cause of the poor and the down-trodden. "Progress towards swaraj will be exact proportion to the increase in the number of workers who will dare to sacrifice their all for the cause of the poor."²³ To Gandhiji political power is only a means for enabling people to better their condition in every sphere of human life. Gandhiji wrote, "Swaraj can never be a free gift by one nation to another. It is a treasure to be purchased with a nation's best blood. It will cease to be a gift when we have paid dearly for it... Swaraj will be a fruit of incessant labour, suffering beyond measure."²⁴

Swaraj is essentially non-violent in nature. Here a question may arise: in a non-violent society is there any need for a government? Gandhiji's reply would be there is need for some form of government but its nature has yet to be specified because it is still in the making. "I have purposely refrained from dealing with the nature of government in a

society based on non-violence.... when society is deliberately constructed in accordance with the law of non-violence, its structure will be different in material particulars from what it is today. But I cannot say in advance what the government based wholly on non-violence will be like.”²⁵

Gandhiji wrote, if we wish to achieve swaraj through truth and non-violence the only way is to build-up from the bottom upwards by constructive efforts. These rules out the deliberate creation of an anarchical state. Thus for Gandhiji, Swaraj meant, “the government of India by the consent of the people as ascertained by the largest number of adult population, male or female, native born or domiciled, who have contributed by manual labour in the service of the state and who have taken the trouble of having their names registered as voters.....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 it is abused. In other words, swaraj is to be attained by educating the masses to sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority.”²⁶

Thus for Gandhiji real Swaraj meant decentralization.

In Gandhiji's picture of independent India, the unit is the village community. Every village has to become a self-sufficient republic or panchayat. In essence, the panchayat of every village is a key unit for decentralization of executive, legislative and judicial powers. Village swaraj, thus represent true democracy wherein power and authority are exercised by different functionaries. Non-violent democratic state of Gandhiji's conception will be a federation of more or less self-suffering and self-governing village communities who always abide by the ideal of truth and non-violence. To establish swaraj, according to Gandhiji we want to save our villages. Thus every village will be a republic or panchayat having full powers and should become the unit of administration. And thereby the last man will become the unit in decision making process. "The law governing every village is that he will suffer death in the defence of his and his villager's honour."²⁷

In his scheme of village swaraj the individual is at the centre, then the village and finally the group of villages. It is not like a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom but an oceanic circle, whose centre will be the individual who is prepared to sacrifice everything for the cause of his village. Gandhiji always remembered us that India lives not in her few

cities but in her innumerable villages. Therefore if India has to attain true freedom, it should give due consideration to villages in which her soul lives. Gandhiji's idea of village swaraj was that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbors for its own vital wants and yet inter-dependant for many others in which dependants is a necessity. Thus Gandhiji pleaded for village swaraj as a necessary pre-condition for actualizing Moral kingdom on earth.

Decentralization for Gandhiji is true democracy. He, therefore, observed: "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."²⁸ Gandhiji's concept of decentralization starts from the bottom where people are independent in making their policies and in deciding and implementing them without any rigid and strict control of the higher authorities and their frequent interference in day to day working.

3.4 PANCHAYAT RAJ

Gandhiji's charismatic leadership coupled with the mantra 'Do or Die', India had won her political freedom. But to Gandhiji political freedom was not an end in itself but a means

to better the conditions of the people in every field of life. He had a dream of a new independent India. He had dedicated his life for the attainment of Swaraj for the masses. With this end in view, he had launched programmes to reconstruct India radically by utilizing all the resources locally available and in harmony with our own culture and civilization. He had dreamt of little village Republics with village Pachayats as the basic unit of administration.

Gandhiji was of the view that every village should enjoy maximum freedom to manage its own affairs even to the extent of defending itself against external invasion and to attain social and economic self-reliance. All that he said and did reflected the Indian framework of thought. The Indian political institution that Gandhiji visualized came to be known as Pachayat Raj, with its base at the village level. Panchayat is the only way to real village swaraj. Gandhiji wrote, "independence must begin at the bottom. Thus, every village will be a republic or panchayat having full powers. It follows therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world. It will be trained and prepared to perish in the attempt to defend itself against any

onslaught from without. Thus ultimately, it is the individual who is the unit. This does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbours or from the world. It will be free and voluntary play of mutual forces. Such a society is necessarily highly cultured which every man and woman knows that he or she wants and, what is more, knows that no one should want anything that other cannot have with equal labour."²⁹

Panchayat have been in existence in India since times immemorial. Rural progress depends entirely on the existence of an active organization as the village which can bring all people including the weaker sections into the main stream of social action. Gandhiji wrote, "Panchayat has an ancient flavour; it is a good word. It literally means an assembly of the five elected by villagers. It represents the system, by which the innumerable village republics of India were governed."³⁰ Therefore Panchayat Raj means a system of governance by the elected five. It is the Indian political institution with its base at the village level consisting of five members with the functional ability of legislature, executive and judiciary. The basic deficiency in the planned development process is the lack of people's participation at

the grass root level. Gandhiji's view of Panchayat Raj is based on the principle of democratic decentralization. He wanted to re-orient village life through the institution of panchayat. Villages are the backbone of our nation. Villages of India, according to him, 'are the real India'. According to Gandhiji, real significance of swaraj was the opportunity to shape India's rural development in accordance with our own tradition. Gandhiji took a keen interest in the development of the rural society.

He contributed a great deal in raising the panchayats to their rightful place in a democratic set-up. To Gandhiji, decentralization is the basic requirement for the success of democracy. He has made panchayats as a part of his scheme for the reconstruction of the society and through its establishment; values of true democracy would be attained. It is the only way to realize the value of democracy from the grass root level as it will provide room for the people to participate and in implementing decisions without a central higher authority. Moreover, it is the only alternative to reduce the interference of the state in day-to-day affairs of the people.

Gandhiji made first reference to panchayats in 1916 by appreciating the working of the 'Indian Panchayat System'. In his presidential address at Belgam Congress, Gandhiji referred to the panchayat system as the right medium for securing justice as well as for avoiding reliance on the government for the settlement of mutual disputes. At the Round Table Conference in 1931, he recommended the panchayat system as the basis of true representative government. Further in 1943, in reply to the pamphlet published by the government of India, he replied, "no congress man would care to deny the statement though it must be added that the roots were to be founded in the old panchayat system."³¹ Similarly, in 1947, he pointed out, "when panchayat raj is established, public opinion will do what violence never does.... In Panchayat Raj only the Panchayat will be obeyed and the panchayat can only work through the law of their making."³² Gandhiji wrote in 1948, "in the true democracy of India the unit was the village. Even if one village wanted Panchayat Raj which was called republic in English, no one could stop it. True democracy could not be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre. It had to be worked from below by the people of every village."³³ In fact

Gandhiji repeatedly emphasized panchayat raj till the last moment of his life.

Gandhiji was very much particular of the inclusion of village panchayat in the constitution for it represent the people's voice. Gandhiji said, "I must confess that I have not been able to follow the proceedings of the constituent assembly..... (The correspondent) says that there is no mention or direction about village panchayat and decentralization in the foreshadowed constitution. It is certainly an omission calling for immediate attention if our independence is to reflect the people's voice. The greater the power of the panchayat the better for the people."³⁴

Considering the relevance of the topic Article 31A has been included in the constitution. That after Article 31, the following new Article be added (31A).According to which "the state shall take steps to organize village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority has may be necessary to enable them to function as self-government."³⁵ Later on Article 40 was included in part IV (Directive Principles of State Policy) of the constitution to provide place for panchayats.

The concept of democratic decentralization received new dimension with the 73rd and 74th amendments to the constitution. The new legislation had given ample scope for the realization of democratic decentralization. It provided a 'concrete form' and 'unified structure' for the realization of the local self-government. Based on this new legislation at the centre the government of Kerala has also given shape to a legislation called Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994. The Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 chapter 19 provides a detailed account of the distribution of financial resources and income of the panchayat. It also suggests to constitute state - district planning bodies along with the lines of democratic decentralization.

The village panchayat is the basic unit of administration with full functional and financial autonomy. It gives financial assistance to the undeveloped sections of the community. Its main focus is on agriculture and small scale industries. Preference is given not to mass production but production by the masses. Initially as a part of democratizing this institution three tier system of rural and local government has been suggested namely, panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishat. But Gandhiji pleaded for the decentralization of the

democratic structure so as to make available its services even unto the last. He suggested a three tier system of administration namely, village - block - district panchayats. Grama Sabhas consisting of adult citizens of the village were constituted to review the work done by the village panchayats periodically. The Grama Sabhas were also entrusted with the work of representing the aspirations of the villagers through Village Panchayats.

The next tier of administration is the block level panchayat. The Block Panchayat Samiti consists of the presidents of village panchayats and elected members by providing proportionate representation in the Samiti with the objective of providing representation of all sections of community within its jurisdiction. The third level is District Panchayat consisting of the representatives of Block Panchayat Samitis, MPs and MLAs, representatives of co-operative organizations and special organizations.

The main objective behind Panchayat Raj system is to set up institutions at the village, block and district levels to ensure representation without any consideration political or otherwise i.e., election should be free and fair without the

interference of any political party. Gandhiji's concept of Panchayat Raj can properly work if only his other concepts like Swadeshi, Swaraj, Non-violence, and Decentralization were implemented in toto. Gandhian objectives, programmes and principles are integrally related to each other. Gandhiji was not a hard core theorist. We find in him a blend of theory and practice. It is not enough if we understand theory alone. It is equally important to understand his practice in the light of the theory. Hence our first and foremost duty is to understand, interpret and classify the concept in order to practice it correctly. 'Without true understanding of the ideal, we can never hope to reach it.'

Panchayat system envisaged decentralization in politics and in economics. But both are inseparable bound up with each other. He conceived each village as little Republic, sufficient with wants and organically linked with the higher bodies and enjoying the maximum freedom in deciding and implementing the decisions relating to the affairs of the locality. In the final stage, the purpose was to achieve Rama Rajya through the decentralization of power, the coercive state authority to be transformed into pure democracy. It is a medium of people's participation and symbolizes the power of

the people. This is swaraj and it signifies poor man's swaraj – swaraj of the masses. By swaraj, Gandhiji meant “government by the consent of largest number of voters.”³⁶ Gandhiji has devoted himself completely to rural reconstruction and to uplift the standards of rural life through the direct and active participation of the people themselves.

The concept of Panchayat Raj was evolved along the Gandhian principles of Gramaswaraj. In this scheme, the village was made the centre for development activities. Gandhiji stated that “My idea of village swaraj is that it is complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its vital wants, and yet inter-dependant for many others in which dependence is a necessity. Thus the villages' first concern will be to grow its own food crops and cotton for its cloth. It should have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and play ground for adults and children. And if there is more land available, it will grow useful money crops, thus excluding ganja, tobacco, opium and the like. The village will maintain a village theatre, school and public hall. It will have its own water works ensuring a clean water supply. This can be done through controlled wells or tanks. Education will be compulsory up to the final basic course. As far as possible, every activity will be

conducted on co-operative basis. There will be no caste, such as we have today with their graded untouchability. Non-violence with its technique of Sathyagraha and non-cooperation will be the sanction of the village community. There will be a compulsory service of village guards who will be selected by rotation from the register maintained by the village. 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 will have all the authority and jurisdiction required. Since there will be no system of punishment 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 without much interference, even from the present government whose sole effective connection with the villages is the exaction of village revenue. I have not examined here the question of relations with the neighbouring villages of the centre, if any. My purpose is 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 the government. He and his

village are able to defy the might of a world. For the law governing every villager is that he will suffer death in the defence of his and of his and his village's honour."³⁷

Thus, Gandhiji worked out meticulously for the details of a wide variety of practical things which are vital to build a graceful village life. His conception of the village was not anchored on the modern notion of development but on the post-modern perspective of quality of life. His main emphasis was on the quality of life.

Notes

1 *Young India*, 12.05.1920, p. 2.

2 *Speeches and Writings of Gandhi*, Appendix II, p. 40.

3 Mahadev Desai, *Gandhi in Indian Villages*, Madras, 1927, p. 171.

4 *Harijan*, 24.06.1939, p. 174.

5 *Young India*, 29.01.1925, p. 41.

6 *Harijan*, 30.12.1939, p. 391.

7 *Ibid*, 14.12.1947, p. 486.

8 *Ibid*, 27.05.1939, p. 143.

9 *Ibid*, 12.11.1938, p. 328.

10 *Gandhi's Correspondents with the Government*, p. 173.

11 *Harijan*, 11.12.1939, p. 6.

12 *Young India*, 12.06.1924, p. 195.

13 M.K. Gandhi, *Village Swaraj*, p. 3.

14 *Young India*, 26.03.1931, p. 46.

15 M.K. Gandhi, *Village Swaraj*, p. 5.

16 *Young India*, 19.03.1931, p. 38.

17 *Harijan*, 25.03.1939, p. 64.

18 *Young India*, 01.05.1930, p. 149.

19 M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swarj or Indian Home Rule*, p. 104.

20 *Ibid*.

21 *Young India*, 18.06.1931, p. 147.

22 *Harijan*, 29.09.1940.

23 *Young India*, 24.06.1926, p. 226.

24 *Young India*, 05.01.1922, p. 04.

25 *Harijan*, 11.02.1929, p. 8.

26 *Young India*, 29.02.1925, p. 41.

- ²⁷ *Harijan*, 26.07.1926, p. 238.
- ²⁸ *Harijan*, 18.01.1948, p.519
- ²⁹ *Harijan*, 04.08.1940p.240
- ³⁰ *Ibid*, 26. 07.1942, p. 238.
- ³¹ D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, The Publication Division, Vol. VI, 1962, p. 227.
- ³² *Ibid*, Vol. VII, 1962, p. 405.
- ³³ *Harijan*, 18.1.1948, p. 129.
- ³⁴ *Ibid*, 21.12.1947, p. 473.
- ³⁵ Jayaprakash Narayan, *Panchayat Raj as the Basis of Indian Polity*, p. 18.
- ³⁶ *Harijan*, 20-07-1946, p. 10.
- ³⁷ M.K. Gandhi, *Village Swaraj*, p. 31-32.

4.1 ECONOMIC EQUALITY

The real meaning of economic equality is, “to each according to his need.”¹ Gandhiji wrote, “My ideal is equal distribution, but so far as I can see, is not being realized: I therefore work for equitable distribution.”² Gandhiji has suggested certain measures to bring about economic equality by the re-distribution of wealth. “What do you mean by economic equality” Gandhiji was asked at the Constructive Workers Conference during his recent tour of Madras, “and what is statutory trusteeship as conceived by you?” Gandhiji’s reply was that “economic equality of his conception did not mean that every one would literally have the same amount. It simply meant that everybody should have enough to his or her needs...”³ Hence the poor man too was entitled to get all the ordinary amenities of life that a rich man enjoys.

Gandhiji considered that it is our bounden duty to serve the poor to bring about economic equality. He has laid special attention to the use of indigenous methods of production such as spinning wheel, cottage and village industries, the revival of handicrafts, decentralization and rehabilitation of the villages to bring about economic equality and well-being of the semi-starved millions of India. He has admitted that there

are inequalities existing in the society but also held that the essential equality has not to be overlooked. His idea of society was based on the view that “while we are born equal meaning that we have a right to equal opportunity, all have not the same capacity. It is in nature of things, impossible.”⁴

Sarvodaya as conceived by Gandhiji is an egalitarian socio-political and economic order with equality prevailing in every sphere of life. All are equal members of this ideal order and all sharing the produce of their labour. There is no scope for separation and exploitation of man by man. In the economic sphere Sarvodaya stands for equality of income and decentralization. Gandhiji pleaded for economic equality. It simply means that everybody should have enough to satisfy their basic needs namely dwelling place, food - at least a square meal a day and clothing - minimum Khadi to cover the body. By economic equality approximate but not absolute equality.

Gandhiji's concept of decentralization is not an isolated phenomenon but largely shaped by the whole range of issues and problems in human life. Gandhiji has devised concrete measures for the realization of an ideal socio-political order.

The constructive programme with its eighteen items, Nai Talim or basic education, decentralized governance, Village Swaraj and Panchayat Raj are significant mile stones in the evolution of a non-violent socio-political and economic order. There will be a non-violent economy in which the dignity of man and his labour will be given the highest consideration. He considers that country as the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings.

Gandhiji stood for the obliteration of differences in income between man and man as far as possible. In the economic sphere the nature and extent of production will be largely determined by social necessity rather than by any profit motive. The economic order Gandhiji envisaged, include within its scope along with economic equality, decentralization, swadeshi, trusteeship, stress on the rural industries - village and cottage industries with a view to transform the rural areas of our nation.

Since majority of the people of our country live in villages, the unit of development in Gandhian technique was the village itself. Gandhiji wrote, "Identifying himself with India's poor, he turned the thoughts of the nation to the needs

for rural millions for whom 'life was an eternal compulsory fast'. Who 'live because they cannot die at will'. Hence he visualized that, 'the development of the country lies in the development of the rural masses and rural areas'. This is because they are the backbone of the country."⁵ Even though not a true economist in the academic sense, Gandhiji can be considered as a true economist of the masses. Gandhiji has developed an economic theory fully based on the then prevailing situation in India. It provides a realistic approach with a warm human touch to problems of poverty, hunger and exploitation. Gandhiji builds up his economic ideas with a view to avoid exploitation of man by man. As a remedial measure, Gandhiji suggested to do away completely with the concentration of economic power by proposing economic decentralization.

In Gandhiji's economic system, the production is to be largely determined by social necessity rather than personal greed. The approach of Gandhiji towards the economic order is essentially constructive and evolutionary. He felt that economic equality provides the way to non-violent independence. For Gandhiji working for economic equality means abolishing the eternal conflict between capital and

labour. He was of the considered opinion that the inequalities existing in societies cannot be removed unless the rich and the poor work in unity and are conscious of their own duties and the rights naturally following there from. He felt that non-violence can play a great role in the establishment of economic equalities.

Gandhiji was not against private property but acquisition of wealth could be allowed only under certain moral conditions of the society based on the attainability of honesty for practical purposes. Inequalities of wealth, “unjustly established, have assuredly injured the nation in which they exist during their establishment, and, unjustly directed, injure it yet more during their existence. But inequalities of wealth, justly established, benefit the national in the course of their establishment; and nobody used, aid it yet more by their existence.”⁶ Unlike in modern capitalist economy Gandhiji has assigned labour superior to capital. Gandhiji was of the view that capital and labour should supplement each other. They are never antagonistic to each other rather living in unity and harmony. He wrote, “...capital not only looking to the material welfare of the labourers but their moral welfare also -

capitalist being trustees for the welfare of the labouring classes under them.”⁷

Gandhiji was aiming at fundamental equality between the capitalist and the labourer. Exploitation of the poor can be extinguished not by effecting the destruction of a few millionaires. But rather it amounts to their own destruction. What is ultimately needed is the conversion leading to both being considered as equal partners. Capital as such is not an evil. It is the wrong use of it that is evil. Gandhiji considers capital in some form or other as essential. Gandhiji recognized that there is no line of distinction between capital and labour. Gandhiji was not opposed to organization of labour but wanted that its organization should be structured along Indian lines. Further Gandhiji said that, “I am not opposed to organization of labour, but as in every thing else, I want its organization along Indian lines, or if you will, my lines, I am doing it. The Indian labourer knows it instinctively. I do not regard capital to be the enemy of labour. I hold their co-ordination to be perfectly possible. The organization of labour that I undertook in South Africa, Champaran or Ahmedabad was in no spirit of hostility to the capitalists. The resistance in each case and the extent it was thought necessary was wholly successful.”⁸ The

labourer has equally to realize that the labour is also capital and has its own strength and no amount of capital can ever subordinate it. Therefore Gandhiji thought that there is no need of any clash between capital and labour. Regarding the healthy relationship between capital and labour Gandhiji once wrote, "Each is dependent in the other. What is essential today is that the capitalist should not lord it over the labourer. In my opinion, the mill - hands are as much the proprietors of their mill as the share holders, and when the mill owners realize that the mill- hands are much mill- owners as they, there will be no quarrel between them."⁹ There is a conflict of interest between capital and labour which could be resolved by doing their own respective duty. Everything else will be added unto it. Gandhiji stood for the constructive use of labour and its power then, "they will become the real rulers and the employers will be their trustees and friends in need and deed. This happy state of things will come only when they know that labour is more real capital than the capital in the shape of gold and silver which labour extracts from the grounds of the earth."¹⁰

Gandhiji pleaded for the voluntary coming out of the rich people with their riches by laying in trust the excess wealth

for the benefit of the community. And if the rich people are not voluntarily coming out as trustees of the poor, the state has to intervene and that the ideal of state regulated trusteeship was found wanting. Gandhiji stated that, "Indeed at the root of this doctrine of equal distribution must lie that of the trusteeship of the wealthy for the superfluous wealth possessed by them... How is this brought about? Non-violently?... non-violent way is evidently superior. The rich man will be left in possession of his wealth, of which he will use what he reasonably requires for his personal needs and will act as a trustee for the remainder to be used for the society. In this argument, honesty on the part of trustee is assumed."¹¹ Gandhiji pleaded to establish healthy relation between the capitalist and the labourers.

According to Gandhiji, "Economic equality is the master key to non-violent independence. It means the levelling down of the rich in whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation's wealth on the one hand, and the levelling up of the semi-starved naked millions on the other."¹² A non-violent system of government is clearly an impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and poor persists. Gandhiji said, "I shall bring about economic equality through non-violence, by

converting the people to my point of view... I will not wait till I have converted the whole society to my view but will straight away make a beginning with myself... for that I have to reduce myself to the level of the poorest of the poor.”¹³

The real implication of equal distribution is that each man shall have the wherewithal to supply all his natural wants and no more. To bring about this ideal it is suggested that the entire social order has to be re-constructed. A society based on non-violence cannot have any other ideal. Gandhiji enquired very seriously how equal distribution can be brought about through non-violence. He said, “The first step towards it is for him who has made this ideal part of his being to bring about the necessary changes in his personal life. He would reduce his wants to a minimum, bearing in mind the poverty of India.”¹⁴ The ideal of Gandhiji - equal distribution cannot be realized. He therefore worked out for equitable distribution. What Gandhiji wanted was that “Everyone must have a balanced diet, a decent house to live in, facilities for the education of one’s children and adequate medical relief”.¹⁵

4.2 TRUSTEESHIP

Gandhiji evolved the idea of trusteeship from the concept of the economic vow of non-possession. Private property was not denied. But Gandhiji has fixed certain limits for private property. The owners of property were asked to act as trustees of the property for the benefit of the community. Trusteeship means that the possessor of wealth should consider himself as a trustee and use the wealth for the good of others. Elimination of exploitation of man by man and inequalities in income are the goals of trusteeship. The basic assumptions of the doctrine of trusteeship are, "trusteeship provides capitalist order of society in to an egalitarian one. It does not recognize any right of private-ownership of property except in as much as it may be permitted by the society. It does not exclude legislative regulation of the ownership and use of wealth. Thus under state-regulated trusteeship an individual will not be free to hold on use his wealth for selfish satisfaction of in disregard of the interests of society. Just as it is proposed to fix a decent minimum living wage, even so a limit should be fixed for the maximum income that could be allowed to any person in society. The difference between such minimum and maximum incomes should be reasonable and equitable and variable from time to time so much. So that the

tendency would be towards obliteration of the difference. Under the Gandhian economic order, the character of production will be determined by social necessity and not by personal whim or greed.”¹⁶

The concept of trusteeship was derived by Gandhiji from his legal studies in England, Snell’s Principle of Equity, Bhagvat Gita, Īśā Upanishad, Bible and Ruskin’s ‘Unto This Last’. The Īśā Upanishad particularly its first verse influenced him greatly.

“By the Lord (ĪŚĀ) enveloped must this all be –
Whatever moving thing there is in the moving world
With this renounced, thou mayest enjoy
Covet not the wealth of anyone at all.”¹⁷

[(know that) all this, whatever moves in this moving world, is enveloped by God. Therefore find your enjoyment in renunciation; do not covet what belongs to others]¹⁸

Of all the Upanishads, the Īśā Upanishad was a favourite Upanishad of Gandhiji and he has quoted its first verse more than once. According to Gandhiji the opening verse of the Īśā Upanishad ‘Īśā Vasyam Idam Sarvam’ gives the following teaching: (i) ‘All this that we see in this great universe is

pervaded by God', (ii) Renounce it and enjoy it', (iii) 'Enjoy what he gives you', (iv) 'Don't covet anybody's wealth or possession'. The last three teachings follow directly from the first. "If you believe", Gandhiji says, "that God pervades everything that he has created, you must believe that you cannot enjoy anything that is not given by Him (Enjoy what He gives you). And seeing that you cannot covet anybody's possession. (Don't covet anybody's wealth or possession). If you think that you are one of His numerous creatures, it behoves you to renounce everything and lay it His feet. (Renounce it and enjoy it). And that means that the act of renunciation of everything is not mere physical renunciation but represents a second or new birth. It is a deliberate act, not done in ignorance. It is therefore, regeneration. We are, thus, called to withdraw from the world's activities not in body but in mind. We have to renounce the sense of attachment.

The principle of non-stealing (asteya) and non-possession (aparigraha) which form two of the eleven vows in Gandhiji's system of ethics are clearly implied in the verse. But Gandhiji discovers other implications too. They are "(i) 'Universal brotherhood, not only brotherhood of all human

beings but all of the living being, (ii) 'The doctrine of equality of all creatures on earth, (iii) 'Service of fellow creatures'."19

Gandhiji thus finds in the first verse of the Īśā Upanishad not a statement of a metaphysical position - 'whatever moves in this moving world is enveloped by God' - but also some of the most important ethical principles: dedicated work, non-stealing and non-possession. Besides, it implies a complete philosophy of social life - fraternity, equality, and service to fellow beings.

The Upanishads, in the light of the aforesaid, have an immense impact on Gandhiji's mind. His belief in the unity of everything and every being, his conception of the Ultimate Reality, his ethical and moral principles, and even some of his social ideas can be traced to the Upanishadic teachings. The Upanishads thus form one of the most important foundations of Gandhiji's thought.

Gandhiji tried to apply this idea as a solution to the economic inequalities in society. Inequalities existing in the society cannot be removed unless the rich and the poor are morally conscious of their duties and realise their defects. An appeal to reason and love of humanity create an awareness

and an atmosphere for self-purification. Trusteeship means that all property originally belongs to the society and those who are possessing it are only the trustees of the society. Gandhiji was of the considered view that non-violence could play a pivotal role for establishing economic equality. Under the trusteeship theory, Gandhiji admitted limited property rights. Trusteeship theory does not recognize absolute right of private property. Acquisition of wealth is permitted and possible only under moral condition of the society based on the principle of honesty for all practical purposes.

Gandhiji held the view that labour is far superior to the capital. Gandhiji was not against the capitalist but against capitalism. He was not for the wholesale liquidation of the capitalist but of capitalism. He wanted to bring about a total transformation - a heart change in the capitalists. Gandhiji stood for their reformation through non-violent method. He wanted to affect a harmonious union between the capital and the labour. Gandhiji wrote, "By the non-violent method we seek not to destroy the capitalist, we seek to destroy capitalism. We invite the capitalist to regard himself as a trustee of his capital. Nor need the worker wait for his conversion. If capital is power, so is work. Either power can be

used distinctively or creatively. Either is dependent on the other. Immediately the worker realizes his strength, he is in a position to become a co-sharer with the capitalist instead of remaining his slave.”²⁰

Gandhiji’s idea of regulated trusteeship does not accept the right of private property hereditary or otherwise. He aimed at transforming the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one. Gandhiji held that a healthy relation between the capitalist and the labourer have to prevail and that the capitalist have to be the trustees for the welfare of the labourers working under them. The capital is meant for the moral and the material welfare of the labourers. Gandhiji said, “I am inviting those people who consider themselves as owners today to act as trustees, i.e., owners, not in their own right, but owners in the right of those whom they have exploited.”²¹

Gandhiji gave the concept of trusteeship the sanction of both philosophy and religion. He was deeply influenced by Ruskin’s *Unto This Last* and was of the view that by nature all human beings were equal and that there should not be any discrimination among individuals in respect of income,

consumption and other bare necessities of life. This made him a believer in man's capacity for goodness, altruism, moral consciousness, change of heart, love, etc. Further man can be happy only if they obey the moral law. Man should not run after greater and higher fortunes. Simple pleasure should be his objective instead. Freedom from want will usher in the Kingdom of God on Earth. Gandhiji in his theory of trusteeship has stated that, "my theory of trusteeship is no make-shift, certainly no camouflage. I am confident that it will survive all other theories. That the possessor of wealth has not acted in accordance with the spirit of the theory, it does not prove its falsity, but proves the weakness of the wealthy man. No other theory is compatible with non-violence. In the non-violent method the wrong-doer compasses his own end, if he does not undo the wrong. For, either through non-violent non-co-operation he is made to see the error, or he finds himself completely isolated."²²

Gandhiji, with the passage of time, has added an economic content to the purely moralistic conception of trusteeship. He has provided a simple and practical formula of trusteeship drawn up by Kishore Lal Mashruwala and Narahari

Parikh, approved by Gandhiji with few modifications. The basic assumptions of the doctrine are:

1. "Trusteeship provides a means of transforming the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one. It gives no quarter to capitalism, but gives the present owning class a chance of reforming itself. It is based on the faith that human nature is never beyond redemption.
2. It does not recognize any right of private ownership of property except so far as it may be permitted by society for its own welfare.
3. It does not exclude legislative regulation of the ownership and use of wealth.
4. Thus, under state-regulated trusteeship an individual will not be free to hold or use his wealth for selfish satisfaction or in disregard of the interests of society.
5. Just as it is proposed to fix a decent minimum living wage, even so a limit should be fixed for the maximum income that could be allowed to any person in society. The difference between such minimum and maximum incomes should be reasonable and equitable and variable

from time to time so much so that the tendency would be towards obliteration of the difference.

6. Under the Gandhian economic order, the character of production will be determined by social necessity and not by personal whim or greed.”²³

Gandhiji held that not only wealth but one’s physical strength, talents and intelligence must be utilized for the service of all. “I would allow a man of intellect to earn more; I would not cramp his talent. But the bulk of his great earnings must be used for the good of the state, just as the incomes of all earnings of sons of the father go to the common family fund. They would have then earnings only as trustees.”²⁴ The doctrine of trusteeship means the use of all one has, for the good of all. Trusteeship, as Gandhiji envisaged, does not exclude legislative regulation of the ownership and the use of wealth. According to Gandhiji, the transformation of the capitalists would not be left to the sweet will of the capitalists, pending necessary legislation if they proved impervious to the appeal of reason; the weapon of non-violent non-co-operation would be brought in to play. The theory of trusteeship was an integral part of Gandhiji’s scheme of the non-violent transformation of the society. But the theory of trusteeship

cannot become a reality without a thorough social awakening. It must also be pointed out that the absolute trusteeship is unattainable. Gandhiji himself said, "Only Jamnalalji came near, but only near it."²⁵ Gandhiji says that "Absolute trusteeship is an abstraction like Euclid's definition of a point and is equally unattainable. But if we strive for it, we shall be able to go further in realizing a state of equality on earth than by any other method."²⁶ He further said: "if only we could make people conscious of this power - the power of non-violent non-co-operation, the realization of the ideal of trusteeship would follow as surely as morning follows night".²⁷ Thus Gandhiji's theory of trusteeship stands for equitable distribution, economic equality, individual non-possession and also belief in the strength of people's non-violent direct action.

4.3 NON-VIOLENT RURAL ECONOMY

Another notable idea in respect of Gandhian economics was decentralized development. This, according to Gandhiji was possible only by beginning from the bottom upward. He favoured the establishment of self-sufficient, self-supporting village republic with the individual at its centre who is ready to perish for the village. Since the times immemorial, India has been a land of villages. In the vedic age village was the basic

unit of administration. Gandhiji, the founder not of any system of philosophy, but the continuator of a great tradition has opined that any programme of socio-economic development that bypasses rural people is bound to be a failure. It has been aptly remarked that, "Rural development is a part of a larger process of development of national society. It is legitimate that it contribute to the over all goals of national development, growth, employment, equity, development of industries and services for self-reliance in defence, environmental conservation and so on."²⁸

Gandhiji was very particular that village life should not become a copy of city life. Rather the cities have to adopt the village life. Gandhiji found in the villages the treasure of an age old culture and civilization. Gandhiji said, "It is only when the cities realized the duty of making an adequate return to the villages for the strength and sustenance which they derived from them instead of selfishly exploiting them that a healthy and moral relationship between the two will spring up. And if the city children are to play their part in this great and noble work of social reconstruction, the vocation through which they are to receive their education ought to be directly related to the requirements of the villages."²⁹

Thus in Gandhiji's picture of independent India the unit is the village. The emancipation of India lie in the reconstruction not of the towns but of her innumerable villages. Gandhiji has devised the twenty point constructive pogramme for the development of the village areas and its people. Gandhiji said, "he who has no belief in the constructive programme that has, in my opinion, no concrete feelings for the starved millions... In actual practice the expansion of my non-violence has kept pace with that of my identification with starved humanity."³⁰ Gandhiji has stated in the Harijan, "you have therefore to be rural- minded before can be non-violent and to be rural-minded you have to have faith in the spinning wheel."³¹ Hence Gandhiji has warned us to return to the village, return to a life of simplicity, serenity, innocence and purity.

Gandhiji's economic ideas such as swadeshi, decentralization, trusteeship along with the twenty point constructive programme were the most effective means to rebuild the nation from the bottom upwards. It is the bounden duty of every educated Indian to go back to the village and undertake compulsory community service to build up a new India - the India of Gandhiji's dream.

Gandhiji was very well aware of the deplorable condition of the Indian villages. He has described the Indian villages as “a collection of unsanitary dwelling constructed in a dunghill.”³² Gandhiji has gone to the extent of declaring that ‘if the villages perish India too will perish to that extent.’ Gandhiji has worked for the reformation of the Indian villages for the majority of the Indian population live in villages. He has a dream of an ideal village and has prescribed the following conditions for its establishment. The conditions include: “there should be orderliness in the structure of village, the lanes and road, should be orderly and must be kept absolutely clean so that nobody need hesitate to walk or even sleep in the street, the lanes should be macadamized and have gutters for draining off water, temples and mosques must be kept beautifully clean. So that visitors feel an air of tranquil holiness about them, the villages should be filled with shade and fruit trees, they should have Dharmasala and a small dispensary, washing and privy arrangements should be such as not to contaminate the air, water and roads of the village, every village should be self-sufficient so far as its food and clothing requirements are concerned, every village should be capable of defending itself from robbers or wild animals, it

should have recreation facilities and a play ground for adults and children and a reserve for its cattle, if space is left over, the village should maintain a village theatre, school, public hall, it should have its own water works, ensuring a clean water supply, education should be made compulsory up to the final basic course, caste, with its graded untouchability should be practiced, as far as possible, all activities should be conducted on a co-operative basis, Non-violence with its technique of Satyagraha and Non-Cooperation should be the sanction of the village community, there should be a compulsory service of village guards, to be selected by rotation from the register maintained by the village, the government of the village should be conducted by a panchayat of five persons, annually elected by adult villages possessing minimum qualification, since there should be no system of punishment in the accepted sense of the term, the village panchayat would be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined, two panchayats should jointly elect one leader and they should form a working party. Fifty such working parties should elect a second grade leader. Parallel groups of two hundred panchayats should continue to be formed till they cover the whole of India, each succeeding

group of panchayats electing a second grade leader. All second grade leaders should jointly serve the whole of India and severally for their respective areas. The second grade leaders might elect a chief when ever they deem necessary, to regulate and command all the groups.”³³

Gandhiji visualized a decentralized non-violent agrarian economy for the progress and development of the rural areas. In Gandhiji’s village based economy, industry has to be small-scale and traditional based mainly on agriculture and indigenous technology which alone can guarantee human dignity. He became a severe critic of industrialization and technology for it enslaves man. On the contrary, he stood for the economic regeneration of India through decentralization. Gandhiji was of the opinion that India could lead an ennobled life by developing cottage and village industries. Gandhiji wrote, “If I can convert the country to my point of view, the social order of the future will be based predominantly on the charka and all that implies. It will include every thing that promotes the well- being of the villagers.”³⁴

4.4 CRITIQUE OF INDUSTRIALIZATION, TECHNOLOGY AND MECHANIZATION

Gandhiji visualized a decentralized economic order in favour of decentralized development of the country. Decentralization in the economic field assigns priority to small and cottage industries. Gandhiji preferred production by the masses rather than mass production. The development based on labour saving machines lead to mass production and distribution in a centralized way. It paved the way for the wide gulf between the haves and have nots. It also helped in the extensive use of machines which in turn resulted in displacing large number of people without job. Gandhiji had an altogether different idea on this matter. He was of the opinion that, "the problem with us is now how to find leisure for the toiling millions inhabiting in our villages but the problem is how to utilize their idle hours which are equal to the working days of six months in a year. It has been rightly pointed out that it is only when there is decentralization of the production of basic needs of people and limited reliance on centralized industry that all other postulates of Gandhian economic order can function."³⁵

Gandhiji had drawn up the eighteen items constructive programme for the reconstruction of the villages. Indian planners totally ignored the need for the evolving any special approach to the problem of rural development. Progress and development have not reached the remote villages and the weaker sections of the society. The villages were denied of the basic necessities of life, like drinking water facilities, education, medical and health services and communication. In order to improve this situation a totally different approach to rural development is needed.

Gandhian strategy for rural development includes the development of village and cottage industries, development of agriculture, improvement of rural health, education, sanitation, betterment of Harijans and democratic decentralization at all levels. He laid special attention to the use of indigenous methods of production for bringing about economic equality. He also stood for village self-sufficiency which originated from the idea of non-exploitation. He became a critique of capitalist method of production. He tried to evolve a production system which altogether eliminates exploitative mechanism. Gandhiji advocated the principle of Swadeshi with its emphasis on indigenization of both production and distribution.

Gandhiji stood for the moralization and humanization of economics. The criteria he adopted to measure progress were moral values and real happiness. Real progress does not lie in the material progress. The industrial civilization is a disease as it is all evil. Gandhiji was a severe critic of modern scientific and technological civilization developed by the west. He even called it a "Satanic civilization."³⁶ His main objection against it is that it is concerned only with material advancement and prosperity. It totally ignores the moral and spiritual aspects of human life. In Hind Swaraj Gandhiji characterized modern civilization as a "disease" and "a nine days wonder" for it "takes not neither of morality nor of religion."³⁷

Like Thoreau Gandhiji believes that this push-bottom civilization reduces man to a mere soulless automation. The modern civilization has reduced man to a mere cog atrophying his limbs. What Gandhiji wanted was that, "whilst this machine age aims at converting men into machines, I am aiming at reinstalling man turned machine into his original estate."³⁸ Modern civilization certainly provides us with many comforts and amenities, but they cannot be regarded as the index of a true civilization. In true civilization the basis of human relationship is morality and selfless love. Simplicity is the essence of true civilization. Civilization, as conceived by

Gandhiji is a way of life, a mode of conduct. It is, as he says, “that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty.”³⁹ The Gujarathi equivalent to civilization is “good conduct.”

Gandhiji was not totally opposed to machinery as such. He was of the considered view that machinery has to promote the human welfare. He was all in for the utilization of the capacity of the nation which was going waste. He has categorically stated that, “Machinery has its place; it has come to stay. But it must not be allowed to displace human labour.”⁴⁰ Further he opined, “How can I be against machinery when I know that even this body is the most delicate machine.”^{41, 42} Gandhiji was ready to rule out all machinery just as he could reject this very body which is a hindrance to higher levels of realizations of the self’s identity with the Universal Self and the absolute liberation of the soul. But machines will remain like the bodies and therefore are found inevitable. “The body itself is the purest piece of mechanism, but if it is a hindrance to the highest flights of the soul, it has to be rejected.”⁴³

While making a reference to the evils of machinery, Gandhiji stated that, “machinery is like a snake-hole which may contain from one to hundred snakes. Where there is

machinery, there are large cities; where there are large cities, there are tram-cars and railways. And there only does one see electric light. Honest physician will tell you that where means of artificial locomotion have increased, the health of the people has suffered. I remember that when in a European town there was scarcity of money, the receipts of the tramway company, of the lawyers and of the doctors went down, and the people were less unhealthy. I cannot recall a single good point in connection with machinery."⁴⁴

But Gandhiji was all in favour of every machine that reduces the burden of the cottage worker. "My machinery must be of the most elementary type which I can put in the home of the millions. He was for the limited use of machinery especially when machinery begin to encroach upon his individuality. The more of machinery the less of non-violence. it is only when machinery has been put into its proper place then only we can think of non-violence."⁴⁵ Gandhiji further maintained that, "There should be ample scope for decentralization of industry, and economic and social power, under the non-violent pattern of economic planning."⁴⁶ Gandhiji described that, "The fullest initiative must lie in the hands of the rural communities that they experience freedom through self-help and self-reliance."⁴⁷

Machinery has to be chosen in accordance with need. Further it has to be non-exploitative and it has to benefit every human being along decentralized ways. There should evolve a non-violent technology, that is technology with a human face which alone could benefit life as a whole. The balance between 'man' and 'machine' is found wanting for permanent results. Gandhiji preferred appropriate technology for the rural sector to match with raw materials, social needs, and people's skill to meet the actual situation instead of indiscriminate use of technology from the west. Gandhiji wrote, "When production and consumption both become localized, the temptation to speed up production, indefinitely and at any price, disappears. All the endless difficulties and problems that our present-day economic system presents, too, would then come to an end."⁴⁸

Gandhiji believed that some key industries are necessary but they have to be state owned so as to benefit not the few but all. Gandhiji stated that, "what is the cause of the present chaos? It is exploitation, I will not say of the weaker nations by the stronger, but of sister nations by sister nations. And my fundamental objection to machinery rests on the fact that it is machinery that has enabled these nations to exploit others."⁴⁹

In the modern times the revival of the rural industries is much sought after obvious reasons. It is non-exploitative and therefore essentially non-violent. Production by the masses rather than mass production is its desired goal. Gandhiji pleads for going back to the rural agricultural civilization. The rude plough is the symbol of true civilization wherein lies the salvation of the husbandman. A life at peace with itself, a life of serenity and calm, is better than the life of a modern man in relentless pursuit of these materials.

From these criticisms of modern civilization we should not come to the conclusion that Gandhiji is totally opposed to it. Gandhiji was opposed only to the 'craze' for machinery which enslaves man and not for machinery as such. Decentralization was one of the means to create an unexploited and egalitarian society. Decentralization in the economic sphere is related to rural economy as a whole. Khadi, village industries and Swadeshi stood for decentralization of production and utilization of locally available resources. Gandhiji was practical in realizing that machinery cannot be discarded totally. His aim was not the eradication of all machinery but its limited use. He stood for the most elementary type of machinery which can be installed in the homes of the millions without much expense. He

objected the use of machinery as an instrument for the satisfaction of man's greed and not his need.

4.5 APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY

The Gandhian concept of decentralization is reflected in his views on production and distribution. He favoured participative growth with social justice to benefit the masses. Gandhiji favoured an appropriate or middle technology. According to Gandhiji, appropriate technology should be used for production. It is the method of production that offers the maximum satisfaction of human needs. Further he stated that it should not lead to violence and exploitation. It should not inflict pain to body, mind or soul.

Gandhiji's economics emphasized the development of self-reliant economy. Self-reliance means independence. That is every village must be capable of satisfying the basic needs of its people without depending on external sources. It should rely on the use of indigenous resources and technology to the maximum without importing the technology of the west. That is we have to think in terms of reviving old technology or inventing a new one, or improving the traditional indigenous technology. Gandhiji preferred intermediate technology i.e., a

technology between the advanced and the backward. It was observed that, “intermediate technology would be vastly superior in productivity to their traditional technology while at the same time being vastly cheaper and simpler than the highly sophisticated and capital intensive technology of the west.

Gandhiji concedes that there are certain sectors and localities in every developing country which are irrevocably committed to the western technology, but, for the rest of the economy he suggested a technology that has to fulfill four requirements (i) the work place have to be created in areas where the people are living now; (ii) their work place must be, on the average, cheap enough so that they can be created in large numbers without making undue demands on savings and imports, (iii) the production method employed must be relatively simple so that the demands of high skills are minimized, not only in the production process itself but also in the matters of organization, raw material supply, financing, marketing, and so forth, and (iv) production should be largely for local use.”⁵⁰

Another major objective of Gandhiji's economics was the attainment of self-sufficiency at the village level itself. That is every village has to be self-sustained and self-sufficient, capable of managing its own affairs even to the extent of defending itself against foreign invasion. Development of a particular area can be achieved by the people of that area. Development without people's participation is no development. The appropriate technology helps in meeting the local needs more effectively than any other mode of production and distribution.

The notable characteristics of appropriate technology include:

1. Low capital investment.
2. Usage of materials whenever possible.
3. Creates jobs, employing local skills and labour
4. Small enough to be affordable to a small group.
5. Can be understood, controlled and maintained by villagers.
6. Can be produced in the village itself.
7. People work together collectively to improve their community.
8. Involves decentralized, renewable energy sources such as wind energy, solar energy, hydro power, methane gas, animal and manual labour.
9. Makes technology accessible to the people for further innovations.
10. Flexible so that they can be adapted to the changing circumstances.

11. Do not involve patents, royalties, consulting fees, import duties, shipping charges and financial obligations.

The concept of appropriate technology plays a crucial role in Gandhiji's non-violent and decentralized economy model wherein the people are of supreme consideration with ample scope for the development of their skills. The technology must fit the prevalent culture and not vice-versa.

4.6 AGRARIAN CIVILIZATION

Gandhiji's main objective was to rebuild India from below upwards. With this end in view he aimed at the creation of an egalitarian socio-political and economic order together with the ideals of simplicity and minimizing of wants. He has assigned supreme consideration to man and higher values of life than material or physical comforts. He preferred decentralized non-violent rural economy based on cottage and village industries. He stood for the revival of village or rural industries especially Charka and all that it implies - namely it includes everything that promotes the well-being of the villagers. The revival of rural industries strengthens the development of rural economy which in turn contributes to the development of agriculture. "Industrialization on a mass scale

will necessarily lead to passive or active exploitation of the villagers as the problems of competition and marketing come in. Therefore, we have to concentrate on the village being self-contained, manufacturing mainly for use.”⁵¹

Gandhiji has formulated his famous ‘Constructive Programme’ for the economic relief of the villagers. Gandhiji’s emphasis on village industries largely help the villages to develop the spirit of self-reliance. Gandhiji himself like a farmer completely identified himself with wishes and aspirations of the starving millions of India. Gandhiji was a supporter of thorough agrarianism and wanted India to develop as an agricultural nation. For he thought that emancipation of India could never be brought about by the reform of the few towns and cities. Rural rehabilitation was an essential pre-requisite for raising the standard of lives of the people. Hence, Gandhiji turned his attention to the villages rather than the few cities.

According to Gandhiji India lives in her villages. Gandhiji wrote, “Under my scheme nothing will be allowed to be produced by cities which can be equally well produced by the villages. The proper function of cities is to serve as clearing

houses for village products.”⁵².Gandhiji was of the definite opinion that non-violence could not be realized in a factory civilization but on that of self-contained villages. Hence his slogan was - ‘back to the village’. Economic centralization leads to political centralization. Centralization, in any field, support violence hence democratic decentralization in order to be a reality it was essential to promote self-sufficient small scale economy of the villages.

Towards the later part of his life, Gandhiji became more radical in his ideas regarding ownership of land. He advocated the revolutionary doctrine that ‘land belongs to him who tills it’ Gandhiji wrote, “Real socialism has been handed down to us by our ancestors who taught ‘all land belongs to’ Gopala, where then is the boundary line? Man is the maker of that, and he can therefore unmake it”⁵³ In a speech at the Federal Structure Committee of the Second Round Table Conference, in 1931, Gandhiji had said, “There is no desire on the part of the Congress, and there is no desire on the part of these dump paupers to disposses landlords of their possession, but they would have landlords to act as trustees for the tenants.”⁵⁴ Further he said that “I would unhesitatingly advice tenants to evacuation the land belonging to a tyrant. That

would be like giving your cloak also when only the court is demanded. To take what is required may be profitable, to have more given to you is highly likely to be burden. To overload stomach is to court slow death. A Zamindar wants his rent, he does not want his land it would be a burden on him when he does not want it.”⁵⁵

Notes

- 1 *Harijan*, 31.03.1946, p. 63.
- 2 *Young India*, 17.03.1927, p. 86.
- 3 *Harijan*, 31.03.1946, p. 63.
- 4 *Young India*, 26.03.1931, p. 49.
- 5 *Journal of the Gandhian studies*, Vol. VII, 1980, p. 188.
- 6 John Ruskin, *Unto the Last*, p. 3.
- 7 *Young India*, 20.08.1925, p. 285.
- 8 *Ibid*, 17.03.1927, p. 86.
- 9 *Ibid*, 04.08.1927, p. 248
- 10 *Amrit Bazar Pathrika*, 03-08-1934.
- 11 *Harijan*, 25.08.1940, p. 260.
- 12 M.K. Gandhi, *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place*, 1941, pp. 20-21.
- 13 *Harijan*, 31.03.1946, p. 64.
- 14 *Ibid*, 25.08.1940, p. 260.
- 15 *Ibid*, 31.03.1946, p. 63.
- 16 *Ibid*, 25.10.1952, p. 301.
- 17 *The 13 Principal Upanishads* - Translated from the Sanskrit by Robert Earnest Hume, Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 362.
- 18 S. Radhakrishnan, *Īśā Upanishad I, The principal Upanishads*, London: George Allen and Ltd., 1953, p. 567.
- 19 *Ibid*.
- 20 *Young India*, 26.03.1931, p. 49.
- 21 *Ibid*, 26.11.1931, p. 369.
- 22 *Harijan*, 16.12.1939, p. 376.
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- 48 *Young India*, 22.10.1931, p.38.
- 49 E.F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful*, p. 140
- 50 *Harijan*, 28.09.1946, p.226.
- 51 *Ibid*, 28.01.1939.

52 *Ibid*, 16.05.1936.

53 *Ibid*, 31.03.1946.

54 *Young India*, 08.10.1931, p.128.

55 M.K.Gandhi, *Sathyagraha*, p.325,

5.1 PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

Gandhiji has stated more than once that man is one of supreme consideration. The individual, Gandhiji considered never as a means to an end but an end in himself and cannot therefore be treated subordinate to any institution howsoever powerful it may be. Gandhiji was of the view that it has his love of the human person which compelled him to enter into public life. The often quoted statements "Hate the sin and not the sinner."¹ "Man is superior to the system he propounds"² testifies Gandhiji's faith in human species. And his conviction that perfectibility of human nature is a possibility. Further, he has added that man is divine by nature. Gandhiji said, "We all are sparks of Truth. The sum total of these sparks is indescribable, as yet unknown Truth, which is God."³ He often spoke of man as the part of God and as an incarnation of God. In Gandhiji's words, "I believe in absolute oneness of God and therefore also of humanity. What though we have many bodies? We have but one soul."⁴

Gandhiji was not an abstract theoriser who sits down and write an elaborate treatise on extreme individualism or socialism. He has always taken a middle position according to which perfection of the individual is closely related with social

perfection, where society must provide opportunities for the full development of his personality. Life, Gandhiji viewed as a unity which cannot be compartmentalized but they act and react upon one another. The individual is not isolated being but an integral part of society. His ideal of spiritual unity, equality of mankind and the ideal of common good and belief in the perfectibility of human nature along with an ethical orientation so as to order individual life in unquestioning obedience to certain fundamental moral principles are the offshoots of his ethico-religious faith and convictions. He has strictly adhered to the observance of morality in personal, societal, national and international life and relations, the failure to do so lead to the 'seven social sins' namely -politics without principle, wealth without work, commerce without morality, knowledge without character, pleasure without conscience, science without humanity and worship without sacrifice.

Another notable idea is the conception of human freedom. Gandhiji's own life was a struggle for freedom both individual and social. In the individual realm, he longed for spiritual freedom. Spiritual and political freedom is not antithetical to each other. Political freedom reflects spiritual

and moral freedom. Political freedom is the expression of the moral level of the individual. But the individual counts much more than the institution he has invented. "The individual alone is real, the society and state have little meaning apart from the individual."⁵ But political freedom or independence is not isolated existence but inter-dependence. He said: "my mission is not merely brotherhood of Indian humanity. My mission is not merely freedom of India. But through realization of freedom of India, I hope realize and carry on the mission of the brotherhood of man."⁶

Gandhiji's ethico-religious outlook was the backbone of his entire message - with the individual at its centre. He has devised a man-centred and action-oriented programme for the upliftment and happiness of the masses. His ideas on Swaraj, non-violent state and decentralization at all levels - social, political and economic were significant milestones in the evolution of a non-violent democratic order in which people are the sovereign. Gandhiji's very entry into politics was to revolutionize it. Instead of the coercive institution of the state authority, he pleaded for the establishment of the non-violent state. In politics, his motto was service to humanity. Gandhiji wrote, "My passion for the service of the suppressed classes

and as I cannot render this service without entering into politics. I find myself in them.”⁷ Thus to Gandhiji, politics is not a stepping stone to attainment of power. It is rather an instrument or means to fight against evils of the suffering humanity. He was totally against centralization of state power. Instead it has to be shared among the people. That is people will have an effective voice in the administration of the village. Ordinarily the system is above the individual and hence acts against their freedom and equality. It has been Gandhiji’s main objective in independent India that developmental and administrative powers should be decentralized from the central authority to the state authority and from the state to the lower levels. The goal of decentralization below the state level has received new impetus after the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments - to make the poor the focal point of planning and development. Any development without people’s participation is no development at all. The government of Kerala initiated the People Campaign in July 1996 which was in fact a re-affirmation of the Gandhian concept of Grama Swaraj so as to ensure greater participation of the people. Gandhiji observed, “I look upon an increase in the power of the state with the greatest fear, because

although while apparently doing good by minimizing exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality which lies at the root of all progress.”⁸

In the economic sphere Gandhiji stood for the moralization and the humanization of the methods of production and distribution. He was against the centralized production and advocated decentralized production. He was against the concentration of the means of the production in the hands of a few rich. Likewise the labour class too should have an effective role in the administration and management of the factory. Instead of the capitalist system of production and distribution, he preferred a non-violent decentralized economic order with emphasis on rural civilization in which there will be no exploitation of one man by another. The prosperity of a nation mainly depends upon its human being. Gandhiji preached economic programmes for the best utilization of manpower. According to him, “to live man must work”.⁹ The ideal of bread labour means that every man has to labour with his body for his food and clothing. His view that the nature and extent of production has to be determined by social necessity rather than profit motive has far reaching consequences. His concept of Khadi, Swadeshi, Bread labour,

small scale and cottage industries enhance the significance of his love of the human race for no one should suffer from want of food and clothing. The basic factor of Gandhiji's economics is that man must eat. Throughout his public life Gandhiji strove hard to free his countrymen from degradation of poverty. S. Radhakrishnan describes Gandhiji as "the representative of the peasant".¹⁰ Jawaharlal picturised Gandhi as "he does represent the peasant masses of India... he is the greatest peasant, with peasant masses of India... he is the greatest peasant, with the peasant's outlook on affairs, and with a peasant's blindness to some aspects of life. But India is peasant India, and so he knows his India well..."¹¹

Gandhi's development philosophy centres round man, society and their development. His philosophy was governed by the two fundamental and inter-related principles - truth and non-violence. In essence the development philosophy centre around the five co-related concepts namely, man as the end of development, man should feel at home with the process of development in which he is both the subject as well as the object, development of collective personality of man in which man finds its fullest expression, participation as the true of democracy and finally self-reliance as the expression of

man's faith in his own abilities. Gandhiji believed that instead of man exploiting the society and both exploiting nature there should be a way of life which is in harmony with each other. In Gandhi's scheme of development, man is at the centre. The objective is the moral and spiritual development of man.

Gandhiji dreamt of building a society with the active participation of people. By development, Gandhiji does not mean merely as the gross national product to improve the economic condition of the people. Gandhiji aimed at rebuilding an India in which the poorest shall have an effective voice and also an India in which all communities will live in perfect harmony. Development which concentrate on relieving absolute poverty or on meeting basic needs can be adopted as a matter of first priority. Development should be understood as a process designed to create conditions in which every person can exercise and utilize under rule of law all his human rights. Every person has the right to participate and benefit from the development in the sense of progressive improvement in the standards and quality of life. Development without people's participation is not true development. True development is only the outcome of the proper utilization of the political will obtained by consumers.

In most cases people are far removed both from policy making and its implementation.

People's participation is an essential ingredient and a necessary precondition for the successful implementation of any project or programme. Participation is a means of reducing power difference and its points to the affirmation of equalization and social justice. Decentralization does not increase participation if the government retains the power of decision. Gandhi's devisal of Panchayati Raj and the Constructive Programme are steps towards the realization of participatory democracy. The Panchayat system was evolved with a view to ensure speedy justice to all and providing protection and education to all. Gandhiji was very much concerned about centralization of power and said that an increase in the power of the state although apparently doing good by minimizing exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality which lies at the roof of all progress. The real power of the village administration lies in the people's support. The panchayat should therefore follow their 'soul force' and act under their control. But the people must be aware of the 'soul force' and on their own strength

and their capacity to regulate the power of the state when it goes astray.

Gandhiji stood for democratizing every aspect of life wherein the liberty of the individual, freedom of opinion and action are protected. In democracy, government by all the people implies arriving at unanimous decision following the opinion of the majority. The will of the majority does not represent the will of the people. Gandhiji held the view that in the matters of conscience the law of majority has no place. Gandhiji was a critic of the majority system in democracy and insisted that the opinion of the minority too has to be taken into consideration. Gandhiji said, "the rule of majority when it comes coercive, is as intolerable as that of a bureaucratic minority. We must patiently try to bring round the minority to our view by gentle persuasion and argument."¹² The tyranny of the majority must come to an end for democracy in order to represent the government of the entire community should not resort to intolerance and violence. Gandhi categorically stated that, "True democracy is not inconsistent, with a few persons representing the spirit, the hope and the aspiration of those whom they claim to represent. I hold that democracy cannot be evolved by forcible methods. The spirit of democracy

cannot be imposed from without. It has to come from within.”¹³

To Gandhiji, real democracy should have meaning not for a few but for all including the poorest. Gandhiji – the man of the masses was a leader of his people unsupported by any political authority or power whose success was based simply upon the moral power of his soul. Gandhiji observed, “we must first come in touch-with them by working – with them and in their midst, we must share their sorrows, understand their difficulties and anticipate their wants. With the pariahs we must be pariahs and see how we feel to clean the closets of the upper classes and have the remains of theirs to be thrown at us. We must see how we like being in the boxes, miscalled houses, of the labourers of Mumbai. We must identify with the villagers who toil under the hot sun beating on their bent back and see how we would like to drink water from the pool in which the villagers bathe, wash, their clothes and pots, and in which their cattle drink and roll. Then and not till then shall we truly represent the masses and they will, as surely as I am writing this, respond to every call.”¹⁴

Gandhiji's developmental scheme placed people's at the centre so as to ensure full participation of the people to develop their capacities to resist authority when it is abused. Gandhiji stated that, "My ideal village contain intelligent human beings. They will be free and able to hold on their own against anyone in the world."¹⁵

5.2 CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAMME

Mahatma Gandhi - the greatest democrat the world has ever seen was a moral beacon for generations to come. The path of democracy and spiritualism has at its core in the Constructive Work Programme which was one of the dual programmes of the Satyagraha envisaged by Gandhiji, the other being Civil Disobedience - positive and negative or agitational and constructive. The agitation part include Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience, Fast, Hartal, Picketing and other forms of mass non-violent resistance. Satyagraha consists in avoidance of violence in thought, word and deed. Violence is used not to convert the opponent but to injure or destroy him. Satyagraha is not merely resistance to evil but non-violent resistance to evil. It is non-violent direct action. It consists of an active and dynamic resistance to both social

and political evils. Constructive programme is also a form of Satyagraha, as revolutionary as the agitational method.

Gandhiji's entire philosophy can be summed up in three words - Sarvodaya, Satyagraha, and Anasakti. Sarvodaya embraces the eighteen point Constructive Programme both as a concept and definite plan of action to uplift the villages. In the conceptual level, it emphasizes the inter-dependence of the individual and society in their different facets. As a plan of action, it stands for the co-ordinated activity of many aspects of life in strict adherence to truth, non-violence and love. It promotes Sarvodaya - the welfare of all.

Constructive Programme is an integral part of non-violence. Constructive Programme was designed by Gandhiji as the basis of the training of non-violence to the brave. He emphasised cultivating non-violence in thought, word and deed, maximum of work with minimum of speech, spinning as the centre of the programme, programme of literacy, prohibition of drink and intoxicating drugs, medical relief, by simple rules of hygiene, sanitation and elementary preventive measures. He also advised to render selfless service and launched the mass-Constructive Programme. Gandhiji said, "this is the mass constructive programme I want you to do,

and that is the basis of the training of the non-violence for the brave. It is the whole and indivisible and those who do not believe in it whole heartedly must leave me and work according to their own lights.”¹⁶ It is a means of establishing contact with the people. Constructive Programme yields its concrete results for the people. Gandhi regarded constructive work as a indispensable tool for training in the art and science of Satyagraha. The Satyagrahi comes close to the people.

The eighteen items which Gandhiji included in the programme were indispensable for the emancipation of the nation through non-violence. Gandhiji’s small booklet titled ‘Constructive Programme: It’s meaning and place’, which he wrote on the train from Sevagram to Bardoli wherein he had listed the following original thirteen items in the year 1941; namely

1. Communal Unity
2. Removal of Untouchability
3. Prohibition
4. Khadi
5. Village Industries
6. Village Sanitation

7. Nai Talim or Basic Education
8. Adult Education
9. Upliftment of Women
10. Education in Health and Hygiene
11. Provincial Languages
12. National Language
13. Promotion of Economic Equality

In 1945, Gandhiji added five more items;

1. Kissans
2. Labour
3. Adivasis
4. Lepers
5. Students

After Gandhiji's death, his followers added the following items to strengthen the movement;

1. Cow Protection
2. Nature Cure
3. Bhoodan
4. Gramdan
5. Shantisena

Gandhiji introduced a number of programmes covering the social, political, educational, economic and cultural aspects of man's life with a programme of total transformation of society. The Constructive Programme provides ample scope for the emergence of a new socio-political and economic order devoid of the exercise of the authority of the state which represents violence in a concentrated form. Through this programme Gandhiji dreamt of building up a non-authoritarian, non-exploitative, society. The state action has coercive power whereas constructive programme has voluntary basis. The more of the state action, the less of non-violence, democracy and satyagraha. There is no compulsion exercised in Satyagraha and Constructive Programme. The Constructive Programme gives us an elaborate blue print of social action comprising of Sarvadharm Samabhavana (equal respect for all religions), the craft based, skill oriented, value creating Nai Talim (new education), the trusteeship concept, decentralized planning, local self-government, village self sufficiency all of which were an all-embracing frame work of the non-violent revolution aimed at a new social order.

The future of India is inseparably connected with the future of villages. In order to translate Gandhiji's programme

of action, in every village there should be a body of voluntary workers engaged in selfless constructive work to achieve social moral and economic freedom. It should be organized along democratic lines from below upwards. The Panchayat Raj institutions play a vital role in the constructive work and service. Gandhiji attached greatest importance to the economic item particularly the Spinning wheel and Khadi. He considered economic problem in terms of morality and human welfare. His economic outlook is founded on the ideals of non-possession, bread labour and Swadeshi. Constructive work also served as an preparation and training for participation in non-violent action. By doing constructive work the non-violent volunteer would become trained and disciplined.

Gandhiji launched a movement of Constructive Programme for economic betterment and for improving social life. He also formed All India Village Industries Association primarily meant for the revival of cottage industries and better rural life. The movement began with emphasis of Khadi and later became the Charka movement. The Charka movement tied workers to village life. Gandhiji give utmost important to Khadi in his programme of economic building. He felt that the growing problem of unemployment could be solved by

establishing small scale industries. Gandhiji wrote “this introduction of village industries as the media of instruction will have far - reaching educational, cultural and economic consequences. It will dispel the distaste and contempt for physical labour - an evil which has penetrated deep into the present system of education.”¹⁷

Gandhiji stood for the revival of the Indian village communities through the revival of village industries, especially Khadi. Gandhiji’s advocacy of the universalisation of Khadi is the expression of the Swadhesi spirit. Khadi was the symbol of Swadhesi and Gandhiji pleaded for complete or cent percent Swadhesi. Khadi alone teach us the village population to be self-dependent. Through the universalisation of hand-spinning Gandhiji’s aim was to taught the village people the dignity of labour. It also brought unity between the masses. At the same time Khadi is an attempt to revive the economy restricting primarily to the needs of the village which lead Gandhiji to establish the Khadi movement. He said, “Khadi is the only economic proposition in terms of the millions of the villages until such time if ever, when a better system of supplying work and adequate wages for every able bodied person above the age of sixteen, male or female is found for

his field, cottage or even factory in every one of the villages in India; or till sufficient cities are built up to displace the villages so as to give the villagers the necessary comforts and amenities that a well regulated life demands and is entitled to.”¹⁸

Gandhiji was convinced that the revival of hand spinning and hand weaving would largely contribute to the economic and the moral regeneration of the nation. Gandhi envisaged several advantages of the spinning wheel.

1. “It supplies the readiest occupation to those who have leisure and are in want of a few coppers.
2. It is known to the thousands
3. It is easily learnt
4. It requires practically no outlay of capital
5. The wheel can be easily and cheaply made. Most of us do not yet know that the spinning can be done even with a piece of tile and splinter.
6. The people have no repugnance to it.
7. It affords immediate relief in times of famine and scarcity.

8. It alone can stop the drain of wealth which goes outside India in the purchase of foreign cloth.
9. It automatically distributes the millions thus saved among the deserving poor.
10. Even the smallest success means so much immediate gain to the people.
11. It is the most potent instrument of securing co-operation among the people.”¹⁹

Khadi industry serves as a supplement to agriculture. Spinning and cottage industries served the millions from starvation. The spinning wheel represents the hope of the masses. The economics of Khadi rests on the human element. Gandhiji said, “Khadi to me is the symbol of unity of Indian Humanity of its economic freedom and equality and therefore ‘the livery of Indian freedom’. More over Khadi mentality means decentralization of the production and distribution of the necessaries of life. Therefore, the formula so far evolved is, every village to produce all its necessaries and a certain percentage in addition for the requirements of the cities.”²⁰

The constructive programme form part of the Community Development Programme was started on 2nd October, 1952.

Community development is the method and rural extension agency through which the five year plan initiated a process of transformation of social and economic life of the villages. It aimed at the establishment of an agency to ensure the participation of villagers at the planning stage. The constructive work programme that Gandhiji initiated was taken up by his followers through two agencies namely 'Sarva Seva Sangh' and 'Gandhi Smarak Nidhi' entrusted with fellowship or brotherhood and coordination organization for all the constructive work respectively.

Gandhiji's Constructive Work Programme is an answer to the ailing society. Gene Sharp, an outstanding scholar on Gandhiji wrote, "the Constructive Programme is an attempt to build the beginnings of the new social order while the old society still exists. The non-violent revolutionary which Gandhi claimed to be thus begins to build the new even when the struggling old one does not need to wait for the capture of the state machinery to begin. The Constructive Programme has been described as the scaffolding upon which the structure of the new society will be built."²¹

5.3 WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Woman is the incarnation of Ahimsa. Ahimsa means infinite love, which again means infinite capacity for suffering.

Mahatma Gandhi

Gandhiji was the champion of women's emancipation from the multifarious disabilities in the male dominated society. Her infinite capacity for love, sacrifice and suffering has very often been exploited. The Indian woman who were defied during the Vedic times have been brought down to the level of commodities. In a society or nation, so long as women were not treated with due respect cannot develop in the right direction. Gandhiji recognised clearly that woman has a vital role to play especially in the reconstruction of society. Woman is the companion of man gifted with equal mental capacities. She has every right to participate in every minutest detail in the activities of man and she has an equal right of freedom and liberty with men. Every individual entitled to a supreme place in her own sphere of activity like man. Women must cease to consider herself the object of man's lust.

A practical idealist at the core, Gandhiji preached and practiced perfect equality between male and female. Gandhiji worked for gender justice signifying equality of two sexes.

Gandhiji was uncompromising in the matter of women's right. He said, "I should treat daughters and sons on a footing of perfect equality."²² There is no occasion for women to consider herself as inferior to man. Instead of calling women 'weaker sex', Gandhiji called her 'better half' or 'nobler sex'. They are not separate entities but halves of one. He was of the view that woman have the same liberty and opportunity as man in matters relating to self-development. Gandhiji said, "Man and woman are equal in status but not identical. They are peerless pair being complementary to one another; each help the other so that without the one the existence of the other cannot be conceived and therefore it follows as a necessary - corollary, from these facts that anything that will impair the status of either of them will involve the equal ruin of both."²³ Gandhiji held that man and woman are equal and their problems in essence must be one and the same. Both are complementary and interdependent and "they cannot live without the others active life."²⁴ Gandhiji stated in his speech on 20th February 1918 that, "Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacities... she has an equal right of freedom and liberty with him. She is entitled to a supreme place in her own sphere of activity as man is in his. This ought

to be the natural condition on things and not as a result only of learning to read and write.”²⁵

Gandhiji held woman in high esteem. Woman is the embodiment of all that is virtuous and moral. Gandhiji has evolved new methods for the social upliftment based on higher values of morality, equality and social justice. Gandhiji pleaded for the equality of both the sexes, but not their identity. But women are far superior to men in some other respects especially in exhibiting nobler virtues like love, suffering, self-sacrifice, and unadulterated ahimsa. Gandhiji said, “I do believe that it is woman’s mission to exhibit ahimsa at its highest and best... For woman is more fitted than man to make explorations and take bolder action in ahimsa... For the courage of self-sacrifice woman is anyday superior to man, as I believe man is to woman for the courage of the brute.”²⁶ But fundamentally man and woman are one for the soul both is the same. Woman is the incarnation of ahimsa which means love and infinite capacity for suffering. “Who but woman, the mother of man, shows this capacity in the largest measure? She shows it as she carries the infant and feeds it... and derives joy in the suffering involved... But she forgets them in the joy of creation... Let her transfer that love to the whole of

humanity, let her forget that she ever was or can be the object of man's lust. And she will occupy her proud position by the side of man as his mother, maker and silent leader. It is given to her to teach the art of peace to the warring world..."²⁷

Majority of woman undertake the special mission of the duty of motherhood, mainly requires qualities which man need not possess. Woman is passive, Man is active and she is essentially mistress of the house. He is the bread winner, she is the keeper and distributor of the bread. She is the caretaker in every sense of the term. The art of bringing up the infants of the race is her special and sole prerogative. Without her care, the race must become extinct.

But women were always degraded and looked down upon by society. Gandhiji was far in advance to understand the dilemma of women, writing in Young India, Gandhiji said in 1921, "of all the evils for which man has made himself responsible none is so degrading so shocking of so brutal as his abuse of the better half of humanity to me, the female sex, not the weaker sex."²⁸ But Gandhiji was of the considered view that woman is also a person in her own right in a plan of life, he maintained that, "women has as much right to shape her

own destiny as man has.”²⁹ However he believed that though both are fundamentally one, difference in their vocation and roles are to be expected and very often to be accepted.

Gandhiji’s position on women’s issues was fundamentally based on two concepts: equality between the sexes and differentiation of their social roles. Both have equal capacities and are equal. But the fact remains that women all over the world are facing problems. Many social reformers and prophets of women’s emancipation have voiced against women atrocities and discrimination but have not yet attained the desired goal – for discrimination against women and violation of human values still persist. Women need freedom from child-marriage, purdah, sexual exploitation, economic exploitation, dowry death, rape, etc. to mention a few. There are no easy answers or solutions to realized gender equality or gender justice. Gandhiji suggested to approach the problem through non-violent means by launching Satyagraha.

In Gandhian framework women have to realise their own potential and inner strength. The Satyagraha technique would be the best remedy to remove all types of gender discrimination. Gandhi wrote, “If she learn Satyagraha, she can be perfectly independent and self-supporting. She will not

have to feel dependent upon one. This does not mean that she shall not take any help from others. She will certainly. But if such help be not forthcoming, she will not feel destitute.”³⁰

Satyagraha has brought about the political awakening with immediate results following there from. Women were largely emancipated from their bonds and came out in large numbers to participate in the freedom movement. Women’s entry into public life in turn had its impact in social life as well and also in restraining the ambition of men. The theory and practice of non-violence, which played significant role in the techniques of Satyagraha involves the avoidance of the suppression of women. Women has as much right as man in matters relating to her destiny in a plan of life based on non-violence. Gandhiji stated that, “the largest part of the human effort for promoting the regeneration of woman should be directed towards removing the blemishes represented in the Shastras as necessary requisite ingrained in the characteristics of women.”³¹ Further he also held that it is the bounden duty of the awakened women to spot out the age-long evils and eradicate them. Women’s non-violent rebellion against man’s supremacy and injustice was proved to be doubly effective. Gandhiji said, “To call women the weaker sex is a libel, it is

man's injustice to women. If by strength is meant, brute strength, then indeed; is woman less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power; then women is immeasurably man's superior, has she not greater intuition, is she not more self sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her, man could not be. If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with women... who can make a more effective appeal to the heart than woman."³²

To enable women to fight against discrimination, it is necessary to empower them by ensuring their participation in decision making bodies at all levels. The use of the notion of empowerment is relatively new. Empowerment is generally viewed as a way of an individual acquiring power from another individual or agency to look after his own interest. As a consequence of empowerment, individuals are expected to voice their views and demands in their favour and also involve themselves in the process of fulfilling their needs. It is often believed that power in the process of empowerment is provided from outside or lie outside an individual. The community also plays a pivotal role in the process of empowerment along with individuals. There is always the

involvement of another personal community that can become empowered. However, it is to be noted that the people have to recognize and act upon the power or potential power that they already have. The emphasis is on the fact that both the individual and the community have potential power which need to be reflected in and through the process of empowerment. The notion of empowerment is a multi-level process. It includes individual involvement, organizational development and community change. Individual involvement in fact refers to participation of a person in decision making. Community change refers to the impact of involvement in the community. Organizational development refers to the structures which mediate between the individual and community and pave the way for collective action which lie at the root of community change. In brief empowerment at its best includes all three levels namely individual involvement, organizational development and community change.

Women's problems can be solved by women themselves. The primary aim of gender justice is the creation of a just, democratic, non-violent and egalitarian society and for that women empowerment is a necessary pre-requisite. Empowerment means that women need to be taken seriously.

Alongside, it is equally important the enlightenment of men to change their attitude towards women. And understand their problems.

From time immemorial, due to the injunctions laid down by the Sage Manu, the study of Vedas was restricted for women. Since then the Indian women have been deprived of education. In the long run, this had narrowed down their outlook and consequently completely suppressed this interest and quest for knowledge. It was in the year 1936. Gandhiji raised a question about educated boys and girls but who were unable or unwilling to resist the evils such as custom of compulsory marriage with dowry. Gandhiji questioned the value of education that was imparted to them. He maintained that there was something basically lacking in the system of education imparted that might have made the educated to be insensitive to the evil customs and practices in Indian society. Gandhiji stood for proper education for women and believed that in proportion to the education they receive they would become sensitive to the glaring inequalities which they are subjected to. Gandhiji pointed out that there was no justification to deny women of their equal rights in matters relating to literacy. Gandhiji said, "Education is essential for

enabling women to assert their natural rights to exercise them wisely, and to work for their expansion again true knowledge is unattainable by the millions who lack such education.”³³ Due to lack of proper education and information, the situation of deprivation of women has increased. It leads to the deprivation of social and political power and also the power of knowledge. It was observed that “An education system to work as catalyst for the socio-political awakening of women needs serious restructuring and re-orientation of its values and ideals. Education pattern of properly sensitive to women, can to a considerable extent help in redefining the role of women in the society and polity. It needs to become ‘neutral’ to socio-religious norms, and establish a new set of values and norms for the progress of society. Then only can it become ‘agent’ for improving the status of women, making them active participants in the process of social and political development.”³⁴

Gandhiji emphasized the fact that the empowerment of women is in not way the threat to society but a way to improve families and societies. Gandhi as categorically stated that he had, “a passion to serve womankind... I hold radical views about the emancipation of woman from their fetters,

which they mistake for adornment. If God will it, I hope one day to place some of my conclusions before the public when my researches are completed. My experience has confirmed me in that real advancement of women can come only by and through their own efforts.”³⁵ This was Gandhiji’s unfinished agenda-the biggest challenge before humanity.

Notes

- 1 M.K. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, p. 203.
- 2 *Young India*, 13.07.1921, p. 221.
- 3 S. Radhakrishnan, *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, p. 21.
- 4 *Young India*, 25.09.1924, p. 313.
- 5 N.K. Devaraj, *Humanism in India*, 1988, p. 120.
- 6 *Young India*, 02.07.1925, p. 232.
- 7 *Harijan*, 02.03.1934, p. 24.
- 8 *Modern Review*, October 1935, p. 412.
- 9 M.K. Gandhi, *From Yeravada Mandir*, p. 35.
- 10 S. Radhakrishnan, *Mahatma Gandhi – Essays and Reflections*, p. 23.
- 11 Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography*, p. 69-70.
- 12 *Young India*, 02.03.1922, p. 129.
- 13 *The Bombay Chronicle*, 18.09.1954.
- 14 K.D. Gangrade, *Gandhian approach to Development and Social Work*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 2005, p. 86.
- 15 M.K. Gandhi, *Village Swaraj*, p. 33 – 34.
- 16 *Harijan*, June, 1939.
- 17 Vithal Das Kothari (ed), *Why Khadi and Village Industries?* 1957. p. 5.
- 18 M.K. Gandhi, *Khadi, why and how?*, Preface.
- 19 *Young India*, 21.09.1924., p.227
- 20 M.K. Gandhi, *Constructive Programme*, p.12.
- 21 Sharp Gene, *Gandhi as a Political Strategist*, 1999, p.81.
- 22 *Harijan*, 17.10.1929, p. 340.
- 23 M.K. Gandhi, *Women and Social Justice*, p. 5.
- 24 *Harijan*, 24.02.1940, p. 13.
- 25 *Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 425.

- ²⁶ *Harijan*, 05.11.1938, p. 317.
- ²⁷ *Harijan*, 24.02.1940, p. 13-14.
- ²⁸ *Young India*, 19.09.1921.
- ²⁹ *M.K. Gandhi, Constructive Programme*. p.17
- ³⁰ C. Augustine and A.K. Sharma, *Feminist Resurgence in India: Towards a Gandhian Framework*, p. 307.
- ³¹ M.K. Gandhi, *Women and Social Justice*, p. 4.
- ³² *Young India*, 10.04.1930, p. 121.
- ³³ M.K. Gandhi, *Women and Social Justice*, p. 5.
- ³⁴ Hemalata Swarup (ed.), *Women Politics and Religion*, p. 110.
- ³⁵ *Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XIV, p. 202-209.

The concept of decentralisation marks the culmination of Mahatma Gandhi's Experiment with Truth and Non-violence in the varied aspects of life. It played a crucial role in fulfilling Gandhiji's dream of rebuilding India from bottom upwards so as to strengthen the villages as self-sufficient and self-ruling units of administration. He was of the considered view that the soul of India consists not in her few cities but in her innumerable villages. Gandhiji conceived that when once the villages perish India too will perish testifies the same.

His vision of village reconstruction was based on a set of inter-related concepts such as Sarvodaya and Swaraj characterized by equality, brotherhood and simplicity. Swaraj embodied the multi-faceted constructive programme with its eighteen items along with emphasis on equitable social relations and development of localized non-violent village economy and revival of village industries and rehabilitation of handicrafts as a solution to the problem of India's 'enforced poverty'.

Gandhiji's concept of decentralisation can be properly understood and appreciated within the frame work of his fundamental ideas, faith and convictions which culminated in

his living and unshakable faith in Truth as God. Truth, Gandhiji considered as the 'Sovereign Principle'—the pole star of his life which includes numerous other principles. Truth he considered as Absolute Reality which include the relative truths as well. Relative truths are nothing but the stepping stones to Absolute Truth which has to be observed in thought, word and deed. Truth is God and it is also the substance of all morality.

Gandhiji synthesized religion with morality for he thought that morality does not preclude religion. Man cannot reach Truth without morality. The ultimate goal of human life is Self-Realization which is identified with Truth and God realization and this goal can be reached only through disinterested service of our fellowmen. Morality is found to be the fundamental pre-supposition to realize Truth. According to Gandhiji, the highest moral law is that in which we should unremittingly work for the good of mankind. "A moral act", Gandhiji wrote, "must be our own act, it must spring from our own will. If we act mechanically, there is no moral content in our act. Such action would be moral, if we think it proper to act like a machine and do so. For doing so, we use our discrimination. We should bear in mind the distinction between acting mechanically and acting intentionally."¹

One of the salient aspects of Gandhian ethics is the identification of morality with spirituality. To him, God is ethics and morality. In Indian philosophical tradition morality is only a ladder to climb upon to reach the summits of spirituality. It is only a means to an end and not an end in itself. As such, is there any justification for regarding ethics and religion as identical? The reply would be that Gandhiji's ethics like his religion has an intuitive basis. Gandhian ethics has not only a metaphysical but also an intuitive basis. Gandhiji identifies the moral sense with conscience which is man's inner guide. Gandhiji laid stress on unflinching obedience to the dictates of conscience, for the voice of conscience is the will of God and final judge of the rightness or otherwise, of all our thoughts and deeds. It is the 'Inner Voice'. The still Small Voice was, Gandhiji believed, his unerring guide when he took momentous decisions. Moral laws are also spiritual laws. The dictates of conscience, according to him convey both the moral sense and the will of God. For Gandhi, "morals, ethics and religion are convertible terms. A moral life without reference to religion is like a house built upon sand. And religion divorced from morality is 'sounding brass' good only for making a noise and breaking heads."²

Gandhi's ethical religion pervades the entire gamut of man's actions and all departments of human life. The individual should order his life in unquestioning obedience to certain fundamental moral principles. It constitutes the realm of individual morality. But man is usually described as a social animal and to be social is an innate and inborn tendency in man. These two aspects of man are like the two sides of the same coin. It is an undeniable fact that these two aspects though distinguishable are not really separable from each other. Perfection of individual is closely related with social perfection, where society must provide opportunities for the full development of his personality.

Gandhiji's mission in the social realm consists in the construction of an ideal social order, which he calls Sarvodaya - an egalitarian society which aims at the good and welfare of all and not of a select few. The ideal social order envisaged by Gandhiji took concrete measures as a remedy for the ills of both individual and society which consist in the eradication of evil practices rampant in Indian social order. He wanted to construct an egalitarian society with equality prevailing in every sphere of life. To him none is law, and none high all are on equal footing. His ideals of spiritual unity, the equality of

mankind and the ideal of common good are the off-shoots of his firm religious faith and convictions.

In Gandhi's system of thought man is one of supreme consideration. Man is at the root of all progress, civilization and culture. But this emphasis on man does not mean the neglect of society. It is the conscience or spirit which dictates what to do and what not to do. This amounts to saying that the inner core of reality of man is spirit. Man is essentially spiritual in nature. Morality both personal and collective has a bearing on this spiritual nature of man. Before doing any thing we must think of the larger whole, the society to which we belong. Hence whether an individual is good or bad is not merely his own concern but, really the concern of the community, nay of the whole world.

In the ideal social order envisaged by Gandhiji all are knit together in the Silken net of Love. Love signifies universal love, which is non-violence. Sarvodaya which epitomizes the whole of his social philosophy aims at the prevalence of equality in all spheres of life. But the individual must out of his own free will should submit himself to social restraint for the benefit of himself as well as society. Further the Sarvodaya

ideal is out and out spiritual. Hence the means used for its establishment must also be spiritual, for according to Gandhi, means must be in exact proportion to that of the end. Happiness in the Sarvodaya society is more moral and spiritual than material.

The concept of decentralisation has political overtones as well. It was Gandhi's firm conviction that human life being an undivided whole, no line can ever be drawn neither between its different compartments nor between ethics and politics. One's every day life is never capable of being separated from one's spiritual being. Both act and react up on one another. Politics as conceived by Gandhiji is closely connected with ethics and religion. Gandhiji's very entry in to politics is to spiritualise it. It was Gandhiji's firm religious faith and conviction that drew him into the field of politics. According to him every activity must be derived from religion and politics is no exception. Religion provides a moral basis to all human activities. A man of true religion identifies himself with the whole of mankind and this necessarily involves taking part in politics because no aspect of life is untouched by politics. This is the reason why Gandhiji said that, "those who

say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.”³

He considered politics as an ‘unavoidable evil’. It is religion that compelled him to take part in politics. But he was a religious man first and a politician only afterwards unlike many other religious man. That is why Gandhiji insisted that the rule of all without rule of oneself is proved to be deceptive and fatal. Therefore Gandhiji insists that the state and its institutions must first of all be based on the twin pillars of Truth and Non-violence. His main aim in politics was to establish ‘a kingdom of righteousness’ on earth which he called ‘Ramarajya’ which stood for the sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority. In both society and the state the moral will or authority of the individual must reign supreme. This ethical outlook is the backbone of the entire political philosophy and political techniques of Gandhiji.

Gandhiji was against the sovereignty of the state over the individuals. Individuals are responsible moral individuals. Morality necessitates freedom of the will. The compulsive nature of the authority of the state damages the moral nature of the individual. Hence he considered the state as a

'necessary evil'. The state is vested with power and authority which necessarily involves violence and which is contrary to the very conception of a non-violent state. He has no objection against an organization which is voluntary and based on Truth and Non-violence. Gandhi's main aim was to win Swaraj for the masses. The Swaraj of Gandhi's dream was the poor man's Swaraj. It makes no discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, colour and sex. For Gandhi, Hind Swaraj is the rule of all people, is the rule of justice. Swaraj is not rule by anyone in particular but equally by all. It is the government of the people, by the people and for the people. Its guiding principle is equality and justice.

Further, Gandhiji does not regard political power as an end in itself. It is only a means to an end to better the conditions of all people. Everyone becomes his own ruler without creating any problem for others. This is the state of enlightened anarchy. The non-violent state as conceived by Gandhiji is a democracy in which non-violence become a creed, an article of faith rather than a matter of mere polity. Democracy in Gandhian sense is both disciplined and enlightened. Perfect democracy is possible only by perfect non-violence, because no true democracy can prevail in an

atmosphere of violence. Gandhiji stood for the decentralisation of political power. This he believed was possible only by beginning from the bottom upwards.

Gandhi's mission in the political sphere consisted in avoiding violence and to eliminate violence concentration of power must be avoided, through decentralisation of power from the state. But he had doubts regarding the realization of a fully non-violent state and government for obvious reasons. Firstly, it represents all the people. Hence Gandhiji thought about the possibility of a predominantly non-violent state which is essentially non-violent. Gandhiji maintained that such an end can be achieved only under decentralization. Centralization as a system is inconsistent with the non-violent structure of society. Gandhiji considered government, whatever its external form may be as merely an externalization of the moral level of the individual.

According to Gandhi, that government is the best which governs the largest number of happy virtuous individuals. He preferred democracy as the best form of government. But it should be both disciplined and enlightened. What is actually

needed for the effective functioning of non-violent democracy is not factual knowledge but right education.

Perfect democracy is possible only by perfect non-violence because no true democracy can prevail in an atmosphere of violence. Democracy and violence can ill go together. Gandhiji became highly critical of western democracy for it lacks the genuine spirit of democracy. Democracy in the west, Gandhiji said, is only 'so called'. If India has to evolve the true type of democracy there should be no compromise with violence or untruth. Non-violent democracy has its basis in self-sufficient village Republics. In the true democracy of India the unit is the village. True democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre. On the contrary it has to be worked from below by the people of every village.

In Gandhi's concept of village Swaraj every village must be free to manage its own affairs without external interference. Gandhiji held the view that the government of every village will be conducted by the Panchayat. The Panchayat of every village is a key unit for decentralisation of legislative, executive and judicial powers. It represents the

values of a true democracy wherein power and authority are shared and exercised by different functionaries. The individual in such a set up will have complete freedom and will be largely regulated by the spirit of non-violence, self-sacrifice and patriotism. Thus in the village republic as envisaged by Gandhiji there is perfect democracy based on individual freedom. The law of non-violence rules him and his government for the law governing is that 'he will suffer death in the defense of his and his village's honour'. In his scheme of village, Swaraj the individual is at the centre and the village, and the group of villages encompassing each other in concentric circles. In such an oceanic circle, Gandhiji believed that the individual will rise to the occasion and will be prepared to sacrifice everything for the cause of his village. Under such a decentralized structure governing rural India "the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but give strength to all within and derives its own from the centre. If there ever is to be a Republic of everything in India, then I claim verity for my picture in which the last is equal to the first, or in other words none is to be the first and none the last."⁴

Gandhiji pleaded for decentralisation of political and economic power through the organization of village panchayats. He held the view that by serving the villages, Swaraj (self-rule) could be established. He categorically stated that we have to make a choice between India of the villages and India of the cities which are a creation of foreign domination. He was optimistic when he stated that, the dream of Panchayat Raj come into true, the humble and the lowest Indian could be equally the ruler of India with the tallest in the country. The polity of the Panchayat Raj is altogether different from the polity of the mass scale. It is for this reason that Gandhiji could not accept the parliamentary democracy which he called "the tyranny of the majority"⁵

Gandhiji was very particular of the inclusion of the topic of the village panchayat in the Constitution as they reflect the people's voice. Gandhi wrote, "I must confess that I have not been able to follow the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly.... there is no mention or direction about village panchayats and decentralisation in the foreshadowed constitution. It is certainly an omission calling for immediate attention if our independence is to reflect the people's voice.

The greater the power of the panchayats, the better for the people.”⁶

The village panchayat the basic unit of administration provides scope for direct popular participation. It gives relief to the undeveloped sections of the community. The village panchayat functions along democratic lines. Gandhiji envisaged a three tier system of rural and local self government namely-the village, the block, the district level panchayats so as to ensure the participation of the adult female and male members of the village. Gandhiji insisted that the democratic structure of the local institutions should be decentralized to the grass root level so that the lowest and the last is empowered by participating in the decision making process.

Gandhi's dream of establishing an ideal non-violent Sarvodaya socio-political and economic order assures the participation of the masses in the discussion of their own affairs through the three levels of Panchayat Raj system. He visualized an ideal social order with a view to reconstruct society along the democratic ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. It is essentially an egalitarian society which has its

own political and economic order. The economic order envisaged by Gandhiji stood for a moralized and humanized decentralized economic structure with the village as its nucleus. Although he has not written any elaborate treatise on economics, his economic theory was essentially normative with a warm human touch. In this economic structure, he preferred production by the masses rather than mass production.

The success of political decentralisation in turn depends on economic decentralisation. Decentralisation in the economic sphere implies the fundamental principle of self-sufficiency. It is not absolute self-sufficiency but confined to the basic needs of the people such as food, clothing and shelter. What he wanted was that people should be independent as regards the satisfaction of the elementary needs. He dreamt of a society free from exploitation of the weaker sections of the society and also his advocacy of charka and village industries demonstrate his living faith in decentralization of economic power. The popularization of Khadi movement and village industries meant decentralization of both production and distribution of the necessities of life for economic decentralization is primarily designed to promote

the interest of the lowliest of the low and the helpless. Khadi symbolizes the unity of Indian community which provides economic freedom and equality. The basic theme of his philosophy of decentralization is oriented towards full employment of human resources of a society and also to provide adequate opportunity for manual labour.

Gandhiji became a trenchant critique of the modern western civilization on the ground that it is unsuited to the Indian soil. He was suspicious of its charm and beauty along with material prosperity totally neglecting the essential nature of man namely the spirit. The modern industrial societies are largely centralized systems and people are dependent for their livelihood upon capitalistic classes. There existed a wide gulf between 'capital' and 'labour'. But Gandhiji wanted to transform the lives of the downtrodden masses through economic decentralization. He strongly opposed the process of mechanization of industry on the ground that the poor will be devoid of labour. What he wanted was villages to be production centres and the cities and towns have to act as clearing houses for such product. Gandhiji preferred non-violent economy in which the dignity of man and his labour will be given the highest consideration. Gandhiji was eager to

advocate the philosophy of bread labour based on simple life, dignity of labour and trusteeship which provide a means of transforming the present consumerist society into an egalitarian one. The rich must be the trustees of the poor and their excess wealth has to be laid in trust for the benefit of the society. He recognized private ownership of property so far as it contributes to the welfare of society. Gandhiji considers that country as the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings. The end to be achieved is human happiness along with full mental and moral growth.

The structure of the Sarvodaya society is not like a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom but it is more like an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village. Further Sarvodaya society is not a state in the modern sense of the term. It is a state in which national life becomes so self-regulated that there will be no need for any centralized political power to regulate it. Such a state is a state of enlightened anarchy. Gandhiji believes that the coercive power of the state, which is nothing but violence in a concentrated form, destroys man's individuality. Sarvodaya is true democracy according to Gandhiji. In true democracy we would regard the humblest

and the lowest Indian as being equally the ruler of India with the tallest in the land. Everybody would know how to earn an honest living and make no distinction between intellectual and physical labour. Everybody would observe Swadeshi as the rule of life and regard every woman, not being his wife, as his mother, sister or daughter according to her age, never lust after her in his heart.

To Gandhiji political freedom was not an end in itself but a means to better the conditions of people in every field of life. He has dedicated his life for the attainment of Swaraj for the masses. Swaraj of his dream meant poor man's Swaraj. He has dreamt of little village republics with village panchayats as the basic unit of administration. The Indian political institution that Gandhiji visualized came to be known as panchayat Raj - grass root democracy - democratic decentralization - Grama Swaraj - village republic, with its base at the village level. Panchayat Raj is the only way to real Swaraj. It represents the system by which the innumerable village republics of India were governed. The panchayat system acquired greater significance during the non-cooperation movement. It offered an alternative to the British system of judiciary aiming at the replacement of courts by the

panchayats for settling inter-personal disputes. The panchayat function as arbitration courts to dispense speedy justice to the parties. The village panchayat has full functional and financial autonomy which in a way provide financial assistance to the undeveloped sections of the community. Its main focus is on agriculture and small scale industries with preference not to mass production but production by the masses.

Gandhiji wanted the panchayats to end exploitation and to carry on its functions on co-operative basis. The relation of village panchayats to higher level is not one of subordination. On the contrary, they wield power from the lower units. They have only to co-ordinate the activities of the village panchayats. The panchayat of his conception became an effective instrument for the diffusion and decentralization of power and authority. In this system there will be ample scope for individual autonomy, people's participation and self-expression. On the contrary, centralization as a system is inconsistent with Gandhi's dream of non-violent structure and functioning of the society and the state. The more the centralization the less will be people's participation and the less of democracy and violence and exploitation of the poor will be in the increase. Gandhiji visualized an egalitarian socio-

political and economic order with individual at its centre. Further he affirms that without decentralization it is impossible to ensure individual freedom and the moral well being of man. It is equally essential for the realization of the democratic ideals and also for people's participation in the decision making process and its implementation. Decentralization does not merely mean devolution of power alone. But it is a system or process by which duties and responsibilities have been transferred from a centre authority to the institutions at the lower level. Panchayat Raj, Gandhiji visualized will give power to the powerless irrespective of caste, sex, creed and religion and in which, "the humblest and the lowest Indian could be equally the ruler of India with the tallest in the country". Villagism and village republicanism were significant milestones in the onward march towards the realization of democratic decentralization.

Notes

1 *Collected Works*, Vol. VI, p.284.

2 *Harijan*, 03-10-1936, p.268.

3 *A Passage from Gandhi's Autobiography*, p.383.

4 Mahatma Gandhi, *Panchayat Raj*, 1959, pp. 8-10.

5 Jayaprakash Narayan, ed., *Panchayati Raj: As the Basis of Indian Polity*, p.12.

6 *Harijan*, 25-12-1947, p. 473.

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