

DECENTRALIZED GOVERNANCE IN INDIA: A GANDHIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Decentralization is a process that involves transfer of power to the popularly elected local governments so as to enhance the participation of the local populace in the political process and decision making, thereby according due importance and leverage to local public opinion. Mahatma Gandhi had innate love for equality, unflinching support for individual freedom and he consistently pleaded for bringing about a just order through the brotherhood of man that recognized no barriers. His idea of democracy was, in fact, rooted in the idea of decentralization of economic and political power. Gandhi firmly believed that the state was an instrument of exploitation and coercion. He emphasized that the decentralization of power could resolve such problems to a large extent by involving public participation and public opinion in the governance system. Gandhian concept of decentralization is very comprehensive in nature and linked closely with non-violence, swadeshi, khadi and trusteeship etc. Thus, an analysis of these concepts is essential for an in-depth comprehension of his concepts of decentralization and how they lead to political, social and economic decentralization of power. The purpose of the present research paper is to make a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the Gandhian concept of decentralization and to establish link between these concepts with political, social and economic dimensions of the decentralization.

Keywords: Democracy, Decentralization, Panchayati Raj, Swaraj, Swadeshi

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Introduction

Decentralization is closely linked with democracy, development and good governance. It is a process of transferring power to popularly elected local governments so as to increase public opinion and participation in the political process. Mahatma Gandhi believed that the rule by the common masses needs to be ensured by each nation in accordance with its own peculiar conditions. He not only admired but also followed democratic ideas and principles in both letter and spirit. Gandhi had a different connotation of democracy varying from the classical democratic ideas of the west. He supported individual freedom and equality unflinchingly. He consistently pleaded for the creation of a just order of the society based on brotherhood of man, which recognized no barriers of culture, language, religion and sex. Gandhi was critical regarding adoption of the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy. He blamed this model for all the prevailing ills manifesting in the Indian society, such as corruption, communalism, indiscipline, violence and administrative order. Therefore, he always expressed his dissatisfaction with the Western form of democracy and government. In Hind Swaraj, Gandhi depicted that every individual was the master of his own destiny. He expressed his ideas by stating that, "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" (Patil & Anikivi, 1989: 26-27). Gandhi aimed at democratic government based on moral authority and power shared by all. This type of democratic set up guarded rights, liberty, freedom of expression and actions of the individual. To quote him, "Difference of opinion should never mean hostility. If they did, my wife and I should be sworn enemies of one another. I do not know two persons in the world who had no difference of opinion, and as I am a follower of the Gita, I have always attempted to

regard those who differ from me with the same affection as I have for my nearest and dearest” (Prabhu and Rao, 1954: 3). Gandhi firmly believed that true democracy protects the interests of all the sections of the society. It not only ensured the interests of the stronger sections of the society, but was equally responsive and concerned about the weaker and deprived sections of the society. He claimed that genuine democracy is a process which controls and regulates social life in meaningful directions. He emphasized and advocated the performance of duty rather than merely claiming of rights. Rights were a privilege and duty was obligatory for every individual. He further argued that, “Swaraj of a people means the sum total of the swaraj (self-rule) of individuals. And as such swaraj comes only from performance by individuals of their duty as citizens. In it no one think of his rights. They come when they are needed for better performance of duty...Rights accrue automatically to him who duly performs his duties. In fact right to perform one’s duties is the only right that is worth living for and dying for. It covers all legitimate rights” (Rao, 1968: 86). Gandhian conception of swaraj has a mass orientation. It encompassed the spirit of true democracy. In Hind swaraj, he pointed out his faith in participatory democracy and rule of all the people. He recommended parliamentary form of government as the immediate goal of his connotation of swaraj. Gandhi believed that if the representatives of the people act and conform in accordance with the will of the people, only then parliamentary government could be regarded as successful.

Gandhi argued, “We have long been accustomed to thinking that power comes only through legislative assemblies. I have regarded this belief as a grave error brought about by inertia or hypnotism. A superficial study of British history has made us think that all power percolates to the people from parliaments. The truth is that power resides in the people and it is entrusted for the time being to those whom they may choose as their representatives. The parliaments have no power or even existence independently of the people. It has been my effort for the last twenty-one years to convince the people of this simple truth” (Kripalani, Krishna, 1960:

181). Gandhi strongly believed in participatory democracy. Participatory democracy as conceived by Gandhi emphasized on individual participation in governance and the decision making process and also in such a democratic structure individual enjoyed freedom of thought and expression and his participation could be ensured in the decision making and implementation process. He realized that democratic government coupled with an equitable society appeared to offer the greatest prospects to achieving his goals. According to him democratic rule fostered a diffusion of power and increased the prospects that equality and freedom would be pursued. Thus, the basic theme of Gandhian democratic ideas is decentralization of power and governance.

Objectives

Gandhian political and economic ideas can essentially prove to be a significant and rational approach so as to resolve the present day problems of national reconstruction and regeneration. The contemporary period is of change and conflict. Political instability and inefficiency in administration has become a regular episode of the day. The absence of a viable economic policy and failure to achieve them has further worsened the socio economic situation in the country. In this context Gandhian ideas and views can be relevant in the context of the Indian society.

Hence the prime objective of the current paper is to critically examine the Gandhian concept of decentralization and explore its utility in the current scenario. Since the concept of decentralization has been debated, discussed and examined by economic thinkers, political scientists and social analysts for a long time, an attempt has been made here to explain Gandhi's concept of political, social and economic decentralization separately which is shaped by other Gandhian concepts and ideas. He was a firm advocate of village swaraj and propounded small scale and cottage industries for economic self reliance. He also preached and practiced swadeshi and khadi. All these notions have direct or indirect bearing on his concept of decentralization. Thus, it is also the purpose of the present

research paper to identify the definitional boundaries of these concepts and establish a clear-cut linkage between them and the theme of decentralization.

Literature Review

Literature abounds on Gandhian philosophy in general but not on his ideas of democracy and decentralisation. Gandhi's personal writings and collected works on him provide a significant source about his views on democracy and decentralisation. Mahatma Gandhi's Village Swaraj encompasses different dimensions of rural life including agriculture, village industry, animal husbandry, transport, basic education, health and hygiene. It also inspired the idea of local self government and Panchayati Raj in India espoused under article 40 of the Indian Constitution. The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi by Shriman Narayan presents Gandhi's choicest writings and speeches on a variety of topics and provides a wider reach to his ideas on different issues. The first part of the volume represents the speeches of Mahatma Gandhi on independence movement and national programme while the second part incorporates his philosophy and ideas about religion, culture, art, literature, science, economics, politics, sociology and education. The collection is significant on account of Gandhi's views on almost all shades of life of an individual, society and the state. Patil and Lokapur's Gandhi's Concept of Decentralisation: An Analysis discusses Gandhi's theory of politics, economic ideas, views on religion, education, nation-state and several other themes. The work brings out the inherent contradictions and the integral elements in the Gandhian thought. Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian Constitution by Narendra Chapalgaonker discusses the evolution of Gandhi as a leader, his role in the struggle for independence, the making of the Constituent Assembly and influence on the making of Indian constitution. At the time of independence, framing of the constitution that determined direction of the future course of the nation was already under way. Gandhi saw the process of constitution framing as another freedom struggle to get rid of the western notions of governance and administration. The first battle was against alien empire

and the second battle he would have to fight against his men, colleagues and followers. Bhikhu Parekh in *Gandhi's Political Philosophy: A Critical Examination* explores Gandhian vision of Indian civilization and the territories of it that collide with the modern. Gandhi's philosophy of religion, spirituality and his reinterpretation of Hinduism have also been examined. *All Men are Brothers* edited by Krishna Kriplani is a selection from the writings of Mahatma Gandhi compiled for the UNESCO helps one land upon the important speeches and messages of Gandhi. The volume contains voluminous information about the views of Gandhi on religion and truth, means and ends, ahimsa or the ways of non-violence, self-discipline, international peace, man and machine, poverty in the midst of plenty, democracy and the people, education, women etc. Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya in *Social and Political Thought* claims that Gandhian philosophy provides a deep insight into the complications and the challenges of man in society. His position as a political member of the society dwarfed by the institution of state and how decentralized governance can rid man out of it has been discussed. He also discusses the ideal society visualized by Gandhi and critically examines the twin means of social control advocated by Gandhi, the constructive programs and satyagraha for transforming the existing social reality gradually into the ideal society of his conception. U. S. Mohan Rao's *The Message of Mahatma Gandhi* is another significant volume worth discussing. The volume explains to us how Gandhi, the icon of truth and non-violence, had become a statesman saint during his life and how he influenced the thought the processes of the people, organizations and the states. *Gandhi, Nehru and the Globalization* by Thakur discusses how Gandhian vision, values and the morals remain central to all the political organizations. In the globalized era under the ecological disaster, environmental concerns, cultural retrogression, social alienation, decline in human rights, growing economic disparities and the great depression Gandhian pragmatism and the understanding of human nature, ecology, and man and society relationship provide a significant way out. Raghavulu and Rao in "Gandhian Approach to Decentralisation: Its Relevance" discuss the factors that are

strategic to limit the scope of the Gandhian path to decentralization and suggests the areas in which the Gandhian path is relevant in current order. Raghavulu and Rao suggest the adaptation of Gandhian ideas against his reincarnation according to the changed circumstances of the time.

Research Methodology

The present study will mainly concentrate on textual approach. An integrated approach has been followed involving the study of both text and the social context in which the text is written. Besides this historical and analytical methodology has been followed to derive meaning and provide explanation to the Gandhian view of democracy and decentralization.

Political Decentralization

Non-violence was the basic tenet of political and socio-economic decentralization for Gandhi. It was kingdom of Heaven. "Men as animal is violent, but as spirit is non-violent. The moment he awakes to the spirit within, he cannot remain violent. Either he progresses towards ahimsa or rushes to his doom. That is why the prophets and avatars have taught the lesson of truth, harmony, brotherhood, justice etc. all attributes of ahimsa" he added (Kripalani, 1960: 112). Gandhi believed that the real meaning of Ahimsa is to avoid harm to anyone, in thought, word or deed. It not only means to refrain from killing but also using violent methods out of anger or selfish purpose. Gandhi held the view that violence was the essence of exploitation. He firmly believed that the state was an instrument of exploitation of the people and it represented an organization based on force. He asserted that concentration of power in a single agency leads to exploitation. Gandhi said, "The state represents violence in a concentrated and organized form. The individual has a soul, but as the state is a soulless machine, it can never be weaned from violence to which it owes its very existence" (Patil & Lokapur, 1989:109).

The logical connection between decentralization of political power and Gandhian conception of ahimsa means protecting individuality from exploitation and violence. Gandhi closely connected the ends and the means with each other. He emphasized that if means were proper the ends would take care of themselves. Therefore, he advocated that decentralization of political power was essential to ensure maximum flowering of the human personality and it must be the ultimate objective of a progressive and welfare oriented society. He argued that, "no action which is not voluntary can be called moral... 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 as a matter of duty" (Dhawan, 1946:282). Gandhi warned that the role of political power was only to regulate national life through national representatives. It was not an end in itself. He argued that national life could become perfect if it was self-regulated. Gandhi believed that no external representation is required in a self regulated society or there will be a state of enlightened anarchy. In such a state the individual governs one self and the sovereignty vests with the people and everyone respects the freedom and act responsibly towards each other. Thus in all such activity there is no political power because there is no state (Patil & Lokapur, 1989:110).

Gandhi advocated and aspired for the creation of a stateless society. He was an individualist par excellence. Gandhi regarded state as an instrument of coercion because it always undermined the freedom of the individuals. This position of Gandhi was akin to Marxist view of the state. However, for, Gandhi efficacy of non violence was essential for socio economic and spiritual salvation of the individual. On the other side, Marxists stressed upon a violent revolution which could eventually bring about the withering away of the state. (Patil & Lokapur, 1989:111).

Gandhi ultimately aspired for the attainment of an ideal society. He differentiated between ideal society and practicable state. Ramraj indicated ideal society of Gandhi and Swaraj indicated the state. He visualized establishing just and perfecting society in Ramrajya. It meant the kingdom

of Righteousness on earth. (Bhattacharyya, 1969:471). Gandian conception of an ideal society was based upon egalitarianism and democratic order based on non-violence and moral values. He stated that ancient ideal of Ramrajya was a form of true democracy. According to Gandhi, Ramrajya was acme of swaraj. Gandhi exclaimed, "It means Ram Raj, Khudai, Sultanat, or the Divine Kindom. I am thirsting after such Ram Raj. My God does not reside up above. He has to be realized on earth. He is here within you, within me. He is omnipotent and omnipresent. You need not think of the world beyond. If we can do our duty here, the beyond will take care of itself. This necessarily includes political independence" (Tendulkar, 1969:32). Similarly, Gandhi stressed that Ramrajya included swaraj. As he said, "claiming as you do, allegiance to India and endorsing as you do your connection with the story of Ramayana, you should be satisfied with nothing but Ram Raj which includes Swaraj" (Tendulkar, 1969:299). Mahatma Gandhi believed that Ramrajya was a stage beyond Swaraj or political self-government. To quote him, "I have given my most earnest thought to it and have come to the conclusion that we can have swaraj, even Ram Raj, if we fulfill the triple program me – a programme in which men and women, young and old, Hindus, Mussalmans, Christians, the Government servants and all can take part" (Tendulkar, 1969:235). Thus, Swaraj, a non-violent state and Ramraya are significant milestones in Gandhian conception of decentralization in its comprehensive form.

Village swaraj or Gram Swaraj is another crucial element of his concept of decentralization. The status of a village, as Gandhi conceived in the political, social and economic structure of independent India was multi-faceted. In his scheme of decentralization, the basic unit of governance would be the village with adequate powers to conduct their administration. The ultimate objective of decentralization cannot be achieved by mere introduction of political institutions for administration of village life. He tried to reduce the concentrated political power of the state to preserve individual swaraj.

Gandhi presented federal form of decentralization. This structure provided different levels of autonomous units with the individual at the centre. As he stated, "In this structure composed of innumerable villages there will be ever widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose center will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last, the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in there arrogance ever humble sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units. Therefore, the outermost circumferences will not wield power to crush the inner circle but give strength to all within and derive its own from the center"(Jha, 2010).

Gandhi recommended that Panchayats would be elected by direct adult franchise and village Panchayat members would in turn elect the Taluka Panchayat. Then its members would vote for the district Panchayat elections and in that order up to the election of national Panchayat by indirect vote. He was firm that the village should have all tri categories of powers to make its own rules, enforce those rules and try cases of crimes and disputes in the villages (Chapalgaindker, 2016:104). He does not mean that the ancient Indian village republic should be revived exactly in the old form. Necessary changes would have to be introduced in view of modern changed circumstances and needs. He desired that these self-sufficient and self-governing villages should be the basic units' of public administration in free India. In Gandhian conception village would have authority to draw its own development plan and implement it. He held town dwellers responsible for exploiting villages or taking away or allow others to take away from them almost the whole of the result of their labor. He believed that cities are capable of taking care of themselves, so to serve villages is to establish swaraj. As he said, "My idea of village swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbors for its own vital wants, and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity. Thus every village's first concern will be to grow its own food

crops and cotton for its cloth. It should have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and playground for adults and children. Then if there is more land available, it will grow useful money crops, thus excluding ganja, tobacco, opium and the like. The village will maintain a village theatre, school and public hall. It will have its own waterworks ensuring 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 the cooperative basis. There will be no castes such as we have today with their graded untouchability. Non-violence with its technique of Satyagraha and non-cooperation will be the sanction of the village community” (Gandhi, 1962: 31). While talking about the legislative, executive and judicial powers and functioning of the villages he stated, “...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. 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. Any village can become such a republic today without much interference, even from the present Government whose sole effective connection with the villages is the exaction of the village revenue. I have not examined here the question of relations with the neighboring villages and 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 his government. He and his villages are able to defy the might of a world” (Gandhi, 1962:32). Gandhi believed, “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...” (Narayan, 1968:450). According to Gandhi, Panchayat had an ancient flavor. It meant an assembly of five elected persons by local populace. It represented a system by which the innumerable village republics of India were governed. He blamed the British authorities for gradually destroying these ancient republics for revenue

collection. Gandhi recommended some rules for the guidance of the village workers. He warned that otherwise irregular and unsystematic panchayat bodies were bound to fall into pieces. His recommendations were like, no Panchayat should be set up without the written sanction of the provincial congress committee that a Panchayat should in the first instance be elected through a public meeting called for the purpose by the beat of drums, it should be recommended by the Tehsil committee, such Panchayat should have no criminal jurisdiction, it may try civil suits if the parties to them refer their disputes to the Panchayat, no one should be compelled to refer any matter to the Panchayat, no Panchayat should have any authority to impose fines, the only sanction behind its civil decrees being its moral authority, strict impartiality and the willing obedience of the parties concerned, there should be no social or other boycott for the time being, every Panchayat was expected to attend to the education of boys and girls in its jurisdiction, its sanitation, medical needs, the upkeep and cleanliness of the village wells and ponds, the upliftment and the daily requirements of the so-called untouchables. Provincial congress committees were capable to disband a panchayat that failed to function according to clause 9 within six months of its election or otherwise failed to retain the goodwill of the villagers or stood self condemned for any other cause (Gandhi, 1962: 67-68). Gandhi believed that functioning of a panchayat depended on the will of the people and in his opinion no law could limit panchayats. He claimed that no one can stop if one village wants a Panchayat. Panchayati Raj was to serve the people and in a true democracy of India, the unit was the village. As he stated, "Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus, every village will be a republic or Panchayat having full power. Moreover, every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its own affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the external forces. It needs to be trained and prepared to perish in an attempt to defend itself against any onslaught from without. Thus, ultimately, it is the individual who is the unit. This does not exclude or limit dependence on and willing help from neighbors or from the outside world. It will be free and voluntary play of mutual forces. Such a society is necessarily highly cultured in which every

man and woman knows what he or she wants and, what is more, knows that no one should want anything that others cannot have with equal labor” (Narayan, 1968: 451). According to Gandhi, true democracy and Panchayati Raj could be attained only by laying emphasis on equality. Everybody would know how to earn an honest living by the physical labor and hard work and this would not make any distinction between intellectual and physical labor. He advised people to voluntarily turn into scavengers and stay away from opium, liquor and intoxicants.

While talking about duties of the panchayats, Gandhi recommended that they should teach and sensitize village people on various issues pertaining to sanitation, self governance etc. Panchayats should also encourage villagers to settle their disputes mutually. According to Gandhi, it was the duty of panchayats to see that cattles were properly protected and taken care of. Similarly, panchayats should see to cattle improvement, steady increase in the milk yield and increase in the quality of the food grains grown in their villages through proper manuring of the soil. For example, Gandhi recommended that valuable manure could be prepared through mixing excreta of animals, human beings and household waste to increase the fertility of the soil. He believed that panchayats could play a significant role to train village people in this respect. Panchayat should maintain and monitor the cleanliness of their village and its inhabitants. People of the villages should be clean and healthy in body and mind. There should be no cinema houses in the villages and Panchayats should promote their own indigenous games. Gandhi expected that Panchayats should work for the eradication of untouchability and Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Parsis and Christians should all live as brothers and sisters. He believed, “Distinguished travelers from the world came to India in the days of yore from China and other countries. They came in quest of knowledge and put up with great hardships in travelling. They had reported that in India there was no theft, people were honest and industrious. They needed no locks for their doors. In those days, there was no multiplicity of castes as at present. It is the function of the Panchayats to revive honesty and industry.”(Gandhi,

1962: 452). He stated that the greater the power of the Panchayats, it was better for the people.

Socio-Economic Decentralization

Political and economic decentralization of Gandhi was interrelated as decentralization of production in villages was linked with decentralization of political power. Gandhi blamed the Britishers for centralizing political authority in India to serve economic interests. Production served colonial interests only instead of serving local needs. Gandhian economic ideas were built on the position that exploitation and violence were interconnected and exploitation of individual was at the root of all violence. His economic ideas were based on the principle of avoidance of exploitation of man by man. He proposed economic decentralization at various levels of the power hierarchy within the Indian society so as to avoid concentration of economic power.

Gandhi believed that capitalist class was a result of the concentration of economic power and this further lead to the exploitation of the talent and resources available in the society. Gandhian conception of economic swaraj stated that poor people should also enjoy basic necessities of life in common with rich section of the Indian society. To realize this, he recommended that the production of basic necessities of life should remain in the hands of the poor or the general populace. As Gandhi frequently asserted that "If India is to evolve along non-violent lines, it will have to decentralize many things" (Patil & Lokapur, 1989: 114).

Gandhi believed that individual must act as a trustee of that excess income which is more than his requirement. He holds the view that "the rich cannot accumulate wealth without the cooperation of the poor in the society" (Sharma, 1956:138).

Trusteeship system would provide sufficient work to the individual so as to fulfill his daily basic requirements. This would ensure equal distribution of the produced goods by the masses. Gandhian theory of trusteeship was

based on the assumption that economic power should be in the hands of the community. Such economic system would provide each member of the society with his needs and to own wealth and property of the community for the welfare of the society. There would be socio-economic decentralization of economic power and economic equality would be assured (Khimta, 2014: 107).

Gandhi's concept of swaraj had religious, spiritual, social, political and economic connotations. In the economic sphere, it refers to self-sufficiency of the village as an economic unit. Taking this reason into account, Gandhi advocated cottage and small scale industries for economic self reliance in rural areas. His ideas assumed great significance for all round development of the rural areas. Gandhi believed that decentralization of economic power could fruitfully serve the interests of the community by bringing about rapid development of small scale industries.

Gandhi's advocacy for Swadeshi is part and parcel of his comprehensive understanding of decentralization through dispersal of economic power. Swadeshi meant that a country should be self-sufficient in meeting her needs. To quote him, "If we have no regard for our respective vernaculars, if we dislike our cloths, if our dress repels us, if our food is distasteful to us, our climate is not good enough, our people uncouth and unfit for our company, our civilization faulty and the foreign attractive, in short, if everything native is bad and everything foreign pleasing to us, I should not know what swaraj can mean for us" (Sen, 1960:222). According to him, India enjoyed Swaraj in the past but as soon as she gave up using her own articles she lost Swaraj. Gandhi said, "Swadeshi restricts all Indians to the exclusive use of articles made in India. It contains our economic independence, Swadeshi, therefore, means fiscal autonomy. Without fiscal autonomy Swaraj has no meaning; swadeshi, hence, may be called Swaraj also (Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, 1965:125).

The broad definition of Swadeshi was the use of all homemade articles to the exclusion of foreign things in so far as such use was necessary for the

protection of home industry. He also cautioned about the narrow interpretation of swadeshi. To quote him, "To reject foreign manufacturers merely because they are foreign and to go on wasting national time and money to promote manufacturers in one's country for which it is not suited, would be criminal folly, and a negation of the Swadeshi spirit... It is a doctrine of selfless service that has its roots in the purest Ahimsa i.e. love" (Bose, 1934: 125). Gandhi related swadeshi with swadharma. He added, "The law of swadeshi requires me no more than to discharge my legitimate obligations towards my family by just means, and the attempt to do so will reveal to me the universal code of conduct" (Gandhi, 1955:43).

Gandhi restricted swadeshi to the most important necessities of life and the most pressing was clothing. He considered Khadi as a necessary and the most important corollary of the principle of swadeshi in its application to society. In the nature of things, Khadi required decentralization of production and consumption. Since Khadi is produced by the common man in every village the economic power is distributed to every village and to every man. Localized production and consumption helps to relieve the temptation to merely speed up production for the sake of mass production. It would be discourage unnatural accumulation of hoards in the pockets of the few. Gandhi said that, Khaddar was not meant, "to destroy all machinery but it does regulate its use and check its speedy growth. It uses machinery for the poorest in their own cottages. The wheel is itself an exquisite piece of machinery" (Patil & Lokapur, 1981:115).

While extending the meaning of swadeshi in terms of self-sufficiency to the village level, he said, "Self-sufficiency is a big word... villages will be swept away, if they are not self-sufficient as to their primary wants and self-reliant as to their protection against internal disruption by dissensions and disease and external danger from thieves and dacoits. Self-sufficiency, therefore, means all the cotton processes and growing of seasonal food crops and fodder for cattle. Unless this is done there will be starvation" (Gandhi, 1962:63-64).

Gandhi believed in such decentralization of power that ensured freedom to the smallest man without any social, political or economic discrimination and disability. He believed that decentralization was possible only by the proper functioning of Gram Swaraj. According to Gandhi, the real meaning of Gram Swaraj was self rule, freedom, liberty and independence. To quote him, "My idea of village swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbors for its own vital wants, and yet inter dependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity"(Gandhi, 1962:31). It meant a total transformation of villages from dung heaps and ecologically destroyed villages to vibrant communities in economics social and cultural senses. It also meant self-governance and self-management of village communities. This ultimately ensured individuals dignity and self reliance. However, he did not believed in narrow conception gram-swaraj. On the other hand, he believed in harmonious relationship and dignified interdependence with neighbors (Khimta, 2017: 93). He stated, "Indian independence must begin at the bottom. Thus every village will be republic or panchayat, having full powers. If 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... But this does not exclude dependence on the willing help from neighbors or from the world" (Bandyopadhyay, 1969: 108).

Gandhi believed that village life alone would save humanity from decay and disaster. As he argued, "If they village perishes India will perish, too. It will be no more India. Her own mission in the world will get lost" (Gandhi, 1962:30). Gram Swaraj involved total transportation of the outlook of the people living in villages. He persuaded a large number of congressmen to go to the villages. Gandhi asked these men to devote themselves to the service of village masses and train them for self rule. He thought of them as his army for swaraj. They must be quietly working behind the back and corroding the basis of the colonial state and preparing for its eventual replacement by distinctively Indian polity under their leadership (Parekh, 1995:117).

Another assumption behind his defense of village autonomy was that people dependent on each other would sustain each other and live in harmony. Many Indians claimed that the village in Gandhi's dream existed in Indian social system sometime in history. The villages far away from the developments in the political centre of the country sustained their existence by making their own independent arrangements (Chapalgaindker, 2016: 206).

Findings

While Gandhi was a conservative and a revolutionary at the one hand he was also a realist and a utopian at the other. The Gandhian philosophy is quite wide in range and spectrum and incorporates various concepts, norms, values, principles and propositions. His ideas never turn still rather they are always dynamic and can at best be described in the tradition of continuity and change. His ideas and propositions are subject to frequent experimentations and are deeply engraved in the matrix of time and place and they never lose their roots and contemporaneity. It is this peculiarity of Gandhian philosophy that makes it ever more relevant in present times and the Gandhian concepts like decentralization, satyagraha, trusteeship, non-violence etc. could well be secured in the modern state.

It was Gandhi's strong belief in the utility of the principle of non-violence and its adaptation in all the circumstances that made it successful in the end. He was also not a utopian since he was aware of the fact that it was not possible for a government to succeed by turning completely non-violent because of the heterogeneity of the people that it represents. However, this doesn't mean that the idea of a non-violent society was a mirage for him rather it was a possibility and he strived hard for it throughout his life. His vision of the village republics with the self dependent economies was a significant move in this direction. And this could be achieved only through the process of decentralization of power to them.

The idea of decentralization that Gandhi opts does not hamper the growth of individuals and community and the two coexist side by side. In order to protect the labor and employment and to check the concentration of wealth he opposed the use of heavy machines. The purpose was not to oppose science and technological advancement rather safeguarding the interests of individual in the society. Gandhi observed that his objections are against the craze for machinery that might create a mess for employment of thousands of laborers in the coming times which may lead to starvation and deaths. His aim was not to save labor for a small section of men rather to the whole of mankind. He wanted to check the concentration of wealth in few hands and machine was one such danger that could have done this. He was aware of the experience of the west where industrial revolution had created profit-oriented classes and the social and economic disharmony. We can see how precise the Gandhian vision was and his concern for the protection of the labor, an issue of mammoth significance today.

The Gandhian idea of decentralization turns more significant and relevant in the class divided modern society. While the concentration of economic power is coincided with the concentration of political power, it also results in the development of authoritarian or dictatorial regimes. In the Indian scenario too this could be noticed as the socially and economically privileged class also owns economic resources. The accumulation of wealth also causes accumulation of power around it. This forced Gandhi to lay the principle of trusteeship that incorporates the morality to own the property and convert the excess for the use of society. Although the theory of trusteeship appears to be an utopian idea, yet it could prove revolutionary in transforming the nature of class divided society into an egalitarian one.

Although Indian constitution enshrines several ideas of Gandhi, the concept of decentralization of power gets a special place in it. The founding of village panchayats under article 40 and the 73rd and 74th amendments to Indian constitution represent the Gandhian idea of village republics and urban local bodies with devolution of powers. The recent amendments have introduced a uniform three tier system that ensures decentralization of

powers at three levels. The prime purpose is to make the local governments more accountable and ensure more participation of people and transparency in rule. While it devolves the idea of self rule it also ensures the resolution of problems of local nature by local governments themselves. The development funds and their utilization have significantly improved leading to the evolution of vibrant democracies, a dream of Gandhi, at the grassroots level of Indian society.

Suggestions

The entire Gandhian theory of state and the place of individual in it appear to be a philosophy of protest. Gandhi claims that the state that he visions would be a decentralized state in which the village would be the key unit. The state would be predominantly non-violent in character. He questions the entire political structure of the time. He even questions the very foundations of the parliamentary democracy and the principle of the rule of majority. He also talks about the drawbacks of political parties, electoral processes and the law making. Thus, in the light of Gandhian criticism, the actual functioning of the parliamentary democracy is subject to suspicion. Gandhian economic philosophy is based on simple living and limited wants which would neither invite aggression nor impel one to commit aggression. Similarly, Gandhi is opposed to heavy machines and centralized production. The fear inherent is the loss of villages to the exploitation by the cities. Cities with better income prospects cause large scale migrations and thus drain the villages of their local talent and skills. For Gandhi claimed that industrialization is the outcome of man's greed for more profits. The machines, by rendering men unemployed deprive them of livelihood. Machines also drive out all the creative instincts of man and destroy the spirit of initiative. It can be concluded that if industrialization and mechanization degrade and exploit man, then these evils are the result of the socio-economic environment which favors unregulated capitalism or laissez faire. In such a scenario, Gandhian theory of decentralization proves to be more relevant as it discourages the unregulated free market and capitalism. Gandhian philosophy of adoption of swadeshi inspires

people to become self-reliant and self-confident. The Gandhian view of swadeshi is relevant even in today's globalized world. Globalization is, without doubt, a new form of imperialism. Gandhian opposition to imperialism and Satyagraha as a methodology, a non-violent means of conflict resolution becomes ever more relevant today. Faith, reason and persuasion – the triple virtues of Gandhian satyagraha are the foundations on which lasting peace can be built and from which a nonviolent social order devoted to truth, justice and freedom could be established.

Conclusion

The concept of decentralization of powers never remained central to the British. The primary concern of the British was to control the colossal territories of the subcontinent which could be done through a centralized administration. It was with the rising voices of the nationalists and Indian National Congress led by Gandhi that a political framework in lines with British Parliamentary system was devised and the powers devolved to the states.

The Gandhi's discourse of development was primarily based upon participatory democracy and Panchayati Raj system. Gandhi realized that the genuine development could be scored not by the grand centralized political systems but by Gram Swaraj in which the role of state shall be minimal against the grassroots level local governments. Gandhi regarded self-sufficient and self-governing village communities as the role model organizations of a non-violent state. He counsels the states to take necessary steps to organize village Panchayats and endow them with such powers that enable them to function as units of local self-government.

Inspired by the Gandhian views the idea of local self-government received significant attention in the post-independence era. In 1957 Balwant Rai Mehta Committee was constituted to study the impact of Community Development Programme and National Extension Service. The committee proffered a wonderful idea that the character of the development

programmes should change from “Government’s programme with people’s participation to people’s programme with Governments’ participation.” Thus a Journey towards political and administrative decentralization began. By 1960 most of the states went for enacting of Panchayat Raj Acts. However, the need for more explicit laws was felt for proper devolution of powers and implementation of the Panchayati Raj laws.

The tumultuous years of Indian democracy when the single dominant power system developed fissures and several new state governments were found the demands for the strengthening of Panchayati Raj institutions also gained momentum. It was felt that provisions of Article 40 were insufficient to ensure development of village Panchayats and states had to be equipped with more powers, specifically provided in the Indian constitution and state laws. This led to the enactment of the 73rd amendment of the Constitution in 1993. The amendment has become a hallmark of the decentralization of powers to the village Panchayats, the primary units of local self government. In all twenty nine subjects of socio-economic significance have been devolved Panchayati Raj institutions to make them more vibrant units of democracy.

Thus the Gandhian dream of decentralization of powers stands institutionalized but a lot more needs to be achieved in this direction. His vision to construct a harmonious, self-contained, empowered and uncorrupted village side by side with the modern urban life and western technology still remains unfilled. He firmly believed that India could recover its lost self and true freedom only through reconstruction of her villages. It can be claimed that vision of his village is answer to various problems raised by industrialization, urban unrest, migration and economic independence. His appeal is quite powerful among those looking for alternatives to the conflict ridden, polluted and un-livable big cities. His ideas have not only inspired many environmentalist writings, shaped liberal-welfarist models of governance but emphasized democratic decentralization in other parts of the world too.

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