

Gandhiji and Decentralized Polity and Economy : A Views

Ananth Kumar D. R.¹

Lecturer, Research Scholar
Dept. of Political Science
Tumkur University, Tumkur

Dr. NARAYANASWAMY. A. M²

M.A., M.Phil., PhD
Lecturer, Department of Sociology
Govt. First Grade College
Madhugiri- 572132 Tumkur- District
Karnataka state, India

I. Introduction

Gandhi is universally known as the most renowned theorist and also the practitioner Of truth, love, non-violence, tolerance freedom & peace. He was very much concerned with the nature, poor, deprived and the downtrodden and he has intender to alter the evil, political, social, and economic systems of the people. In the ethical sense, every man is 'great' who lays down his life for others. Hence Gandhiji was indeed 'Great' for he lived and scarified his life for the "lowliest of the low" and the starving millions of India. He had a dreams which consisted not of the few cities but of the innumerable villages. His mission was to reconstruct India from below upwards- a decentralized socio-political and economic order with India's myriad villages as its base.

Democracy depends upon the equality of all human beings; their right to participate is social and political transformation and the right to development, to live in dignity. Self rushing is a system and process of good governance. Villages have always been the basic units of administration in India since ancient times. The gram Sabha can become the cornerstone of the whole Panchayat raj institutional set-up, thereby the Indian democratic system. So in this paper focus is on Gandhian concept of Panchayat Raj (decentralized polity)

II. Decentralized Polity

Political decentralization can be defined as transfer/ dispersal of decision making powers, accompanied by delegation of required, authority to authority to individuals or units at all levels of organization even if they are located for away from the power centre. Decentralization implies not only the sharing of the decision-making authority with lower levels in the organization, but also in the context of institutional framework of division of power. Accordingly, decentralization combined with democratization, in its electoral representative form, might provide greater transparency, accountability, responsiveness, probity, frugality, efficiency, equity and opportunities for mass participation.

III. Gandhiji's concept of political decentralization

The concept of decentralization occupies paramount importance in Gandhian scheme of rebuilding India from below upwards. .

Gandhiji stood for the decentralization of both political and economic power which he believed is possible only by beginning from bottom upwards and not vice-versa. Village Swaraj was an essential componet of decentralized polity or decentralized governance.

Gandhiji's concept of political decentralization bears the stamp of his passionate belief in non- violence, truth and individual freedom. He calls it Panchayati Raj or village swaraj. He wants to see each village a little republic, self- sufficient in the vital wants organically and non-herachically linked with the larger spatial bodies and enjoying the maximum freedom of decading the affairs of the locality. Gandhi wanted political power to be distributed among the villages in India. Gandhi preferred the term 'Swaraj' to describe what he called true democracy. This

democracy is based upon freedom. Individual freedom in Gandhi's view could be maintained only in autonomous, self-reliant communities that offer opportunities to the people for fullest participation.

IV. Gandhi Views on Decentralization of the Economy

Fundamental to Gandhi's economic approach was the idea that each individual should have the wherewithal to feed and clothe himself adequately. For the universal realization of this ideal, it was necessary, he wrote, that "the means of production of elementary necessities of life remain in the control of the masses Their monopolization by any country, nation or groups of persons would be unjust." Neglect of this principle was the cause of the destitution that was a worldwide phenomenon.

So, it can be said that decentralization of the production of essential commodities was the pillar of Gandhi's economic philosophy. His own khadi movement, he said, was an example of this approach. In it, poor peasants were given advances to buy cotton and spinning wheels from AISA units and the cotton they spun was bought at fixed prices by AISA and passed on to the weavers.

The weavers were also given help where required and the cloth they produced was retailed at fixed prices in shops set up specifically for the purpose. Gandhi formulated rules that khadi should not be sold outside the locality or province where it was produced. In this manner, the whole enterprise was supervised and coordinated by AISA with the aim of assuring a living to those who needed it the most.

Gandhi was in favour of granting total protection to indigenous industries by banning import of articles that could be produced in the country itself, even if the cost of production was greater and the quality inferior in the initial stages. He would permit import facilities for only those articles that were an absolute necessity and could in no circumstances be produced in the country.

A major advance in Gandhi's economic thinking was marked by the Resolution on Fundamental Rights and Economic Changes, which he drafted for the Karachi Congress in March 1931. It was his picture of swaraj in which the exploitation of the masses would end only when their political freedom included real economic freedom. The economic clauses in the resolution included special protection for women workers, prohibition against employment of children in factories, and the right of workers to form unions to protect their interests.

In the agricultural sector, the resolution provided for a substantial reduction in the rents paid by the peasantry and, in the case of uneconomic holdings, exemption from rent for such period as might be necessary. Relief would be given to small zamindars wherever necessary by reason of such reduction. A progressive income tax was to be imposed on agricultural incomes above a fixed minimum.

Other measures to rationalize and improve the state economy included a graduated inheritance tax; reduction in military expenditure by at least one half of the prevailing scale; and considerable reduction in expenditure and salaries in civil departments. A truly radical clause was that no servant of the state, other than specially employed experts and the like, was to be paid above a certain fixed figure, which should not ordinarily exceed Rs 500 per month.

The clauses relating to the industrial sector sought to provide protection to indigenous cloth by exclusion of foreign cloth and foreign yarn from the country; control over the exchange and

currency policy to help Indian industries and bring relief to the masses; and control of key industries and ownership of mineral resources by the state.

Thus, Gandhi envisaged a major economic role for the state. Provisions in the resolution that had a moral undertone, but also an economic impact, were the total prohibition of intoxicating drinks and drugs; abolition of duty on salt manufactured in India; and control of direct or indirect usury.

Describing the intention of the resolution in unambiguous terms, Gandhi said: "By passing this resolution, we make it clear to the world and to our own people what we propose to do as soon as we come into power They (the clauses) are also meant to forewarn all concerned. Let them prepare themselves for the coming legislation by modelling their lives in the light of coming changes."

Gandhi's thinking turned more and more towards economic equality, but he knew that it was an ideal that could only be approximated. Therefore, he wrote largely about equitable distribution of wealth. He would not, as far as possible, recommend compulsion to achieve this object because he believed in non-violence. His faith in the essential goodness of man made him adhere to his theory of trusteeship.

The rich, he held, could not accumulate wealth without the cooperation and labour of the poor in society; therefore, they should hold their superfluous wealth in trust for them and not squander it on luxuries. If they refused to do so, the poor should collectively refuse to cooperate with the proprietors of wealth and offer non-violent resistance, or satyagraha. This was, he was convinced, the only enduring remedy for the crushing inequalities in society.

In 1942, Gandhi was ready to consider trusteeship as a legalized institution and not merely the whim of a lone philanthropist. "A trustee has no heir but the public," he wrote in Harijan in reply to a pointed question from a correspondent. "In a state built on the basis of non-violence, the commission of trustees will be regulated. Princes and zamindars will be on par with the other men of wealth." Though Gandhi himself accepted and practised the ideal of non-possession and voluntary poverty, he did not, unlike the Marxists, forsake the notion of private property altogether. However, he favoured many limitations on it to secure the ends of social justice and community welfare.

In retrospect, one may say that all Gandhi's plans and policies were aimed at a comprehensive social and economic transformation of Indian society in which the emphasis was on the villages as they contained more than 80 per cent of the country's population. They would provide them sustenance through their leadership and expertise. This, he hoped, would usher in a mutually reinforcing, rather than antagonistic, relationship between urban and rural areas. Only in this way would their development be founded on social and economic justice.

The application of the technique of satyagraha for the resolution of social and political conflicts; the production of swadeshi goods for mass consumption and export; the all round uplift of villages; an integrated pattern of adult and primary education; uprooting of the social stigma of untouchability; fostering of communal harmony; mobilization of women as prime movers in society; an all India organization for popular mobilization; and a socialistic pattern of economic development were among the foremost instruments of social change as perceived by Gandhi.

V. Village republic

Gandhi was firmly of the view that the creation of Ram raj is possible only through the creation of Gram raj. These should be a very large number of free and voluntary associations of the people to look after their own affairs. Each village should be autonomous to manage its affairs through its Panchayat. In the government by the village the entire village will be the owner of the land and all participate in production and the produce equally. Distributed among all there will be no class distinctions. In this state each individual shall have maximum freedom and opportunity to develop his personality to the greatest extent.

Indian villages produced and supplied to the Indian towns and cities all their wants. India became impoverished when our cities became foreign markets and began to drain the villages dry by dumping cheap and shoddy goods from foreign markets. Acharya Kripalani wrote that the most intelligent and active members who could have contributed to the life of the villages have migrated to cities, to seek employment as the industrial complexes are located there.

Gandhi also proposed a scheme of government under the Gandhian Constitution beginning from the primary unit the Village Panchayat to the level of the All-India Panchayat, with the powers being assigned to all levels of the government. He spoke about the distribution of powers and finances to the seven hundred thousand villages which would become the shareholders of those assets. And this in turn would make them responsible for the effective management of these assets. These villages should not only be self-sufficient but also capable of defending themselves, even if need be, against the whole world.

VI. Village unit of a decentralized system

Gandhi made it very clear that concentration of either economic or political power would violate all the essential principles of participatory democracy. To check centralization, Gandhi suggested the institution of village republics both as institutions of parallel politics and as units of economic autonomy. Village is the lowest unit of a decentralized system. Politically a village has to be small enough to permit everyone to participate directly in the decision making process. It is the basic institution of participatory democracy.

The Gandhian decentralization means the creation of parallel politics in which people's power is institutionalized to counter the centralizing and alienating forces of the modern state according to Mahatma Gandhi. Utilization of the local resources is quite fundamental to the development of the Panchayat Raj System. The Panchayats with the Gram Sabhas should be so organized as to identify the resources locally available for development in the agricultural and industrial sectors.

Each village a little republic, self-sufficient, enjoying maximum freedom for deciding the affairs of the locality. Gandhi also proposed a scheme of government under the Gandhian Constitution beginning from the primary unit the Village Panchayat to the level of the All-India Panchayat, with the powers being assigned to all levels of the government. These villages should not only be self-sufficient but also capable of defending themselves, even if need be, against the whole world. In his Presidential Address at the Belgaum Congress, Gandhi said that the Panchayat was not only a right medium for securing cheap justice but also an instrument for avoiding reliance on government for the settlement of mutual justice.

VII. Democratic development through Decentralization

According to Gandhi decentralization of political power is the basic requirement for the success of true democracy. For him a decentralized democracy based on non-violence must consist of groups settled in small communities or villages in which voluntary co-operation is the condition of dignified and peaceful existence. For it is the only way to realize the value of democracy from the

grassroots level as it will enable the people to participate in taking and implementing decisions without a rigid and strict control of any higher authority. Moreover, it is the only alternative to reduce the interference of the state in day to day affairs of the people. Gandhi never believed in half-way house democracy, or disinterest decentralization he does not advocate decentralization only because of the economic and political advantages. To Gandhi decentralization envisions and upholds the cultural or spiritual ideal of simple living and high thinking. Thus his linking for decentralization originates from his usage for the shrinking of the date and depending of the roots of democracy.

VIII. Relevance of Gandhian political decentralization .

The vehicle that was most ideal to initiate both political and economic democracy at the grassroots level was the Panchayati Raj system. Mahatma Gandhi's tours all across the country reinforced his convictions that India would benefit if the villages were governed by Village Panchayats based on the principal of "simple living and high thinking". These were village republics which were self-contained and self-reliant and having all that people want.

These were the institutions where minimum standard of living could be accorded to all human beings. An individual had maximum freedom and opportunity to develop his personality to the greatest extent. In these republics there would be a diminution of the state and the roots of democracy deepened. According to him centralization cannot be sustained as a system without adequate force.

By the political decentralization Gandhi meant "prevention of massive concentrations of political power in the hands of too few, rather to distribute it in the hands of many. The Gandhian political order takes the form of direct participation democracy operating in a tier structure from the base village level tier upward through their district and state levels to the national level. Gandhian democracy is still relevant in India. Gandhiji's development discourse hinged in a village based participatory democracy embedded in his vision of the Panchayat Raj. Gandhi advocated for a democratic polity that would have its foundation in thousands of self governing village communities.

Gandhi felt that real development of India can take place only through political system of Gram Swaraj in which the state government would only exercise such powers which are not within the scope and competence of the lower tiers of participatory governance institutions. Rural local government in the form of Panchayats were included in the chapter on Directive principles of the state policy (article-40) It stated that the states shall take steps to organize village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self government.

But it is clear from the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments of Indian constitution that amendment is related only with rural administration of India. One significant provision of that amendment is decentralization of power upto the rural level. That amendment has already been implemented in India in 1992.

Gandhi concept of political decentralization not only helped to people in the field of politics and also helped to social and economic. This is the method of all round development of the people. This is the Gandhian political ideal as based on ethical and spiritual grounds raising real democratic values. In the state of Gandhian enlightened anarchy there is no place for injustice, immoral actions, any kind of variations based on caste or religion, possessions or non- possessions, sex etc. Equality and fraternity only remaining there and people are enjoying their life peacefully.

IX. Conclusions

A technique which tends to make man a robot, robs him of his perennial urge to freedom and makes an all-out invasion on his political, economic and social liberties is not acceptable to Gandhi. "Science in so far as it consists of knowledge, must be regarded as having value, but in so far as it consists of technique, the question whether it is to be praised or blamed depends upon the use that is made of the technique. In itself it is neutral, neither good or bad and any ultimate view that we may have about what gives value to this or that must come from some other source than science." This is what Bertrand Russell has to say about the use of scientific technique. According to Gandhi, the scientific technique, therefore, must be informed by a deep awareness of values which it is out to create. In other words, the advancement of technique and perfection must accord with the general aims. Large-Scale technique strikes at the very root of the general aims. Gandhi, therefore, does not show any quarter to it.

References

1. V.P. Varma-political philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi & Sarvodaya
2. WWW.MKgandhi.org/article
3. WWW.arthapedia.in
4. socialsciences.in
5. [shodhaganga,inflibnet](http://shodhaganga.inflibnet)
6. appliedgandhi.blogspot.in
7. *Harijan-A Journal of Applied Gandhism-1933-1935*, (New York and London, Garland Publishing House Inc, 1973), Vol IX, p. 27.
8. *Gandhi's Correspondence with the Government 1942-1944*, *ibid.*, p.174
9. M.K. Gandhi, *Village Swaraj*, (Navjivan Trust, Ahmedabad, 1962), p.71.
10. *Mahatma Gandhi's Message to the Indian Youth*, *op cit.*, p. 52.
11. Shriman Narayan Agarwal, *Gandhian Constitution for Free India*, (Allahabad, Kitabistan, 1946) for further details.