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Review Article

## **Decentralized Governance: Gandhian Ideals for Sustainable Socioeconomic Progress**

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**Abstract:** The nature of Gandhian political beliefs was investigated in this paper. What did Gandhi mean when he spoke about the state, politics, democracy, leadership, decentralisation, freedom, rights, and duties? He also spoke about his future vision for India. The research also looked at Gandhi's political contributions to the Indian constitution, including panchayats, secularism, and the abolition of untouchability, freedom of speech, and their relevance today. Finally, in a nutshell, I had gained some awareness of the recently emerged issues in the current society and hoped to address them in the context of Gandhian ideals in order to establish real democracy. As a result, the primary emphasis of this essay was on Gandhiji's political accomplishments and ideals as well as their continued significance. His political beliefs were decentralisation, freedom of expression, moral politics, secularism, stateless and partyless democracy, and the removal of untouchability. In this day and age, increasing intolerance and violence, Gandhian political conceptions and principles are very applicable.

**Keywords:** Decentralisation, Gandhian Ideals, Village Swaraj, Socioeconomic Progress, Gramme Panchayat

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The village economy was revived as part of the Gandhian strategy of economic decentralisation, which aimed to create a republic that was self-sufficient, self-supporting, and balanced between cottage industry and agriculture. The introduction of modest scientific technologies was allowed in this self-sufficiency equilibrium model as long as it didn't lead to unemployment or take advantage of others. Gandhi thought that the establishment of a nonviolent social order was incompatible with centralisation. Increased governmental control, monopolies, urbanisation, and wealth and income disparity are all consequences of economic centralisation. However, centralised manufacturing is essential

for a number of fundamental and important sectors, including heavy engineering, chemicals, mining, and public utilities like railroads and electricity. The public sector will own and run these companies, but the means of production for basic requirements of existence will continue to be controlled by the general populace. Large-scale enterprises may be able to create goods that tiny and cottage industries are unable to. It is decentralised since the hamlet was transformed into a republic. This arrangement encourages individuals to actively participate in economic, political, social, and cultural matters in a comparable manner; town and city communities are arranged and united by connections of mutual assistance and dependency. Every action would be carried out by the panchayat in a cooperative manner, to the greatest extent feasible. During its one-year tenure, the panchayat, also known as the community government, will function as the combined executive, judicial, and legislative branches. In this place, a perfect democracy is founded on individual freedom, and each person designs their own kind of government. (M. K. Gandhi, 1926)

As a result, there are two main sectors in the decentralised economic system: the public sector and the private/cooperative sector. Gandhi's eighteen-point Constructive Programme shapes the decentralised private-cum-cooperative economy. However, Shriman.Narayan.Agrawal clarifies the matter of coordination between the nationalised and non-nationalised sectors in his 1944 book, "The Gandhian Plan of Economic Development for India." The primary characteristics of this planned economy are as follows (M. Gandhi, 1958):

- The state will own and control the fundamental and important industries for the benefit of the whole country.
- Under this approach, there won't be much room for capitalist ventures and investments.
- The Gramme Panchayat is the centre of the entire plan.
- The plan's creed is simple living and high thinking.

The plan's execution will prioritise the revival of village communities with the greatest amount of autonomy, even though the Central National Planning Committee, with its provincial branches, will play a major role.

Therefore, a greater quality of life for the populace, albeit not a steadily rising one, is the goal of the nationalised commanding heights of the economy and the decentralised private-cum-cooperative village community structure. (Dunn, 1979)

### **Gandhi's Vision For Socioeconomic Progress**

The Gandhian village production system is critiqued for having a balance between consumption and output. There is no room for the steadily rising quality of life or the building up of surplus for the society's further development. Thus, just as in the Middle Ages, society is compelled to revolve around the orbits of basic reproduction. His concepts of non-possession and voluntary poverty allow for the buildup of surplus, but they do not provide sufficient incentives to spur quicker economic growth. Equal income distribution is encouraged by the division of industry into small units and the widespread ownership of the means of production. Because of the jobs it creates, everyone may access money. Conversely, large-scale, centrally managed manufacturing encourages growth and accumulation but concentrates money in the hands of a small number of individuals. Therefore, certain systemic changes are needed to strike a balance between equality and employment and progress and accumulation. (Prabhu, 1959)

Decentralisation is thus the foundation of Gandhi's philosophy, which is based on his concepts of Swadeshi and Village Swaraj, his concern for the underprivileged and the self-sufficiency of the village republics, the sovereign position occupied by individuals in his scheme of things, his passion for the advancement of man in freedom through the exercise of personal initiative, his desire to build up the social structure on non-violence, and his belief that the state is a soulless machine. Dudley Seers posed fundamental concerns regarding development, which the decentralised approach sought to answer. These are: what's going on with poverty? What is the state of unemployment? What is the current state of inequality? The Gandhian model is acknowledged by economists such as D. R. Gadgil, C. N. Vakil, and Brahmananda as being the most appropriate for India.

### **Interlacing Gandhi's Wisdom Into Decentralisation**

India's villages are its essence. Mahatma Gandhi once said that India would also die if the villages collapsed. India's future thus resides in its countryside. Furthermore, about half of the nation's 5.76 lakh villages are spread across various topographies with deplorable socioeconomic circumstances. Gandhi's emphasis on the decentralisation of the means of production—that is, economic power—may have been his greatest contribution to social theory this century. Since his thesis is the sole solution to the nation's unemployment issue, many people are willing to give it careful study. (Nehru, 1960)

They contend that decentralisation is preferable as massive capital accumulation is required to industrialise the nation via large-scale enterprises. They further argue that

decentralisation is the only worthwhile objective as widespread industry requires the presence of international markets, which this nation cannot have. Stated differently, large-scale industry will be preferred if the issues around international markets and capital generation are resolved.

Now, Gandhi's whole decentralisation doctrine is in jeopardy because of this line of thinking. It would be incorrect to assume that Gandhi developed his philosophy primarily to accommodate circumstances in India. (Mehta, n.d.)

However, Gandhi's philosophy of decentralisation emerged from his acute and almost prescient understanding of the many political, social, and cultural evils that the era of massive industrialisation had left in its wake.

Bertrand Russell discusses Gandhi's decentralisation idea as follows: "In those parts of the world where industrialism is still in its infancy, but there is hope for preventing the disasters we have seen. India, for example, has traditionally been a country of village communities. It would be tragic if this ancient way of life, with all its flaws, were suddenly and violently replaced with the greater issues of industrialism. This would be particularly true for those whose standard of living is already abject. So, all it takes to understand Gandhi's decentralisation idea is to realise how big those "horrors" are that Russell speaks about. The word "decentralisation" also refers to the process by which tasks and responsibilities are assigned from a higher or central authority to the institutions or organisations at lower levels, providing them with enough incentive for autonomous operation. (Prabhu, 1959)

Decentralisation includes a spatial component, meaning that when an organisation's operations are distributed across a large geographic area, it may be more effective to plan and oversee the widely dispersed activities from a location other than the central headquarters. Since they have more autonomy and less central control, the decentralised units perform better. The foundation of a small number of people holding all the political power is large-scale industrialism. Large-scale enterprises, by their very nature, concentrate economic power in the hands of a small number of people. (Gandhi, M. K. (1942), "My Idea of Village Swaraj", Harijan, 26 July 1942, n.d.) This authority is centralised in the hands of individual capitalists under capitalism, and it is taken over by managers, technocrats, and bureaucrats under socialism. Therefore, the idea of democracy itself is refuted by the State's concentration of power. (Nehru, 1960)

Gandhi opposed what is known as Western democracy for this reason. He believed that Western democracy was just ceremonial. Since only a small number of people could enjoy political power under this system, it was really dictatorial. In addition to its negative impact on politics, industrialisation has a negative psychological impact on people. The first act of industrialism is to break the man's navel chord, which is bound by dirt and the all-encompassing, corrosive shadow of massive machinery. He thus becomes just another gear in the machine. Industrialisation restricts man's ability to express himself since it is predicated on the division of work. The aforementioned charge is further supported by Adam Smith's well-known image, which states that a pin must pass through ninety hands before it is fully made. As a result, the work loses its colour, initiative, and diversity. Undoubtedly, having such a division boosts output. However, it prevents the full expression of human ability. (Frankel, Francine (2005))

### **Empowering Rural Communities For Sustainable Growth**

Gandhi once said, "A large nation with a cohesive populace and a long-standing rural culture that has served its purpose up to this point need not, and should not, imitate the Western. model. What works well in one country under certain circumstances may not be sufficient in another with other circumstances. Thus, he promoted a nonviolent culture and civilisation, which could only be established in independent and self-sufficient communities. His deepest wish was for India's rural millions to be the powerful allies of its economy and politics. He considered life to be a single thing, and his goal was to create life as an integrated notion that was easy to understand but richer in quality in terms of moral, political, social, and economic growth. (Terchek, 1986)

Gandhi was certain that the villages needed to be given their rightful role if we were to establish Swaraj on the basis of non-violence. Furthermore, he made the point that because exploitation is the root of all violence, we could not establish nonviolence just on the foundation of a manufacturing society, but also on self-contained communities. (Frankel, Francine (2005))

The foundations of our society's structure, as well as people's social and religious beliefs, are. the postulates of Swadeshi, Khadi, Trusteeship, Bread-Labour (truth and non-violence being continuous value criteria), non-exploitation, non-possession, and equality. The growth of villages is essential to the establishment of a just and social order. Gandhi did not have a limited perspective on villages, nor did he want to propagate the preservation of the dilapidated, unsanitary hamlet with its ancient, decaying homes, etc.

Instead, he saw communities as hubs of production with skilled labour, a first-rate environment, and flexible technology. (Terchek, 1986.)

### **Rural Development As Envisaged By Gandhi**

In Gandhi's plan, there are circles that are always becoming wider and never getting higher inside a system made up of countless communities. Life is not a pyramid where the base supports the summit. However, it resembles an ocean circle, with the person at its heart, always prepared to die for the village, and the village itself prepared to die for a circle of villages. (1946, Harijan: 236-237)(Gandhi, M. K. (1942) In keeping with his idea of the oceanic circle, Gandhi hoped that "The individual being pure, sacrifices himself for the family, the latter for the village, the village for the district, the district for the province, the province for the nation, the nation for all" (Young India 1931: 123). The link between the rural and urban regions is complementary, according to Gandhi. There are now two sectors, each of which represents a different group or class of people, competing with one another. (M. K. Gandhi, 1926)

Gandhi's vision of the village was based on the post-modern viewpoint of "quality of life," which today's men of ideas realised only after seeing the devastation caused by modern urban industrialism, rather than the contemporary (urban-industrial) sense of "development."(Nadkarni et al., 2017)

In general, a village may serve as

- 1) a market for commodities made in metropolitan regions,
- 2) a source of raw materials, or
- 3) an independent organisation.

Under approaches (i) and (ii), it cannot thrive. The community qualifies as a good citizen only based on the third system. Gandhi emphasised, saying, "In my imaginary village, which has a thousand souls, a village unit is as strong as the strongest." If such a unit is set up correctly and operates on the principle of self-sufficiency, it may provide a positive image of itself. (Pyarelal 361 in 1958)(M. K. Gandhi, 1926)

He would not give up on a way of living in the village where character was paramount, saying, "Intelligent people would live in my perfect village. They will not survive as animals in the mud and the gloom. Nobody will be idle or live in luxury, and there won't be a plague, cholera, or smallpox. Each person must do their fair share of physical effort. (Nehru 1960: 506)

Gandhi envisioned the communities as "tiny gardens of Eden" or as "model villages," replacing the term "dung heaps." Gandhi believed that village rehabilitation has to be planned for the long term. In contrast to the Gandhian perspective, a skewed strategy for rural development was implemented in the years after independence. For instance, the National Extension Service (NES) and the Community Development Programme (CDP) were introduced, but they were unable to inspire rural residents' involvement or popular initiative. These initiatives fell short of affecting the rural community as a whole. In a similar vein, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) were set up, but they lacked the authority and funding needed to achieve the intended outcomes. Gandhi, however, aspires to energise village life as a whole. All facets of village life, including the economics, political structure, health, sanitation, etc., have been duly taken into account in his constructive work plan. (Prabhu, 1959)

### **Gandhi's Vision Of Democracy**

Gandhi intended to utilise democracy as a tool to accomplish his bigger objectives, but it cannot be fully implemented or disregarded. In actuality, it must be contextualised in light of the current situation. A few recent ideas and hypotheses have been used to support this conclusion.

Gandhi believed that arbitrary authority was incompatible with the objectives he had set for himself. He came to the conclusion that the best chance of accomplishing his objectives seemed to lie in a democratic government combined with an egalitarian society. He claimed that democratic governance promoted the spread of power and raised the likelihood that freedom and equality would be sought. According to him, democracy ought to be predicated on collaboration and agreement that go beyond the majority principle and prioritise the well-being of everyone. (Dey, S.K. (1982), *Destination Man*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, n.d.). He said, "It is appropriate to defer to the majority in questions of detail, but the rule of the majority has a circumscribed applicability. However, submitting to the majority's judgments, regardless of their nature, is tantamount to slavery. Individual liberty, opinion, and action are fiercely protected in democracies. I hope that what we desire is a government that is built on conversion rather than force, even against a minority. (Dunn 1979: 27) He said that British democracy was flawed because it was based on the idea that the person with fifty-one per cent of the vote would win. The majority had the last say over the minority. Although he thought that consent was the cornerstone of all successful governments, he wanted to see the perfect state as being governed by unselfish people. He

disapproved of liberal democracy, contending that individuals just strive for their own interests. (Al., 1934)

For Gandhi, democracy meant both substantive and procedural. For him, democracy meant giving the weakest people the same opportunities as the strongest. He bemoaned the fact that democracy had devolved into party control, or more accurately, the Prime Minister's rule, which often lacked integrity of purpose. He said that each side benefits from it by engaging in horse trading and exaggerating sensationalism, which the media exaggerates. (Mehta 1996: 219)

Gandhi envisioned his perfect democracy as a decentralised economy, a simpler way of life, and a distributed distribution of authority in the village. With just their own products to eat, the peasants would have plenty for themselves. Handspun fabric, or khadi, was the main source of employment in the community and gave everyone valuable work. Gandhi placed a strong focus on direct labour in the agricultural and handicraft sectors, stressing that workers needed to be able to operate equipment and not become too reliant on it in order to support themselves. He thought that when production is localised, that is, when distribution occurs concurrently with production, distribution may be equalised. He felt that by focusing all activity on the villages, the people would still be in charge of the means of producing basic needs. (*E.A. Narayana, "Reforms in Anchayati Raj", The Indian Journal of Public Administration, January-March 1991, p.34. Constituent Assembly Debates (1989), Vol. VII (4 Nov. 1948 – 8 Jan. 1949), Reprint, New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, n.d.*). The villagers would collaborate, combining their resources, labour and goods, and splitting the earnings. He anticipated an agricultural society based on cooperation, in which each hamlet would be essentially economically and politically independent, to replace the competitiveness of capitalism. The panchayats, a five-person village council chosen by the populace, would have local authority over the villages. (Terchek, 2000)

Gandhi disregarded the conventional wisdom of democracy. He refuted the notion that elections and voting alone can guarantee a popularly consenting government or protect individual liberty. (Mehta, 1986)

Gandhi believed that popular rule required even more, yet he still valued representative democracy. He aspired to support a system in which all kinds of power are distributed, and significant reductions in economic, social, and political inequality had occurred.

According to him, a perfect democracy safeguards and values diversity, giving particular consideration to those who have historically been marginalised. Gandhi said, "This age of awakening of the poorest of the poor is the age of democracy," in keeping with this attitude. (Source: 194) He challenged Democrats to work towards simplifying government and eschewing dominance and hierarchy in order to make it a reality. Gandhi, however, believes that even the most perfect democracy may make errors, and he equips his people with the weapon of civil disobedience to oppose injustice. (Terchek, n.d.)

### **Idea Of Liberty**

Gandhi believes that freedom is incompatible with responsibility and that freedom necessitates accountability. He believed that one cannot be free if one does not take responsibility for one's actions. According to him, the liberal definition of freedom is flawed as well since it ignores the social foundation of human existence and is self-serving. Gandhi believed that we cannot make claims for ourselves at the cost of others since what we do impacts others and they affect us. He maintained that rights and obligations are mutually exclusive and that it is impossible to defend one without the other. According to what he said, "Every responsibility fulfilled bestows a particular privilege, and the exercise of every right entails corresponding responsibilities.

Thus, the never-ending circle of obligation and righteousness continues." Terchek (1986) p. 314–315. Gandhi emphasised that individuals must be conscious of the effects of their own deeds. They could not be considered free unless they accepted responsibility for their actions and their tolerance. (Terchek, 1986)

### **Idea Of Equality**

Equality is a fundamental tenet of Gandhian democracy. Gandhi did not advocate for complete economic equality that extended to all people equally when he spoke of equality. Gandhi said that equality in terms of the economy "simply meant that everybody should have enough for his or her needs." (Terchek, 1986, p. 316) Gandhi opposed this form of equality, even if it might be attained by government ownership of all property, as it relied on centralised control that would restrict personal freedom. Gandhi believed that equality should promote rather than limit personal freedom. He thus desired a considerable reduction in the spectrum of economic disparities. (Terchek, 1986, p. 316)

Gandhi saw trusteeship as a post-capitalist structure that would replace the current capitalist social order with an egalitarian one. According to him, "Trusteeship offers a way to change the current capitalist social structure into an egalitarian one. Although it allows

the current owning class a chance to change itself, it does not give in to capitalism. It is predicated on the idea that atonement is always possible for human nature. It does not acknowledge the existence of any private property rights other than those that society may grant for its own good."(Deutsch: 386 (1986)) This implies that the new Gandhian perspective was to refuse to accept what nobody can have. Gandhi rejected the idea that the greatest benefit for the greatest number should be the guiding principle. He said, "I reject the idea that the greatest benefit for the largest number of people should come first. Its plain meaning is that the interests of 49% may, or rather should, be sacrificed in order to fulfil the purported welfare of 51%. It has harmed mankind and is a callous philosophy."Gandhi: 1961, 7) Gandhi thus believed that the greatest welfare of all is the only true, honourable human ideology, and that this can only be attained by complete self-sacrifice. (Nadkarni, M.V., Sivanna, N., & Suresh, 2017)

## **CONCLUSION**

India is still mostly a rural nation, and the welfare state that prioritises industrialisation and urbanisation has not been able to address the issues facing the countryside. Similar to how rural people have been marginalised, and the wealthy upper and middle class have reaped the benefits of economic progress, these developments may be attributed to globalisation and the free-market economy. Poor people have been ignored, both generally and specifically, in rural areas. It is true that the PRIs were given constitutional stature and had their roles and responsibilities codified in the Constitution with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. It is a serious worry that PRIs in India do not now have enough financial resources or economic sustainability, particularly in light of globalisation. Thus, it is imperative that Indian policymakers and intellectuals give the problems associated with rural development careful consideration. For rural India, Gandhi's idea of a village republic seemed to provide a viable alternative. Gandhi creates an integrated strategy for village restoration that takes into account the interdependence of political, social, economic, and psychological elements because he thinks that all human existence is one. Since "India begins and ends in the village," Gandhi's call to "return to the village" is still pertinent today.

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