Gandhi's Ideas on Village Community and Modern Civilisation

Avirup Sinha

Abstract: *This article explores the Gandhian idea of Indian village community and his notion of modern civilisation. The village for Gandhi reflected the essence of Indian civilization. According to him, Indian villages were self-sufficient units; he used this notion as a political symbol to strengthen anti-imperialist struggle in India. Gandhi characterised modern cities as symbols of colonial domination, decay and degradation. He emphasised on the programme of rural development. He also identified limitations such as untouchability, pollution etc. in India's villages and favoured their eradication. This article will explore all this and also try to understand the relevance of Gandhian ideas in today's context.*

Keywords: *Village Community, Modernity, Honesty Symbol, Village Republic, Utopia, Concrete Utopia.*

I

In India the majority of the population lives in villages; needless to say, rural development is essential to ensure development in the country. The Indian government initiated and implemented several rural developmental planning measures after independence through the Five Year Plans. During colonial rule, politicians like Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Dr.B.R.Ambedkar,

Jawaharlal Nehru, and others had their own ideas of rural development and rural reconstruction. This essay is about Gandhi's notion of the Indian village community and his ideas about modern civilization. We shall deal with mainly three issues. How did Gandhi use the concept of the village community to strengthen anti-imperial movement in India? How far were the Gandhian ideas practical or were they utopian in nature? What is the relevance of Gandhian notion of village community and modernity in the present-day context?

To understand these, we shall try to first understand the concept of village community. We shall then briefly discuss the understanding of colonial writers and administrators about the Indian village community. This is relevant because it helps us to understand how the Indian village community became a symbol of underdevelopment to the colonial writers, who used this concept to legitimise British rule in India. Thereafter we shall try to understand Gandhi's concept of the Indian village community and his ideas of rural reconstruction and his critique of modern cities and modern machinery.

<div align="center">II</div>

Literally, the term 'village' means a group of people living in households, situated in rural areas. It is also the smallest unit of local government. Louis Dumont explained the term 'village community' in three different ways: as a political society, as a body of co-owners of the soil, and as the emblem of traditional economy and polity.[i]

Villages have existed in the Indian subcontinent through ages. However, it was only during British colonial rule and through the writings of the colonial

administrators that India was constructed as a land of 'village republics'. This trend began with Sir Charles Metcalfe's (1785-1846) description of the 'village republic' that appeared in the British Parliamentary Inquiry of 1810.James Mill used it in his discussion on revenue matters. Mountstuart Elphinstone and E.B. Cowell further developed this concept.

A close study of the colonial literature makes it clear that British writers emphasised mainly two aspects of the Indian village community: that it was a self-sufficient republic, and that it was stagnant in nature. To quote Monier Monier-Williams: "It [the Indian village community] has existed unaltered since the description of its organization in Manu's code, two or three centuries before the Christian Era. It has survived all the religious, political and physical conclusions from which India has suffered from time immemorial..." [ii] As Ronald Inden pointed out, in order to legitimise colonial rule in India, British writers tried to portray Indian society as still ancient in nature. To quote Inden, "Just as the modern succeeded the ancient in time so the modern would dominate the ancient in space." [iii]

It must be mentioned that Karl Marx also believed that in India there has existed self-contained village communities unchanged since the 'Dark Age'. He believed that the Asiatic mode of production has no forward movement; this is because the structure of the Eastern social formations lacked certain fundamental distinctions found in Western forms. These are: no separation of the cultivating householder from the village, the clan or commune to which he belonged; an absence of division of labour among villages; and no separation of village from its land.[iv] Like Marx,

Henry Maine also emphasized on the changelessness of Indian village community. According to Maine, land was originally held in common and governed by village councils, and that a ruler or the state had the right to only a 'share' of the produce.[v] The Indian village community was thus projected as a symbol of backwardness in comparison with the modern civilisation in the West.

III

Gandhi's ideal villages belonged to the pre-British period, when they were small republics; it was this republican character of the villages that was destroyed by British rule. Therefore, in the Gandhian idea of rural reconstruction, what served as the model was the ancient republican village bereft of any exploitation. Gandhi aimed at the attainment of village *swaraj* and wrote in *Harijan* in 1942:

> My idea of village swaraj is that it is completely republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants and yet independent for many others in which dependence are necessary... Education will be compulsory up to the final basic course. As far as possible every activity will be conducted by panchayats of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers, male and female possessing minimum prescribed qualifications.[vi]

According to Surinder S. Jodhka, there are three ways in which Gandhi used the idea of the Indian village: he invoked it to establish equivalence of the Indian civilization with the West; he juxtaposed the village with the city and presented village life as a critique of, and an alternative to, modern western culture and civilization; he projected village as a political symbol.[vii] Interestingly, Gandhi

4

supported the view of Sir Henry Maine. According to the latter, the Indians have been familiar with representative institutions almost from time immemorial. Thus Gandhi tried to prove that the traditional Indian village and its core institution, i.e. caste, were compatible with modern western ideas of democracy as they were similarly organized on the principles of representative governance. His more substantive and better known writings on the village are from the time he came back to India and got involved in the nationalist struggle of which he was soon to assume leadership. In order to wage his struggle, Gandhi required a different set of ideas or an identity that would de-legitimize British rule over India. Such an ideology required the construction of a difference that would establish a sovereign identity of India and restore its cultural confidence; the idea of the village came to be very useful in this endeavour.

Gandhi gave primary importance to the welfare of individuals by reducing inequalities in income and wealth. According to him, every person ought to be provided with the basic necessities, i.e. food, shelter, and clothing. He was in favour of the self-sufficient village economy where the villages will be the independent economic units. He wrote in *Harijan*:

> 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.[viii]

Gandhi favoured agricultural techniques that would not pollute the soil and the environment; he wanted peasants to use lesser and lesser amounts of fertilizers and pesticides. He also preferred well-irrigation instead of large hydro-electric projects. As regards the ownership of land holding, he was against *zamindari* system and he held that ownership of land should go to the actual tillers of the soil. He also held that there should be communal ownership of land for balanced cultivation and surplus land, if any, must be distributed among the members of the village community. Gandhi also put forward a theory of trusteeship for rural development; this meant that the influential and affluent section of society would be the trustees of resources beyond their needs and keep aside such resources for rural development. However, he emphasized only on the need for a change of attitude among individuals to achieve this.

Gandhi wanted all goods and services necessary for village members be grown and provided for within the village. Thus, every village should be a self-contained republic. He held that if every village distributes its surplus produce among the poor, poverty and starvation would not be a problem in rural areas, and people would be happy and self-reliant. However, he also held that the agricultural sector alone cannot solve the problem of poverty and unemployment. That is why Gandhi stressed on the growth of the rural industries like sericulture, *khadi* and other handicrafts. He wrote:

> I have no doubt in my mind that we add to the national wealth if we help the small-scale industries. I have no doubt also that true Swadeshi consists in encouraging and reviving these home industries. That alone can help the dumb millions. It also

provides an outlet for the creative faculties and resourcefulness of the people. It can also usefully employ hundreds of youths in the country who are in need of employment. It may harness all the energy that at present runs to waste. I do not want anyone of those who are engaged in more remunerative occupations to leave them and take to the minor industries. Just as I did with regard to the spinning wheel, I would ask only those who suffer from unemployment and penury to take to some of these industries and add a little to their slender resource. [ix]

Gandhi realised that it would not be possible for a village to produce all necessities and so he emphasised on an integrated system of rural exchange. In 1944, he thus commented during a discussion with Shri Krishnadas Jaju:

To be self-sufficient is not to be altogether self-contained. In no circumstances would we be able to produce all the things we need nor do we aim at doing so. So though our aim is complete self-sufficiency, we shall have to get from outside the village what we cannot produce in the village; we shall have to produce more of what we can in order thereby to obtain in exchange what we are unable to produce. Only nothing of our extra produce would be sent to Bombay or far off cities. Nor would we produce things with an eye to export to those cities. That would run counter to my conception of swadeshi. Swadeshi means serving my immediate neighbor rather than those far away… [x]

However, while Gandhi favoured a revival of the spirit of the traditional village life, he also found many flaws with the actually existing villages; he was aware that not all the evils were a consequence of the Western or urban influence. Of these, he commented quite frequently on the practice of untouchability and a general lack of cleanliness. Compared to cities, untouchability was far more a serious problem in the

7

villages which Gandhi held as centres of orthodoxy. While he wanted the village society to abandon the practice of untouchability, he also wanted the untouchables to change themselves. According to him, the lack of hygiene and sanitation was the other thing that all villagers need to pay attention to. He was often disappointed by the disregard for cleanliness that he observed in most villages he visited in different parts of the sub-continent. In "*Shikshan Ane Sahitya*" published in 1929 Gandhi wrote:

> From the standpoint of health, the condition of villages is deplorable. One of the chief causes of our poverty is the no availability of this essential knowledge of hygiene. If sanitation in villages can be improved, lakhs of rupees will easily be saved and the condition of people improved to that extent. A sick peasant can never work as hard as a healthy one. . . In my opinion based on experience, our poverty plays a very small part in our insanitary condition.[xi]

Gandhi offered a solution. He developed an integrated plan for improving sanitation in villages. He wrote:

> [Every] village should have the most inexpensive water-closets built at one place. The spot at which the dunghill is located can itself be used for this purpose. Farmers can share among themselves the manure accumulated in this manner. And so long as they do not start making such arrangements, volunteers should clean dunghills in the same way as they clean streets. Every morning after the villagers have performed this function, they should go to the dunghill at an appointed hour, clean up all the filth and dispose of it in the manner mentioned above. If no field is available, one should mark out the place where the excreta may be buried. If this is

done, it will facilitate the task every day and when the farmers get convinced of the matter, they can make use of the manure that is collected there.[xii]

IV

In Gandhi's vision, the prosperity of Indian villages is possible only through rural-urban inter-dependence. He had an elaborate plan for labour-intensive production which would generate more employment opportunities and suit rural communities. According to him, regional development planning creates a better urban-rural balance and reduces migration pressure on urban areas; it is important that planners and policymakers develop strategies based on the realities of people's lives in both urban and rural areas. Gandhi's vision of an ideal region was eco-friendly and sustainable for future generation. Gandhi wrote in *Harijan* in 1947: "In the scheme of reconstruction for Free India, its villages should no longer depend, as they are now doing, on its cities, but cities should exist only for and in the interest of the villages. Therefore, the spinning-wheel should occupy the proud position of the centre round which all the life-giving village industries would revolve."[xiii]

He compared village life and city life and projected village life as an alternative to modern civilization. Gandhi considered village civilization and urban civilization as two contradictory concepts, and preferred village civilisation which eschewed machinery. He wrote: "Our country was never as unhappy and miserable as it is at present. In the cities people may be getting big profits and good wages, but all that has become possible by sucking the blood of the villagers.[xiv] To Gandhi, village life represented the essence of India; on the other hand, modern Indian cities symbolized colonial rule. He considered cities established by the British not a sign of progress

but that of degeneration. He commented in *Young India* in 1921: "Our cities are not India. India lives in her seven and a half-lakhs of villages. They do not bring their wealth from other countries. The city people are brokers and commission agents for the big houses of Europe, America and Japan. The cities have co-operated with the latter in the bleeding process that has gone on for the past two hundred years.[xv] Gandhi further said that the big cities were not only the symbols of alien rule and exploitation but they had a morally corrupting influence on the village people as well. In an article in *Young India*, published in 1927, Gandhi wrote: "Some of the villages are deserted for six of eight months during the year. Villagers go to Bombay, work under unhealthy and often immoral conditions, then return to their villages during the rainy season bringing with them corruption, drunkenness and diseases."[xvi] Thus, the upliftment of India, according to Gandhi, depended solely on the upliftment of the villages. Gandhi did not ask for the destruction of cities; he suggested that those living in cities would have to develop a village mentality and that they ought to learn the art of living from villagers.

V

It would now be relevant to discuss Gandhi's attitude towards modern machinery, his criticism of labour-saving machines, and an alternative suggested by him. In this context, two issues must be dealt with: the extent to which Gandhi was against modern science and his idea of Indian economic development.

Doubtless, modern machinery contributed to modern economic growth in the West. But according to Gandhi, "India does not need to be industrialized in the

modern sense of the term. It has 750,000 villages scattered over a vast area... The people are rooted to the soil, and the vast majority are living in a hand-to-mouth life..." [xvii] In his address to the Indian Industries Minister's Conference, held in Poona, Gandhi defined machinery as "...an appliance that tended to displace human or animal labour instead of supplementing it or merely increasing its efficiency".[xviii] In other words, machinery is antagonistic to human labour, and Gandhi blamed it for the problem of unemployment in India. Machinery, according to Gandhi, is also responsible for unequal distribution of wealth and power. He said: "The present use of machinery tends more and more to concentrate wealth in the hands of a few with total disregard to millions of men and women whose bread is snatched by it out of their mouths." [xix] In other words, modern machinery contributed to the rise of the capitalist classes. Gandhi also found a connection between machinery and violence. Industrial revolution created a need for new materials and new markets and this inspired the principal European powers to establish colonies in different parts of the world. Thus Gandhi argued: "[The] danger in making more and more machinery is that we have to make great efforts for the protection of it, that is to say, we shall have to keep an army as is being done today elsewhere in the world. The fact is that even if there is no danger of aggression from outside we shall be slaves to those who will be in control of big machinery." [xx]

As a remedy, Gandhi spoke of balanced economic development. He wanted peasants to have a supplementary industry in addition to their earnings from agriculture. He supported the promotion of hand-spinning and hand-weaving,

although it must be mentioned that he supported both mill industries and handlooms. The spinning wheel, according to Gandhi, has an additional symbolic importance. He wrote:

> When as a nation we adopt the spinning-wheel, we not only solve the questions of unemployment but we declare that we have no intention of exploiting any nation and we also end the exploitation of the poor by the rich... when I say I want independence from the millions, I mean to say not only that the millions may have something to eat and cover themselves with but that they will be free from the exploitation of the people here and outside.[xxi]

Was Gandhi against modern machinery and modern-day progress? Aldous Huxley was among the first to brand Gandhi and the *khadi* movement as anti-science. He commented: "Tolstoyans and Gandhites tell us that we must 'return to native', in other words, abandon science altogether and live like primitives, or, at best, in the style of our medieval ancestors. The trouble with this advice is that it cannot be followed if we are prepared to sacrifice at least 8-800 million human lives." [xxii] This view was shared by many Congress leaders, including Nehru. And yet, this is what Gandhi had to say: "...I am not opposed to the movement of manufacturing machines in the country, or to making improvements in machinery. I am only concerned with what these machines are meant for."[xxiii] In other words, Gandhi was against the craze for labour-saving machinery but not against machinery as such; he was against the use of machinery if a thing could be done manually.

Gandhi had his own idea of economic development. He laid emphasis on the revival of village communities. According to him, Indian villages should play the role of producer and their product should be supplied to towns and cities. He commented: "India became impoverished when our cities became foreign markets and began to drain the villages dry by dumping cheap and shoddy goods from foreign lands."[xxiv]

VI

In conclusion, we shall try to find answers of the questions raised at the beginning of our discussion. To recapitulate: How did Gandhi employ a concept of village community to strengthen his anti-imperial struggle? How far was his notion of village *swaraj* "utopian"? To what extent are Gandhian ideas relevant in present times?

It is clear that Gandhi criticized two mainstays of modern civilization, urbanisation and industrialisation. He suggested an alternative path, that of the revival of the Indian village communities – the 'self-sufficient republics'. Gandhi was soundly critical of the capitalist economic system. He said in India, economic progress ought to be made on the basis of a balance between agriculture and rural handicrafts. He favoured the promotion of the spinning wheel both as an economic tool and as a rural-nationalist symbol.

British writers regarded Indian village communities as self-sufficient republics; but they also emphasized their stagnant nature. They described India primarily as a

'land of villages'. As Ronald Inden has shown, colonial British writers wanted to prove that Indian society was still backward, thereby allocating the British, representing modern civilization, the responsibility to modernize India. It was in this way that they tried to legitimize colonial rule in India.[xxv]

Gandhi, on the other hand, by using the concept of the *panchayati raj*, showed that traditional Indian villages were ruled on the basis of democratic principles of the modern West. Secondly, Gandhi criticised modern city-life; according to him, harmonious village life was more peaceful than the modern city-life. Gandhi also criticised the capitalist economic system; he blamed labour-saving machinery for the problem of unemployment in India, the growing disparity in concentration of wealth and power, and the rise and growth of imperialism. Thus, Gandhi tried to prove that Indian civilization was in no way inferior to modern capitalist civilisation of the West. In his opinion, Indian civilization declined during the colonial rule, and therefore, India should not follow the West in the path of modernisation. It is clear that Gandhi used the concept of village community to fulfil a political purpose – to strength his movement against human exploitation.

Another equally valid question is how far are Gandhian ideas relevant for the present times? We shall first deal with the debate regarding the "utopian" nature of Gandhi's notion of village *swaraj*. Utopia is a literary-philosophical concept, the label given to an ideal community or society. This concept was first used in *Of the Best State of a Republic and of the New Island Utopia*, a book by Sir Thomas More in 1516. The book describes Utopia as a fictional island in the Atlantic Ocean with

seemingly perfect living conditions. Publications on the theme also include Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627), James Hilton's *Lost Horizon* (1933), B. F.Skinner's *Walden Two* (1948), Aldous Huxley's *Island* (1962), Robert Heinlein's *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress* (1966), and so on. But how do we define utopia? Levitas argues that utopia has generally been defined and understood along three parameters: content (e.g., as an ideal commonwealth), form (e.g., utopia as a literary genre), and function (e.g., what the utopia will accomplish).[xxvi] Ernst Bloch theorized the need to differentiate between "abstract" and "concrete" utopia: between those unreal, unrealizable spaces of the future that are pure fantasy, offering compensatory escape but no transformative critique, and those, which although also invested in the future, are but realizable and therefore hold much that is of value for the present.[xxvii]

Utopia therefore is a term for an ideal place that does not exist in reality; it is used to describe an imaginary world where social justice is achieved as well as the principles that guarantee it. Utopia usually symbolizes people's hopes and dreams. Gandhi's concept of an ideal village does resemble a utopia. He wrote to Nehru:

> My ideal village still exists only in my imagination. After all every human being lives in the world of his own imagination. In this village of my dreams the villager will not be dull—he will be all awareness. He will not live like an animal in filth and darkness. Men and women will live in freedom, prepared to face the whole world. There will be no plague, no cholera and no smallpox. Nobody will be allowed to be idle or to wallow in luxury. Everyone will have to do body labour. Granting all this, I can still envisage a number of things that will have to be

organized on a large scale. Perhaps there will even be railways and also post and telegraph offices.[xxviii]

Jawaharlal Nehru, although a disciple of Gandhi, rejected his notion of modern Indian economic development based on the revival of traditional village communities. Nehru admitted that true India could be found in villages, but his vision for an independent India relied heavily on industrialization and the building of material prosperity. He regarded the Indian village as a site of backwardness and ignorance. In his letter to Gandhi in 1945, he wrote: "I do not understand why a village should embody truth and non-violence. A village, normally speaking, is backward intellectually and culturally and no progress can be made from a backward environment."[xxix] Nehru also did not support Gandhi's criticisms of city life; according to him, "the fundamental problem of India is not Delhi or Calcutta or Bombay but the villages of India...We want to urbanize the village, not take away the people from the villages to towns".[xxx] Dr.B.R.Ambedkar, another contemporary of Gandhi, also did not share his view; an admirer of city life and modern technology, he dismissed the Indian village as a den of inequality.

Dennis Dalton categorises the Gandhian dream as anarchist because the state is distrusted and society is made primary.[xxxi] Geoffrey Ostergaard also categorises the Gandhian vision as anarchist although he believes that the 'gradualist' Indian anarchism shows greater acceptance of the state in the short term than 'immediate' western anarchism does.[xxxii] Detlef Kantowsky typifies Gandhian utopia as populist because it is among several other things, moralistic, loosely organised, ill disciplined, anti-establishment, class concessional but nevertheless egalitarian and

fundamentally nostalgic.[xxxiii] Margaret Fisher and Joan Bondurant however characterise it as socialist.[xxxiv]

Richard G. Fox prefers to term Gandhi's notion of going back to traditional village life as "utopia": "[The] very reason I term it 'Utopia' rather than socialism or anarchism or corporatism is that it was revolutionary and that it experimented with contemporary reform because it dreamed of a world that it could be."[xxxv] He views it as a set or structure of cultural meanings. He draws our attention to the fact that Gandhian utopia represented a revolutionary rejection of Western notion of economic development and that his notion of the village community was shared by eminent Western thinkers like Tolstoy, Ruskin and Carpenter. Anupama Mohan argues that the Gandhian ashram's insistence on a single kitchen, common vessels, individual cleaning and rotational service for public areas ensured order and regimen, far removed from the philosophical or political anarchy his opponents often charged Gandhi with. She agrees with the Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph that "the ashram and the Satyagraha [were]…vehicles for displaying a democratized public sphere [that] became a new kind of political theatre".[xxxvi]

Gandhi's conception of an ideal village life is definitely a utopia; Gandhi himself believed that his ideal village resided in his imagination. But his concept of the village community is still relevant and in this sense, a "concrete utopia". Certain aspects of Gandhi's ideas like employment for all villagers, the need for improving village sanitation, the plan of balanced economic development based on agriculture and handicrafts etc. have found place in several policies of the Government of India.

Gandhi's vision of the village influenced a range of writers too – from Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, and Raja Rao to Vijay Tendulkar, O. V.Vijayan, Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie and many others.

But does Gandhi's concept of a 'self-sufficient village economy' have any value in a globalized economy? Is his criticism of modern civilization of no value in this age of globalisation? There can be no doubt that, in the process of improving their standard of living, human beings have seriously neglected the environment. Global warming, climate change, acid rain etc are side-effects of active industrialization and urbanisation. Chemical plants, coal-fired power plants, oil refineries, petro-chemical plants, metal-producing factories and other industries are significant sources of pollution. Pollution affects human health in many ways. Ozone pollution can cause respiratory diseases, cardio-vascular diseases, throat inflammation, chest pain and congestion. Noise pollution leads to hearing loss, high-blood pressure, stress and disturbance. Chemical and radio-active substances can cause cancer and birth defects. Modern machinery directly affects human health in at least two ways. First, human work-load has been increasing daily. Stress, depression, frustration etc are side effects of today's highly competitive and fast life. Second, a work-free, luxurious and sedentary life-style has made people unhealthy. Competition and over-utilisation of resources beyond need have led to depletion of the environment and the basic standard of life.

Gandhi spoke primarily against such tendencies implicit in modern industrialization. If the environment is to be saved from degradation we have to

avoid or limit the use of machinery. Gandhi's promotion of *khadi* and village industries has become relevant in this context. In other words, Gandhi's ideas of a simple yet well-disciplined life-style as an alternative to modern life-style is valuable even today. Second, Gandhi strongly advocated the improvement of rural sanitation system. This was largely neglected during the colonial rule and a colonial legacy continued in this sphere after independence. As late as the 1980s Government of India initiated programmes to improve rural sanitation and health. Important programmes by the Government of India in this area include – (a) *Central Rural Sanitation Programme* (1986), which aimed at improving the quality of life of the rural people and also to provide privacy and dignity to women, (b) *Total Sanitation Campaign* (1999) which aimed at draining rural waste, (c) *Nirmal Gram Puruskar* (2003), which promise to reward those villages which would fulfill the criteria for becoming a clean village , (d) *Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan* (2012),which was a community led programme as a part of solid and liquid waste management and (e) *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan* (2014) which aims to accomplish the vision of a 'Clean India' by 2 October 2019, the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

Third, the Gandhian economic idea of regional development based on cooperation is still relevant. The overall progress of the national economy depends on the balanced economic development of all the regions. In India there exists massive regional economic disparity. Even within a state some districts are more backward than the rest. In this context Gandhian economics is relevant because it support the attainment of uniform economic development for each region. Another major

problem faced by this country is the problem of unemployment. Gandhian economic ideas could be useful in this context also. Gandhi emphasised on attainment of economic self-sufficiency based on rural handicraft industries. Government of India after independence undertook several programmes to improve condition of rural handicraft industries. Although the ratio of poverty has been declining, but still now a great portion of the rural people lives in acute poverty. In order to improve the conditions of the rural poor it is necessary to expand rural industries further at a great pace. At the same time it is essential to review seriously the rural anti-poverty programmes in the context of formulating economic planning.

Fourth, Gandhi was against the zamindari system. Soon after independence, measures for the abolition of the zamindari system were adopted in different states. The first Act to abolish intermediaries was passed in Madras in 1948; by 1955, the process of the abolition of intermediaries was complete in almost all states. Meanwhile, Acharya Vinoba Bhabe had started the Bhoodan Movement in 1951 at Pochampally in Telengana. His movement to collect land from the rich could be viewed as a symbol of attack against landed intermediataries like zamindars, talukdars etc.

Finally, Gandhi was in favor of de-centralization of political power. His notion of rural development through Panchayati Raj did not get proper attention immediately after independence, although state governments were empowered to organize village panchayats. The Community Development Programme was launched in 1952 to seek people's participation and involvement in the task of rural reconstruction, but it

failed. In 1957 the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee recommended that there should be a three-tier institutional structure of local self-government from the village to the district. It also recommended that there should be genuine transfer of power, responsibility and resources to the institutions of local government. In accordance with the recommendations of the Committee, a number of states created a three-tier system of rural local self-government with some modifications. To improve the system of local governance several other committees were appointed too, like the V.T.Krishnammachari Committee (1960), Ashok Mehta Committee (1977), G.V.K Rao Committee (1985), Sarkaria Commission (1986) and Dr.L.M.Singhvi Committee (1986). Political de-centralization at the rural and Zillah level has now become a prominent feature of the Indian political structure.

In this age of capitalism and globalization, the Gandhian model of India's economic development does appear to be a utopia. However, if we deconstruct Gandhi's ideas of rural development, we find that many of his ideas are very much relevant and useful for development of a country. Several policies of the Government of India, like those to eradicate rural poverty, improve rural handicrafts, make khadi products more popular, open rural employment opportunities, strengthen political de-centralization and democratic institutions at the grass-root level, and improve rural health and sanitation system support this point.

Endnotes:

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[xiv] Jodhka, *Op. Cit*., p.3346.

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[xxxii] *Ibid*.

[xxxiii] *Ibid*.

[xxxiv] *Ibid*.

[xxxv] *Ibid*, pp.59-60

[xxxvi] Mohan, *Op. Cit*., p.55.