
UNIT 2 MODERN INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT: ISSUES & APPROACHES

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the issues facing modern India;
- have an idea regarding the main currents of the history of political ideas in India during 19th and 20th centuries;
- differentiate between different strands of anti-colonialism and nationalism;
- list the arguments of different streams and schools of Indian thinkers; and
- attempt a comparative assessment of different arguments.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit is intended to introduce you to the main features of modern Indian political thought. It will give you a bird's eye view of the major issues as well as acquaint you with the basic approaches to the study of this theme.

Since the term 'modern' is open to different and varied interpretations, the idea of modern Indian political thought is difficult to date precisely.

Overlooking the importance of indigenous trends, some scholars credit colonialism with introducing 'modern' values in India. A few of them therefore welcomed British colonialism as an instrument of modernisation. In their reckoning the emergence of modern ideas and social and religious protest movements were a consequence of the introduction of European ideas and institutions through colonial rule. While the influence of Western education in the development of modern ideas in the 19th and

20th centuries cannot be undermined, the elements of protest and dissent in Indian intellectual traditions and potentialities of social movements in the 18th century, also cannot be overlooked.

2.2 THE COLONIAL CONTEXT AND CONCEPTION OF COLONIAL RULE

As has been pointed out in the previous unit, by the beginning of the 19th century, the process of colonisation of India was complete. Henceforth, the foremost concern of colonial rulers was the consolidation of the gains, i.e., the maintenance of colonial rule. For this they needed supporters from among the subjected which could be achieved only through cultural and ideological hegemony. The creation of a class of landlords and the educated urban middle class, most of whom were absorbed by colonial administrative system and other colonial institutions, were steps to meet the needs of British Colonialism. The colonial education and other cultural undertakings geared towards the establishment of ideological hegemony. This was the social and ideological context in which the political thought during the early colonial rule developed.

A different conception of colonial rule also developed during the course of the nineteenth century. It was based on an appreciation of the traditional institutions and practices.

An important trend of thought, informed by liberal principles, focused attention on the positive aspects of British rule.

Rammohan Roy, it has been mentioned earlier had considered British rule as a blessing and held that this conversion would yield future benefits. His sharp critique of many degrading aspects of Indian society was probably what made him appreciate the advantages of being ruled by and associated with an enlightened nation like the British. Keshab Chandra Sen too held that British rule which appeared at a time of grave social and moral crisis was a divine dispensation and not a mere accident. God willed it so. He even held that the temporal sovereign was God's representative and sedition, therefore, was not only a political offence but a sin against God.

Rabindranath Tagore, Dada Bhai Nauroji, G.K. Gokhale, M.G. Ranade, as well as CR Das and Moti Lal Nehru—all spoke, in varying degrees of the benefits that British rule had brought to India. Said Gokhale in 1905: "The country enjoys now uninterrupted peace and order....". Nauroji noted that no educated native will prefer any other rule to English rule.

In the face of colonial repression and exploitation, this conception of colonial rule i.e. of the British rule being beneficial, could not last for long. The colonial rule was looked upon as an unnecessary evil and by the beginning of 20th century, anti-colonialism became integral to political thinking.

You shall study the ideas of nationalist or anti-colonial thinkers in details in subsequent units. Here we shall present the broad outlines of different streams in the anti-colonial thought in 20th century.

Despite the appreciation for certain English values and institutions, all the stream of anti-colonial nationalist thought commonly held that colonial rule was dehumanising and exploitative. In fact, the roots of nationalist conception of colonial rule could be traced in the liberal tradition of 19th century. Nauroji had laid the blame of 'material treatment it received at the hands of British rulers.' Gokhale blamed the British rule for 'steady dwarfing of a race in consequence of its exclusion from power' which he considered an 'enormous evil.' The 20th century liberals, without refuting the 'civilising' role of colonial rule, pleaded for the transfer of power.

The agenda for future nationalist conceptions of colonial rule was set by Tilak.

The decade of 1920s was the decade of radicalisation of anti-colonial thinking. A section of the educated youth, critical of Gandhi's ideas and methods, sought to

advance the understanding of British and to evolve new methods of political struggle. The revolutionary nationalists emerged out of this trend. Subhash Chandra Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru became the spokesmen of this section.

Another trend was represented by the Socialist and Communists.

The Communist Party of India came into existence with the inspiration and help of Communist International. Its conception of colonial rule was based on Lenin's theory of imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism and Marx's articles on India in *New York Tribune* (1853). M.N. Roy's *India in Transition* and Rajni Palme Dutt's *India Today*, both stressed the integration of Indian resources and economy with the British colonial economy to exploit India's raw materials. M.N. Roy, official ideologue of the Indian Communists in 1920s, emphasised the linking of anti-colonialism with the campaign against world capitalism.

The process of radicalisation of Congress led to the emergence of radical nationalism in the form of Congress Socialist Party in 1934. The Congress socialist thinkers, particularly Jaya Prakash Narayan and Acharya Narendra Dev, made an attempt to synthesise socialism with nationalism and to press socialism in the service of nationalism, i.e. in the anti-colonial struggle.

Check Your Progress 1

Note : i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your answer with that given at the end.

- 1) Briefly discuss the various contexts in which political thought developed during the early phase of colonialism.

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2.3 RENAISSANCE AND SOCIAL REFORM

The Indian Renaissance and Social Reform movement challenged age-old traditions and customs which bound the Indian people in chains of servitude and bondage. The burning questions of caste-oppression, child marriage, Sati and so on became the focal point of many a reform movement. Attacks on idolatory and superstition were also an important feature of these reforms.

2.3.1 Rational Critique of Religion and Society

We have seen above that the early thinkers of modern India were pre-occupied mainly with social and religious issues. The political questions were paid little or no attention. Rammohan Roy's first published work, *Tuffat-ul-Muwahihhidin (A Gift to Deists)* (1803-4) is a rational critique of religious systems in general and the role of vested interests in religion. Rammohan in his later writings exposed the irrationality of Hindu religious rituals and dogmas, and social evils such as sati, child marriage etc. He considered religious reform most essential for both social reform and political modernisation. Thus, the beginning of modern Indian thinking is marked by a critique of the existing social order. This critique was carried forward by successors with a view to create a 'modern' society.

As mentioned before, Rammohan Roy's first published work *Tuffat-ul-Muwahihhidin* was a comparative study of religion and a rational critique of religion and society. He attacked the belief in revolution, prophets, miracle and all kinds of superstitions like seeking salvation through bathing in a river and worshipping a tree etc., and pleaded for rational explanation and empirical verification as the only basis

for truth. Radh Kanta Deb, Henry Derozio of Hindu College, despite their criticism of Rammohan for his pro-British attitude, agreed with him on the question of rational explanations. Akshay Kumar Dutt rejected religion supernaturalism and maintained that everything could be explained on the basis of reason and rationality. Naturally, therefore Brahmo Samaj and other streams of the reform movement in Bengal fought for widespread reforms in Hindu Society. Syed Ahmed Khan, Ranade and other thinkers too stood for a rational critique of Indian society. Jyotiba Phule challenged the legitimacy of the Hindu Social order based on caste-hierarchy and pleaded for social transformation on egalitarian grounds.

Rammohan's *Tuhft* not only forwarded the rational explanation and reason as the basis of truth but being a study of comparative religion, also contributed to the development of the idea of religious universalism and a universal outlook based on the unit of Godhead and monotheism. Rammohan explained different religions in terms of national embodiments of one universal theism. In Keshub Chandra Sen's view all the established religions were true and all the prophets having the same *Divine*. Keshub's notion of "Fatherhood of God" implied brotherhood of man".

Check Your Progress 2

Note : i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with that given at the end.

- 1) What did the thinkers of early 19th century India have to say by way of critique of the then society and religion?

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2.3.2 Religious Revivalism

Religious revivalism was a trend within the reform movements which sought to reform religion, but differed in one important respect. It sought to reform by an appeal to the past—the Golden Age, as it were. It sought to restore the glory of ancient religion. Mainly emerging from within the womb of Hindu Society, they tried to dexterously combine pristine religious purity with many modern values like individual liberty and democracy.

Among the major religious reform movements of 19th century India, like Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Arya Samaj and Ramakrishna Mission, it was the latter two that really represented this appeal to the past. The Arya Samaj with its slogan of 'Back to the Vedas' and the Ramakrishna Mission with its attempt to resurrect vedantic Hinduism, though substantially different in their approaches to religion had the same essential purpose of reforming religion in terms with changing times. They sought to establish to some degree, the freedom of individual, break the stranglehold of Brahminism and reform the caste system which had birth as its solid determinant of status.

Thus, Arya Samaj and its chief architect Swami Dayanand Saraswati, repudiated the authority of the Brahmins and fought against the very idea of intermediaries between God and his devotees. To that extent, they freed the individual from the tyranny of Brahmin priesthood. It opposed polytheism and associated meaningless rituals and superstitions which split the people into innumerable sects.

The Ramakrishna Mission which drew inspiration from saints like Chandidas and Chaitanya and was initiated by the rustic saint Ramakrishna, on the other hand

idealized Hinduism, its polytheism and idol worship. Swami Vivekananda, its chief propagandist, was chiefly concerned that Indian nationalism which he said must fight the corrupting 'materialist influences' of the west. Unification and reform of Hindu society were a prerequisite to this end.

There was thus an essential unity in the religious revivalist movements, in terms of the objectives. The Arya Samaj fought against the rigid, hereditary caste system and argued for the inclusion of **guna** (character), **Karma** (action) and **Swabhava** (nature) as criteria for the basis of caste. Even Shudras, according to it, could study the vedas.

It was this appeal of religious revivalism that drew hundreds of nationalist towards it and it thus signalled a component of India's national awakening.

2.4 LIBERALISM: DIFFERENT STRANDS

Liberalism as a political idea in India was developed by the English educated middle class, a product of the colonial education system. The colonial education was introduced with the aim of creating cultural and ideological hegemony for maintaining alien rule. It was intended to project the superiority of European values and institutions to disseminate them as the ideal for Indians. The Indian "traditional" values and institutions were not considered to be conducive to social progress.

The liberal critique of Indian society and colonial state began with Renaissance. Raja Rammohan Roy, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Devendra Nath Thakur, Akshay Kumar Dutt, Jyotiba Phule, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, M.G. Ranade, Dada Bhai Nauroji, Surendra Nath Banerjee, Pherozshah Mehta, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and others tried to set a liberal model for transforming Indian society and polity. The Indian liberal looked upon the colonial rulers to lead and guide the socio-political transformation. The English liberals like J.S. Mill and many others pleaded for the continuation of colonial rule as it was essential for 'civilising' the native and putting them 'on the path of progress.' The conception of colonial rule by various stands of Indian liberals was not very different from their European counterparts.

Even those who understood the exploitative character of colonialism did not go to the extent of denouncing it and were concerned only with the question of impoverishment and pauperisation of Indian masses due to the colonial drain of country's wealth. The liberals like Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Dadabhai Nauroji and others exhorted the colonial rulers, through petitions for redressal. But even this concern eventually boiled down to the problems of the members of the educated middle class who had not found appropriate place in the administration. Dadabhai Nauroji in a memorandum submitted in 1880 appealed to the 'manliness' and the 'moral courage' of Englishmen to pay attention to "the thousands that are being sent out by the universities every year" and who "find themselves in a most anomalous position."

Similar conception of colonial rule found expression in the writings of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan who projected the colonial rule as 'emancipatory', 'democratic' and 'progressive'. Its continuance was desired to safeguard and enhance the interests of the Muslim community as Islam did not come into conflict with progress and reason symbolised by British rule. This can be compared with the logic of Renaissance thinkers who desired and justified the continuance of a representative system of government on the ground that "so long as differences of race and creed and distinction of caste form an important element in the socio-political life of India, the system of election cannot safely be adopted." This line of argument represented the interests of landed and educated Muslim middle classes and was unconcerned with the problems of lower classes of the community.

You have read how colonialism and colonial education hastened the emergence of new social classes in India. The nascent Indian capitalist class and the new intelligentsia, which drew from the traditional social elite of Indian society became the main vehicle of liberal political ideas. The Bhadrals of Bengal, the Brahmins of

Madras, and the Brahmins and Prabhus in Bombay presidency were among the earliest to be affected by the spread of liberal ideas. Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833), Dadabhai Nauroji (1825-1917) S.N. Banerjee (1848-1925), Pherozeshah Mehta (1845-1915), G.K. Gokhale (1866-1915), Gopal Ganesh Agarkar (1856-95) and M.G. Ranade (1842-1901) among others, evolved a liberal critique of Indian society and colonial state and underlined the importance of liberal ideas for the transformation of Indian society and polity.

2.4.1 M.G. Ranade

Ranade, a representative of the dominant liberal thinkers, articulated the interests of the rising Indian capitalist class. The central part of his argument was that the Indian economy should follow a capitalist path of development, if it is to solve her problems. He argued that the state must play an active role in economic development. He disagreed with the laissez-faire concept of state. He believed that India could get rid of its phenomenal poverty and dependence on agriculture through industrialization and commercialization of agriculture, and the state must play an active role in such transformative process.

Ranade pointed out the immense progress of agriculture in France, Germany and Russia after the liquidation of feudal agriculture and introduction of capitalist relations and peasant proprietorship.

However, Ranade's advocacy of state intervention in economic activities did not give the state unlimited sanctions, for he was a believer of individual freedom. Unlike the western liberal philosophers, however, Ranade's individual liberty was a concept that derived from his metaphysical ideas which based themselves on the upanishads. In his view God resides in everything in this universe, and ther fore, in each human being. Thus the freedom of conscience is the real freedom and the rights of conscience must take precedence over all other considerations. Man should then submit to the voice of his inner conscience alone and not to any outside force or authority—religious or political. However, this also means that individual freedom of action is to be used in a way that is does not impose restraints on the equally free rights of other people.

Ranade, for the above-mentioned reasons, was also a critic of the caste system which imposes external restrictions on human behaviour. He supported the Bhakti movement because he thought the saints asserted the dignity of the human soul irrespective of birth.

The agency of social change and reform in Ranade's view was the elite stratum. In his opinion, ".....there is always only a minority of people who monopolize all the elements of strength. They are socially and religiously in the front ranks, they possess intelligence, wealth, thrifty habits, knowledge and power. This elite group was composed of Brahmins, Baniyas, Zamindars and the educated middle-class." So, true to the aspirations of the capitalist class, he believed that "power must gravitate where there is intelligence and wealth." His scheme for representation to Indians contained provisions for giving political power to the rich and educated. At the municipal level, for example, the elected seats were to be divided in the ratio of two to one between property holders and the intelligent class... Though he did not consider such representation democratic, he nevertheless believed that it was necessary as the masses were still incapable of electing 'worthymen as representatives. Generations of training and education were required before they could be made capable of it.'

2.4.2 Jyotiba Phule and B.R. Ambedkar

In contrast, Jyotiba Phule (1827-90) and B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956) presented the other pole of liberal thought. The predominant influence of Phule was the revolutionary liberalism of Thomas Paine. He maintained that all men and women are born free and equal. God had made them so and no one should suppress anybody else. They should therefore, have equality before law and equality of opportunity for entry into the civil service or municipal administration.

In the light of this, naturally, the high caste politics of the Ranade School did not make sense to him, nor did the strategy of developing capitalism. Phule's main preoccupation on the other hand was liberating the downtrodden castes—the

Shudras and Adi-Shudras from the grip of caste-slavery. He rejected the whole system of Hindu/Brahminical mythologies and the cruel and inhuman caste laws that went with them. Whatever improvement was evident in the conditions of these people was the result of British rule. Unlike Ranade, Phule therefore, was a votary of mass education and criticized the British for diverting funds to higher education which was to him of secondary importance.

Fundamental to Ambedkar's approach for the upliftment of the 'untouchables' was their education. Education, for him, meant not only literacy but higher education. 'Untouchables' must possess self-respect and dissociate from traditional bonds of untouchability and refuse to do traditional untouchables' work. 'Untouchables' must be represented at all levels of government by their representatives. He was always firm on the question of 'untouchables' leading themselves, i.e.; producing their own leaders.

Further, for ensuring that the downtrodden castes got their due, he insisted that the government take responsibility for the welfare of all its people, create special rights for those who had been denied education and occupational opportunities. To this end, he visualized a strong central government with a clear-cut commitment for the welfare of all its people. Phule's and Ambedkar's liberalism thus despite a chronological gap, provided a counterpoint to the elite liberalism.

Check Your Progress 3

Note : i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Write a brief note on the liberal strand of Indian nationalism.

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- 2) Mark True or False against the following statements.

- i) Liberalism in India was largely a product of the colonial education system (True/False).
- ii) Akshay Kumar Dutt and Surendranath Banerjee do not belong to the liberal tradition of Indian nationalism. (True/False)
- iii) Ranade argued that India should follow a capitalist path of development for its salvation. (True/False)
- iv) Jyotiba Phule was predominantly influenced by Chaitanya Maha Prabhu (True/False.)

2.5 NATIONALISM

The development of the nationalist idea right from the early days went through an intricate course. Veneration of the British empire was so strikingly articulated by Dadabhai Nauroji in 1885 at the first session of the IN Congress in the following words: "What makes us proud to be British subjects, what attaches us to this foreign rule with deeper loyalty..... is the fact that Britain is the parent of free and representative government...." As mentioned, this was a dominant idea, in varying degrees among the intellectuals and leaders of early nationalism. They realized the economic ruin and immiserization of Indian people as a result of British rule. Indian economy according to Dadabhai Nauroji was subjected to heavy 'drain' of resources.

This, he considered, the outcome of what he called "drain" theory. In fact, his critique of Indian economy was based on factors independent of British rule: dependence on agriculture, lack of capital, antiquated credit system etc. He therefore advocated commercialization of agriculture and industrialization.

It was only later that Aurobindo Ghosh and S.N. Banerjee developed a case for self-government. Such an idea was never on the agenda of earlier nationalists, whose main emphasis, as you have seen was on reforms. Essentially the debate was whether social reforms should precede political reforms or vice versa. Banerjee thought self-government would increase efficiency in administration. Moreover, he believed it to be India's mission to be the spiritual guide of mankind, which could not be fulfilled unless India itself was free. Aurobindo Ghosh considered that a foreign government by its very nature was bound to deny freedom to the individual to develop self-expression. He also considered self-government essential for completeness and full development of national strength. Nationalism to him was a 'religion that has come from God.'

Swaraj became the clarion call of later nationalists i.e. the 'extremists', though they still defined swaraj as self-government within the Empire. Tilak took up the theme of the country's economic drain once again, which he wanted to be stopped forthwith alongwith revival of industries killed by foreign competition. Radical nationalists led by B.G. Tilak, Aurobindo Ghosh and B.C. Pal, advocating direct methods of boycott of British goods and passive resistance denounced the colonial rule and gave the call of Swadeshi. In reaction to liberal glorification of colonial rule, they emphasised the achievements of Ancient India. To meet the challenges of nationalist political consciousness, colonial rulers introduced an elective element into the legislature through the reforms of 1892, 1909 and the Government of India Act 1919. The radical nationalists opposed the reforms, but by and large it was received well in the beginning. Gandhi, who had initially supported the idea of cooperation in working the reforms, had changed his opinions by 1921 and declared that the reforms "were only a method of further draining India of her wealth and of prolonging servitude." Anti-colonial ideas started gaining immense strength in the aftermath of the first nationalist movement of an all India character, the Non-cooperation movement in the early 1920s. The loosely connected Left-Wing of the Congress launched vigorous anti-imperialist campaign and advocated an uncompromising rule in bringing about the political and administrative unification of the country and arousal of political consciousness; recognition of Western values of knowledge and their substantiation by ancient Indian scriptures; need of a national movement across the barriers of race, caste, religion and sex; and advocacy of regional and religious symbols and sex; and advocacy of regional and religious symbols for political mobilisation. Gandhi's concepts of 'Swarajya' (self-government), 'Swadeshi' (Indian) and Bahishkar (boycott of foreign goods) provided the future programme for the anti-colonial struggle.

It can be seen therefore, that what can be called Indian Nationalism comprised of innumerable streams of thought.

The first assertions of nationalism in India were mixed with a strong sense of religious revivalism—an appeal to the past, a fervent call to revive the pristine glory of the Hindu Golden Age.

This was preceded by the moderate nationalists whose main critique of colonialism was, as we have seen, against either the economic impact of British rule, or against the "bureaucratic aspects" of it. The methods of this school of moderate nationalists were constitutionalist, limited primarily to issuing appeals and petitions.

The militant nationalists, on the other hand, grasped fully the contradiction between the Indian people and colonial rule, and therefore advocated a more decisive break with colonial rule. They were however, thoroughly imbued with religion, which made use of religious ceremonies for mobilizations. The student religiosity of such nationalism alienated the Muslims from the nationalist movement.

The militant nationalists also drew great inspiration from the life of Mazzini and the history of the Italian *risorgimento*.

The third stream of nationalists, i.e. the revolutionary nationalists were also for the most part ideologically revivalist who believed in Swaraj, and sought to achieve it through any means, including revolutionary violence. Their chief source of inspiration ranged from the Russian **Narodinka** to Mazzini.

Finally, the various streams of socialism comprised the radical arm of Indian nationalism, of which you will read in next section.

2.6 SOCIALISM

The post non-cooperation period witnessed a rapid growth of socialist ideas and emergence of numerous Socialist and Communist groups. There were two factors responsible for the development of radical politics in the twenties.

The increasing restlessness among Indian youth and the toiling masses who were being drawn into the national movement was coming to the fore. It was Gandhi's signal contribution that he made the Congress led movement a full-fledged mass movement. Yet his insistence on non-violence in the face of brutal repression by the colonial government as witnessed in the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, or his withdrawal of the non-cooperation movement in the wake of the Chauri-Chaura episode when a mob of peasants burned down a police-station manned entirely by the British led to large-scale disillusionment. Increasingly, it was being felt that non-violent methods will not do. Search for alternative forms thus became imperative.

This search was decisively influenced by another factor: the victory of the Russian Revolution and the establishment of a socialist state. The first socialist weekly, **The Socialist**, was started by S.A. Dange in 1923 in Bombay. In Bengal a group of determined organizers led by Muzaffar Ahmed started the foundations of the Communist Party. Earlier M.N. Roy, a revolutionary nationalist, who had left India in search of arms, reached USA and became converted to socialism. Thereafter, in 1921, he along with a band of Mohajirs formed in Tashkent, the Communist Party of India which was affiliated to the communist International. The Mohajirs were those who left the country on hijrat i.e. self-imposed exile—a concept of Islamic faith. In 1924, a number of people, including Dange and Muzaffar Ahmed, were arrested under the Kanpur conspiracy case. Workers and Peasant Parties were formed in Bombay, Bengal and Punjab. They supported the economic and political demands of the workers and peasants and organized them on class lines. They articulated and propagated the programme of national independence and stood for direct action by the workers and peasants. Trade unions were organized and a number of strikes took place.

Side by side, the development of revolutionary terrorism into socialism took place. Bhagat Singh and his Hindustan Socialist Republican Association typified such developments.

2.6.1 Revolutionary Socialism

In 1926, a political forum by the name of Naujawan Bharat Sabha was created with the idea of educating young people in social matters, popularizing swadeshi and developing a sense of brotherhood. Apart from this it sought to cultivate a secular outlook, even atheism among the youth. This organization was a fore-runner of the Hindustan Republic Association, which aimed at overthrowing the British rule by insurrection. It had an elaborate organization to carry on its clandestine activities. The Sabha propagated the ideal of equality, removal of poverty and equitable redistribution of wealth. This Hindustan Republican Association (HRA) subsequently changed its name to Hindustan Socialist Republic Association (HSRA).

When the British Government, in its bid to suppress the working class movement, sought to introduce the Public Safety Bill and the Trade Disputes Bill, the HSRA decided to protest by bombing the Assembly when the bills were placed—the action was carried out by Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutta, while many such activities carried on by the HSRA seem, on the face of it, to be conventional terrorist activities and the Naujawan Bharat Sabha functioned with a much broader

perspective. Bhagat Singh clarified in his trial that revolution to him was not the cult of the bomb and pistol but a total change of society culminating in the overthrow of both Indian and foreign capitalism and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The assembly bombs were meant to be purely demonstrative to make the authorities see reason.

In a sense the activities of the HSRA exemplified the transition from terrorism to radical socialist politics, as it did for finding the appropriate methods of political agitation.

2.6.2 Marxist Socialism

As we have mentioned earlier, the first beginnings of Marxist Socialism in India were made by small groups in the Bengal, Bombay and Punjab. These groups then organized the Workers and Peasants' Parties in these states, started work in the Trade Unions and also started organizing the peasantry. Parallel to this development was the formation in Tashkent of the Communist Party of India.

The CPI's critique of colonialism was based on its understanding that imperialism was plundering India's raw materials. The exploitation of the Indian people, particularly the working class and peasantry by the British imperialists would remain as long as India did not fully break away from colonialism and build a society free from exploitation. Behind the utter misery and destitution of the Indian peasantry, the communists saw the exploitation by foreign and Indian capital side by side with antiquated feudal forms of exploitation.

The communists, therefore derided the nationalist leadership for their implicit faith in the British rulers and their hesitation to raise the demand for complete Independence. They were also severely critical of the nationalist leaders for their use of religion in political mobilization.

However, the communists themselves could not really join the mainstream of the national movement till the mid-1930s.

M.N. Roy in his famous debate with Lenin in the Third Congress of the Communist International had held that the leadership of the Indian national movement was reactionary and therefore the Communists should have no truck with it. The implication of such a strategy would have been to isolate the communist movement from the mainstream of Indian politics. Lenin, on the other hand, had advocated a united front against imperialism. After the Seventh Congress of the Comintern adopted the United front policy in 1935, two British leaders R.P. Dutt and Ben Bradley prepared a statement for Indian Communists. This document, known as the "Dutt-Bradley Thesis" constitutes a landmark, in Indian Communist history, since it brought the CPI into the mainstream of the anti-imperialist struggle. The document helped the CPI to reforge its links with the national movement. Following this, in January 1936, the Congress Socialist Party, on the recommendation of its general secretary, Jaya Prakash Narayan, decided to admit communists to its membership. Many Communists joined the CSP. From then on, till the eve of World War II, the Communists and the Congress Socialists, despite differences worked together for radicalizing the Congress from within.

An important aspect of Communist thinking has been in relation to its assessment of the leadership of the Indian National Congress, its class character, and subsequently, the class character of the Indian State. They regarded the Congress as an organization of Indian capitalists and landlords which Gandhi had transformed from an elite assembly to a mass movement. Gandhi, though he initiated the process of turning Congress into a mass movement, was in their view a compromiser determined to stem the rising militancy of national struggle. They also disapproved Gandhi's non-violent methods of struggle and the use of religion for political mobilization.

2.6.3 Congress Socialism

As mentioned the decade of the 'twenties saw a radicalisation of Indian youth and their gradual turning away from the Congress fold towards socialist ideas. Disenchantment with Gandhian non-violent methods, impact of the Russian

Revolution and the need to evolve the masses of Indian people in the anti-colonial struggle increasingly led to this radicalization.

As a parallel development, sections of young congressmen increasingly adopted the socialist ideal and from within the Congress sought to influence it in a Leftward direction. They formed the Congress Socialist Party in 1934. Prominent among these were Acharya Narendra Dev and Jaya Prakash Narayan. Both these leaders were profoundly influenced by Marxism and believed that socialism could be achieved only with the socialization of the means of production. Both were for a drastic reorganization of the agrarian economy and land to the tiller.

However, what distinguished both Narendra Dev and Jaya Prakash Narayan from the Communists was that they advocated a cooperative agriculture with a marked emphasis on decentralization. Both believed in socialism but sought to combine it with a humanist ethics.

Ram Manohar Lohia, another member of this group pleaded for greater incorporation of Gandhian ideas in socialist thought.

Lohia's insistence on Gandhian ideas was not merely at the level of incorporation of Gandhian ethics, but also in the economic performance of socialism. He advocated a decentralised economy based on a resuscitation of cottage industries. In this sense, his socialism was that of the petty producer.

Lohia believed that the interface of caste and class is the key to the understanding of historical dynamics of India. In his view, all human history has been an internal movement between castes and classes—castes loosen into classes and classes crystallize into castes. Thus, he tried to understand the caste/class dynamics—an issue that has generally been ignored in Indian politics.

Check Your Progress 4

Note : i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.

1) Trace the rise of Marxian Socialism in India.

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2.7 SARVODAYA AND ANARCHISM

The political philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi as it developed during the course of his political activities maintained an essential continuity with earlier strands of thought. The essentially Indian spiritual approach to politics, developed by Vivekananda and Aurobindo Ghosh found its continued expression in Gandhi. In 1909, in *Hind Swaraj*, he accepted the basic distinctions made between society and state and India and the west. He extolled the spirituality of India and juxtaposed it to the violent, politically corrupt nature of the European state. His comments were

reserved for the English parliamentary system; he described all western political power as brute force. His participation in politics was therefore apologetic. "If I seem to take part in politics, it is only because politics encircles us today like the coil of a snake..... I wish, therefore, to wrestle with the snake."

This being the attitude to politics, logically to Gandhi, the state was by definition abhorrent. It is in this sense, that from a totally different perspective, Gandhism and his Sarvodaya shared its most essential political trait with anarchist ideology.

Gandhi, like Vivekananda believed that if individuals are allowed freedom to express and pursue their interests, then as part of their spiritual unity, they will gradually discover their identity of interests. This he believed gave rise to a human nature that was essentially accommodative and compromising. To this end, he saw like his anarchist counterparts—Kropotkin and Tolstoy—the state as a major obstacle in the realization of individual freedom and social harmony. "The state represents violence in a concentrated form." He saw it as a soulless machine that can never be weaned away from violence. In his ideal society, therefore, there is no state-political power. Since he saw in the state an essential centralising tendency that curbs individuality he held that, "if India is to evolve along non-violent lines, it will have to decentralize."

Following Gandhi, Vinobha Bhave articulated this position as a leading exponent of Sarvodaya ideology. Vinobha visualized a total revolution transforming all aspects of life. The goal for him was to mould a new man.... to change human life and create a new world. The departure of the British had not brought Indian society any closer to Sarvodaya, the main obstacle to which was the centralized government. "Sarvodaya", according to him, "does not mean good government or majority rule, it means freedom from government, it means decentralization of power."

Central to Vinoba's conceptualization of politics and power is his distinction between **rajniti**, the politics of power, and **lok-niti**, the ethics of democracy. Lokniti strives to use the "potential powers of the citizen" and would abandon political parties and elections, arrive at decisions through consensus, and forge an identity of interest that would ensure continuing social harmony."

Subsequently, Jayaprakash Narayan carried forward the Gandhian—Sarvodaya conception of politics. J.P. as a national leader remained primarily concerned with the abuse of political power in India, and thus found himself perpetually in opposition to the Congress. He, too, was a strong advocate of decentralisation of power and expanded and propagated the concept of partyless democracy.

Check Your Progress 5

Note : i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit

- 1) Briefly discuss Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of Sarvodaya.

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- 2) Fill in the blanks :

i) An important publication emphasizing Gandhi's Sarvodaya philosophy

was.....

- ii) The commonality between Gandhism and Anarchism is centred on
abhorrence for the
- iii) That Sarvodaya stands for decentralisation of power is attributed
to
- iv) Vinoba distinguished between Rajniti and

2.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you studied the main issues and approaches of what has been called the Modern Indian Political Thought. You studied the various contexts with reference to which Indian thought evolved in modern times. You also read about the various strands of modern Indian thoughts, viz; Liberalism, Nationalism, Socialism and Sarvodaya. It is hoped that an insight into the above shall help you understand the happening in present-day India in a better manner.

2.9 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

Chandra, Bipan. *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India*. Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1979

Desai, A.R. *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*. Bombay 1948

Pantham, Thomas and Deutsch, Kenneth L., *Political Thought in Modern India*. Sage Publications, New Delhi 1986

Bishop, D.H. ed; *Indian Thought: an Introduction*. Wiley Eastern, 1975

Naravane, V.S: *Modern Indian Thought: A philosophical Survey (ASIA)* Bombay, 1969

Gandhi, M.K. *Non-violence in Peace and War*, Navajivan, Ahmedabad, Vol.1, pp 220-21

Mehta N. & Chhabra S.P. *Modern Indian Political Thought*, New Academic Publishing Co., 1976, p.1

2.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Sections 2.1 and 2.2

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Section 2.3 and subsection 2.3.1

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See Section 2.4 and subsections 2.4.1 and 2.4.2
- 2)
 - i) True
 - ii) False
 - iii) True
 - iv) False

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) See subsection 2.7.3

Check Your Progress 5

- 1) See Section 2.7 and subsection 2.7.3

Check Your Progress 6

- 1) See Section 2.8
- 2)
 - i) 'Hind Swaraj'
 - ii) State
 - iii) Vinoba
 - iv) Lokniti