

MODERN INDIAN THOUGHT

COURSE CODE: M23PH10DC

Discipline Core Course
Postgraduate Programme in Philosophy



SELF
LEARNING
MATERIAL



SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY

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The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

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Modern Indian Thought
Course Code: M23PH10DC
Semester - III

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Semester- III

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Postgraduate Programme in Philosophy

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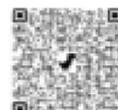
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MESSAGE FROM VICE CHANCELLOR

Dear learner,

I extend my heartfelt greetings and profound enthusiasm as I warmly welcome you to Sreenarayanaguru Open University. Established in September 2020 as a state-led endeavour to promote higher education through open and distance learning modes, our institution was shaped by the guiding principle that access and quality are the cornerstones of equity. We have firmly resolved to uphold the highest standards of education, setting the benchmark and charting the course.

The courses offered by the Sreenarayanaguru Open University aim to strike a quality balance, ensuring students are equipped for both personal growth and professional excellence. The University embraces the widely acclaimed “blended format,” a practical framework that harmoniously integrates Self-Learning Materials, Classroom Counseling, and Virtual modes, fostering a dynamic and enriching experience for both learners and instructors.

The University aims to offer you an engaging and thought-provoking educational journey. The postgraduate programme in Philosophy is designed to be a continuation of the undergraduate programme in Philosophy. It maintains a close connection with the content and teaching methods of the undergraduate programme. It advances the more nuanced aspects of philosophical theories and practices. The university has recognised that empirical methods have limitations when explaining philosophical concepts. As a result, they have made a deliberate effort to use illustrative methods throughout their content delivery. The Self-Learning Material has been meticulously crafted, incorporating relevant examples to facilitate better comprehension.

Rest assured, the university’s student support services will be at your disposal throughout your academic journey, readily available to address any concerns or grievances you may encounter. We encourage you to reach out to us freely regarding any matter about your academic programme. It is our sincere wish that you achieve the utmost success.



Warm regards.
Dr. Jagathy Raj V. P.

01-01-2025

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A wooden frame with a dark brown interior and a lighter brown, textured exterior. The frame is rectangular with rounded corners and four small, dark, circular fasteners at the corners. The text is centered within the dark interior.

BLOCK 1

**Swami Vivekananda,
Sri Aurobindo, and
Gandhi**

UNIT 1

Swami Vivekananda

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- comprehend the Neo-Vedanta philosophy of Swami Vivekananda
- compare and contrast the various paths to realisation as propounded by Vivekananda
- appreciate Vivekananda's idea of universal religion
- apply the ideas of Vedanta in everyday life

Background

The modern period of Indian Philosophy witnesses the attempts to revisit the forces of the long tradition in light of the scientific temper of the new world. We see two kinds of thinkers in this era. There are philosophers like Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, K C Bhattacharya, Dr. S Radhakrishnan, Mahatma Gandhi, etc., who stuck on with the basics of traditional thought and only reinterpreted certain concepts in accordance with the needs of the modern era. On the other side, we find thinkers like Dr. B R Ambedkar, Periyar Ramaswamy Naicker, etc., who demanded the complete abolition of the tradition and emphasized the need to build a society that grounds itself in the scientific education of the modern period. This block introduces the philosophies of Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, and Mahatma Gandhi.

Keywords

Neo-Vedanta, Yoga, Practical Vedanta, Universal Religion

Discussion

- Modern Indian thought revisits the tradition in light of the trends of the new era

- Vivekananda's life changed when he met Ramakrishna Paramahansa

- Vivekananda's thought was influenced by the ideas from various religions

1.1.1 Introduction

Indian philosophy has often been characterised as a non-progressive tradition that continues to focus on ancient ideas with hardly any creative development. But besides the commentarial works that reinterpret the classical systems, we find some efforts, especially since the 18th century, from a group of thinkers that includes both academicians and non-academicians to revisit the long-held ideas in light of modern scientific developments. Swami Vivekananda is one such thinker who inspired the world to view the philosophy of Vedanta through the contemporary lens. He is recognised worldwide as an iconic figure of practical Vedanta. His views on the necessity of religion in human life and his vision of a universal religion evoked serious discussions about the philosophy of religion. Here is a brief account of Swami Vivekananda's contribution.

1.1.2 Swami Vivekananda: Life and Influences

Vivekananda, whose real name was Narendranath Dutta, was born on 12th January 1863 in Calcutta. He studied Indian scriptures and acquainted himself with Western thought. He developed a critical attitude towards all knowledge and was more or less like a sceptic in his early youth. In 1881, Vivekananda met Ramakrishna Paramahansa, who instilled in him a spiritual awakening. He understood the value of personal realisation as distinct from intellectual conviction and soon became a disciple of the great Yogin. Ramakrishna led Vivekananda to an in-depth realisation of the divinity of the soul, the non-duality of existence, and the harmony of different religions. Vivekananda became an iconic figure of spirituality and religious tolerance through his famous speech at the World's Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893. He later founded the Ramakrishna Ashram at Belur and indulged himself in social reform and service to humanity.

Vivekananda realised the deep-rooted nature of religious orthodoxy and superstitions in society as the cause of many of the social evils. He aimed at the re-establishment of spiritual values among the masses. He adopted different ideals and values not only from Hinduism but also from other religions like Christianity and Buddhism. Vivekananda had a strong conviction of the essential unity of everything under the influence of the Vedānta school of Indian Philosophy.



Upaniṣads showed him the divinity and immortality of the soul. The concept of ‘selfless work’ emphasised by the Bhagavad Gita was a constant source of inspiration to him. Vivekananda was also influenced by the Buddhist ideal of Bodhisattva. Buddha’s efforts in helping others in their struggles against various kinds of suffering, even after he attained Nirvana, motivated Vivekananda to pursue his missionary zeal for service. The strength of the character shown by Jesus Christ in forgiving the oppressors amidst acute physical suffering instilled a belief in Vivekananda that man possesses within him a spark of divinity which, upon ignition, would lead to a life that resembles the Kingdom of God.

Vivekananda took his last breath on 4th July 1902, but the good work he started has been carried on by a large number of disciples since then. Since 1985, India has celebrated the birthday of Swami Vivekananda as National Youth Day.

1.1.3 Neo-Vedanta of Swami Vivekananda

The main body of Vivekananda’s thought is derived from the Vedanta philosophy. It is said that the entire philosophic endeavour of Swami Vivekananda is directed towards presenting the tenets of Advaita Vedanta in an intelligible, concrete, scientific, practical, and inspiring form. Vivekananda re-interprets the principles of Advaita Vedanta as conceived in the Upaniṣads and then later by Sankara, in accordance with the conditions of his time. He reconciles the values that he borrowed from other religions to his system of thought based on Vedanta. This is why his philosophy is known as Neo-Vedanta. Vivekananda remarks that Vedanta’s attempt to explain the particular through the general, which further moves on to embark upon the universal and its way of viewing everything from the inside rather than from the outside, gives it the status of a sound philosophy. Moreover, its rootedness in the idea of the greatest harmony conceivable, makes it a system of thought with huge impact.

- Vivekananda reinterprets the tenets of Advaita Vedanta

1.1.3.1 God and World

As an Advaitin, Vivekananda asserts that reality is one. It is not a whole with parts. It is a perfect unity without any distinction between a whole and its parts. This ‘one’, the Absolute, is referred to, by Vivekananda, using the term Brahman as seen in the Vedanta texts. This Brahman is infinite and indeterminate in its real sense. We cannot attribute qualities to it because once we can determine it as so and so, it ceases to be the unknowable Absolute. But from a human point of view, the Brahman can be

- Vivekananda adopts the non-dualistic view of reality

described in the best way possible as Sat-Cit-Ananda or Existence-Consciousness-Bliss.

- Non-dual reality manifests itself through space, time, and causation

Brahman is beyond space, time, and causation. However, it has become the universe by passing through space, time, and causation. However, space, time, and causation are not independent metaphysical realities. They are just the forms in and through which the creation becomes possible. Vivekananda explains this using the analogy of the ocean and the waves. The ocean is the ultimate reality, the Brahman. The universe with its diversity – the material world, all living and non-living creatures, the realm of thoughts, all the so-called states such as heavens, etc. – are compared to the waves which, many in number, arise out of the ocean, persist in it for some time, and finally subside into it. The waves are nothing but water, i.e., the ocean itself. But as long as they exist, they take up separate names and forms and seem as if they have a reality of their own. When the waves subside, there are no abstract names and forms existing by themselves, and only the ocean remains.

- Impersonal Absolute and Personal God go hand-in-hand for Vivekananda

It seems like the philosophy of Vivekananda flows simultaneously in the form of two currents – one that of the Advaita Vedanta, and the other that of the theistic version of the Bhakti cult. He often speaks with conviction that these two currents are not really different. They are just two ways of looking at the reality. The Impersonal Brahman is looked upon by the individual mind as the creator, preserver, and destroyer of the universe. There emerges the picture of a God, a personal God who controls this vast universe and cares about the happenings therein. He is viewed as good and loving, approachable to all individual minds. In Advaita, this God is not ultimately real and is a creation of Maya, i.e., a picture of the Absolute when viewed with respect to its power to manifest itself as the pluralistic world. However, Vivekananda believes that such a distinction is unnecessary. According to him, the Absolute and the God are one. The latter is not a creation of Maya and is just the former viewed from a religious point of view. Such religious urges and aspirations of the individual minds are not to be undermined. The Supreme reality can also be approached religiously; it can also be made the object of devotion and worship.

Vivekananda takes special care to re-interpret the conception that is often accredited to Advaita, which is nothing but the unreality of the universe. He claims that the word *mithya*, used to describe the character of the universe, as seen in the



- Vivekananda denies the unreality of the universe

works of Sankara, does not mean unreal in the opposite sense of being real. It just refers to that which has no permanent or fixed character, something transitory and temporary. The universe, which is constantly changing and has no absolute character of its own, is a *mithya* when viewed with respect to the Absolute.

- Maya, for Vivekananda, is a description of the contradictions in the world

The word Maya, seen in the Advaita texts, is also taken up by Vivekananda in a different sense. Advaita texts describe Maya as the power of the Brahman, which deludes the individual souls into believing in the reality of the illusory world. For Vivekananda, Maya is not a theory for the explanation of the creation. It is just a description of the facts, a description of the contradictions in the world – “... wherever there is good, there must also be evil, and wherever there is evil, there must be some good, wherever there is life, death must follow as its shadow, and everyone who smiles will have to weep, and vice-versa”.

1.1.3.2 Nature of man

- The real nature of man lies beyond his physical and psychological aspects

According to Vivekananda, man is not what he appears to be; he is a concentration of spiritual energy. Vivekananda believes that the physical nature of man includes his external body and his biological and psychological aspects, shows a better organisation and exhibits a greater unity as compared to other animals. Man's responses to environmental stimuli are not just instinctive and mechanical. There are some plans and patterns in them. However, man's real nature, as Vivekananda asserts, lies in his capacity to go beyond his well-ordered physical dimension to realise the underlying spiritual dimension.

- Immortality is the true nature of man

The true nature of man is the soul or Atman. “It is the self, beyond all thought, one without birth or death ... the beginningless and endless, the unmovable, the intangible, the omniscient, the omnipotent Being, that it is neither the body nor the mind, but beyond them all”. Even though in our ordinary experiences we do not experience this true self of ours, Vivekananda says that in certain life situations, like when we witness the death of someone near and dear to our heart, we pause for a moment and ask ‘What becomes of our soul after death’. Centuries before, the sages of our tradition proclaimed that the soul is immortal. Vivekananda remarks that the immortal nature of the soul has been a constant conception that has withstood controversies in all ages and civilisations. If at all this conception was a false notion, it could not have kept on deluding subsequent generations, one after the other. The infinite potential of man that always marches forward cannot

be expected to end all at once. The constant desire to transcend the limits and be free from all physical constraints shows that there is a soul that is beyond destruction. Is not it interesting that even to imagine our death, we have to stand and look on as a witness? The inability to imagine ourselves as mortal shows that the soul is immortal. Man is the immortal soul, not the perishable body. Immortality is, at the same time, man's nature as well as his destiny. Man has to strive for it as he is now ignorant about the same.

- Man is determined only by his actions

Atman, in its true form, is pure freedom. All the physical and mental restrictions it experiences arise out of ignorance about its true nature. Here, freedom does not mean 'no-determination', it means 'self-determination'. Man is not determined by any external agency. His own actions (that include thought and speech) determine his nature. As far as they are his actions, he is not determined by any external agency, but by himself. He can and will overcome all the limitations set for him by himself, through conscious adjustment of his actions.

- Plurality of selves is only apparent

Moreover, the plurality of selves is only apparent. Vivekananda, as a true Advaitin, identifies the Atman with the Brahman. There is one all-comprehending existence. Even though there is only one real ocean, the many different waves give the impression that they are real. Likewise, there is only Atman in which individualities appear in varied forms. As long as man is ignorant, he believes in the reality of many distinct souls. He has to acquire knowledge to get rid of the illusion.

- Vivekananda endorses the life of a *jivanmukta*

The soul which attains self-realisation is liberated from all bondage. Liberation is not an other-worldly gift. Vivekananda endorses the possibility of a *jivanmukta* as Sankara advocates. He never asks us to run away from this world. His lectures on practical Vedanta provide useful insights into the application of the knowledge about the true nature of Atman in the various struggles that we all experience in our daily lives.

- Man can realise his true nature through yoga

1.1.3.3 Ways of realisation

Now, how can the soul realise its true nature? Vivekananda says that it is possible through yoga. Yoga literally means union or a path or discipline. Vivekananda uses the term in both senses. He advocates different paths or disciplines that enable the soul to experience union with its true nature. In fact, these paths are not inconsistent with one another, but complementary to each other.



Jnana Yoga – The Way of Knowledge

- Jnana yoga presupposes ignorance as the root cause of suffering

This path presupposes that bondage and suffering are due to the ignorance of reality. Ignorance lies in the inability to discern the real from the unreal. By acquiring proper knowledge, the soul realises that its true nature lies not in its physical or psychological identity but in the consciousness that underlies all other identities. It realises that it is free from all restraints and is immortal. It also realises its oneness with all other souls and the Absolute. However, the acquisition of knowledge is not an easy, one-step process. It involves listening to the scriptures and the words of learnt yogis, critical analysis of the truths studied by meditating upon the same, and finally the practical realisation wherein the learnt truths are experienced.

- Renunciation is an important part of Jnana yoga

Vivekananda stresses that serious concentration on the ideas learnt is impossible unless we direct our entire energy to the same. But we waste a lot of our energy on bodily activities and sense-gratification. So, in order to progress in the path of knowledge, the aspirant has to control his body, senses, and mind. This is called *vairagya* or renunciation. Negatively, it stands for refraining from bodily desires, but positively, it also stands for the true longing to know the Atman. Vivekananda emphasises the importance of *vairagya* in the Jnana yoga.

- In Bhakti yoga, the Supreme God is made the object of love

Bhakti Yoga – The Way of Devotion

Here, one knows God through love and devotion. Love is natural to man. But instead of making transient and perishable entities the objects of love, Vivekananda asks one to love the infinite, the unlimited, the Supreme God. As the love becomes intense, man acquires a more and more comprehensive picture of God. This love will gradually become the love for all, with the realisation that God is everything. What the follower of the way of knowledge realises at the end is attained by the follower of the path of devotion. According to Vivekananda, devotion is the most convenient and popular of all the ways. Because man does not need to cultivate any special aptitude or capacity or acquire any resources for this, it is natural for him to love. He only needs to direct that love to God.

Vivekananda determines the steps through which Bhakti yoga progresses. The first stage will be that of external worship where one concentrates on the gross forms of God. Idols, images, representations of Gods and Goddesses, incarnations, prophets, God-men, etc., will be the objects of devotion and worship

- Bhakti yoga moves from external worship to inner meditation and the realisation of oneness with God

then. The next stage is characterised by prayer, repetition of the names of God, and chanting of hymns. The devotee moves closer to the subtler aspects of God in this stage. In the final stage, the devotee moves into silent meditation wherein he completely gets immersed in nothing but God. He then realises that he is one with God. He experiences the oneness of everything.

Karma Yoga – The Way of Action

- Karma yoga prescribes the selfless performance of actions

It is a discipline that does not demand the aspirant to believe in any doctrine about the world or God. The aspirant need not think what his soul is or undertake any such metaphysical speculation. He just has to perform all actions without any kind of selfish motives. There is no running away from the duties and responsibilities. Amidst all evil and good, irrespective of the circumstances, one has to work as well as he can. But Karma Yoga wants the work to be non-attached. This path requires one to adopt the ‘duty for duty’s sake’ attitude. Vivekananda says that a man should work as a master, not as an enslaved person. When one allows personal desires or motivations to control or regulate his work, he is being a slave of his mind. The idea of *nishkama karma* mentioned in the Bhagavad Gita shows how one must work without the expectation of anything in return. In Vivekananda’s words, “He works best who works without any motive, neither for money, nor for fame, nor anything else; and when a man can do that, he will be a Buddha, and out of him will come the power to work in such a manner as will transform the world. This man represents the very highest ideal of Karma yoga”.

- Selfless work leads to the realisation of one’s true nature and the oneness of everything

But how can a soul realise its true nature through unselfish action? Vivekananda is very clear about this. When one continuously does selfless work and practices non-attachment in all actions that he performs in life, he is rising above his limited self and is freed from the bondage of personal desires. His mind becomes pure as he does all the work with the same sincerity and honesty. This allows him to identify himself in all; the feeling of oneness with everything emerges.

Raja Yoga – The Way of Psychology

In his book *Raja Yoga*, Vivekananda explains the ancient teachings of Patanjali’s *Yogasutra* in a structured and accessible way, emphasising that yoga is the science of controlling the mind. He presents Raja Yoga as the highest path to self-re-



- Selfless work leads to the realisation of one's true nature and the oneness of everything

alisation, calling it the 'king of yogas' because it directly leads to spiritual liberation. According to Vivekananda, human suffering and bondage arise from mental distractions and ignorance. The restless mind, influenced by emotions, desires, and external disturbances, prevents a person from realising their true nature. Through systematic control of the mind and body, one can achieve deep concentration and ultimate freedom. He describes Raja Yoga as a scientific method for exploring consciousness, just as physical sciences study the external world. By following Patanjali's eightfold path, one can progress towards self-mastery. Vivekananda stresses that this path requires patience and discipline, as true meditation is only possible when the mind and body are stable.

- Universal and practical method to attain liberation

In his explanation of Raja Yoga, Vivekananda also discusses the latent powers of the mind, which can be awakened through deep concentration. These powers, known as siddhis, may include heightened intuition and mental strength. However, he warns that these abilities can become distractions, leading one away from the ultimate goal of self-realisation. He insists that Raja Yoga is not about acquiring supernatural powers but about attaining inner peace and unity with one's true nature. The final aim of Raja Yoga is liberation, a state of pure consciousness beyond the limitations of the body and mind. Vivekananda presents Raja Yoga as a universal and practical method, open to anyone willing to follow its discipline. By practising meditation and mental discipline, individuals can improve clarity, decision-making, and overall well-being.

- One may choose the path that suits his temperament

All the four yogas are different ways to realise the same goal. Men differ in temperaments, dispositions, and capacities. One would like to pursue the path of devotion rather than the path of knowledge. Vivekananda assures that if a man chooses a path with sincerity, earnestness, and a proper sense of purpose, he will reach the goal. In fact, these paths overlap with one another. A devotee may also resort to knowing about God at some stage and perform selfless actions on many occasions.

1.1.4. Practical Vedanta

- Vedanta thought can be carried into our everyday life

Vivekananda has made huge efforts in bringing the ideals of Vedanta into practice. His four lectures delivered in November 1896 in London are named the lectures on Practical Vedanta and are included in the second volume of *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. He remarks that "If it be absolutely impracticable, no theory is of any value whatever, except

as intellectual gymnastics. The Vedanta, therefore, as a religion must be intensely practical". He also explains how the Vedanta thought "can be carried into our everyday life, the city life, the country life, the national life, and the home life of every nation". Vedanta is not the monopoly of the people who live in seclusion in caves and forests. Vivekananda reminds us that many truths of Vedanta were once advocated by people living in the busiest of conditions, like kings and householders. Thus, it can be realised by men in all possible conditions of life. Let us now have a look at some ways in which Vivekananda shows the practical nature of Vedanta.

- Vedanta instils faith in ourselves

The essence of Vedanta is "Thou art that"; you are divine. The human soul is pure and omniscient. Birth, death, etc., would be nonsense when spoken of in connection with the soul. The soul is never born and will never die. So, we need not be afraid of our death and live our entire lives thinking about the same in despair. All determinations made of the soul that it can do this or cannot do that, etc., are mere superstitions. There is nothing impossible for the soul. There is no concept of sin, but only error. The greatest error is to think that we are sinners condemned to be miserable creatures. Vedanta teaches us to overcome the hypnotizing that we have done on ourselves, which has made us think that we are weak and wretched; it teaches us to have faith in ourselves first. If faith in ourselves is extensively taught and practised, a very large portion of the evils and miseries will vanish.

- Vedanta helps to build a sense of oneness and harmony

Oneness is preached by Vedanta as its central idea. There is one life, one existence. The differences are only in degrees, not in kinds. Animals are not separate from humans. They were not created to be used by humans for food. "The amoeba and I are the same; the difference is only in degree, and from the standpoint of the highest life, all these differences vanish". We must not look upon our fellow beings with contempt. All of us are on our way to the same goal. The differences between weakness and strength, virtue and vice, heaven and hell, life and death, etc., are in degrees only. Oneness underlies everything. "All is One, which manifests Itself, either as thought, or life, or soul, or body and the difference is only in degree". If you can lend a helping hand, do so. In case you cannot just fold your hands, bless them, and let them move in their own path.

Vivekananda cites the discussion between Arjuna and Krishna on the battlefield as described in the Gita. According to him, Vedanta asks us to do our work with a great balance of mind. Whatever happens, the mind should not get disturbed.



- One who has inculcated Vedanta manages his life well

Once we realise our true nature and the oneness of everything, we become calmer. The calmer we are, the better for us. When our feelings and emotions are let loose, a lot of energy is lost, and we will not be able to accomplish our duties. It is only when we attain mental stability that we can do a good amount of work. A man cannot do anything significant if it is done out of anger, grief, hatred or jealousy. “It is the calm, forgiving, equable, well-balanced mind that does the greatest amount of work”.

1.1.5 Universal Religion

Vivekananda states that religion is a necessity of life. He feels that “of all the forces that have worked and are still working to mould the destiny of the human race, none certainly is more potent than that, the manifestation of which we call Religion”. He says that a man cannot be satisfied with food, clothing, shelter, etc., which form his physical or materialistic needs. Even in the midst of such comfort, man craves something higher, which, Vivekananda says, is a religious craving. Those who deny that religion is a necessary aspect of life are, in fact, opening only about a few outward expressions of religion. They cannot deny the longing in man for something that the physical environment cannot satisfy. Even the attempt to give up religion will itself become another kind of religion. Vivekananda points out that many political or social organisations have emerged, remained prominent for some time, and then passed out. But religions have continued to live through. In situations of huge criticism and suppression, religions have always found some new ways of expression. Even the advent of science could not completely abolish religion in spite of reforming and refining the tenets and outward expressions of various religions.

- Religion is a necessary aspect of human life

Regarding the origin of religion, Vivekananda states that it is the struggle of men to transcend the uneasiness caused by the limitations of their faculty of knowledge in answering some serious questions about life, death, and the wonders of the natural world around them that has paved the way for the origin of religion. Religion has both inner and outer aspects. Philosophy, mythology, and ritual are three contents seen in every religion. Philosophy sets forth its basic principles, the goal, and the means to achieve the same. Mythology contains stories and legends of great religious men who concretize philosophical ideas or are vehicles that convey philosophical ideas about religion. Rituals help keep a man engaged religiously and ensure unity through the formation of religious organisations.

- Every religion has its own philosophy, mythology, and rituals

- Vivekananda distinguishes between the inner and outer aspects of religion

The outer aspects of religion take the form of symbols, rites, and rituals and have resulted in the formation of sects and institutions, and the major objections against religion are due to the separative and disruptive tendencies caused by the institutionalised form of religion. Religious conflicts are, in a sense, necessary, says Vivekananda. The clashes between superficial thoughts awake deeper thoughts and add vitality to the religions. The true essence of religion never gets affected by these conflicts. Rather, we move closer to the core when we try to go beyond the mutually inconsistent thoughts at the brim. Vivekananda draws our attention to the inner aspect of religion, wherein we find the real, spiritual, and universal notions that can do more good for humanity than ever before. His famous quote reads thus: “Religion is realisation, not talk, nor doctrine, nor theories ... it is being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging; it is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes”.

- Vivekananda conceives of a universal religion with acceptance as the watchword

Vivekananda conceives of an ideal religion, a universal religion, which will open its gates to every individual irrespective of the characteristics of his birth. It should satisfy the needs of all kinds of aspirants by harmoniously balancing philosophy, emotion, work, and mysticism. Acceptance will be the watchword for such a universal religion. Whereas tolerance implies the sense of allowing something in spite of believing its wrongness, acceptance stands for broad-mindedness and open-heartedness. “The believer in the universal religion ... would be prepared to learn from the scriptures of all religions and keep his heart open for what may come in the future”. According to Vivekananda, such a universal religion is already there, and all different religions are, in fact, expressing different aspects of the ideal one.

Summarized Overview

The philosophy of Swami Vivekananda is called Neo-Vedanta as he reinterprets the tenets of Advaita Vedanta in light of the scientific developments of his time. According to him, the Absolute manifests itself through space, time, and causation into the manifold universe. Maya is the description of the contradictions in the universe and never a principle of delusion. The real nature of man is beyond the physical and psychological realms. He is the immortal soul and is identified with the Absolute. Man can realise his true nature through yoga. Various streams of yoga exist in accordance with the different temperaments and dispositions of men. Vivekananda puts great effort into shedding light on the practical aspects of Vedanta. He speaks and writes a lot about



how Vedanta helps to overcome all fears and sufferings by realising our true nature and thus building faith in ourselves. He also highlights the sense of oneness that prevails in the Vedanta outlook. Vivekananda feels that religion is a necessary aspect of human life. Instead of the outer expressions of religion in the form of rituals, he draws our attention to the inner aspect of religion. He conceives of a universal religion that is open to everyone and incorporates sufficient philosophy, mysticism, rituals, mythology, etc., to satisfy the needs of different kinds of aspirants.

Self-Assessment

1. Vivekananda's philosophy is known as Neo-Vedanta. Why?
2. How does Vivekananda's definition of the Vedanta notion of Maya differ from its popular definition?
3. Is Vedanta a practical philosophy? Comment.
4. Reflect upon the necessity of religion in our lives.

Assignments

1. Outline Vivekananda's views on the nature of the world.
2. Give brief accounts of the different paths to realisation – Jnana Yoga, Bhakti yoga, Karma yoga and Raja yoga.
3. Discuss with examples how Vedanta principles can be put into practice.
4. Critically analyse the features of universal religion as envisaged by Vivekanda.

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UNIT 2

Sri Aurobindo

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- differentiate Aurobindo's Integral non-dualism from traditional Vedanta
- discuss Aurobindo's views on involution and evolution
- apprehend the characteristics of Gnostic beings
- appreciate the features of the Divine Life as envisaged by Aurobindo
- distinguish Aurobindo's Integral Yoga from other streams of yoga

Background

Modern Indian thought witnessed many attempts to reinterpret the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta. The Integral Non-dualism of Sri Aurobindo is such a reinterpretation of Advaita. He describes the universe as a delightful play of the Absolute. Material and spiritual realms are given due value and position in his system. He claims that man is yet to evolve into a Gnostic being who has a unitary comprehension of reality. The emergence of a race of such supramental beings or supermen will establish on earth a Divine Life in which there is only pure joy and no suffering. Aurobindo develops an Integral yoga that overcomes the limitations of the existing streams of yoga as a practical method for the evolution of man to a Gnostic being. Here some of the main ideas from the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo are discussed.

Keywords

Integral non-dualism, Involution, Evolution, Integral yoga, Gnostic being, Divine life

Discussion

1.2.1 Sri Aurobindo: Life and Influences

Aurobindo Ghosh was born on 15th August 1872 in West Bengal. He had a major part of his education in England. He came back to India at the age of 21 and joined the Baroda State Service. He happened to read ancient Indian philosophy at that time. Later, he drew himself into a political career, which finally led to his arrest in 1908. The period of imprisonment brought changes in his life. He realized that he was destined to pursue a different kind of life. He was transformed through what can be called a spiritual awakening, and the political activist turned himself into a Yogi. He founded an Ashram at Pondicherry and lived the later part of his life there, aiming to bring into practice the spiritual ideas that he happened to conceive. His persona, as well as the vast and profound literature that he wrote, won him a large number of disciples. He died in 1950, but the Ashram continues to be the centre of spiritual discipline. Recently, his 150th birth anniversary was celebrated in 2022.

- Aurobindo had a spiritual awakening in the days of his imprisonment

Sri Aurobindo had studied the Western philosophy and literature at an early age. He was well acquainted with the ancient Greek philosophical systems of Plato and Aristotle and the contemporary idealistic systems like that of Hegel, Whitehead, Bergson, etc. He was also well-versed in the ancient Indian schools of philosophy, especially the Advaita Vedanta and the Yoga. Aurobindo relied more on his own vision and contemplation and developed a comprehensive system of philosophy in which all other systems were given due position. His philosophy was thus called integral, as even the opposition between materialism and spiritualism was accepted and sublimated in it.

- Aurobindo developed a comprehensive system of philosophy

1.2.2 Integralism

Aurobindo's philosophy can be best described as integral non-dualism (Advaita), integral idealism (Purna-vijnana), or just integralism (Purna-vada). Integralism in his philosophy becomes evident when we understand his assertions regarding 'the materialistic denial' and 'the refusal of the ascetic'.

- Aurobindo's philosophy is called integralism

'Materialistic denial' stands for the denial of anything spiritual by the materialist for whom reality is monistic with matter being the sole substance out of which everything is made up of. Aurobindo contends that even though materialism



- Materialism and spiritualism are wrong in their denial

claims the sanction of science, the senses and intellect of man have not yet been successful in providing satisfactory answers to certain questions. He feels that science also is pointing towards something beyond. On the other side, 'refusal of the ascetic' stands for the denial of ontological status to matter by the spiritualist who insists that the pure spirit is free from all changes is that what can be ranked as real and everything else is relative or illusory. The spiritualist who claims that everything is, in reality, the pure spirit must also consider the matter as a form of spirit and thus is obliged to give due status to the same. Unless he agrees to do this, Aurobindo convicts the spiritualist with the charge of one-sidedness as he does with the materialist. For Aurobindo, "The affirmation of a divine life upon earth and an immortal sense in mortal existence can have no base unless we recognise not only eternal Spirit as the inhabitant of this bodily mansion, the wearer of this mutable robe, but accept Matter of which it is made, as a fit and noble material out of which He weaves constantly His garbs, builds recurrently the unending series of His mansions".

- Aurobindo reinterprets Vedantic Brahman so as to reconcile matter and spirit

Adopting reconciliation as the guiding principle, Aurobindo conceives of reality as supremely spiritual and yet manages to assign in it a place for matter. He accepts the pure spirit as manifesting its absolute freedom in us and, at the same time, recognises matter as the mould and condition of the manifestation. He thus wants to find a principle that can reconcile matter and spirit and give both their due role and justification in life and thought. Such a principle should be characterised by a transcendent consciousness that rises above the separation of the material and the spiritual. Aurobindo discovers it in the Brahman of Advaita Vedanta. He highlights many aspects of Brahman that the Vedanta has not given emphasis on. Thus, he is able to conceive of Brahman as the spiritual entity that can accommodate matter in its bosom.

Now, how does Aurobindo explain the nature of the universe, the material world, after conceiving Brahman, the pure spirit, as the ultimate reality?

1.2.3. The Absolute and its Manifestation

According to Aurobindo Brahman, the Absolute is in itself beyond any description. We can only say that it is above and beyond anything that is thinkable or conceivable. But from the standpoint of the human consciousness, the Absolute has a threefold character. It is Sacchidananda – Existence, Consciousness-force, and Bliss – a triune principle. It is "not only

- Absolute is a triune principle that manifests itself out of bliss

- Evolution or ascent presupposes involution or descent

- Aurobindo lists out eight cords of being to explain the order of descent and ascent

a conscious Existence but a supreme Intelligence and Force and a self-existent Bliss”. The Absolute is an infinite, boundless, timeless existence which cannot be summed up in quantities or composed of qualities. A Force with a dual nature of self-concentration (rest) and self-diffusion (motion) is inherent in this Pure Existence. The Force is not an unintelligent power but a Consciousness that comprehends varied dimensions like the material, the vital, the mental, and the supra-mental. The blissful nature of the Absolute is the reason that it throws out the motion aspect of its consciousness force and creates in itself the manifold universe. Aurobindo describes creation as the ecstatic dance of Siva. He uses the word ‘Lila’, meaning ‘delightful play’, to answer the ‘why’ of creation.

Creation, according to Aurobindo, is a double process. It is a process of descent and ascent, of involution and evolution. Scientific knowledge in modern times is concerned with the theory of evolution or ascent that explains how the higher forms of existence, like life and intelligence, arise out of pure matter. But Aurobindo advocates that every ascent presupposes a descent, or every evolution presupposes an involution. The higher can emerge from the lower only because the former lies embedded within the latter. Unless we accept that life is already involved in matter and that mind is already involved in life, we will find it difficult to explain why life should evolve out of matter or mind out of life.

Aurobindo explains in detail how the Absolute descends from the level of pure consciousness to the level of crude matter and how ascent happens from the material form to the supreme consciousness. The processes of descent and ascent proceed in an order that is described by Aurobindo through the eight cords of being – Existence, Consciousness-Force, Bliss, Supermind, Mind, Psyche, Life, and Matter. The last four belong to the lower hemisphere, which represents the stages that the process of evolution has been able to reach, and the first four belong to the higher hemisphere, which represents the stages into which evolution is going to enter.

1.2.4. Descent or Involution

The Supermind is the link that paves the way for the descent from the Absolute to the individual mind and for the ascent from the individual mind to the Absolute. The Supermind is the Supreme Truth-consciousness; it stands for the knowledge of the One. However, it is also able to differentiate the unitary

- Supermind descends through Overmind to Mind

principle into a multitude without actually dividing it. It manifests the many but does not lose its unity. On the other hand, Mind cuts up and breaks the plurality from the indivisible unity. There is a huge gulf between the Supermind and the Mind that to explain the descent from the Supermind to Mind, Aurobindo introduces the Overmind. It stands for the stage where unity begins to yield place to multiplicity. The Supermind makes possible the first crystallization of the Absolute into individuality. However, it is in the Overmind that the centres of individuality are clearly demarcated. It is thus seen as the stage at which ignorance actually begins. Mind is characterised by the absence of synthetic vision. There exists only the piecemeal observation of things as completely dismantled and separated.

- Descent proceeds further till matter where consciousness becomes so obscured

As the Mind descends to Life, the supreme consciousness further moves into obscurity. Passion and instinct arise at this stage. There are multiple sub-stages here, which range from the confluence of mind and life at the highest to blind cravings and bodily urges at the lowest. When the Absolute plunges itself deeper into ignorance, the level of matter is reached where consciousness has almost wiped out itself. The matter thus should not be considered a contradiction to consciousness but only as one of the forms; the lowest may be that it chooses to assume. It is not the stage of nescience or negation of knowledge, however. The Supreme Consciousness deliberately withholds itself step by step and gradually reaches a stage where it becomes so obscured that it seems as if there is no consciousness at all. Thus, through the process of descent or involution, the formless acquires forms, and the bodiless acquires bodies.

1.2.5 Ascent or Evolution

- Ascent progresses through widening, heightening and integration

Aurobindo explains evolution as having a triple character. It comprises a widening, a heightening, and an integration. Widening stands for the extension of scope. It incorporates differentiation, organisation, variety of expression, and adaptation. When the material body extends its scope and becomes organised, life emerges. When the living organism extends its scope and expresses more and more complexities, the mind emerges. Alongside this widening process, there is heightening. The force of consciousness rises in the level of its manifestation; it grows towards higher forms grade by grade. However, for Aurobindo, what is of utmost importance in the process of evolution is that which he calls integration. As the lower rises to the higher, it does not cease to exist thereby. It gets lifted into the higher; it gets infused and transformed. When life emerges out of mat-

ter, matter is not destroyed. Instead, it gets vitalised. Similarly, when the mind emerges out of life, life does not cease but gets transformed into a higher form. This view of Aurobindo differentiates him from the Advaita view that the higher spirit in man should dissociate itself completely from the lower principles of body and life. Aurobindo feels that the Advaita view fails to recognise that in divine life, the physical, vital, and mental dimensions also get spiritualised and are provided with a fuller and wider play than at their own levels.

- Man is yet to evolve into Superman

Now, let us turn to the actual process of evolution. After plunging itself to the farthest limit, consciousness swings around and starts to climb the steps it has descended. It forces matter to take the upward gradient. This sets out a tension in matter, and as a result of the struggle, matter gives birth to Life. The manifestation of consciousness is rudimentary in the plant and vegetable world. Dissatisfied with its own expression, consciousness again rises, this time to the animal level, where it becomes equipped with sensation and feeling. Being dissatisfied further, consciousness ascends still higher and reaches a better articulation in the form of mind or intelligence. Here, it is characterised by the power of discrimination and analysis. It becomes self-conscious. Aurobindo claims that evolution has only reached this stage so far. But it will not stop here. Man is not the end of evolution. Aurobindo conceives of an ascent from the Mind to the Supermind, from man to Superman.

1.2.6 From the mental to the supra-mental

- Ascend from mind to supermind is not sudden

The difference between Mind and Supermind lies in the ways in which they apprehend reality. The latter always have the unitary picture of reality. In contrast, the former, by its very nature, breaks down or cuts out things from indivisible wholes and treats them as if they were separate elements. However, as we have seen, the Mind is a fall from the Supermind, and the Supermind is potentially there in the Mind. Still, the transition from Mind to Supermind is not abrupt or sudden. Aurobindo enumerates the intermediary steps through which the ascend takes place – Mind, Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuition, Overmind, and Supermind.

First of all, the Mind must somehow become aware of its potential. It must be able to exercise some control over its capacities. The Higher Mind emerges as an observing intelligence that is conscious of its own actions. It stands for the self-aware activity towards integration. But the Higher

- Mind rises through Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuition, and Overmind to reach the Supermind

Mind that works by thought lacks the sudden and direct insight. It ascends to the Illumined Mind, which brings in a still greater consciousness through its truth-seeing light. The above-mentioned stages of ascent can be fulfilled only by reference to the next higher level, i.e., intuition. It is the power of consciousness that is nearer and more intimate to knowledge than the previous stages. However, the flashes of expertise provided by Intuition are short-lived. The mental effort has reached its culmination here. What is needed is a faculty that possesses all powers of Intuition and other preceding stages and is capable of receiving the spiritual light from the above. This faculty is nothing but the Overmind. It is the proper link between the Mind and the Supermind. It can receive light from the Supreme Truth-Consciousness. It performs mental activities in a spiritual manner. Its consciousness is not individualistic but cosmic due to its affinity with the Supermind. However, Overmind is never the Supermind. The former lacks the integral character of the latter. It is capable of holding together all differences and contradictions but still lacks the apprehension of the Absolute as a unity. Aurobindo takes up the example of Prakriti and Purusha and says that to the consciousness of the Overmind, these two would appear as separate realities that cannot be reconciled. The integral view is missed here, and that is why as mentioned earlier, Overmind is considered as the level at which ignorance actually commences. Overmind is the last form that the consciousness assumes in the lower hemisphere. The final leap in the ascent leads to the Supermind, wherein lies the Supramental consciousness – the cosmic vision that is all-comprehensive and all-pervading. It is the integral knowledge of the non-dual reality.

- Three levels of transformations that make Supramental change possible

According to Aurobindo, the Supramental change becomes possible through three kinds of transformations: 1) Psychic transformation – Psyche is the flame of divinity in us that remains unpolluted and undimmed throughout all our life experiences. Awakening the psychic being by overcoming the veil that hitherto has been hidden is what is called psychic transformation. This transformation means an awakening of the soul and then relating body, life, and mind to that awakened soul. 2) Spiritual transformation – The psychic being is hereby turned towards the higher reality. It is the opening of the soul to spiritual intimations. The spiritualised mind gradually moves towards the apprehension that transcends all dualities. 3) Supramental transformation – This consists in the descent of the Supermind towards the Mind that evolves, in order to liberate the supramental principle within the Mind. Only through such

an intervention from the higher realm will the final change become possible.

The supramental change would bring about a radical change in the whole of terrestrial existence. Men would then become men of knowledge, the Gnostic beings, and the life here would be a Divine Life.

1.2.7 Gnostic Beings and Divine Life

Aurobindo describes Gnostic beings as those who have attained a state of supramental consciousness. Unlike ordinary human beings who function within the limits of the mind, emotions, and ego, Gnostic beings transcend these limitations and live in perfect knowledge, harmony, and unity with the divine. They are free from ignorance, meaning they do not experience confusion or doubt but have a direct and intuitive knowledge of truth. Unlike ordinary individuals who struggle between spiritual aspirations and worldly responsibilities, Gnostic beings achieve a perfect integration of spiritual and material life. Their spirituality is not confined to meditation or contemplation alone; rather, it extends into every action they perform, which is guided by divine wisdom. They live in complete unity with the Divine, acting as instruments of higher consciousness, allowing the divine will to manifest through them in all aspects of life.

- Supramental beings are men of knowledge and hence called Gnostic beings

- Gnostic beings experience the greatest integration within and without

- Gnostic beings experience delight as their nature

The Gnostic individual is one with an entirely changed and spiritualised outlook. The consciousness of the Supermind is integral, and it harmonises and unifies apparent diversities. Thus, the Gnostic being will always be a perfect and complete individual due to the highest possible integration, both within and without. He will also be able to create a harmonic unity with the other mental beings. Aurobindo says, “A complete self-knowledge in all things and at all moments is the gift of the supramental gnosis and with it a complete self-mastery, not merely in the sense of control of Nature but in the sense of a power of perfect self-expression in Nature”.

All activities of the Gnostic being will be based on knowledge and not on ignorance. Ignorant men perform all activities with a fragmentary view of reality. Their ego-sense creates various mental barriers and difficulties. However, the Gnostic being, with his harmonious vision of reality, will feel no difficulty in acting. He has no desires, nothing to strive for or achieve. He performs all activities with a joyous spirit; the delight is his nature.



- Divine life emerges when the entire human race rises to the supramental level

Aurobindo conceives of another ideal, which makes him different from other non-dualists. The realisation of the supramental status is not the ultimate destiny of a man. A superman must work for the transformation of others in order to change the whole of mankind to a race of Gnostic beings. The culmination of the evolutionary process is the emergence of such a Divine Life on earth where all individuals will be endowed with supramental powers. The Divine Life is characterised by self-aware existence and complete self-possession of cultivated powers and capacities. All men will experience intrinsic and natural delight. Pain and suffering, which are signs of imperfection, will not have any place in such a life. "Divine Life, thus, is the emergence of a perfect life on earth, a life not of separation or isolation, but one of unity and harmony, a life not regulated by the mental and natural forces, but a life regulated by Super-consciousness".

1.2.8 Integral Yoga

- Aurobindo develops an Integral yoga that expedites the rise from mind to supermind

How can we bring into effect the Divine Life, which is the ultimate destiny or goal of the evolutionary process? Aurobindo feels that such a life is bound to emerge sooner or later, but we can accelerate its descent through spiritual activities. For the same, he developed what is known as Integral Yoga. Aurobindo contends that all the previously existing yogas lay emphasis on certain aspects and overlook others. Jnana yoga focuses on knowledge, whereas Bhakti yoga focuses on devotion. Patanjali's yoga focuses on the mind, whereas Hatha yoga focuses on the body. Aurobindo envisages a transformation of all the aspects of being through his Integral yoga. It does not suppress bodily aspects but charges even the physical with the supramental light. The divine union takes place not in any trance state where contact with the ordinary world is lost but in the state of waking consciousness itself. It is open to all and does not place much emphasis on breathing and postural exercises, rites and rituals, recitals of prayers and hymns, etc. Aurobindo's Integral yoga is an inner yoga requiring some disciplines of purification and spiritualisation which everyone can practice. It proceeds through three stages of psychicisation, spiritualisation, and supra mentalisation, which correspond to the triple transformation mentioned earlier.

Summarized Overview

Aurobindo's philosophy adopts an integralist approach. He reinterprets Advaita Vedanta to reconcile matter and spirit. According to him, the non-dual Absolute, from a human point of view, is a triune principle of Existence, Conscious-Force, and Bliss. It manifests itself into the material, vital, and mental universe out of delight; creation is a joyous play. Aurobindo asserts that no evolution is possible except for an already occurred involution. The Absolute plunges itself into the state of obscurity and becomes matter. The evolution of life from matter and mind from life has been possible only because the Absolute is potentially present in matter. For Aurobindo, man is not the culmination of evolution. He is yet to evolve into a superman, with a supramental consciousness that has the unitary vision of everything as the manifestation of the non-dual reality. The superman is the epitome of perfect integration within and without. He lives the life in delight. Aurobindo conceives of a Divine Life on this earth with the emergence of a race of Gnostic beings with supramental consciousness. He also develops an Integral yoga that overcomes the limitations of already existing streams of yoga, which would expedite the transformation from mental beings to supramental beings.

Self-Assessment

1. Distinguish between 'the materialistic negation' and 'the refusal of the ascetic'.
2. What are the eight cords of being listed out by Aurobindo?
3. Describe the process of evolution from Mind to Supermind.
4. How does a Gnostic being behave?

Assignments

1. Differentiate Aurobindo's integral non-dualism from the traditional Advaita Vedanta.
2. 'Evolution presupposes involution'. Shed light on the same with respect to Aurobindo.
3. Compare and contrast the characteristics of mental beings and supramental beings.
4. What is Divine Life according to Aurobindo? How can it be realised?
5. Give a brief account of Aurobindo's Integral Yoga.



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SGOU



UNIT 3

Gandhi

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- interpret Gandhi's notions of God and Truth
- analyse the relationship between the means and the end
- reflect upon the nature of Satyagraha practised by Gandhi
- evaluate Gandhi's vision of Sarvodaya

Background

Social reformers and freedom fighters have always had their own fundamental philosophies. They might not have built any complete system of thought. But their ideas lie scattered in the way they behave in their life. Modern Indian thought comprises many such personalities, and Mahatma Gandhi is one among them. He is a man who held on to Truth and practised ahimsa or non-violence. He emphasizes the positive aspect of non-violence, which is nothing but selfless love. His motto is to conquer hearts not through physical force but through love and trust. Gandhi develops his version of Satyagraha as a non-violent technique to win over his antagonists. His conviction in the essential oneness of humanity and his trust in the goodness of one's soul led to his socio-economic vision of Sarvodaya, or the welfare of all. This unit introduces the philosophic ideas that formed the ground for Gandhi's life and actions.

Keywords

Truth, Non-violence, Satyagraha, Sarvodaya

Discussion

1.3.1 Mahatma Gandhi: Life and Influences

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on 2nd October 1869 in Porbandar. He was brought up in a religious and moral environment, but his mind was open to the new ideas of his time. He went to England in 1888 to study law. He acquainted himself with many Western ideas at that time. After returning to India in 1891 and staying here for a short period, he went to South Africa to work with respect to a case. Gandhi's life took a great turn from there. He stood against various acts of racial discrimination committed by white people through different forms of passive resistance. With a bundle of experience from his moral and political adventures in South Africa, he returned to India and applied his techniques to India's struggle for independence. He also put in a huge effort to remove social evils such as untouchability. Gandhi's life in India from then till his assassination in 1948, soon after India attained independence, has become a household story. He was a great soul – Mahatma, in whom the world witnessed a combination of the inner strength that withstood various bitter experiences and the unconditional love for humanity.

- Gandhi's moral and political adventures shaped his philosophy

Gandhi's thought always had the stamp of the ancient Hindu tradition. We find in him the currents of Advaita as well as the Vaishnava theism. He has respect for the orthodox Hindu ways of religion and worship. He had studied Gita, Ramayana, and various other Vaishnava and Jain literature. While in England, he was attracted to the life and personality of Christ, who asked the world to forgive the sinner. Tolstoy's interpretation of Christianity had a great influence on Gandhi. Tolstoy's emphasis on the power and dignity of suffering inspired him to develop his own version of Satyagraha. The idea of civil disobedience, as propounded by Thoreau, the great American thinker, revealed to Gandhi the different non-violent means through which various social and political problems can be solved. Besides these, Gandhi knew the ideals of Zoroastrianism and Islam and familiarised himself with the works of theosophists like Ruskin. It should be remembered that Gandhi's main source of inspiration was his own experience. As he said in his autobiography, he considered his life a series of experiments with the truth.

- Gandhi was influenced by the ideals of different religions



1.3.2 Truth and God

- Gandhi identifies God with Truth

Even though, at times, Gandhi speaks like an Advaitin about the indeterminate character of the ultimate reality, his notion of God is largely theistic. He feels that God is not exclusively meant for the satisfaction of reason and intellectual curiosity but also for providing strength and solace. He advocates that God becomes God only when He rules the heart and transforms it. A personal God is necessary for the same, and we see how intensely Gandhi speaks of the interpersonal relationship between God and man. In his early days, Gandhi described God as Truth rather than merely an attribute of God. He described God as Truth because he felt that God alone is real. Truth is taken here in connection with the Sanskrit word 'sat', which means that which is ultimately real.

- Gandhi shifts the emphasis from God to Truth to incorporate everyone

Later, Gandhi shifted the emphasis from 'God is Truth' to 'Truth is God'. He feels that the word Truth is not as ambiguous as the word God. God may be theistic, deistic, polytheistic, or pantheistic. But the word Truth is always clear in its scope. Moreover, it is possible to rationally doubt or deny the existence of God. But reason would not reject Truth. The sceptics and the non-believers may deny God, but they cannot deny Truth. Gandhi says, "... I never found a double meaning in connection with truth and not even the atheists had demurred to the necessity or power of truth. But in their passion for discovering truth, the atheists have not hesitated to deny the very existence of God ...". Blind religious notions of God have created many problems in the world and have done immense damage to mankind. Gandhi thus adopted the slogan 'Truth is God', which, he said, gave him the greatest satisfaction. One of the implications of this assertion is that Truth is taken as the object of worship, which can, in fact, provide the basis for a universal religion. Gandhi foresees that the worship of Truth can bring together Hindus, Muslims, and even Atheists.

- Gandhi considers the universe as the manifestation of God in different forms

The world, as Gandhi conceives, is an expression of God, the all-pervasive reality. In the inexorable laws of nature that the sciences discovered, Gandhi saw nothing but the force or the will of God, which maintains the order and harmony of the universe. According to him, the innumerable forms in this universe are all the manifestations of God, and they command reverence from him. Gandhi believed in the essential unity of

1.3.3 Nature of the world and man

everything, and he considered one's earthly life to be the service of God, who resides in everything around him.

- Man is essentially divine and good

Regarding the nature of man, Gandhi feels that all theories that attempt to describe man, such as the anthropological, sociological, psychological, psycho-analytical or even existential theories, are inadequate as they do not emphasise the basic truth about man. They only provide partial or superficial accounts of the external aspects of man. As God is in everything, He is in man too. Man is thus divine, and it is the spirit or soul present in man that is his true nature. It is what nourishes the physical and psychological aspects, which are its expressions. The divinity in man implies his essential goodness. Gandhi insists that even if a man appears like a brute in his outward expressions, his inner nature is essentially good. This is why Gandhi says that he will never suspect human nature. He believes that there is no human soul that cannot respond to a noble and friendly action. This belief forms a strong basis for Gandhi's method of Satyagraha.

1.3.4 Non-violence as the Means and Truth as the End

- Gandhi prioritises means over the end

Thinkers who deal with ethical and moral questions have long debated the relationship between the means and the end. There have been theories that prioritise the end over the means and vice-versa. According to Gandhi, the means or the way cannot be separated from the end or the goal. He believes that we have control only over the means and not over the end. We can change or adjust only the means and never the end. If we take care of the means, we will surely reach the end sooner or later. Gandhi explains his view with an example. He says that the means can be compared to a seed and the end to a tree. There is an undeniable relationship between the two. This implies that the means, at least implicitly, contains the possibility of the end just as the seed contains within the energy, which gets expressed as a tree. Even if we have the clearest possible definition and appreciation of the goal, its realisation depends on our way of utilising the proper means for the same. The progress towards the goal will be in exact proportion to the purity of the means.

Gandhi responds to those who say that means are, after all, means, and whatever the means we adopt, the end is what becomes important. He insists that means are, after all, everything, as the means to the end. He repeatedly contends that



- Purity of means is essential for the realisation of good end

the adoption of a particular means makes a significant difference in the nature of the work. For example, one can acquire an object which is now under the possession of somebody else in different ways. He can pay money to buy the object, or he may steal it without letting the owner know about it. In both cases, the result is that the person gets the object. But in the former case, it is an object bought by him in the proper manner, and in the latter case, it is a stolen property. Therefore, it is clear that the nature of the means adopted makes a great difference in the result. Gandhi strongly denies the slogan “ends justify means”. He believes that the purity of means is an essential condition for the realisation of good ends. A wrong means will have an adverse effect on the character of the work.

- Non-violence is the means to approach Truth

Gandhi applies his philosophy of the means and the end to his doctrine of truth and non-violence. He remarks that non-violence and truth are intertwined. It is impossible to separate or disentangle them. They are like the two sides of a coin. Truth is the life goal towards which we all strive. If so, what path should we adopt to approach the truth? Without any doubt, Gandhi says it is ahimsa or non-violence. As said earlier, we have access only to the means, and it is our responsibility to purify them so as to accomplish the result we want. Therefore, in our quest for truth, we should always go on the path of non-violence. It becomes our supreme duty to practice non-violence.

- Gandhi redefines ahimsa beyond non-harm

We should now focus a bit on the sense in which Gandhi talks about ahimsa or non-violence. The traditional definition of ahimsa entirely relies on its negative aspects. Ahimsa means *a-himsa*, i.e., not causing any harm. Gandhi is aware that all of us need to do some amount of harm to the creatures around us in order to sustain our lives. For food, we destroy vegetation; for self-protection, we might take the lives of animals or insects. But when we injure or kill somebody intentionally out of anger, pride, hatred, or other selfish motives, we are guilty of violence. Gandhi reminds us that nothing permanent has been built through violence. History has taught us that those who have adopted the path of violence, even if out of certain good and honest intentions, so as to suppress greed and dishonest brutes, have gradually fallen prey to the same evil things done by the latter. Gandhi wants all of us to refrain from such acts of violence.

However, Gandhi also points to a positive dimension in the practice of ahimsa, which he feels is more basic than the negative aspect. The positive aspect is nothing but love, the

- Ahimsa, in the positive sense, is pure love for all

feeling of oneness. Love is natural to man, Gandhi says, and violence is alien to him. It is love that cleanses one's inner life and uplifts him. Love includes noble qualities like benevolence, compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, generosity, kindness, etc. Love makes sacrifice possible. It never gives and never claims. It never suffers and never revenges. Ahimsa, according to Gandhi, is the practice of love. He wants us to believe in the essential goodness of man. We, in situations where we are treated adversely by our opponent, should quietly suffer out of our love for him and wait till his anger calms down so that he realises his faults and reforms himself. The non-violent man who practices conscious love and suffering always preserves his self-respect and dignity. The forgiveness that he practices actually puts the opponent to shame. Ahimsa is universal, according to Gandhi. All of us, irrespective of gender or age, can practice it. It does not demand the use of any external object. It only needs sincerity of purpose and purity of intentions. Even societies and nations can practice ahimsa.

1.3.5 Satyagraha

- Satyagraha is holding fast to the truth

Satyagraha literally means the *āgraha* of *satya* or holding fast to truth. It works on the belief that the will of God is represented in the truth, and we have to strictly follow the path of truth. Gandhi translates Satyagraha into English as Truth-force, Soul-force, or Love-force, incorporating the definitions given by Tolstoy. Satyagraha is a great spiritual force that is independent of any trace of physical force or violence. Violence is, in fact, the negation of this force. Satyagraha is based on love. The opponent is regarded as one of us, as the same God dwells in both him and us.

- Satyagraha is the method of conversion, not coercion

Gandhi prescribes Satyagraha against violence, injustice, and tyranny, all of which arise from the neglect of truth. Resisting violence with violence, injustice with injustice is like adding fuel to the fire. Gandhi believed that the force of Satyagraha, based on truth and love, could evaporate these evils. It is a method of conversion and not coercion. The latter may pave the way for violence in some or another. However, Satyagraha does not appeal to fear or threat. It appeals to the heart of the opponent, which contains the element of goodness. In fact, there are no 'opponents' or 'enemies'. A person may do something bad when the veil of passion, anger, hatred, etc., covers the good in his soul. In Satyagraha, we see an intention to bring about a change in the heart of the wrongdoer and make

him realise his mistake so that he will repent and rectify it. “The essence of Satyagraha is to liquidate antagonism, not the antagonist”.

- Satyagraha is different from passive resistance

Satyagraha is distinguished from passive resistance. It is, in fact, more active than violence in terms of its love force. Passive resistance always contains a scope for violence, at least in the form of mental harassment of the adversary, whereas in Satyagraha, it is completely forbidden. There is hardly any element of love in passive resistance, while the entire progress of Satyagraha is based on love and trust. Passive resistance may proceed to the deliberate disobedience of all laws. However, Satyagraha always holds on to the higher law of truth, love and God.

- Satyagraha is meant for the strong-minded

Satyagraha is the method practised by the strongest souls. The one who practices it, known as Satyagrahi, subjects himself to suffering for the sake of truth. His love for mankind enables him to do so. It cannot be practised by one who is weak-minded. It demands extreme patience as the Satyagrahi would have to wait longer to win over the anger and hatred of the wrong-doer with his love and conscious suffering. The Satyagrahi should be fearless, simple, humble, honest, sincere, and disciplined. Satyagraha can be used by everyone alike. It can be used by individuals as well as communities and nations. Gandhi proclaims that there is no force in the world so great that it would not bend before a Satyagrahi. The strongest form of Satyagraha can work wonders even in extreme adverse conditions.

- Gandhi endorses four kinds of Satyagraha

According to Gandhi, Satyagraha is a technique that can be used differently in different situations. Although many kinds of Satyagraha have been practised all over the world, Gandhi mostly favours only disobedience, non-cooperation, direct action, and fasting. The first of these is a protest against unjust laws. It is believed that obeying Truth and disobeying man-made laws is morally proper in cases where the laws seem immoral and cruel. Non-cooperation is a kind of refusal on the part of the exploited to be exploited further. Gandhi’s Swadeshi movement is an example of this kind of Satyagraha. Direct action, as conceived by Gandhi, is not any mass rebellion. It is essentially non-violent. Quit India movement is an example of such direct action. For Gandhi, the most effective form of Satyagraha is fasting. It purifies its practitioner. Gandhi believes that as we subdue the flesh, the strength of the soul grows in proportion. The suffering borne by the Satyagrahi is so intense that it somehow mends the obstinacy of the other party. But

Gandhi feels that this should be resorted to only when all other means have failed.

1.3.6 Sarvodaya

Sarvodaya etymologically means the betterment or upliftment of all (*sarva* means all, and *udaya* means betterment or upliftment). Gandhi uses this term first in his translation of John Ruskin's work 'Unto This Last'. Ruskin's work had an outlook on the economic and political life of a society wherein he asserted that the good of the individual is contained in the good of all and that the barber's job has similar value as compared to the lawyer's. All have equal rights to earn their livelihood from their job, and finally, a life of physical labour is the best way to earn a livelihood.

- Sarvodaya aims for the welfare of all

Gandhi shapes his economic philosophy of Sarvodaya by incorporating the above ideas with his own ideals of love and oneness. Sarvodaya is different from the popular vision of utilitarianism. The latter stands for the greatest pleasure for the greatest number of people. This certainly implies that the needs and feelings of the minority would be overlooked or neglected. No doubt, basing something on utility precludes a sense of universality. Gandhi does not wish to inflict pain on any individual for the sake of others. However, it is not practical to meet everyone's requirements simultaneously because the needs of different individuals contradict each other. Here, Gandhi emphasises the importance of cultivating a moral sense. He wants all of us to be Sarvodayi, who aims not at selfish accomplishments but at the welfare of all. We should be prepared for maximum possible self-sacrifice for the good of others. It should come out as a sincere act and should not contain traces of discontentment. This is possible when we have the sense of oneness that makes us love others as we love ourselves.

- Sarvodaya can be accomplished only through the sense of love and oneness

The socio-economic ideas put forward by Gandhi can be viewed in light of his broad vision of Sarvodaya. He tries to instil in all of them a sense of dignity in labour. He asks all to do some manual work at least to earn his daily bread, irrespective of their social professions. This, he thinks, will reduce the feeling of inequality among people who engage in various jobs. He believes that if a person who is doing intellectual work by profession also does some physical work like cleaning, sweeping, gardening, etc., those works would never be considered inferior. Gandhi also proposes equal wages for all professions. Though the idea seems impractical and illogical,



- Gandhi proposes many socio-economic ideas that contribute to the accomplishment of Sarvodaya

he believes it is the right approach to prevent comparisons between different jobs. He believes that if the wages paid for all jobs are equal, people would then concentrate on doing their work sincerely rather than focusing on income. Sticking to his ideals of love and oneness, Gandhi also introduces the doctrine of trusteeship of the rich. The so-called capitalists are human beings and have the element of goodness in them. They should be won over by love and not compulsion. They should be awakened so as to understand that a good society is one in which all live in harmony with a sense of sharing and cooperation. They would then come to think that the capital in their possession is to be utilised for the collective well-being. The rich would then function only as the trustees of the wealth of the society. In all these ideas put forward by Gandhi, we can see his vision of Sarvodaya is based on the essential oneness of mankind and the resulting love for all.

- Education should shape an individual to work for the realisation of Sarvodaya

Gandhi's views on education also resonate with the Sarvodaya vision. The individuals have to be educated and trained in such a manner that the ideal of Sarvodaya is realised. Hence, education aims to bring out the essential element of goodness in man. Education should help in character building. It should “develop courage, strength, virtue, and the ability to forget oneself in working towards great aims”. The individual should be taught about the oneness of humanity and the importance of love and selflessness in everyday life. Gandhi defines education thus: “By education, I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man – body, mind and spirit”.

Summarized Overview

According to Mahatma Gandhi, the whole universe is the manifestation of God in different forms, and it commands our reverence. He has the highest regard for truth and, in fact, proclaims ‘Truth is God’ to bring together the believers of various religions and even atheists. He believes that the purity of means is necessary for the realisation of a good end. He thus adopts non-violence as the way to approach truth. Non-violence, according to Gandhi, has both positive and negative aspects. The negative dimension is about refraining from injuring or harming, whereas the positive dimension is pure love for all. He developed Satyagraha as a technique for practising non-violence. It is a method of conversion rather than coercion. It is different from passive resistance, which bears the scope for hatred and violence. Gandhi says that through love and forgiveness, one can win the heart of the adversary. This works on the basis that the real nature of man is divine and there is an essential element of goodness in everyone, which often gets veiled by passion, anger, hatred, etc. Gandhi has a vision

of Sarvodaya or the welfare of all and proposes various socio-economic ideas to realise the vision. He wants the education system of a nation to be structured in such a way that an attitude is cultivated in the individual to work selflessly for the well-being of all.

Self-Assessment

1. Worship of Truth can bring all kinds of people together. How?
2. Distinguish between the negative and positive aspects of ahimsa.
3. Satyagraha is not for the weak. Comment.
4. How does Sarvodaya differ from Utilitarianism?

Assignments

1. Why does Gandhi shift from 'God is Truth' to 'Truth is God'?
2. 'Means are after all everything'. Shed light on this with respect to Gandhi.
3. The Gandhian view of ahimsa emphasises its positive aspect. Discuss.
4. Discuss the salient features of Satyagraha developed by Gandhi.
5. Give a brief account of Sarvodaya as envisaged by Gandhi.

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Suggested Reading

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU

BLOCK 2

**Mohammed Iqbal, Krishna
chandra Bhattacharya and
Rabindranath Tagore**



UNIT 1

Mohammed Iqbal (1877-1938)

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- explain Iqbal's philosophy of ego (Khudi), its development, and its role in self-realization and human destiny.
- examine Iqbal's holistic approach to religion, emphasizing its integration of thought, feeling, and action in shaping an individual's life.
- evaluate the relationship between intellect and intuition and their significance in human development.
- Appreciate the worldliness and life in Iqbal's philosophy of ego.

Background

Muhammad Iqbal holds a unique place in modern Indian philosophy, deeply rooted in the Islamic tradition while engaging with contemporary thought. His philosophical ideas aimed at reconstructing Islamic religious thought in response to modern challenges. Born in 1877 in Sialkot (now in Pakistan) to devout parents, Iqbal received an early Islamic education. In 1904, he composed *Tarana-e-Hind*, famously beginning with *Saare Jahan Se Achcha*, a patriotic poem that expressed love for Hindustan and its people, transcending religious and communal divisions.

As a Muslim scholar who studied Western philosophy, Iqbal remained unconvinced by Western theories of human nature, particularly those influenced by Marxism and Darwinism. While deeply influenced by Western thinkers like Nietzsche and Bergson, he also formulated a critique of Western political and cultural conventions, particularly the divisive nature of nationalism. Iqbal believed that Islamic principles of global brotherhood and ethics provided a moral alternative to the fragmentation caused by modernity and nationalism. His views on human nature and personality were fundamentally rooted in the Quran, blending Islamic values with Western dynamism to create a vision of selfhood that was both spiritually grounded and forward-looking. His philosophy of

the *Khudi* (Self) was meant to empower individuals to rise above external divisions and cultivate a dynamic, self-actualized existence in harmony with God and humanity.

Keywords

Self, *Khudi*, Ego, Intuition, Self-realization

Discussion

2.1.1 Philosophical Outlook of God

- The true nature of the physical world can be revealed through intuition

Iqbal, like other modern Indian thinkers, is a realist and seeks to assert the existence of the world. He believes that the reality of the world will be unveiled via an intuitive insight. That is, we won't be able to explain our experiences and behaviours if we don't accept the reality of the world. Iqbal claims that the true nature of the physical world can be revealed through intuition. Here, he appears to have been influenced by Bergson, who asserts that intuition discloses reality as a process that is always evolving, growing, and changing, as well as constituting duration. Iqbal claims that we have a direct intuition of self and that further intuition informs us that the world may be conceived of in terms of the analogy of what we have known about the self through intuition.

Islam upholds monotheism; God as one, Omnipotent, all knowing and supremely good creator of the universe. Islam is indifferent to the distinction between God and the Absolute. Iqbal attempts to develop such a concept of God and shows how it satisfies both man's religious yearning and his metaphysical curiosity. All possible beings rely on Him for their existence, and he is the only necessary being. Since all proofs restrict his existence, he is independent and beyond all of them. Here, Iqbal's view is that God's existence is necessary, which is revealed to man in his existential experience. Iqbal attributes certain features of God, and they are as follows;

1. God is Omniscient, Omnipotent and Eternal.
2. God is immanent and Transcendent. No reality is outside of Him. God transcends the finite selves and the world and yet encircles and encompasses, creates and manifests the latter.



3. God is a dynamic reality. He is the essential unity of all existence.
4. God is the Perfect Reality. He has infinite creative possibilities. There can be no duplication or reproduction of God.
5. God is the Ultimate Ego. He has an ego, and like a human self, He has an organizing principle of unity.

- Salvation lies in the realisation of the self or khudi.

Salvation for humanity lies in the uncompromising adherence to the belief in the Oneness of God and the consequent ceaseless activity to shape one's own destiny and the destiny of the world in the attempt to imbibe the divinity in themselves. The aim of the human being should, therefore, be the realization of *Khudi* or Self, which is the Absolute Self. It is the development of one's self-hood. It can be achieved by doing good things. It raises the individual to the divine level, making him capable of vicegerency on earth and being nearer to God.

2.1.2 Human being

Human beings are the main concern of the Quran, and their performance in the world will be counted and rewarded. According to Iqbal, a human should be honest, kind, fearless, and capable of accepting death with equanimity. Iqbal offers a thorough understanding of human beings who are ultimately distinguished by an infinite array of divine attributes and potentialities. Human beings are free, unpredictable, and unanalysable, and it is always an open possibility. He claims that human beings alone have the distinctive characteristics of being awake, alert, creative, and mobile, in contrast to all other objects in the phenomenal world. Human beings, according to Iqbal, are both finite and boundless.

As a thinker who was deeply anchored in the teachings of Islam's holy script, the following form the major premises on which his views on human nature were built:

1. Among all creations of God, man is the best and chosen one of God.
2. That man, with all his faults, is meant to be the representative of God on earth.
3. That man is the trustee of a free personality, which he accepted at his peril.

- The concept of humans emphasizes khudi and considers humans as dynamic and creative.

He says, “A man is an ocean that is vast and free. Its every drop is like the boundless sea”. According to Iqbal, man is superior in nature despite his numerous shortcomings. Man, in Iqbal’s opinion, is a dynamic entity. By relating to the Quranic message that the universe in which man lives is constantly growing every minute and second, Iqbal applied the same to state that in man, too, there is constant growth. He can transform his pre-determinism into freedom, his helplessness into strength, and his reliance on independence by working ceaselessly and coming up with creative actions. It is clear from reading Iqbal’s philosophical perspectives on human personality that he placed great importance on the role, potential, and creative mind that humans possess. Iqbal’s views on man are a perfect reflection of the Quran’s teachings. His standpoint regarding the mind-body relationship is that the mind or soul and the body show unity in their working in the real world, otherwise known as reality. As such, they complement each other.

According to Iqbal, a human is not someone who quietly surrenders to God without trying to alter his or her destiny. Being an individual who does not readily give up on fate, humans work hard to improve themselves through knowledge, competence, and energy. After doing all within his capacity, such a human leaves the ultimate decision to God. For him, humans are not only the centre and the ruler of the world, but he is also God’s assistant in the creation, refinement and perfection of the universe, which is still imperfect. So, by giving great importance to humans, Iqbal shows the relationship between humans and God.

2.1.3 Intellect and Intuition

Iqbal rejects the idea of the world as a mere illusion, and he asserts that the world is real because it reflects God’s creativity and is a stage for human action and spiritual development. He views the world as undergoing continuous evolution and ever-dynamic. He emphasised the interconnectedness of all existence through God’s creative will. Without accepting the reality of the world, we will not be able to explain our experiences and behaviours. Iqbal was, in a sense, in opposition to the fundamental tenet of mysticism, which holds that it is an attempt to arrive at the ultimate reality via inner experience and rejects reason or intellect as insufficient in favour of intuition or love. That is, he believes in the intuitive approach to reality. The concept of man in him relies on intuition. In his lectures, he adds, “Nor is there any reason to suppose that thought and

- Intuition is the gateway to metaphysical knowledge.



intuition are essentially opposed to each other. They spring up from the same root and complement each other.” Iqbal gives reason/intellect and intuition their proper places and regards intuition as the higher form of intellect through which man can properly gain metaphysical knowledge. He defined intuition as a unique experience, differentiated it from every other mode of cognition, and added that it is not perception or thought because it transcends the limitations of both; it makes metaphysics possible.

The characteristics of intuition put forth by Iqbal are as follows:

1. Intuition is immediate knowledge of reality or God.
2. Intuition has the directness of sense experience.
3. Intuitive experience always apprehends its object as a whole.
4. Intuition is knowledge by being, whereby the distinction between the subject and object vanishes altogether.
5. The knower becomes one with the known and thereby realizes it.
6. Intuition is the propriety of the heart, not of the mind or intellect. Intellect knows its object after creating a distinction between the knower and the known, but the heart establishes an affinity with its objects; in fact, in a sense, it becomes the object. That is why intuition is said to be knowledge by the heart.
7. Intuitive experience is the only possible source through which reality can be known.
8. Therefore, only at the level of intuitive experience is the organic unity of knowledge possible. Comprehending the whole reality is the goal of intuition, and everyone can have intuitions of his own self while making crucial choices when one goes deep to the bottom of self.

• Intuitive experience as the organic unity of knowledge.

2.1.4 Concept of Ego (*Khudi*)

Iqbal offers a fresh perspective on the evolution of human personality. His *Khudi*, or philosophy of ego, is at the heart of his theory of personality. His Persian classic *Asrar-e-Khudi* (Secrets of the Self) extensively details the philosophy of *Khudi*. At the same time, his book *The Reconstruction of Religious*

- Philosophy of Self: self as an evolving and growing entity

Thought in Islam explores broader philosophical and religious themes, including aspects of ego and selfhood. As highlighted by many Iqbal scholars, known as ‘Iqbalians,’ his philosophy of the ego is not entirely new. As a Muslim philosopher, Iqbal developed his own version of ego philosophy, which he termed ‘Khudi.’ For him, the human ego is the core of one’s existence, reflecting the divine spark within. *Khudi* represents self-awareness, individuality, and a deep connection with the eternal. It portrays the self as an autonomous and creative entity that evolves and grows through struggle, self-discipline, and interaction with the world. Through willpower and action, the ego is inherently capable of shaping its own destiny.

- Ego is a divine spark.

Philosophers from both the West and the East have explored the existence of the human ego. Iqbal’s notion of the ego is deeply rooted in religion and aligns with the human goals outlined in the Quran, distinguishing it from many Western philosophical perspectives. Through his concept of *Khudi*, Iqbal explains the life of the ego—its origin, hidden potential, struggles in the external world, and its final state after passing through worldly existence. His theory of personality, which integrates both philosophical and religious dimensions, asserts that the life of the ego begins with God. To develop a strong personality, the ego must struggle against the forces of nature. Thus, an individual should not evade the challenges of the real world but rather confront them. Iqbal cautions that isolation and withdrawal from worldly struggles weaken the ego, ultimately hindering the development of a strong personality. In his view, nature or the environment should not be perceived as an obstacle to personal growth. Instead, human imperfection and external challenges serve as essential conditions for the ego’s development, enabling individuals to actualize their latent potential.

- Ego is a dynamic and unique centre of all experiences

The ego is not a static or immobile entity; rather, it is a dynamic and unique centre of the experience, where mental states exist in an organic unity rather than in isolation. It constitutes the integrated organization of desires, pleasures, pains, ideas, and experiences, forming a cohesive unity of consciousness. No idea exists in isolation from another; instead, they are interwoven within the organic unity of the ego. However, the nature of this unity differs from person to person, making each ego unique.

The ego defines human individuality—both physically and spiritually. Yet, in Iqbal’s view, human individuality remains incomplete and imperfect. He argues that the farther one is from



- The purpose of human life is to seek this perfect self.

God, the weaker one's individuality becomes. Conversely, as human draws closer to God, he/she attains a fuller sense of selfhood, reaching the highest stage of self-development. The ultimate realization of selfhood is the attainment of its perfected state, wherein a human actualizes his highest potential. The purpose of human life, according to Iqbal, is to seek this perfect self. True fulfillment lies in realizing the preciousness of one's absolute self, for a life that fails to teach this is, in Iqbal's view, a failure. Iqbal attributes personality to God, but this does not imply that God possesses a finite existence. Individuality, in the case of the Ultimate Ego, does not signify limitation or finitude. God is not infinite in a spatial sense; rather, in matters of spiritual valuation, mere immensity is irrelevant. Space and time are possibilities of the ego, but beyond His creative activity, no space or time can delimit or confine God in relation to other egos.

Iqbal emphasizes the fundamental role of the physical world in realizing the spiritual ideal of selfhood's growth. His entire conception of self-development unfolds across three interconnected levels:

1. The self and "I-am-ness" (intrapersonal): The individual's awareness of their own existence and identity.
2. The self and the other (interpersonal): The self in relation to society and other individuals.
3. The self and God (transpersonal): The ultimate relationship between the self and the Divine.

Within this framework, Iqbal outlines specific stages for the development of the ego. The first stage requires obedience to the Quran and Prophet Muhammad. To strengthen the ego, one must follow in Muhammad's footsteps, as his life represents the ideal model for humanity. According to Iqbal, Prophet Muhammad possessed the most powerful and perfected ego. The second stage involves self-control, where the ego gains mastery over passions and sensory desires, further fortifying itself. This discipline is essential for the ego's development, ensuring its refinement and resilience.

Through the continuous strengthening of the ego, Iqbal envisions humans as capable of partaking in divine creativity, contributing to the perfection of the universe. This process represents the pinnacle of self-actualization and self-realization,

- Self-development through three stages

- By strengthening ego, humans are capable of partaking in divine creativity

granting the self profound moments of awe, insight, and spiritual ecstasy. At the highest level of self-realization, Iqbal's "Perfect Human" attains spiritual power, drawing nearer to God through the absorption of divine attributes.

- Every human being is a center of latent power

Iqbal's concept of the Perfect Human is inherently democratic, rooted in the belief that every human being is a centre of latent power with the potential to actualize it through the cultivation of character. The realization of the self demands a life of action and love. As the self becomes aware of its true significance, it advances to the stage of spiritual awakening. In this sense, Iqbal's philosophy integrates spirituality with self-discipline, asserting that true individuality flourishes through adherence to divine guidance and the practice of personal restraint.

- The ultimate destiny of humans is in the realization of complete ego-hood

In Iqbal's poetry, the awakening of the self is marked by the transformation of desire into a passionate drive for self-realization and the pursuit of higher ideals. For Iqbal, the ultimate destiny of man is not the dissolution of the self into the Divine but rather the realization of complete ego-hood. In this state, all the potentialities of the ego are fully actualized, and the self attains its highest intensity. As Iqbal states, "The unceasing reward of man consists in his gradual growth, in self-possession, in uniqueness and intensity of his activity as an ego. And the climax of this development is reached when the ego is able to retain full self-possession, even in the cause of direct contact with the all-embracing ego." This, according to Iqbal, is the ideal of perfect humanhood.

- All meaningful actions contribute to the sustenance and development of the ego.

Iqbal envisions the world as a domain for ego activity, providing opportunities for the self to express its potential. Every meaningful action contributes to the sustenance and development of the ego. Respecting the self and having faith in its capacities are crucial for this process. Iqbal emphasizes patience and prayer as essential to strengthening the ego. Patience fortifies the self against adversity and enables it to channel concentrated energy into every challenge it faces. Prayer, on the other hand, deepens emotions and activates the will, affirming the ego's presence in the world. It instils new energy, allowing the self to progress in its quest for immortality.



Summarized Overview

Muhammad Iqbal's philosophy centers on the development of the ego (*Khudi*) as the key to self-realization and human destiny. He viewed the ego as a dynamic force that must be strengthened through moral discipline, self-mastery, and creative engagement with the world. Unlike traditional mystical thought, which emphasizes the dissolution of the self into God, Iqbal argued that the highest goal of human life is to perfect the ego while maintaining its individuality. This journey unfolds in three stages: obedience to divine guidance, self-control over desires, and ultimately, self-realization, where the ego attains its highest potential while remaining connected to the Divine. For Iqbal, religion is not a departmental affair; it is neither mere thought, nor mere feeling, nor mere action—it is an expression of the whole man. He saw religion as a holistic experience that integrates all aspects of human life, providing a framework for a balanced existence that nurtures both spiritual and material growth.

Iqbal also conceived of reality as dynamic and ever-flowing, beyond the reach of rigid, abstract thought. He saw humans as unique beings who are neither separate from God nor identical to Him, but rather connected like pearls in a garland. By unlocking their inner potential and engaging in ego-sustaining actions, individuals can shape their destiny and improve the world. His rejection of rigid nationalism was deeply influenced by the Quranic principle that “All are from Adam, and Adam is from the soil”, which emphasizes the unity of humanity and rejects racial, ethnic, or national superiority. Iqbal saw nationalism as a divisive construct of modernity that fragmented humanity, particularly the Muslim world, and instead championed a spiritually united community. Through his poetry and philosophy, he sought to inspire a reawakening among Muslims, urging them to embrace a dynamic and purposeful existence in an ever-changing world.

Self-Assessment

1. Give a brief insight into the concept of *Khudi* (Philosophy of Ego) put forth by Iqbal.
2. What are the peculiar characteristics of religion according to Iqbal?
3. Elaborate on his views on intellect and intuition.
4. How does Iqbal reconcile individuality with divine will in his philosophy?
5. Discuss Iqbal's critique of materialism and its impact on human development.

Assignments

1. Examine the stages of the ego's journey toward freedom and analyze how he integrates self-awareness with spiritual realization in his philosophy.
2. Analyze *Khudi* and its relationship with God.
3. Bring out the social implications of Iqbal's vision of *Khudi*.
4. Explore Iqbal's critique of nationalism and its relevance in today's world.

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SGOU

UNIT 2

K.C. Bhattacharya (1875-1949)

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- Analyze K. C. Bhattacharyya's concept of philosophy and its relation to the branches of philosophy.
- Examine the four grades of theoretic consciousness and their significance.
- Explore the different stages of subjectivity in Bhattacharyya's philosophical framework.
- Interpret the concept of 'Subject as Freedom' and its implications for metaphysics and self-realization.

Background

K.C. Bhattacharya, a distinguished figure in modern Indian philosophy, provided new insights into Indian philosophical thought. He was born on May 12, 1875, in Serampore. His philosophical inquiries were deeply rooted in ancient Indian traditions, including Advaita Vedanta, Sankhya-Yoga, and Jain philosophy, while also being significantly influenced by Kant and other German idealists. His discussions are abstract yet highly analytical, engaging deeply with the nature and scope of philosophical inquiry.

For Bhattacharya, philosophy is a unique form of thinking that differs from both empirical knowledge and ordinary thought. It does not deal with observable facts or tangible realities but instead explores concepts that exist independently of experience. Philosophy concerns itself with self-subsistent objects—ideas that do not rely on perception or imagination but are contemplated as true. Unlike empirical knowledge, which is based on direct observation, philosophical thought is symbolic rather than literal. It seeks to interpret and elaborate on abstract, spiritual, and transcendental ideas that point toward the Absolute. In this sense, philosophy is not about verifying facts



but about deepening our understanding of reality through contemplative reasoning. According to him, philosophy is concerned with meaningful contemplation—ideas that, even if abstract, contribute to the pursuit of truth.

Keywords

Theoretic Consciousness, Subject as Freedom, Levels of subjectivity, Cognitive Inwardization

Discussion

2.2.1 Philosophical Method of Bhattacharya

- Philosophical thoughts give the potential to reveal the Absolute

K.C. Bhattacharya defines philosophy as the study of theory, distinguishing it from science, which deals with empirical facts. Philosophy does not provide actual or literal knowledge, but philosophical contents are contemplated as true with faith in their potential to reveal the Absolute. To speak is to formulate a belief and philosophy, in this sense, expresses beliefs that are “speakable.” It is the articulation of theoretic consciousness, which refers to our awareness of what can be spoken about. This awareness may not constitute knowledge but involves belief in something “as known or to be known.”

- Ultimate reality transcends the distinction between the subjective and the objective

All forms of theoretic consciousness are sometimes called thought. And, Bhattacharya’s thought is loosely associated with Transcendental Idealism, though he does not equate reality with mere ideas. Instead, he argues that ultimate reality is beyond conventional philosophical categories. Reality, for him, is the ultimate presupposition of experience—it transcends the dichotomy of subject and object. Since subject and object are relational concepts in knowledge, the principle that relates them must itself be beyond this distinction. Therefore, he sees ultimate reality as something that transcends both subjectivity and objectivity. For Bhattacharya, the goal of philosophy is not to construct a synthetic worldview. Philosophical judgments, unlike empirical judgments, do not claim factuality. They are independent of empirical facts and operate at a level distinct from the realm of scientific or literal truth.

Bhattacharya views that philosophers are responsible for developing a method to realize reality and a corresponding logic to account for it. His philosophical approach can be

- Cognitive inwardization leads to the emergence of spiritual consciousness

- Subject transcends all objective constraints and exists as absolute freedom

- Objects exist only in relation to the subject's awareness.

described as a “method of cognitive inwardization.” This method explores the depths of human subjectivity, moving beyond surface-level understanding to uncover deeper layers of existence. Ultimately, it reveals the ultimate subject—a reality free from duality and change. Through this inward journey, one attains intuition or spiritual consciousness. When an individual realizes their subjectivity as independent of objectivity, philosophy fulfills its purpose.

According to Bhattacharya, metaphysics primarily studies the subject (self) and the object (material reality), with its ultimate aim being the realization of a reality that transcends both. While objects are known in relation to the subject, the subject is self-revealing—it is known in itself. The certainty of knowing the subject differs from that of knowing the object, as the object imposes limitations on the subject. The subject becomes a known fact only when expressed through the personal pronoun “I.” Unlike the object, which is externally known, the subject possesses intrinsic freedom—it is known only by itself. This freedom manifests as the subject’s ability to dissociate from the object, moving away from bodily or psychological identification toward a higher spiritual subjectivity. In this state, the subject transcends all external constraints and exists as pure, absolute freedom

The subject is neither identical to nor distinct from the object in a conventional sense. As K.C. Bhattacharya states, “The subject is said to be distinct and therefore distinguishable from all objects.” However, the subject is not known through thought or introspection but through self-awareness and direct experience. It is a self-evident fact—a self-expression of itself. The subject knows itself as “I” without needing to represent or define itself. The pronoun “I” signifies the depth of the subject, pointing to its inherent freedom from the object. When the speaker expresses itself as “I,” it indicates the ability of the subject to dissociate from the object. To truly know the subject, one must detach from identifying the subject with the object and recognize it as pure consciousness. Thus, the subject is not an entity that can be analyzed like an object; rather, it can only be realized.



2.2.2 Grades of Consciousness

- Theoretic consciousness transcends empirical awareness.

Philosophy and science are both expressions of theoretic consciousness. Theoretic consciousness has just a 'believed content' and not a 'meant-content'. It involves the subject's reflective awareness of their own mental processes while attempting to apprehend external objects. Theoretic consciousness transcends mere empirical awareness, involving a deeper, introspective examination of thought and existence. It includes a critical inquiry into the nature of knowing and challenging the dualism between the knower and the known. Bhattacharya associates theoretic consciousness with the idea of freedom. He believes that true consciousness must be self-determined, not merely a product of external influences or mechanical processes. Self-awareness is intrinsic to consciousness; it is inherently reflexive. True consciousness, to him, is a movement of liberation from constraints that reflects an inner freedom that transcends external limitations.

Bhattacharyya's conception of philosophy is closely linked to his idea of grades of consciousness. According to him, philosophy is an expression of theoretic consciousness, which itself exists apart from its expressions. Since all forms of theoretic consciousness are considered thought, he identifies four grades of thought.

- Four grades of thought

1. **Empirical Thought:** This is the realm of science that Bhattacharyya considers actual thought. It always maintains a reference to an object and is grounded in empirical reality.
2. **Pure Objective Thought:** In this grade, thought is purely objective and involves contemplation of an object. However, this object does not necessarily depend on sense perception.
3. **Spiritual Thought:** This grade moves beyond both facts and objectivity. Its content is reality, but the approach is subjective, reflecting a spiritual attitude.
4. **Transcendental Thought:** The highest form of thought, it transcends both objectivity and subjectivity. Its focus is neither the empirical world nor individual subjectivity but rather truth itself.

- Philosophy of object, Philosophy of subject and Philosophy of truth

Out of the four grades of thought, empirical thought belongs to the realm of sciences, whereas pure objective, spiritual, and transcendental thought belongs to the realm of philosophy. Accordingly, Bhattacharyya classifies philosophy into three branches: philosophy of the object, which includes metaphysics and logic; philosophy of subject, which corresponds to epistemology; and philosophy of truth, which concerns the consciousness of the transcendent. Within the philosophy of the object, metaphysics and logic hold distinct roles. Metaphysics is the science of being or reality, and Bhattacharyya largely equates philosophy with metaphysics.

- Difference between the scientific and philosophical approach

Science, in contrast, is empirical and solely concerned with facts. It studies phenomena without reference to the subject, whereas philosophy examines objects only in relation to the subject. As Bhattacharyya states: “No metaphysical concept is intelligible without reference to subject or spirit, which itself goes beyond metaphysics.” Philosophy elaborates the concept of object in reference to subject, and it arises from object to self and ultimately to Absolute. In science, a fact is understood as information, and belief in it does not depend on its being spoken. However, in philosophy, speakability is essential. While speakability is a contingent feature of empirical thought, it is a necessary characteristic of philosophical thought. Pure thought is not intelligible unless spoken, but this does not mean that philosophy is merely an expression of speech. Rather, philosophical contents are self-evident and exist independently of individual minds. Unlike science, philosophy does not study objects as mere things to be known. Instead, philosophy emphasizes the subjective experience of the objective, making its inquiry deeply reflective rather than purely observational.

- Difference between Logic and metaphysics

Metaphysical reasoning systematically explores symbolic concepts in relation to the subject. Logic, on the other hand, deals with pure forms and examines the formal structures of reasoning. While logic categorizes and defines, metaphysics transcends conceptual knowledge to investigate the nature of the subject. Thus, logic presupposes metaphysics, as it symbolizes the contents of metaphysical inquiry. Metaphysical concepts are self-subsistent; they are not merely categorized but dissolve rigid conceptual boundaries to attain an understanding of the pure being. Metaphysics reveals the subject’s transcendence beyond objectivity. The path to spiritual realization lies in true knowledge, which is not confined to conceptual knowledge but



is realized through spiritual knowledge. The realization of the self as a state of pure, autonomous being marks the attainment of absolute freedom.

- Absolute is free from the subject-object duality.

There is a theoretic consciousness of “I am nought”. The content of this consciousness is Truth. Though the Absolute is a positively believed entity, its positive character is expressible only by the negation of ‘I’. The negation of the self implies the existence of the Absolute. Negatively, the Absolute is understood as Truth. But the Absolute cannot be equated with Truth. The Absolute may be truth, freedom, or value. The Absolute is each of them. The consciousness of truth is neither subjective nor objective. It is transcendental consciousness. Bhattacharyya says the consciousness of truth is a subject of belief. It can be understood neither by objective nor by subjective attitude. It is a transcendental consciousness and can be best conveyed in a symbolic way. The consciousness of truth is not literally speakable. Thus, the Absolute, as transcending the subjective and the objective, which is believed to be self-revealing, constitutes the subject matter of the philosophy of truth.

2.2.3 Subjectivity and its Stages

- Object is “what is meant”

In *Subject as Freedom*, Krishna Chandra Bhattacharyya delineates the concept of subjectivity by distinguishing between the subject and the object. He defines the object as “what is meant,” encompassing both sense-perceived objects and all contents necessarily referring to them. The object is what is intended or meant, including objects of perception and thought. In contrast, the subject—the subjective—cannot be reduced to mere awareness of meaning; it involves a distinct awareness beyond what is simply meant.

The subject cannot be a meaningless term; for it to be distinguished from the object, it must have intrinsic significance. However, if the subject were something ‘meant’ - something that could be thematized as an object of knowledge- it would lose its subjectivity and become an object itself. This paradox implies that the subject cannot be fully asserted or denied as a ‘meant’ content, for what cannot be denied does not require assertion. Thus, subject and object are interdependent, with each presupposing the other. Subjectivity, in its essence, is a dynamic process of self-liberation from objectification. At every stage, it frees itself from the object by negating its identification with it. True self-awareness, therefore, requires that the self be understood purely as itself—independent of any relation

- Spiritual progress is the realization of the subject as free

to a particular object. This knowledge cannot be mediated through an object; it must be immediate and self-revealing. The realization of the self as pure subjectivity necessitates an act of ecstatic transcendence, in which the subject stands apart from itself, free from objectification. As Bhattacharyya states: “Spiritual progress means the realization of the subject as free. One demand among others—all being absolute demands—is that subjective function, being essentially the knowing of the object as distinct from it, must be known as fact. This knowing, which is only believed and not known as fact, has to be known as fact—as the self-evidencing reality of the subject itself.”

Bhattacharyya identifies three progressive stages of subjectivity, each representing a higher level of freedom. These stages are bodily subjectivity, psychic subjectivity, and spiritual subjectivity.

- Subject identifies itself with body

1. **Bodily Subjectivity:** At this initial stage, the subject identifies itself with the body, perceiving the self as closely bound to the physical form. This stage consists of three sub-stages: the body as perceived, the body as felt, and the knowledge of the body’s absence. As subjectivity develops within this stage, the self moves progressively from a purely external identification with the body to a more internal and abstract understanding of its relation to physical existence.

- Subject identifies itself with mental images

2. **Psychic Subjectivity:** In this stage, the subject shifts its identification from the body to the realm of mental life such as images and thoughts. Psychic subjectivity has two key aspects; one, identification with images and thoughts – where the subject becomes aware of its own introspective experiences and two, introspection through the spoken word ‘I’ – where the subject recognizes itself in self-referential expressions but without fully comprehending the meaning of ‘I’. At this stage, the subject enjoys a direct awareness of itself as ‘I,’ but this awareness remains incomplete. Since subjectivity is by nature uniqueness, any attempt to define it objectively distorts its essence. To realize its true subjectivity, the subject must transcend even this level of self-awareness, leading to the third and highest stage, that is, spiritual subjectivity.

3. **3) Spiritual Subjectivity:** The transition from psychic to spiritual subjectivity occurs when the subject recog-



- Subject demands that it should be free from all objective meaning

- Complete subjectivity is the self, free from objectification and fully autonomous.

- Dissociation of the subject from the object

- Absolute freedom lies in dissociation

nizes a demand for positive freedom from all objective meaning. At this stage, the self is no longer self-evidencing to another (dependent on external validation), instead, the self becomes self-evident to itself, realizing its pure autonomy. True subjectivity is attained when the self is free from all subjective states; that is, it intuits itself without relying on any external reference. Bhattacharyya distinguishes between lower forms of subjectivity (bodily and psychic) and higher subjectivity (spiritual), where absolute freedom is realized. The journey from bodily identification to psychic introspection and ultimately to spiritual self-awareness marks the subject's progressive liberation from objectification.

Spiritual Subjectivity has also been subdivided into three sub-grades: a) Feeling, b) Introspection and c) Beyond Introspection. In the first stage of feeling, there is a feeling of freedom from actual thought, and in the second stage, there is a feeling of freedom from possible thought. Introspection is the clearest example of subjectivity because it is the awareness of the subject as 'I'. But in this awareness itself, there is the awareness that subjectivity, properly speaking, is not even expressible. Therefore, the purest or the complete subjectivity would be the state beyond Introspection – the Indefinite or the Absolute.

2.2.4 Subject as Freedom

K.C. Bhattacharyya's concept of 'subject as freedom' elaborates on the dialectic of dissociation, where the subject deepens its consciousness through introspection. Introspectivity, in this context, is the subject's function of distinguishing itself from objectivity. In Bhattacharyya's philosophy, the subject is understood as freedom itself, and the ultimate destiny of human existence is self-transcendence, or the realization of the subject as pure freedom.

However, absolute freedom cannot be attained at the level of rational thought, since reason operates within the duality of content and consciousness. This duality can only be dissolved in a higher form of consciousness- one that is spiritually realized as pure subjectivity. Freedom, in its truest sense, is achieved only when the subject is completely dissociated from the object. In the stages of bodily and psychic subjectivity, there remains a definite connection with the object. But when one reaches the level of spiritual subjectivity, this connection

is transcended. For Bhattacharyya, the spiritual signifies a state of detachment from objectivity, where the subject exists in pure self-awareness. The true cultivation of the subject lies in this dissociation, affirming that the subject is ultimately self-evident.

- Dialectic of subjectivity

Bhattacharyya's dialectic of subjectivity leads to three key ideas: 1) Subject as freedom, 2) Freedom as absolute, 3) Subject as absolute for knowing. For Bhattacharyya, the subject is fundamentally free from the constraints of the objective world—it is not bound by specific characteristics or categories. He argues that the subject can be known not only through external perception but also through non-perceptual subjective experiences, such as the internal awareness of one's body, memory, productive imagination and inferential knowledge.

- Freedom lies in the transcendence of perceptual modes of cognitive consciousness

Firstly, Bhattacharyya argues that the body, as experienced internally, can be known from within, and this knowledge need not rely on external perception. The internally felt body is not an object in the observable world, yet it is still believed to be an observed body due to its intrinsic character of internality. Secondly, the self can be immediately apprehended through its absence. This mode of knowing does not correspond to external perception in the ordinary sense but emerges from recognizing the self's present absence within a spatio-temporal context. Thirdly, memory also plays a crucial role in grasping the nature of the self or 'I.' Through memory, one can retrieve a sense of selfhood that persists over time. Fourthly, productive imagination offers another means of realizing the self. However, the subject, as apprehended through productive imagination, is not fully concrete but appears only in glimpses, revealing its nature in a fragmented or partial manner. Finally, the self can also be known through inference, which involves recognizing a perceptible object as possessing an unperceivable character of necessity. Inference enables an understanding of the self that transcends direct perception, offering insight into its underlying essence. Ultimately, Bhattacharyya suggests that the path to freedom lies in the transcendence of perceptual modes of cognitive consciousness, where true self-realization emerges beyond objectification

The realization of freedom, according to Bhattacharyya, lies in disengaging the subject from the objective world. He asserts that the subject's relation to the objective world is not intimate; rather, the subject exists as a dissociated and singular reality, possessing a mystical quality that defines its subjective



- Intuition transcends reason

nature. For Bhattacharyya, spiritual progress is the realization of the subject as inherently free, demanding an intuition of the subject as absolute freedom. Pure freedom, devoid of any definite content, is the ultimate goal of human existence. In intuitive or spiritual consciousness, one attains an awareness of freedom from all ‘contents.’ Intuition transcends reason, dissolving the duality between content and consciousness. Bhattacharyya emphasizes that human beings have the capacity to move beyond reason and directly realize the Absolute through intuition. He argues that the true subject is unrelated and absolute, existing beyond any awareness of an actual or even a potential introspector. This state, which he terms ‘de-individualized freedom’ or ‘the subject as absolute freedom,’ marks the transcendence of individuality.

- Ultimate destiny is the realisation of complete freedom.

However, spiritual consciousness alone cannot fully grasp the ‘subject as freedom.’ It is only in transcendental consciousness that this realization becomes possible. While spiritual consciousness allows for the enjoyment of ‘I,’ individuality is not entirely transcended at this stage. In transcendental consciousness, even the experience of ‘I’ is negated, leading to a state of pure consciousness. The subject, as Bhattacharyya envisions it, is not an object within the world but a free, transcendental reality that exists beyond perceptual and conceptual categories. This subject is self-contained, detached from the external world, and accessible only through introspective, non-perceptual knowledge. Ultimately, the subject continually strives for the complete realization of freedom, which is its true and legitimate destiny.

Summarized Overview

K.C. Bhattacharya’s philosophy is marked by rigorous critical and analytical thinking, employing an analytical philosophical approach with a strong emphasis on “cognitive inwardization.” He asserts that analysis is the only path to achieving this inwardization, wherein the subject progressively deepens its awareness of itself. His most significant contribution lies in demonstrating the supreme freedom of the subject, not through dialectical reasoning but through a critical analysis of both subjective experience and the objective world.

Bhattacharya offers great insights into the nature of metaphysics, the structure of theoretic consciousness, and the diverse objects of reason. His central concept—the subject as freedom—draws inspiration from Advaita Vedanta while remaining grounded in a systematic and analytical method. His formulation of a critical and

analytic approach to metaphysics, particularly in exploring the nature of ultimate reality or the unconditional, stands as a major philosophical contribution. In his philosophy, reason plays a dual role: it distinguishes the subject from the object and the real from mere appearance while simultaneously recognizing its own limitations. By subjecting experience to critical scrutiny and turning this critical lens upon itself, reason becomes self-aware of its constraints. This self-awareness, in turn, paves the way for the realization of a higher, spiritual consciousness, ultimately leading to the understanding of the subject as absolute freedom.

Self-Assessment

1. Elaborate the branches of philosophy according to K.C Bhattacharya.
2. What is theoretic consciousness and explain the grades of theoretic consciousness?
3. Analyse subjectivity and the stages of subjectivity in Bhattacharya's philosophy

Assignments

1. Discuss Bhattacharya's view on 'subject as freedom' and bring about the critique of this concept.
2. Compare and contrast Bhattacharya's idea of freedom with political freedom.
3. Examine the philosophical influences that shaped his conception of freedom.

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SGOU

UNIT 3

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- understand Tagore's concept of human nature
- examine how Tagore connects freedom with self-growth, creativity, and spiritual fulfilment
- understand how Tagore views the world as an interconnected reality
- evaluate the humanistic view of Rabindranath Tagore
- analyse Tagore's idea of a spiritual religion based on love, morality, and human dignity

Background

Tagore, a modern thinker, was born in an affluent family in Calcutta on May 7, 1861. He was one of the leading figures in the field of philosophy. He was a writer, poet, naturalist, philosopher, and educator who changed the course of Indian philosophy in the early 20th century. He had a significant role in the Bengali Renaissance. In addition, he was a humanist, Universalist, and adamant nationalist. He was the first Indian to win the Nobel Prize in 1913 for his outstanding work, 'Gitanjali.' His philosophical writings mostly address ethical and theological aspects. Both the Indian and Western learning traditions have a strong influence on his writings. It incorporates depictions of everyday people's lives, literary criticism, philosophy, and social issues, in addition to fiction in the form of poetry, songs, stories, and plays.

Tagore's thought has derived much of its influence from Vaiṣṇavism and Christianity. He gave utmost importance to personal realisation. His philosophy can be called a religious synthesis of abstract monism and a particular type of theism. Reality to him is one, and he identified this reality as a personal God. He can be rightly called an idealist or a spiritualist. Despite his greatness as an artist, cultural figure, and writer, he is a



passionate champion for truth concerning human rights and dignity. Tagore's idealistic views are more important in our practical life than finding the ultimate truth, which will liberate us from the cycle of birth and death.

Keywords

Spirituality, Humanism, Religion, Consciousness, Absolute

Discussion

2.3.1 Philosophical Outlooks

Tagore's philosophy of life is based on the ideals of dedication, patriotism and naturalism. Though he was an ideal philosopher, his thoughts on naturalism, pragmatism, and individualism are also reflected in his philosophy. To him, humans should realise the ultimate truth, which will liberate them from worldly bondage. The idea of the human, in Tagore's thought, transcends all limitations, contradictions, and the finiteness of life, which arise from the material ego. The 'ego' in a person satisfies material interests, leading to contradiction and duality. However, the 'I' or 'Universal Human' within inspires individuals to overcome limitations and contradictions by cultivating an integral spirit of unity and a synthetic outlook. Tagore observes with a profound sentiment, "Someone lives in our heart, who is Man, but who cross individual man. He is a man for all and for all times." He is truly a humanist who views nature and humans as created by the supreme power and that there is a strong link between humans and nature. Human beings should act naturally to feel the presence of a superpower within them. Tagore believed in the Upanishadic idea that God is present in everything around us. He saw Brahman as the ultimate reality, not as something separate but as something existing within the world we live in. His words, "In order to find Him, you must embrace all," mean that to realise God, one must accept and love the entire world. This reflects his inclusive spiritual vision.

- Realisation of ultimate truth liberates humans from worldly bondage.

Tagore believed in a personal God, and he justified his standpoint by saying that humans cannot take an active and living interest in an unapproachable Brahman, as it is merely an abstract principle. Thus, God has to be brought nearer to hu-

- God as Jivan Devatha

mans, and they can take interest in the Absolute only when it is humanised. He calls his God 'the man of his heart', 'Jivan Devatha'. He attributes personality to God, and personality remains the most important character of the Supreme Being. Tagore, thus, depicts his Jivandevata as the Lord and the supreme Creator of his being. The Jivandevata expresses his own being in and through His creation. Tagore uses the example of love to explain this relationship. In love, the lover, although a distinct entity, identifies himself with the object of his love. He states, "In love, all the contradictions of existence merge themselves and are lost only in love are unity and duality not at variance".

2.3.2 Human nature

According to Tagore, the life of a human being is the highest form of existence in the world because it possesses both finite and infinite aspects. This means that while humans have physical limitations, they also have an inner spiritual dimension that connects them to the infinite. They are earth's child but heaven's heir and have the potential to realise their Jivandevata, the divine presence within them. Tagore places great importance on human actions to realise Jivandevata. His primary aim was to reconcile different religions by emphasising their commonalities and overlooking their differences. Despite religious diversity, people should live together in harmony. For Tagore, the fundamental truth of religion is the divinity of human beings. This idea aligns with Jesus Christ's statement, "The kingdom of God is within you," suggesting that the goal of spiritual life is to realise one's divine nature. Tagore's spiritual philosophy is rooted in peace, love, and humanism, making him a spiritual humanist. He also believed that human nature has two aspects: a lower, material aspect and a higher, spiritual one.

- Humans are finite-infinite beings.

- The finite self represents the natural human being who is driven by various desires

The finite aspect of human nature, as described by Tagore, refers to the part of human existence that is shaped by natural and environmental factors. The finite self represents the ordinary, natural human being who is driven by various desires. According to Tagore, the finite self is made up of different kinds of desires. To fulfil these desires, individuals engage in various activities, focusing on material needs and worldly pursuits. However, this is only one dimension of human existence, as Tagore also emphasises the higher, spiritual aspect of the self. He described the infinite aspect of human nature as being called the 'Universal in man' or the 'Surplus in man.' The most



important characteristic of the infinite aspect of humans is that it constantly impels the individual to go beyond. In this stage, humans yearn for mukti or immortality.

- Emphasis on human action for the realisation of God

The infinite aspect of human personality is dynamic and ever-growing. This aspect is naturally drawn toward nature, unlike the physical or finite self, which does not inherently feel a deep connection with it. The infinite aspect of human nature is fundamentally creative, as creativity is an essential characteristic of human beings. Tagore explains that humans possess an inherent power to select, modify, and integrate elements from their environment, making them their own. He states, “Man has his forces of attraction and repulsion by which he not merely piles up things outside him, but creates himself.” This means that human creativity is not just about gathering and organising external things but also about shaping one’s inner self. Creativity involves more than just selection, analysis, and rearrangement; it also includes new insights and original thought. Humans can analyse given data and restructure it in entirely new ways. They also can perceive or intuit deeper meanings in ordinary experiences that are not immediately obvious to the senses. Furthermore, humans can create their own ‘world’ within the realm of ideas and imagination.

2.3.3 World

- World as the manifestation of the divine.

Tagore asserts the reality of the world, viewing it as the only field for action where created beings have the opportunity to work toward their own redemption. He perceives the world as spiritual in nature rather than merely material. According to Tagore, when human beings fail to recognise their kinship with the world, they live in a confined existence, as if trapped within walls that feel alien. However, when one realises the presence of the eternal spirit in all things, they attain liberation. This realisation allows individuals to understand the true significance of their existence, leading to self-discovery and harmony with the world. The central ideas in Tagore’s philosophy of the world are harmony and interconnectedness. He views the world not as a mere physical reality but as a marvellous work of art, reflecting deeper spiritual unity.

Human Humans experience a deep sense of oneness with nature. The very fact that we can interpret, understand, appreciate, resist, and even shape nature suggests that it shares a connection with human consciousness. If nature were entirely foreign to us, meaningful interaction with it would not be

- Interconnectedness of humans and nature

possible. Through intuition and aesthetic experience, one can recognise the spiritual beauty present in nature. However, a true sense of kinship with nature cannot be established when one remains bound by finite reasoning, which tends to divide the world into opposites. To realise the spirit, one must see nature as its manifestation and engage with it in a deeper, spiritual way. Tagore said, “Whenever the landscape is immense, the sky unlimited, clouds intensely dense, feeling unfathomable, that is the day where infinity is manifest, its companion is one solitary person.”

2.3.4 Freedom and Self-realisation

- Self-denial as the path towards self-realisation.

According to Tagore, the infinite nature of human beings is expressed through spiritual freedom, which allows one to transcend the limitations of the finite body and seek the realisation of oneness or unity. True freedom involves going beyond the constraints of the ego, and it is achieved through harmonious relationships that lead to the realisation of the Universal within the individual. Tagore asserts that freedom is attained when the soul realises its true nature by transcending itself. The awareness of the infinite within us is expressed through joy in selfless giving. In this state, one’s work becomes an act of renunciation, seamlessly integrated with life itself. Spiritual attainment, according to Tagore, is found in self-giving or renunciation, where self-denial leads to self-realisation. The dissolution of the ego results in the fulfilment of love. In the presence of the vastness and splendour of the divine, the individual self dissolves, surrendering completely to all-encompassing love. This love overwhelms and transforms individual consciousness, leading to the ultimate state of spiritual fulfilment. However, this state is not death but the perfection of consciousness, total harmony, boundless love, and supreme joy. In this all-embracing consciousness, the finite and infinite merge, and the individual undergoes a complete transformation, becoming a true expression of the Absolute.

- Self-realisation as unity with the infinite.

Self-realisation is a central concept in Tagore’s religious philosophy. As long as a person remains finite and attached to selfish pursuits, their true destiny remains unfulfilled, and the ultimate goal of oneness with the divine is not attained. In this stage, the individual exists within the moral life, striving toward a higher purpose but unable to fully achieve it. When an individual completely surrenders to the universal life, the self merges with the supreme reality, leading to spiritual bliss and eternal fulfilment. At this stage, the individual transcends



the cycle of birth and death, rising beyond the limitations of time, to which death is otherwise relevant. In the moral life, where the individual struggles to reach the goal, existence is bound by endless succession in time, which characterises the finite realm. However, when moral life is absorbed into spiritual realisation, the spirit transcends time and attains a state of timeless immortality.

- Self-realisation is the awakening of the soul to its divine nature.

Tagore views death as playing an important role in expanding consciousness and assisting in spiritual attainment. Within this understanding, he develops his philosophy of rebirth. According to Tagore, the soul survives death and undergoes a cycle of births and rebirths until self-realisation is achieved. However, he asserts that rebirth itself is not the final destiny of human existence; rather, it is a mechanism through which the soul progresses toward its ultimate goal. This final destiny is the attainment of complete freedom, which involves the realisation of immortality and, ultimately, freedom even from the cycle of rebirth. Tagore, in attributing freedom to human beings, also emphasises responsibility. This responsibility lies in making efforts for both self-redemption and the upliftment of others. It involves practising moral and ethical discipline as well as spiritual concentration, which are essential for attaining the highest realisation of the self.

2.3.5 Universal Humanism- Religion of human

Rabindranath Tagore promoted humanism by giving it both a human touch and a divine dimension without diminishing God's divinity or human dignity. His understanding of religion differs fundamentally from conventional religious doctrines. In his work *The Religion of Man*, he explores the idea of the humanity of God and the divinity within human beings, emphasising that the essence of religion lies in humanity. For Tagore, humanity and divinity are not separate realities but rather two aspects of the same existence, like two sides of a coin. Religion, according to him, aims to awaken the latent divinity within human beings. His unique conception of religion transcends the confines of any specific creed, positioning him as a thinker beyond sectarian boundaries. In several of his writings, Rabindranath Tagore refers to his system of religious belief as 'The Poet's Religion' and also describes it as 'An Artist's Religion.' He contrasts this with dogmatic religion, where all questions have definite answers and doubts

- Humanity as the essence of religion.

- Religion as inner realisation rather than rigid dogmas.

- Universal humanism upholds the dignity, freedom and unity of all humans

are resolved conclusively. In contrast, the poet's religion remains fluid, offering no fixed conclusions but instead revealing endless realms of insight, as it has no rigid boundaries. This religion is deeply personal, as it is not based on external authority, nor is it supported by specific rituals or mythologies. It exists within the individual's mind and allows for continuous exploration rather than adherence to rigid doctrines. Tagore's religious perspective stands apart from traditional religious thought, emphasising freedom, openness, and the boundless nature of spiritual experience.

Tagore's idea of religion was deeply personal and focused on continuous self-growth. He believed that human life is not limited to the present moment but is a journey toward something greater. His religious beliefs were not bound by the rigid rules of any institution or tradition. Instead, he relied on personal experience and inner realisation to understand the divine. Unlike fixed religious doctrines that provide final answers, Tagore's approach to religion was always evolving. He did not see religion as something that remains unchanged over time but as a living experience that grows and transforms. Throughout his life, his thoughts on religion changed as he explored new ideas and experiences, showing his openness to learning and discovering deeper truths.

Tagore's Universal Humanism is an ethical and philosophical framework that stresses the interconnectedness of humanity, respect for diversity and the importance of individual freedom. His ideas on Universal humanism have their roots in his Vedantic influence, which emphasises the oneness of all existence. It is the idea that all human beings are united by a shared spiritual essence that transcends individual differences. To him, humanism is about recognising the common thread that binds all human beings together and this Universalist notion calls for a rejection of divisive ideologies and an embrace of a more holistic, compassionate approach to human relations. The central point of concern was living human beings of flesh and blood. Every human being is valuable intrinsically, not as a means to an end. No trans-human truth exists beyond this domain of human consciousness. Passion for worldly life with all its pleasure and pain is the most significant theme of Renaissance Humanism. With this comes unconditional love for all other beings, for this mundane, sensuous world.

In his essay *The Religion of Man*, Tagore states, "I believe that the greatest and noblest expression of humanity is when it transcends the narrow limits of nationalism, sectarianism, and



- True humanism is rooted in love and empathy.

other parochial boundaries.” He describes his religious outlook as a poet’s religion, distinct from that of an orthodox follower or a theologian. According to Tagore, his religious experience comes through an unseen and mysterious path, much like the inspiration for his poetry. He emphasises that true religion is about realising one’s deep connection with all existence and cultivating a universal sense of love. Tagore was aware that religious institutions often misinterpret the true spirit of religion, focusing on superficial rituals rather than its essence. While true religion leads to freedom, religious organisations tend to impose restrictions and create dependence. For Tagore, genuine religion must be spontaneous and natural, free from compulsion and rigid boundaries.

- Against dogmatic and institutionalised religion

Tagore rarely uses the term ‘Absolute.’ Instead, he often refers to God as the Universal Being, the Supreme Spirit, or the Infinite Personality. These expressions suggest a theistic understanding of God, yet Tagore also describes God as formless and beyond attributes. He believes that God is best revealed through human beings and sometimes even identifies humanity itself as divine. For Tagore, God does not reside in temples, nor does divine presence depend on rituals or traditions. Instead, he views God as existing within human consciousness and, at times, equates human existence with divinity. He states, “My religion is the religion of humanity, in which the infinite is defined in human existence.” According to Tagore, the purpose of religion is to realise the divine essence within oneself and to extend this realisation universally.

- Religion as personal journey of love, self-realisation and unity with the cosmos.

Tagore asserts that everything is a manifestation of the Absolute. In Gitanjali, he says, “Thou art the sky, and thou art the nest as well.” In fact, in his lecture on ‘Universal Man’, Tagore examines Sankara’s standpoint and distinguishes it from his own. God is the ultimate reality, and as such, He is the basis of the universe. Creation is, in a sense, the manifestation or the expression of the Absolute. This expression is almost necessary in the sense that there is no sense in conceiving a creation-less God - a God who just is but does not create. God, according to Tagore, finds himself by creating. This perspective shapes Tagore’s understanding of religion. If God manifests through creation, then the human experience becomes a crucial part of realising the divine. Religion, for him, is primarily an attitude of love, with love being the highest expression of religious experience. He does not support metaphysical intuition, as he believes it fails to connect ultimate truth with the world of experience. Since religion arises from human experience,

it is rooted in the need to support one another in the pursuit of perfection. In crux, Tagore seeks to humanise religion. He finds the true ideal of religion in universal love and service to humanity, emphasising a humanistic and worldly approach serving others simply as fellow human beings in this world.

- Intuition can release man from the bondage of ignorance.

The ultimate goal of human life, according to Tagore, is the union of the individual with the divine or the supreme spirit. He emphasises that intuition serves as the gateway to spiritual life, as reason can only describe the outer self but cannot fully grasp the inner being. Love, however, has the power to dissolve the ego and reach the depths of the soul. While rational understanding is limited and dualistic, love fosters unity and wholeness. Thus, love is the highest state of fulfilment, allowing individuals to realise that they are one with the entire existence. Tagore sees love as the purest form of intuition. To attain a complete and integrated vision of reality, one must transcend reason through intuition. Only intuition can penetrate the mysteries of the divine and free individuals from ignorance. Regardless of the name or nature of one's religious beliefs, Tagore argues that the ideal of human perfection must be rooted in a unifying bond that connects all individuals and ultimately leads to a Supreme Being, who represents the eternal essence within humanity.

Summarized Overview

With a realist and humanist outlook on life and its issues, Tagore's opinions on contemporary societal issues were shaped by spiritual vision rather than by narrow considerations such as politics, economics, and religion. He believed that societal discontent emerged from people's negative outlook on life and lack of reverence for the divine. A materialistic mindset and an excessive focus on physical aspects led to general discontent. Human should live in the world, but they should be dedicated to helping fellow humans out by lending a hand to one another and using all of the resources to make life meaningful. His understanding of religion is distinct from the conventional understanding. Humanity is the focus of Tagore's religion. Religion is the manifestation of human's inner nature and the essence of humanity. Tagore consistently urged people to stay away from religious superstitions and was adamantly opposed to conventional religious imagination. He conveys the idea that God attracts even the mind of an atheist.

Tagore emphasises the rule of love in religion, asserting that the realisation of the Infinite cannot be achieved instantly. Love should be the foundation, and its fulfilment is found within love itself. He argues that a narrow perspective that strengthens the ego must be abandoned. Instead, individuals should expand their consciousness through



love, embracing both nature and humanity. In this very act of love, one attains unity. Tagore also suggests that the Divine possesses human qualities, and humanity plays a crucial role in realising divine truth. His religious philosophy remains highly relevant in the modern world, where religion is often used to serve other purposes. His vision of a unified world and universal humanity, along with his message of love and brotherhood, continues to inspire people today and will do so in the future.

Self-Assessment

1. Bring out the important principles of Tagore's philosophy?
2. How does Tagore perceive the relationship between man and nature?
3. Explore how Tagore's philosophy of man, God and religion guide us in addressing modern spiritual crisis?

Assignments

1. Analyse the contemporary relevance of Tagore's Universal Humanism.
2. Make an analysis of the structure and progression of Tagore's arguments in "The Religion of Man".
3. How does Tagore build his case for his unique perspective on "The Religion of Man".

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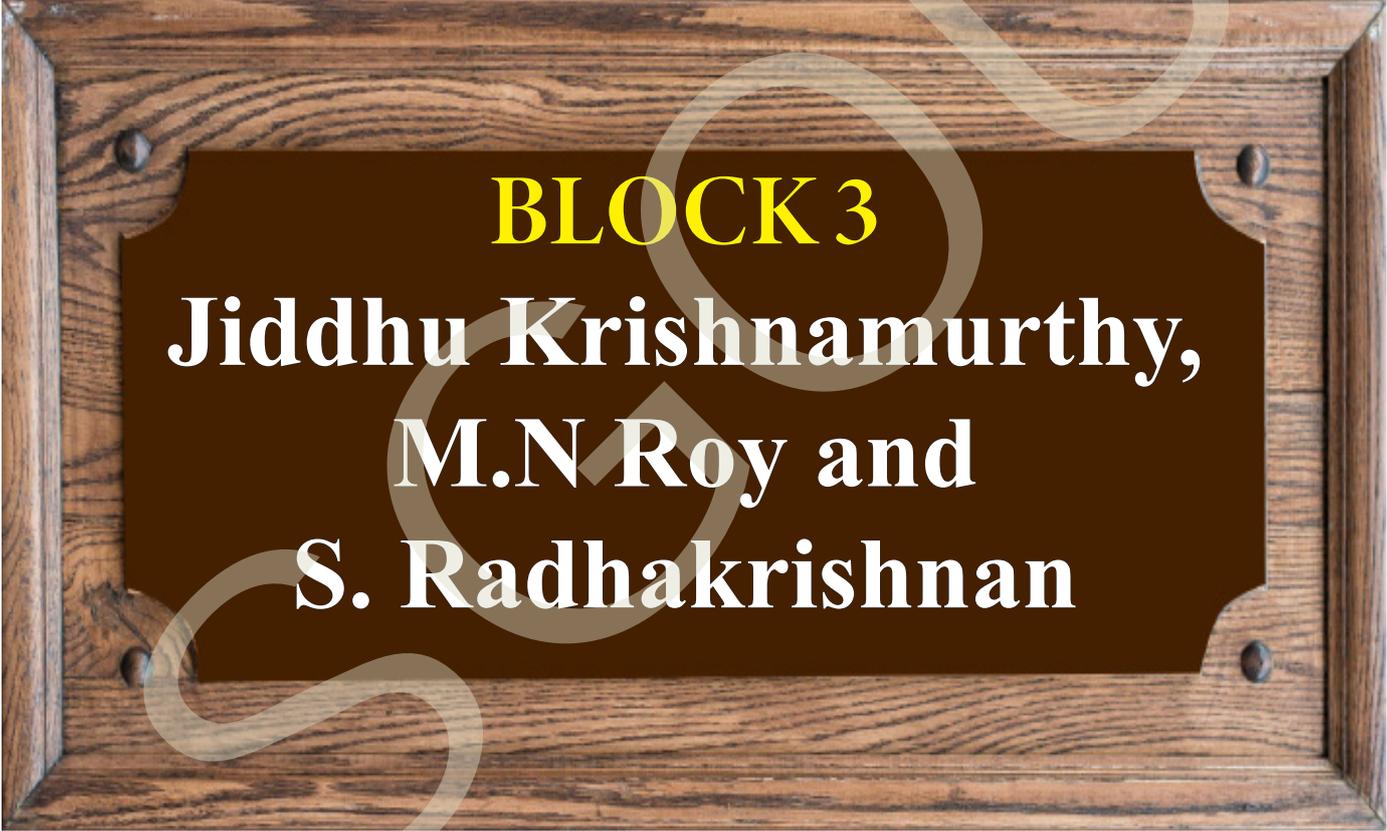
Suggested Reading

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



A wooden frame with a dark brown interior and a lighter brown, textured exterior. The frame is rectangular with rounded corners and four small dark circular accents at the corners. The text is centered within the dark interior.

BLOCK 3

**Jiddhu Krishnamurthy,
M.N Roy and
S. Radhakrishnan**

UNIT 1

Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986)

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- understand the historical background and philosophical insights set forth by Jiddu Krishnamurti
- explain the concept of freedom in J. Krishnamurti's philosophy
- conceptualise the relationship between love and freedom

Background

Jiddu Krishnamurti is considered a significant philosophical figure of modern times. In the year 1895, Krishnamurti was born in Madnapalle, a small hill town in present-day Andhra Pradesh, South India. In addition to being a philosopher, Krishnamurti was a psychologist and a true pioneer in exploring human consciousness and self-inquiry. His central concern was to reveal and interpret the human search for truth and freedom. One of Jiddu Krishnamurti's fundamental ideas was that love, not fear should be the basis for judgment and that life is the only truth. According to Krishnamurti, one must set away all theoretical and ideological notions of freedom in order to inquire whether it is ever possible to be free in one's thoughts truly. It is impossible to perceive reality or determine whether it is a fear-induced or socially constructed reality unless the human mind is psychologically and internally free. One must be aware of oneself, not through analysis or introspection, but as one truly is. Krishnamurti uses straightforward language to reaffirm the age-old principle of 'know thyself.' However, in order to do that, a person must undergo a dramatic and profound transformation within themselves. Thus, freedom for Krishnamurti is not an end or goal but is at the very beginning. There must be a total revolution in the psyche itself. So, one has to live from moment to moment in the eternal 'now', free from all dependence on the past and of expectations from the future.



Keywords

Choiceless awareness, Freedom, Truth, Conditioning, Self-inquiry.

Discussion

3.1.1 Philosophical Insights into His Conception of Religion

According to Krishnamurti, philosophy is not about collecting knowledge or thinking conceptually about truth. Nor is it about creating new ideas in academia while ignoring the truth and reality of everyday life. Instead, he asserts that philosophy is the love of truth, which requires direct vision or insight - one that goes beyond thought. His philosophy emphasises the need to break free from psychological reliance and conditioning and to view life directly, without the limitations of accumulated knowledge and past influences. He was not affiliated with any political or ideological school of thinking. He made no assertions about developing a system or advocating a specific theory. "I am not concerned with the establishment of new theories and philosophies, or the formation of new sects or religions," to quote Krishnamurti. He was extremely motivated to find freedom and the truth. He believed that religion has changed from its original meaning when it is closely connected to philosophy. He disagreed with the traditional goals of religion and said that what people now call religion is mostly based on thought. According to him, beliefs, hopes, fears, and the search for security in another world all come from the mind's thinking process. However, he argued that this is not a true religion. Instead, it is simply the movement of thought influenced by fear, hope, and the need for safety, making it a material process rather than a deep spiritual reality.

- Philosophy as love of truth

- The goal of religion is to grant freedom

Krishnamurti believes that the goal of religion is to grant people freedom. It should outline the means to achieve this freedom and offer relief from suffering. In his book *Commentaries on Living*, Krishnamurti stated that organised religions cannot bring comfort to the human mind, which is full of suffering and conflict. No religious system, retreat, or strict discipline can lead to true freedom. While discipline may offer hope, hope itself is not freedom. He also pointed out that religion often creates divisions among people. Because of this, the freedom that religion claims to provide is not real; it is only an illusion. However, this does not mean he was against religion. Instead, he suggested that to understand true religion,

we must first recognise what is false and let go of it. Only by doing so can we have a clear perception and discover what true religion really is.

- Religion as inner journey of self-awareness.

Religion, according to Krishnamurti, is not found in chanting, ceremonial performances, worshipping stone statues or tin gods, or reading any books. It does not adhere to human-invented superstitions. A religious mind cannot be affiliated with any formal religion. Understanding is impossible for a mind that is reliant on authority and unable to stand on its own. The only way to see things clearly is to have an open mind that is not attached to any group, organisation, or belief system. A truly religious mind is independent and shines with its own understanding, like a light that does not depend on others to stay lit. If someone else's belief or teaching is the only source of light, it can easily fade away when challenged. Krishnamurti also made a distinction between a ritualistic mind and a truly religious mind. A mind that blindly follows rituals and traditions is not truly religious. Instead, a real religious mind is like a revolutionary mind; it is free, alert, and capable of responding to life's challenges with clarity and understanding.

- Religion is all about direct experience and self-inquiry.

Krishnamurti believed that all ideologies, no matter how well-formed, are meaningless. What truly matters is paying close attention to what is happening in our daily lives both within ourselves and in the world around us. If we carefully observe and examine our experiences, we will realise that much of what we believe is shaped by intellectual ideas. However, intellect alone is just a small part of life, not the whole of existence. No matter how old or traditional an idea is, it remains only a fragment of reality. But to truly understand life, we must look at it in its entirety. He argued that the root cause of human suffering is egoism, narcissism, and selfishness. A mind burdened with prejudices and rigid beliefs cannot explore the unknown. For true understanding, the mind must be completely free without attachment, longing, or hope. Only then can it perceive reality as it is. When the mind is creatively empty, it can experience something beyond measure, which he referred to as the immeasurable or the divine. According to Krishnamurti, a mind free from religious biases is one that can truly understand immortality.



3.1.2 Truth - a Pathless Land

- Truth as a pathless land

One of Krishnamurti's greatest desires was to find freedom and truth. He critiques the conventional approaches and strategies for determining that they are the product of thought. Thought breeds fear of constant change, and out of this fear, it seeks something permanent. But thought cannot end fear. He holds that no knowledge, which is mental or intellectual, can take one to reality, as it is based on the dualism of knower and known. For him, truth is an ever-changing now and cannot be approached through a static and fixed path. To quote him, "I maintain that truth is a pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect. That is my point of view, and I adhere to that absolutely and unconditionally. Truth is to be discovered and understood in every thought, every feeling and every action. Truth is timeless and hence one cannot capture it and accumulate it. Truth must be discovered anew from moment to moment, it is not an experience that can be repeated; it has no continuity, it is a timeless state."

- Truth demands freedom from conditioned thought.

To find Truth, man must be absolutely free. The very knowing of truth is the denial of truth; as Krishnamurti puts it, one cannot know truth. Truth is not to be found intellectually. This is not an epistemological truth but an existential truth. Freedom is possible only when the experience ceases or thought is blown up. The self, the knower, has to be removed and freed from the entire conditioning process, which is a result of memories, habits, desires, concepts and thoughts. Human freedom lies in simply seeing and experiencing without following blindly what has been seen and experienced. Freedom is an immediate realisation, which comes from understanding oneself as such. This is termed self-knowledge or choiceless awareness. In choiceless awareness, one observes thoughts, emotions and experiences without labelling them and is free from conditioning. There is no division between the observer and the observed. It arises naturally when one is fully attentive and open to the present moment. One must be extremely aware in order to follow oneself and observe how one's thoughts function. As one becomes more aware of the complexities of one's own thoughts, reactions, and emotions, one also becomes more aware of the other person they are in communion with. Intelligence is the ability to recognise truth and falsity intuitively through a choiceless awareness of 'what is' at any given moment.

- Intelligence as a state of total awareness and freedom.

According to Krishnamurti, intelligence is very important and different from intellect. Intellect is simply the ability to think, reason, and understand concepts without involving emotions. However, Krishnamurti believed that true intelligence comes from a balance between thought and feeling, between the mind and the heart, and between reason and emotion. But where there is desire, there is fear, and fear leads to conflict. In a state of conflict, true understanding and intelligence cannot exist. Only when there is love free from fear and desire does real intelligence emerge. For Krishnamurti, intelligence is not about making choices based on personal likes and dislikes. Instead, it arises from a deep awareness of oneself without judgment or preference. He compared it to a seed of awareness that grows into understanding and finally blossoms into intelligence. To quote Krishnamurti “intelligence is truth, completeness, beauty and love itself”. Truth, goodness and beauty are only different modes of intelligence.

- Fear as a psychological barrier to the attainment of true freedom.

Krishnamurthi considers fear to be one of life’s greatest issues. A mind ensnared in fear must be violent, warped, and aggressive because it lives in turmoil and conflict. We are all afraid of something; there is no fear in abstraction; it is always in relation to something. That is fear of death, fear of losing and so on. If the mind tries to overcome the fear, suppress it, control it or translate it into terms of something else, there is conflict, and that conflict is a waste of energy. He believed that thought itself is the cause of fear, as it arises when the mind starts imagining future possibilities or recalling past experiences. To live fully in the present, one has to understand the structure of thought, memory and time. This understanding should not be merely intellectual or theoretical but must come from deep awareness, involving the heart, mind, and entire being. When this happens, one becomes free from fear, allowing the mind to use thought as a tool without letting it create fear. Krishnamurti, in his famous work *Freedom From The Known*, states that “when you see that you are a part of fear, not separate from it- that you are fear- then you cannot do anything about it; then fear comes totally to an end.”

3.1.3 Self-knowledge and Awakening of Intelligence

“To know oneself is to study oneself in action, which is relationship. The more you know yourself the more clarity there is. Self-knowledge has no end - you do not come to an



- The self and its boundaries dissolve in the state of choiceless awareness.

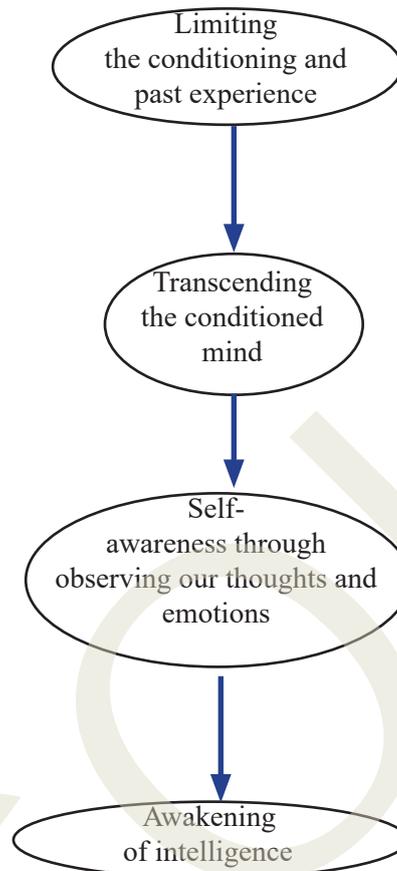
achievement; you do not come to a conclusion.” Krishnamurti viewed self or ego as a product of thought and memory. It is the accumulation of past experiences, conditioning and knowledge that creates a sense of individuality and separateness. It creates a false sense of distinction between the observer and the observed, which is the root cause of conflict, fear and suffering in human experience. Freedom from the self comes from dissolving the self, not through effort or will but through awareness and direct perception. It is in the state of choiceless awareness that the self and its boundaries dissolve. It is the state of profound stillness and wholeness, free from conflict and the limitations of thought.

- Thought is the cause of sorrow.

To free the mind from conditioning, one must first understand how we identify with things like beliefs, labels, and past experiences. This awareness helps us see that these identities are not our true selves. When we clearly see what is false, we naturally come closer to the truth. Real understanding happens when we see things as they are, without distortion. This frees us from the habit of always trying to become something or create an identity. It also helps us break free from the old patterns of ignorance and conditioning that control our thinking. To Krishnamurti, thought is always dependent on the past and is always conditioned by memory. Thought, for Krishnamurti in a wider sense, is an obstacle in the way of absolute perception of harmony, love and goodness, which limits the release of energy. If there is thought, there is no love. Thought is the root cause of our sorrow, ugliness, anxiety, grief, pain, power and violence. The ending of thought is possible only when thought is aware of itself without choice.

- Awareness is the direct perception of reality.

Self-knowledge means being aware of how we identify ourselves in our actions and relationships. This awareness helps awaken intelligence and leads to a state of clear, immediate understanding without personal bias. Awareness means seeing things as they are without letting thoughts, past experiences, or personal opinions interfere. It is a direct perception of reality without labelling, analysing, or comparing based on memory. Through self-knowledge, one realises that the thinker is not separate from thought and that the self is just a part of consciousness. Krishnamurti emphasises that true self-knowledge comes from being fully aware in every moment without making choices based on past conditioning. For him, life is action, and true awareness is a free, flexible, and fresh state of mind, untouched by memories and beliefs. Self-knowledge is the foundation of true understanding.



3.1.4 Liberation Through Self-discipline

Krishnamurti teaches that liberation means complete freedom from mental limitations and conditioning. It happens when all desires come to an end. In this state, the mind is peaceful and still, and a deep understanding of oneself arises. A key idea in his teachings is that the 'self' is not real but is created by our conditioning. Liberation means letting go of this false sense of self and experiencing a sense of oneness with all that is. He emphasised that liberation is not just about reaching the destination but also about the journey of self-discovery and growth that gets us there. It implies withdrawal from all identifications, such as labels, beliefs, and past experiences. Krishnamurti calls this process 'self-discipline.' It is not about forcing oneself to follow rules but about developing inner strength, focus, and perseverance. This self-discipline helps purify the mind and heart, making liberation possible.

- Liberation through deep self-awareness.

3.1.5 Freedom from the Known

- One must start with freedom rather than discipline.

Krishnamurti's entire philosophy revolves around the concept of freedom. He dedicated his life to urging people towards freedom and helping them overcome obstacles. He believed that only then could they experience eternal bliss and self-realisation. He opposed the notion of 'freedom through discipline.' For him, discipline and freedom go hand in hand. Freedom has no element of compulsion and develops its own discipline. He defined 'known' as all of the knowledge we have acquired through memory, experience, culture, education, and social factors. This 'known' shapes our thoughts, beliefs and actions through which we interpret the world. The 'known' is the source of division, fear and conflict, creating a sense of identity and separation. True freedom, to Krishnamurti, lies in stepping beyond the confines of the 'known' that is free from psychological dependence from the past. To quote him, "Freedom is found in the choiceless awareness of our daily existence and activity."

- Freedom as a state free from fear, conflict and conditioning.

Krishnamurti argues that when people follow social norms without questioning them, it leads to conflict. He believes that society shapes the way individuals think and behave, often creating patterns that limit independent thought. To build a society that grows and changes rather than repeating the same ideas and actions, individuals must bring about a deep change within themselves. He calls this inner transformation a 'creative revolution,' which cannot be imposed by external systems such as governments, traditions, or institutions. Instead, it must arise from within each person. According to Krishnamurti, a true understanding of life is possible only when the mind is free from comparison and dependence on others. He sees living in peace and order with the world as the most important goal for every individual. For him, order is not just about discipline or structure; it is closely connected to freedom and moral integrity. He also suggests that when people stop being creative, society begins to break down. Creativity, in his view, does not come from external pressure but from an inner state of tranquillity, where the mind is free to explore and discover.

Imitation, according to Krishnamurti, is the root cause of society's breakdown because it shapes education, social structures, and religious life. Leaders, who play a key role in society, contribute to this disintegration since their authority is based on imitation. To bring real change in the world, transformation

- Freedom as free from constraints and observing how one is conditioned.

must begin with individuals, and the intention behind this transformation is crucial. Instead of expecting others to change or relying on external revolutions, one must focus on understanding oneself. Krishnamurti argues that as long as the mind depends on systems, it remains trapped within its own limitations and cannot attain true freedom. He states, “No system, outwardly, is going to help man - on the contrary, systems are going to divide people; that is what has always been happening in the world.” True freedom, he asserts, requires being free from the past because a mind burdened by past experiences cannot be fresh, innocent, or open to new possibilities.

- Real freedom is not a reaction but a state of mind that is beyond opposites.

Krishnamurti explains that true freedom is not just ‘freedom from’ something because that would be only a reaction to a specific situation. Real freedom is not tied to any reference point, such as freedom from fear or freedom to act in a certain way. Instead, it is a state of mind that exists on its own. This kind of freedom does not allow any form of control, conformity, or dependence. To be truly free, a person must be completely alone, meaning they must not be influenced by past experiences, memories, or social conditioning. However, most people are not truly alone because their minds are shaped by past events and emotions. Letting go of the past is necessary to free the mind from sorrow.

- When there is true love, it brings freedom

Krishnamurti also connects freedom with love, suggesting that real love can exist only when the mind is free. “If I love you because you love me, that is just a trade,” he says. This kind of love is based on conditions and personal benefit rather than a deep and unconditional feeling. According to him, true love does not seek anything in return. It exists by itself and is always present in a person who is free from selfishness and dependence. Love does not follow the rules, traditions, or expectations set by society. It does not arise from a sense of duty or responsibility but flows naturally when a person is truly free. Krishnamurti also observes that, in today’s world, people often mistake pleasure and desire for love. Many relationships are built on personal satisfaction rather than a deep connection. However, he emphasises that true love is not just a passing emotion or a response to external factors. It is something deeper, beyond thoughts and desires, and can only be experienced by a free mind.

Krishnamurti also asserts that freedom is meaningful only when it is accompanied by responsibility. He argues that if freedom is used without responsibility, it leads to anarchy.



- Freedom requires responsibility for societal harmony

When people act only for personal gain without considering the well-being of others, it results in negative consequences for society. Just as love is not about seeking personal satisfaction but about a deep connection beyond desire, freedom is not about doing whatever one wants without awareness of its impact. He emphasises the need for self-discipline and conscious awareness in using freedom wisely. Only when individuals balance freedom with responsibility can they create a society that is peaceful and in harmony.

Summarized Overview

Jiddu Krishnamurti rejected the traditional notion of philosophy as the accumulation of knowledge or the creation of intellectual theories. Instead, he saw philosophy as the love of truth, which requires direct insight beyond thought and conditioning. He argued that organised religions, rituals, and ideologies create divisions and illusions rather than leading to true freedom. For him, true religion was not about beliefs or practices but about inner clarity and direct perception. He emphasised that true freedom comes from breaking free from psychological conditioning, authority, and attachment to past experiences. According to Krishnamurti, truth is timeless and cannot be approached through any fixed path, system, or doctrine. He famously stated that ‘truth is a pathless land,’ meaning it must be discovered in each moment through awareness rather than intellectual pursuit.

Krishnamurti saw thought as the root of fear, conflict, and suffering, as it is always tied to memory and the past. He advocated for self-knowledge through ‘choiceless awareness,’ where one observes thoughts and emotions without judgment or attachment. In this state, the division between the observer and the observed dissolves, leading to a deep understanding of reality. He distinguished between intellect, which is limited to reasoning, and intelligence, which emerges from a balance of thought and feeling. Intelligence, in his view, arises from love and freedom. Liberation, according to Krishnamurti, is the process of freeing the mind from conditioning and dissolving the false sense of self. This self-discovery is not about achieving a goal but about continuous awareness in daily life, allowing one to perceive reality without distortion.

Self-Assessment

1. What is the importance of self-knowledge and the role of awareness in Krishnamurti’s philosophy?
2. How does thought create division and conflict?
3. Bring about Krishnamurti’s conception of ‘freedom from known’ and the relation between truth and freedom.

Assignments

1. Analyse 'truth as pathless land' in the light of Krishnamurti's philosophy.
2. Critically reflect on the key ideas put forth by Krishnamurti and its relevance in contemporary society.

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

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SGOU

UNIT 2

M.N Roy (1887-1954)

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- understand the concepts of Humanism and Radical Humanism
- trace the evolution of M.N. Roy's journey from Marxism to Radical Humanism
- analyse the factors which led to the development of Radical Humanism

Background

A well-known Indian philosopher of the 20th century, Manabendra Nath Roy, was born in West Bengal on March 21, 1887. He left India in 1915 in search of weapons to organise a resistance against British rule in India, having begun his career as a militant political activist. He distinguished himself both as a man of action and as a man of thought. As a man of action, he was a devoted and dedicated revolutionary. As a man of thought, he developed himself as an original social philosopher. At the age of twelve, he joined the revolutionary movement in Bengal led by Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, Jatin Mukherjee and others. Roy was the founder of the Communist Party of India and the Mexican Communist Party. He aimed to establish the Indian Communist Party as a legitimate national political party, similar to the Congress and Swaraj parties. He believed that fighting for freedom was the party's core objective, with social liberation being a secondary goal. The question of national liberation was primary because "the release of all forces of social production is the first step towards the ultimate realisation of our programme, which is the end of class domination.

Roy travelled to Mexico and participated actively in Mexican politics, having become the General Secretary of the Socialist Party, which was later transformed into the first Communist Party in the world outside the Soviet Union. Roy's efforts in Mexico drew the attention of Lenin, who invited him to Russia to attend the Second World Congress in 1920. At the Congress, Roy differed from Lenin on the colonial question. He soon played an important role in the international Communist Movement and became the



head of the Eastern Department of Communist International and of the Communist University. He was influenced by Marxism and later he transformed his philosophy from Marxism to Radical humanism.

Keywords

Marxism, Materialism, Radical Humanism, Renaissance, Radical Democracy

Discussion

3.2.1 Philosophical Standpoints

When communism was no longer seen as a revolutionary ideal but was tested by experience and found inadequate in the modern political and social context, Roy's ideas developed into a system of thought and a movement. He believed that political and social theories should focus on moral values, as the main crisis in the world was a moral crisis. This belief shaped his political and social views. Roy searched for a true path to revolution. He emphasised that the role of revolution and its guiding philosophy should be based on the idea that 'Man is the maker of his world.' This means that people have the power to shape their own lives and society. He also emphasised that every person is important as an individual and should have the freedom to think and act. According to him, the brain is the most powerful tool because it produces thoughts and ideas, which can bring real change. For democracy to work well, people must recognise their creative power and have a strong desire to change the world. They should be open to new ideas and remain committed to their ideals of freedom. Roy also believed that when free individuals take charge of society, they can break the chains of oppression and bring freedom to everyone.

- Ideas and freedom shape revolution and transform society.

M.N. Roy strongly believed in materialism, considering it the only philosophy that makes sense because everything, including knowledge, is based on material reality. He criticised Hindu philosophy for being unclear and contradictory, pointing out that it often describes something as both real and an illusion at the same time, which he saw as illogical. Roy argued that if something is truly immaterial, it cannot create material things, as two things with no common properties

- Matter is primary, and human consciousness is shaped by material conditions.

cannot have a cause-and-effect relationship. If the material world comes from something immaterial, then that source must also be material. Therefore, he concluded that everything is made of one substance - matter. He also disagreed with the idea that Indian philosophy is entirely focused on rejecting the world and life, believing that such views were simply wordplay used to support unnecessary theories.

- The need to create a world based on reason, freedom and justice.

Roy reveals the essence of materialism by claiming that matter is the source of all existence and the only reality. Since all other appearances are merely changes in matter, they are governed by laws inherent in nature. Knowledge acquired through contemplation, observation, and investigation of natural phenomena forms the basis of this understanding. Materialism asserts that everything that truly exists originates from matter, and all appearances are different transformations of matter governed by natural laws. The world exists objectively, both physically and biologically, with nothing beyond or outside it. Its existence and development are governed by laws inherent in itself, which are neither mysterious, metaphysical, nor merely conventional, but rather coherent relationships between events. Materialist philosophy encourages humans to transform the world and themselves in the process.

- Two key aspects of human nature: rationality and the desire for freedom.

Being a materialist, he analysed that all human attributes, including intelligence and emotion, have a physical basis and originate from the simplest forms of organic matter. According to Roy, human nature is determined more by physical and biological factors than by social and environmental factors. In other words, man is the product of a long process of evolution - physical and biological - and the nature of man is determined by this process. Roy acknowledges the uniqueness of each individual, but he believes that all human beings share certain common traits, which form the basis of human nature. He highlights two key aspects of human nature: rationality and the desire for freedom.

M.N. Roy's philosophy of materialism is rooted in the idea that knowledge comes from our interaction with the physical world. He believed that our thoughts and ideas are not separate from the material world but are shaped by our experiences within it. In simple terms, what we know and think comes from engaging with the world around us. Roy argued that ideas are not independent or abstract; they are reflections of reality based on our experiences. Since these ideas come from our interaction with the material world, they do not restrict our thinking instead,



- what we know and think comes from engaging with the world around us

they help us understand more. Our minds, influenced by the conditions of the physical world, keep producing new ideas. In his theory of knowledge, Roy says that thinking happens when the mind and the world interact. Knowledge has both objective and subjective sides because both the person knowing and the world being known are important. To understand knowledge, we must first accept that the mind is real. He says the mind is real because it is part of the physical world. In *Materialism and Science*, he explains that experience is the base of knowledge, but knowing is not just about collecting facts. Instead, we arrange what we experience into a meaningful explanation. Knowledge is created by constantly linking what we perceive to the real world. It is not just a collection of facts but an organized understanding of reality. In his new humanistic vision, Roy says that higher beings, especially those with developed brains, do more than just receive information. They organise what they see into a clear picture of reality. So, knowledge is formed through critical thinking, reasoning, and understanding the world.

- He was an advocate of scientific materialism and rejected supernatural entities

Being a monistic materialist, he rules out all sorts of metaphysical dualism, which divides the world into- material and spiritual. He rejected all allegedly supernatural entities like God and soul. Similarly, he was opposed to fatalism and the doctrine of karma. He unequivocally rejected the religious mode of thinking and advocated a scientific outlook and a secular morality.

3.2.2 M. N Roy and Marxism

- He rejected Soviet communism

Roy played an important role in global communist movements by helping to establish the Mexican Communist Party and the Communist Party of India. However, after Joseph Stalin rose to power in the Soviet Union, Roy moved away from mainstream communism and developed his own political ideas. He also disagreed with Lenin's view that communist parties should support national freedom movements led by middle-class leaders in colonized countries to weaken imperialism and promote socialism. Instead, Roy believed that workers in these countries, who were being exploited due to industrialization, were also rising for their rights. He argued that the focus should be on making workers aware of their class struggle. He urged the Communist International (Comintern) to support them rather than relying only on nationalist leaders. However, Roy admitted that working with nationalist leaders could help remove foreign control, which was the first step toward revolution.

- Roy criticized Marxism for ignoring human creativity

M.N. Roy criticized Karl Marx's philosophy for being too focused on materialism, which means giving importance only to economic factors and production forces in shaping history. Roy believed this approach was rigid and unscientific because it ignored the role of human creativity and mental activity in social change. According to Roy, Marxism should not be seen as just a political and economic tool for revolution but as a philosophy that has grown with human thought since ancient times. He viewed Marxism as the shared intellectual heritage of humanity, meant to help everyone work toward a better world. Roy argued that Marx's economic interpretation of history was flawed and led to the failure of Marxism. A philosophy that ignores other aspects of human life and relies only on material conditions cannot effectively guide positive social action. For Roy, history cannot be understood solely through materialistic objectivism; human thought and creativity are equally important.

- Rejection of dialectical materialism of Marx

To Roy, a revolutionary reconstruction of society is not a matter of human desire, human will, human aspiration and human endeavour; it takes place of necessity. Through dialectical materialism, Marx dehumanised humanity by subordinating the entire history to secular ideology. A soulless mechanistic view of life became the foundation of his revolutionary philosophy. It ignored the fact that man is the maker of his destiny; in making the world, man makes himself.

3.2.3 Radical Humanism

Roy thought that people needed a new way of thinking - a philosophy - to guide their lives, free their minds, and explain the world and human experiences without relying on gods or supernatural forces. He called this philosophy Radical Humanism or New Humanism. This philosophy focused on individual humans rather than groups like nations or social classes. Roy developed this idea because he was unhappy with Marxism's focus on economic factors and class struggle. He felt Marxism did not pay enough attention to ethics or the role of ideas and intellectual contributions in shaping history. He also disagreed with how some communists interpreted Marxism and applied it in practice. Communism started as a movement to save the world from the suffering and exploitation caused by capitalism. However, over time, it has raised serious concerns, even among progressive thinkers in the modern world. Roy believed that communism or socialism, in practice, often turned into a form of state capitalism. In such a system, he observed that individuals were reduced to powerless tools, controlled by impersonal

- Radical humanism as an alternative to Marxism and religious dogmas and authoritarianism.

economic forces and treated as small parts of a larger collective. This denied people their independence and sovereignty. Roy argued that any political or economic system that prioritises abstract collective goals over the individual cannot truly achieve freedom. He believed that dictatorship of any kind, including the so-called ‘dictatorship of the proletariat,’ was incompatible with the ideal of freedom. The communist claim that a planned economy under proletarian dictatorship would bring the greatest good to the greatest number had, in his view, been proven wrong.

- Looking beyond the deceptive ideal of communism.

Roy believed that neither capitalism nor communism could solve humanity’s problems. He argued that we must move beyond the misleading ideals of communism to avoid potential disasters. Instead, we should place our trust in human creativity and ingenuity, which have immense untapped potential. According to Roy, a new social order should balance planning with freedom, guided by the principles of collective welfare and progress. Initially, Roy developed a radical perspective on humanism that was still influenced by Marxism. However, he eventually grew dissatisfied with this approach as well. This led him to propose a new theory based on integral scientific humanism, which he called New Humanism. He described it as ‘new’ because it was enriched, strengthened, and refined by scientific knowledge and the social experiences gained over centuries of modern civilization. Roy’s ideas about Radical or New Humanism were inspired by the writings of Friedrich Engels, who worked closely with Karl Marx to write the *Communist Manifesto*.

- Man as the measure of everything.

M.N. Roy’s philosophy of Radical or New Humanism focuses on human beings as the center of social progress and change. He explained this philosophy in his book *New Humanism: A Manifesto*. The three main pillars of Radical Humanism are the individual, society, and the nation. According to Roy, individuals are the foundation of all social institutions, such as the state and laws. People create these institutions and the values that promote human well-being. Since individuals create these systems, they also have the power to change them for the better. Roy rejected the idea that history is shaped by divine will, economic forces, or any mysterious power. Instead, he believed that human actions and decisions drive social progress. He followed the idea of the Greek philosopher Protagoras, who said, “Man is the measure of all things.” This means that human experiences and actions are the most important factors in shaping society. Roy called

his philosophy humanism. It focuses on human beings and their creativity, materialism because it is based on facts and reality, naturalism because it studies the natural world and rationalism because it uses reason.

- Stress on the Individualistic outlook

Roy's philosophy of Radical Humanism gives great importance to the individual. According to him, an individual should not be controlled or dominated by either a nation or a social class. Each person has their own identity and should not lose it by becoming part of a larger group, such as a class or a nation. One of the main reasons Roy opposed Marxism was that it focused too much on class struggle. Marxism divided people into classes, such as the working class and the capitalist class. Roy believed that this focus on class struggle forced individuals to lose their uniqueness and identity by becoming just members of a particular class. He also criticized nationalism. In his view, nationalism makes people lose their individuality by making them part of a larger idea of the nation. People are often expected to put the interests of the nation above their own personal growth and freedom. To quote him, "Radicalism thinks in terms neither of nation nor class; its concern is man; it conceives freedom as freedom of individual".

- Man as a free, rational and ethical being

Roy's Radical Humanism sees humans as the central force for social progress. According to Roy, every human being has three essential qualities: reason, morality, and freedom. Human reason allows individuals to understand the natural world and break free from the limitations imposed on them by society or nature. Morality helps people work together for the common good of society. The quest to understand the laws of nature and the universe ultimately aims to help humans free themselves from natural restrictions. Freedom, which is a result of human efforts to survive and grow in a challenging environment, is at the core of this struggle. Radical Humanism aims to build confidence in humans and encourages them not to give up, even in difficult situations. It seeks to create a society that removes all barriers to human progress and development. Roy believed that political, economic, and social institutions should serve the true purpose of life - the growth of human personality. Unlike Marxism, which focuses mainly on economic changes, Radical Humanism highlights human will as the driving force behind social evolution.



Summarized Overview

M.N. Roy's philosophy evolved from his early association with communism to the development of Radical Humanism, which emerged from his disillusionment with Marxist dogma and Soviet communism. He believed that the world's crisis was fundamentally moral, necessitating a reorientation of social and political philosophies based on ethical values. For Roy, human beings were the creators of their world, and the brain was the ultimate means of production, generating revolutionary ideas. He emphasised the importance of individual freedom and creative potential in a democratic society. Rejecting the metaphysical dualism of traditional Indian philosophy, Roy upheld materialism as the only valid philosophy, asserting that matter is the foundation of existence and that knowledge is derived through observation and rational inquiry.

Roy's Radical Humanism rejected both the rigid determinism of Marx's historical materialism and the authoritarianism of communism. He viewed Marxist philosophy as dehumanizing, as it reduced human agency to mere economic forces. Instead, Roy advocated for a new social order rooted in scientific knowledge, ethical values, and individual freedom. His Radical Humanism aimed to liberate humanity from the tyranny of religion and authoritarianism, promoting a society where free individuals could shape their destiny through reason and moral responsibility. He emphasised that humans are the creators of their world and that their minds are powerful tools for change. Through their creativity, people can reshape the world and establish true democracy. Roy believed that humans should have confidence in their ability to control their own destiny without relying on any supernatural authority.

In India, radical humanism emerged at a crucial moment when the young republic, on the verge of independence, was desperate for a worldview to direct its future. To what extent Radical Humanism provided the answer is for history to judge. It would be impossible to overlook Roy's fundamental inspiration and the driving force behind Radical Humanism, which was human freedom. In his picture of the future of contemporary civilization, reason will gradually triumph over faith and science over superstition.

Self-Assessment

1. Briefly analyse the philosophical standpoints of M.N Roy.
2. Bring out the criticism of Marxism put forth by M.N Roy.
3. What are the main influences behind Roy's New or Radical Humanism, and bring out its significance?

Assignments

1. Debate on the significance of MN Roy's Humanistic standpoint.
2. Compare and bring forth the agreements and disagreements between Marxist philosophy and M.N. Roy's philosophy of Radical Humanism.

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SGOU

UNIT 3

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975)

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- familiarise with Radhakrishnan's idea of integrating intuition, reason, and religious experience as a means to attain higher knowledge
- explore the ethical and moral dimensions of Radhakrishnan's philosophy
- analyse the relevance of spiritual humanism in addressing contemporary social and cultural issues

Background

In the 20th century, Indian philosophy embraced a holistic perspective that integrated both the spiritual and empirical dimensions of human existence. Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan emerged as a key figure in this philosophical evolution. He was born on September 5, 1888, in Tirutani, a famous religious center in Madras. His intellectual brilliance and diverse personality helped him succeed as a thinker, teacher, administrator, and a bridge between Eastern and Western philosophies. His philosophical contributions centered on interpreting Vedanta within the framework of Western philosophy and modern scientific thought. Through interpretative construction, he aimed to establish an ontology rooted in ancient Indian wisdom while addressing contemporary philosophical discourse. His renowned work, *History of Indian Philosophy*, and his lectures at Oxford University, particularly *The Hindu View of Life*, brought global recognition to Indian philosophy. Radhakrishnan's achievements culminated in his appointment as the second President of India in 1962 and his reception of the prestigious Bharat Ratna award in 1967.

Radhakrishnan believed that the purpose of philosophy is to explore the relationship between the universe and human existence, offering a logical understanding of reality that fulfils intellectual, moral, aesthetic, and religious aspirations. He identified metaphysics, psychology, ethics, and religion as the four pillars of a philosophical outlook. He argued



that religious doctrines are essentially 'illusions' that cannot be proven or imposed on others as absolute truths. These practices gain acceptance due to their positive impact on human life rather than as a means to attain divine perfection. For Radhakrishnan, true spiritual understanding comes from personal experience and direct contact with divine reality, going beyond traditional religious authority.

Keywords

Idealism, Religion, Intuition, Spirit, Absolute

Discussion

3.3.1 Nature of His Philosophy

Radhakrishnan believed that the purpose of philosophy is to transform human thinking and way of life. Influenced by Advaita Vedanta, he viewed Brahman as the ultimate reality. For Radhakrishnan, the search for truth focuses on understanding the ultimate reality, which he saw as the spirit that gives life. He believed that the self, God, and the Absolute are different expressions of the universal spirit that acts through the human body and mind. Radhakrishnan blended Shankara's idea of the Absolute, which is beyond everything, with Ramanuja's idea of God, who exists within the world. He argued that the universe is ultimately spiritual. According to him, the Absolute is nameless, formless, infinite, eternal, and beyond time and space. It is unchanging and has no beginning or end. The Absolute and God are both real; the Absolute is transcendent while the God is immanent. God is the projected Absolute; the Absolute is the pre-cosmic God.

- Brahman as the ultimate reality

- Absolute can be realised through direct spiritual experience.

Radhakrishnan conceived that the Absolute is a transcendental existence, but it is also capable of immanence. Absolute is the infinite possibility, and God is one of its powers. The Absolute is manifested in God. Absolute is the totality of God and the world. It is also infinitely beyond them. God is the personal aspect, whereas the Absolute is the impersonal aspect. Radhakrishnan holds God is not an ethical principle nor an intellectual concept or a logical idea but a perceived reality present in each man. Man expresses his very intuition of reality through concrete forms. Through such concrete forms, he responds to the eternal reality. Radhakrishnan reconciles the

Absolute with God. He does not want to transform the Absolute and God into one reality. He identifies four levels of reality: the Absolute Brahman, the creative spirit (Īśvara), the world spirit, and the world itself, which together form a unified whole.

3.3.2 World

According to Radhakrishnan, the world is neither a logical necessity arising from the Absolute nor a chaotic event. Instead, it is a free expression of the Divine Spirit. He provides a spiritual explanation of creation and rejects mechanistic views of the universe. Radhakrishnan's ontology does not eliminate objectivism and subjectivism but transcends them, showing their deep interconnection as two aspects of the same Being. He believed that "the material looks upward to the spiritual to find its true meaning, while the spiritual leans toward the physical to discover itself." He rejected the idea that the world is an illusion. Instead, he saw the world as real because it is a manifestation of the Absolute or the ultimate reality. However, he called the world 'accidental' not because it is without purpose but because it is just one of the many possibilities that the Absolute could have chosen to create. This shows the infinite creativity of the Divine Spirit and highlights the unity between the physical and spiritual aspects of reality, and the World as both real and accidental.

The characteristics of the world put forth by Radhakrishnan are as follows:

- It is an ordered whole.
- There is a greater inter-relatedness and interaction between organisms and their surrounding environment.
- There are expressions of reality in the world in terms of matter, life and mind.
- The world is ever-dynamic and active. It is never satisfied with the levels it has reached and always aspires to other levels.

3.3.3 Human and Human Destiny

Radhakrishnan viewed humans primarily as spiritual beings, emphasizing that the essence of human existence lies in the soul, or atman. According to him, the physical aspect of a person is real, but it does not contradict the ultimate spiritual



- Realization of oneness is the ultimate human destiny

nature of the soul. The spiritual awakening occurs suddenly and through spontaneous intuition. There is no separation between the outer self and the inner self, as “the realm of spirit is not cut off from the realm of life. The two orders of reality, the transcendent and the empirical, are closely related.” He points out that the moral and scientific progress of humanity depends entirely on the growth of spiritual consciousness. Humans must strive to recover the spirituality that has been lost. They are bound to progress morally, spiritually, and socially. As a philosopher, Radhakrishnan emphasises the unity of individuals and the human community. Humans are finite-infinite beings, and the ultimate destiny is the realisation of oneness.

He puts forward two aspects of man;

1. The finite aspect

- It refers to the physical, biological, and empirical dimensions of human existence.
- It views the individual as an embodied being living within an environment.
- It holds reality as long as a person remains at this stage of existence.
- Higher spiritual goals cannot be attained without transcending this stage.
- The embodied individual is aware of the potential to rise above this bodily existence.
- The individual also recognises the limitations of the physical nature and realises the possibility of overcoming these limitations.

2. The infinite aspect

- The infinite aspect of human existence lies in spirituality.
- It transcends the empirical world and overcomes the subject-object distinction through self-consciousness.
- A self-conscious individual can integrate all experiences and actions through the act of self-awareness.

- The capacity for self-consciousness leads to spiritual growth and reflects the true nature of the self, which is divine.
- Freedom is the essence of spirituality.

- Importance of universal emancipation as the destiny of all beings.

Radhakrishnan explains that the first aspect of human destiny is freedom from embodied existence, while the final aspect is the realisation of unity. In this realisation, one experiences the presence of a single spirit in all minds, lives, and bodies. The liberated individual is known as a *jivan mukta*. After attaining salvation, the individual remains in the world and works for the liberation of others. The world process will reach its ultimate goal when every individual realizes divinity. Therefore, the ultimate human destiny is not individual redemption but universal liberation, or *sarvamukti*.

3.3.4 Intellect and Intuition-Religious Experience

According to Radhakrishnan, true religion is born of the spirit, not from flesh and blood, codes and customs, or races and nations. It is not a subjective phenomenon or merely the cultivation of the inner life but involves the apprehension of something that exists beyond the individual. The spirit finds its true home in religion, and its life fulfils every aspect of our being. The peace gained through religion is not mere emotional satisfaction. Through it, the mind becomes illuminated with divine light, and the stubborn questions of reason find answers. The will sheds its indecisiveness as it aligns with the divine will. Spiritual leaders reach the highest state of human life by staying connected with the divine force that creates life. They live in peace and calm, untouched by strong emotions or hardships. Just because some people do not experience this does not mean it is unreal or impossible. Our limited experiences cannot define the truth for everyone. Even if we can't express the voice of the spirit, it still exists deep within us.

- True religion is universal beyond the sectarian boundaries.

- Religion transcends reason but integrates rational guidance

The deeper dimensions of religion transcend reason, yet reason plays an essential role in shaping our religious experiences and beliefs. According to Radhakrishnan, while reason is secondary to the supra-rational - those spiritual and intuitive experiences where religion finds its fulfilment - it remains significant. Religion emerges not only from these higher realms but also from an infra-rational domain of instincts, impulses, sensations, raw emotions, and dogmas, which form the primal roots of human aspirations. Even these lower aspects



of life are touched and elevated by the religious sense inherent in humanity.

- Religious experience is the heart of true religion.

Human nature, as Radhakrishnan sees it, is dual - comprising both higher and lower tendencies. The lower nature is clouded by impurities such as ignorance, superstition, and unrefined desires. Often dominated by blind instincts and impulses, it requires the intervention of reason to perform its rightful task: illuminating, purifying, and disciplining our being. Religion, however, goes beyond this corrective function. Its primary purpose is to awaken the spirit, fostering a religious consciousness distinct from intellectual, moral, or artistic pursuits. While it encompasses intellectual clarity, ethical depth, and aesthetic richness, it is not limited to these - it transcends them. For Radhakrishnan, the essence of religion lies in a comprehensive, synthetic, and integral realisation of life's totality. The religious individual perceives meaning in all things and discerns an underlying harmony amid apparent conflicts. Radhakrishnan affirms that humanity possesses the capacity to recognise this significance and unity. Religion, in his view, is not a fragmented endeavour but a self-sustaining spiritual life that integrates and elevates every facet of existence.

- Religious experience is beyond the limits of language.

The initial phase must be faith - faith in religious experience. There is nothing exceptional or supernatural about it; it is just an experience. Subject and object are indistinguishable in such an experience. It is a state of consciousness in which "ordinary distinctions are transcended, boundaries are broken, feelings are fused, and ideas melt into one another," according to Radhakrishnan. It is a subjective life, meaning it is an experience cultivated within the human psyche or inwardness. It is not merely a knowing or feeling. It is an exhaustive embrace of the total man, encompassing his moral, intellectual, and aesthetic qualities, and it brings with it a state of freedom and tranquillity. Radhakrishnan states that the nature of this experience is beyond the limits of language. The self is entirely integrated into this experience. A man can only find salvation via religious experience. The religious man lives in a new world that fills his mind with light, his heart with joy and his soul with love. Religious experience differs from religious intellectualism, which remains confined to superficial religious phenomena and does not enter into the very core of religion. Religious insights ask us to train our consciousness and educate our sensibility to the level where we can see God.

- All knowledge is derived through sense experience, discursive reasoning and intuitive apprehension.

Radhakrishnan, being a synthetic philosopher, integrated insights from both Indian and Western traditions to explain the different levels of consciousness and ways of knowing. He emphasised that knowledge can be scientific, mathematical, realistic, and rational while also embracing axioms and values. According to him, all cognitive experiences contribute to understanding reality, which can be achieved through three methods: sense experience, discursive reasoning, and intuitive apprehension. Sense experience allows us to understand the external world by becoming familiar with the sensory qualities of objects. Logical knowledge is gained through analysis and synthesis, where the data from perception are examined, leading to a more systematic understanding of the object. Both sense knowledge and logical knowledge enable us to gain control over our environment for practical purposes.

- Intuitive knowledge as the knowledge of the self.

There is a type of knowledge that differs from conceptual knowledge. It allows us to see things as they truly are, as unique individuals, not as members of a group or units in a crowd. This is called intuitive knowledge, which arises from a deep connection between the mind and reality, where the distinction between the knower and the known disappears. It is immediate and non-sensuous, unlike empirical knowledge that relies on external observation. In Indian philosophy, this is known as Atma Jnana or self-knowledge, which forms the foundation for all other forms of knowledge. According to Radhakrishnan, the deepest truths of life, such as moral values and spiritual experiences, can only be understood through intuition, not through logical reasoning. This kind of knowledge is transformative, leading to self-realisation and unity with the ultimate reality, which Radhakrishnan identifies as Brahman, the supreme consciousness.

- The intellect relies on sense experience

In Radhakrishnan's philosophy, the intellect plays a role in understanding reality, but it has its limitations. He explains that the intellect relies on sense experience, which provides data for reasoning and analysis. However, sense experience reveals only the surface or appearance of reality, not the deeper truth. Therefore, the intellect, which depends on these external inputs, cannot fully grasp the ultimate reality. Radhakrishnan does not entirely reject the intellect. Instead, he acknowledges its value but limits its scope. The intellect is useful for logical reasoning and scientific analysis, but it cannot offer a complete understanding of deeper truths, such as spiritual experiences or self-realisation. According to Radhakrishnan, intuitive knowl-



edge, which arises from direct experience and inner awareness, is essential for attaining the highest truth. The key points of his criticism of intellect are as follows:

- Intellect does not touch reality in itself and is concerned with the appearance of reality.
- Intellect relies on sensory experience, which is limited and deceptive.
- The intellect abstracts only those qualities or functions from the reality which serve individuals practical purposes.
- It cannot perceive the reality in itself. As it does not perceive the truth. It invents theories and awaits confirmation.
- Intellect divides and analyses reality into parts which prevent it from grasping the unity of the Absolute and existence, which is indivisible and holistic.
- Intellectual knowledge fails to give a unified understanding. It cannot overcome the duality of the subject and object. Higher reality like Brahman which is non-dual is beyond the grasp of intellect.
- Intellect is a preparatory stage for intuition and spiritual realisation.

• Intellect and intuition are not opposed to one another but in harmony with one another.

• Intellect is the stepping stone, and intuition is the goal.

In his critique, Radhakrishnan highlights the limitations of the intellect but does not see intellect and intuition as inherently opposed. Instead, he emphasizes harmony between them. Intuition differs from other mental faculties. According to Radhakrishnan, it is the essential whole into which all properly cultivated aspects of the mind will grow and merge. Intuitive knowledge reveals the inmost being, where there is no distinction between subject and object.

We are not heading toward irrationality as we go from intellect to intuition; rather, we are entering the most profound level of rationality that human nature is capable of. It helps us see more clearly, feel more intensely, and think more deeply. The self encompasses both intuition and intellect. The latter employs the whole self, whereas the former involves a specialised part. The two are interrelated in their activities and are synthesised in the self. Though it is non-conceptual, intuitive knowledge is not non-rational. Immediacy and mediacy are both understood

in this rational perception. In reality, both our intellectual and intuitive faculties are active throughout our lives. When it comes to observing and describing objects, intellectual processes are more beneficial. Intellectual process better serve the observation and description of things and their quantitative relationships. We get an understanding of the whole from intuition, and we can analyse the parts using intellect.

- Intellectual deepening of intuition

Every intuition has an intellectual content, and by making it more intellectual we deepen the content. Even if intuitive truths cannot be proved to reason, they can be shown to be not contrary to reason, but consistent with it. Intuition is neither abstract thought and analysis nor formless darkness and primitive sentience. It is wisdom. He states “intuitions are not substitutes for thought, they are challenges to intelligence. Mere intuitions are blind, while intellectual work is empty. All processes are partly intuitive and partly intellectual. There is no gulf between the two.” Intuition is the highest consciousness that assimilates and transfigures sense and discursive knowledge. The characteristics of intuition put forth by Radhakrishnan can be summed up as follows:

- Intuition is an integral experience or holistic understanding, capturing the whole truth or reality at once.
- It is the synthesis of sense, reason and insight.
- It gives the direct perception of thing-in-itself with its qualities and attributes.
- Intuition manifests in moments of creative insights.
- Intuition paves the way for self-awareness and self-realisation, leading to an understanding of one’s inner nature and unity with the universal spirit.
- It is a knowledge of being the reality and of feeling oneness with it. In intuition, the subject does not remain the knower of reality. Rather, the knower and the known become identified in one.
- Intuitive knowledge is not non-rational, it is only non-conceptual.
- Intuition is supra-sensory perception. It goes beyond the



sensory world and allows one to access metaphysical truths, revealing aspects of reality that lie outside empirical observation.

- Intuition depends on the intellect and also transcends it.
- Both intuition and intellect belong to the self. When the whole self reacts to reality, intuition is experienced, but intellect is a faculty of self which comes in contact with reality only partially.

- Intuition paves the way for true wisdom leading to self-realisation

Developing intuition is just as important as developing the ability to observe and think. A process of moral ascension that gradually moulds the soul into harmony with the invisible realities is the only way to realise the potentialities of the spirit. Consecration of the self and understanding of reality grow in tandem. The only one who can know the fully real is the fully real himself. And intuition is, in this sense, both perfect living and perfect knowledge. Intuition probes into the nature of God and intuitive seer shrinks from precise statements and definitions because definition involves relation and comparison, which are obviously the functions of reason. For this reason, seers and mystics around the world use symbolic language to explain their life's more profound spiritual experiences.

Summarized Overview

The main tenets of Radhakrishnan's philosophy were the necessity of incorporating ethics and metaphysics into everyday life, the unity of all existence, and the importance of spiritual experience. There are two levels of the state of consciousness that we refer to as 'reality' that exist simultaneously: intellect and intuition. Whereas intuition is a component of the uninterred knowledge of the self (atma jnana), intellect is the logical awareness of the human mind. We must not misunderstand intuition as a formless or abstract concept; rather, it is wisdom at its purest. In the framework of his religion, he emphasised the ethical principles of love, compassion, and human togetherness because he viewed religion as a universal spiritual quest rather than a dogmatic system. In essence, religion, according to Radhakrishnan, is an attempt by man to articulate his ideas about a perfect being, a perfect world, and a way for us to encounter God. His views on religion reflect that he based his idea of God on the Vedantic tradition of Indian philosophy. Religion is an eternal revolutionary because no order of life can ever satisfy it. It demands the most radical transformation of man and society. Dogmas and codes are not an absolute embodiment of religious truth. They express particular stages in man's spiritual development. The dogmas and rites employed by religion for its expression and diffusion are only means for bringing about that elevation of the soul which can dispense with them all. The intuitive seer understands the variety of

theological doctrines and codes. They are but attempts to express the inexpressible, to translate into human words the music of the divine. A discipline of our whole being, including the emotions which are the springs of action is essential for restoring to the world the inspiration that it has lost.

Self-Assessment

1. What are the main philosophical standpoints of Radhakrishnan?
2. Bring forth Radhakrishnan's views on religion as the realisation of the Absolute.
3. Analyse Radhakrishnan's conception of intuition in understanding ultimate reality.

Assignments

1. Critically examine the two aspects of man put forth by Radhakrishnan.
2. Compare and contrast intuition and intellect and bring forth the shortcomings of intellect

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Suggested Reading

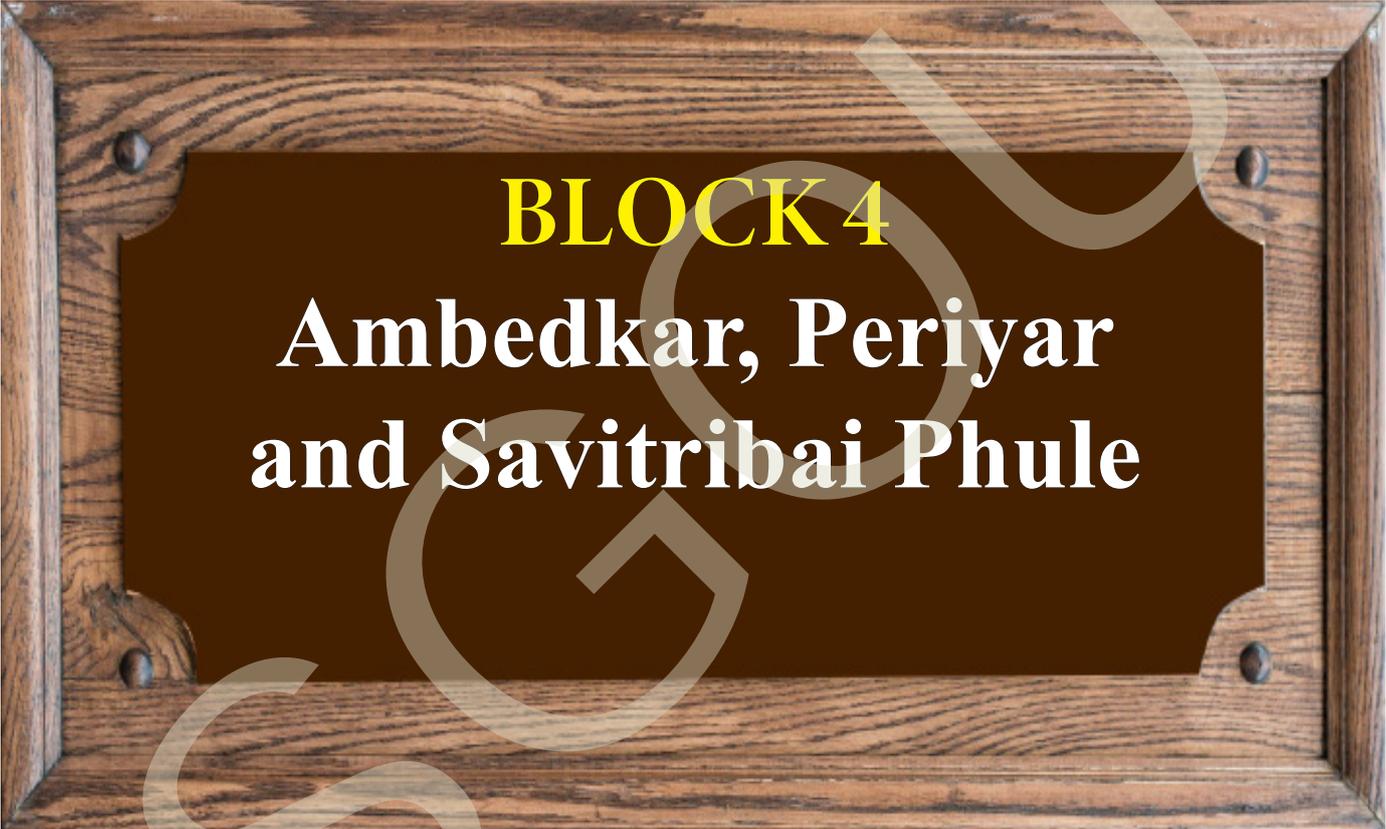
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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU

A wooden frame with a dark brown center containing text. The frame is made of dark wood with visible grain and four small dark knobs at the corners. The center is a solid dark brown rectangle. The text is centered within this rectangle. A large, faint, light-colored watermark is visible across the center of the image.

BLOCK 4

**Ambedkar, Periyar
and Savitribai Phule**

UNIT 1

Dr.B.R Ambedkar

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- analyse Ambedkar's struggles against caste discrimination and his role in social and political reforms
- evaluate the contributions of Ambedkar to the Indian Constitution, focusing on justice, equality, and fundamental rights
- examine the critique of casteism offered by Ambedkar and his arguments for abolishing the caste system
- assess the significance of education, political representation, and economic empowerment in his vision for marginalised communities
- know Ambedkar's vision of democracy and its relevance in contemporary society

Background

The caste system in India has existed for centuries, rigidly dividing people into hierarchical social groups based on birth, determining their professions, social status, and access to resources. Historically, lower castes, especially Dalits, suffered extreme discrimination, including untouchability, denial of education, and exclusion from economic opportunities. While legal reforms and action policies have helped to challenge caste-based injustices, discrimination continues in various forms, such as unequal access to education, employment biases, and social exclusion. Overcoming these challenges requires continuous efforts to promote equality, justice, and inclusivity. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's birth marked a turning point in Indian history, as he led the movement against caste oppression, advocated for the rights of the marginalised, and played a key role in shaping a more just and inclusive society through constitutional reforms.

Keywords

Caste System, Annihilation of Caste, Political Representation, Economic Empowerment, Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha, Mahad Satyagraha, Dalit Buddhist Movement, Labour Rights

Discussion

4.1.1 The Life of Ambedkar

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was a remarkable leader, visionary social reformer, and the chief architect of the Indian Constitution. He was born into an untouchable Mahar caste and faced severe discrimination, hardships, and social exclusion throughout his life. These experiences shaped his worldview and strengthened his commitment to fighting caste-based oppression and ensuring justice for marginalised communities. Despite the challenges, Ambedkar attained education with determination. He completed his secondary schooling at Elphinstone High School in Bombay, marking a significant achievement for someone from an oppressed caste background. After studying abroad, he returned to India and attempted to establish himself as a lawyer in Bombay, but caste discrimination made it difficult for him to attract clients. Realising the deep-rooted injustices in society, he decided to dedicate his life to the eradication of caste discrimination and the upliftment of the oppressed.

- Ambedkar faced severe discrimination and social exclusion throughout his life

To promote social justice, Ambedkar founded the Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha (Society for the Welfare of the Marginalised). He led movements like the Mahad Satyagraha in 1927, which demanded equal access to public water resources for oppressed castes. That same year, he was nominated to the Bombay Legislative Council, where he worked for the rights of marginalised communities. Over time, he became one of the most influential leaders advocating for the abolition of the caste system. Ambedkar founded organisations such as the Independent Labour Party and the All India Scheduled Caste Federation to mobilise people. He also led temple-entry movements to challenge religious discrimination and established many educational institutions to empower the lower castes through learning. Ambedkar recognised the power of the press in spreading awareness. In 1920, he launched his first newspaper, Mooknayak (Leader of the Voiceless), followed by Bahishkrut Bharat, Janata, and Prabuddha Bharat. These

- Ambedkar led temple-entry movements to challenge religious discrimination



newspapers played a crucial role in voicing the concerns of the oppressed and shaping Dalit politics.

- Ambedkar championed untouchables' rights, shaped India's inclusive Constitution

Ambedkar actively participated in the Round Table Conferences (1930-32) in London, where he strongly advocated for the rights of the 'untouchables.' In the 1930s, he transitioned into active politics, demanding a separate electorate for oppressed castes. In 1936, he founded the Independent Labour Party, which contested the 1937 elections in Bombay and won 15 out of 17 seats, marking a significant political achievement. After India's independence, Ambedkar was appointed as the first Law Minister in 1947. On 29 August 1947, he was chosen as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution. His contributions played a crucial role in shaping a constitution that guaranteed justice, equality, and fundamental rights for all citizens.

- Ambedkar strongly believed that Hinduism could not be separated from the caste system

Ambedkar strongly believed that Hinduism could not be separated from the caste system and that true social equality was impossible within its framework. After much reflection, he decided to embrace Buddhism in 1956, a religion he saw as rooted in equality, liberty, and justice. Throughout his life, Ambedkar championed the principles of equality, justice, liberty, and fraternity, which are deeply embedded in the Indian Constitution. As a scholar and modern thinker, he wrote extensively on social and political issues. His most influential works include *Annihilation of Caste*, *Who Were the Shudras?* *The Untouchables*, and *Buddha and His Dhamma*. Ambedkar's ideas were shaped by thinkers such as John Dewey, Jyotirao Phule, and Buddha. With his Western education and deep understanding of Indian society, he could envision a future beyond caste-based discrimination. His heritage continues to inspire movements for social justice, making him one of the most influential figures in modern Indian history.

- The origins of the caste system can be traced back to ancient Hindu scriptures, particularly the Vedas

4.1.2 Critique of casteism

The caste system in India is one of the most complex and deeply rooted social hierarchies in the world. Rooted in ancient traditions, it has evolved over centuries, influencing social, economic, and political structures. The system divides people into different castes based on birth, determining their roles and responsibilities in society. Although the Indian Constitution has banned caste-based discrimination, the fragments of this rigid social stratification still persist in various forms, affecting millions of lives. The origins of the caste system can be traced back to ancient Hindu scriptures, particularly the Ve-

das, which classify society into four main varnas: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. Beyond these four categories, a large section of people was classified as untouchables or Dalits, who were subjected to severe discrimination and social exclusion.

Several theories attempt to explain the emergence of the caste system. The religious theory suggests that caste divisions were divinely designed, while the biological theory proposes that caste is linked to the inherent qualities of individuals. A socio-historical perspective, however, attributes the caste system to the dominance of the Aryans over indigenous populations, leading to rigid hierarchical divisions over time. Despite its historical significance, the caste system has had deep negative consequences on Indian society. It has created deep divisions among people, fostering discrimination and social inequality. The caste system restricted social mobility, preventing individuals from moving beyond the occupations and roles assigned to them by birth. This rigidity not only led to economic disparities but also restricted intellectual growth, as education and knowledge were monopolised by the upper castes. The practice of untouchability was one of the most inhumane aspects of the system, subjecting Dalits to extreme marginalisation. They were denied access to temples, public spaces, and even basic resources such as water, forcing them to live in terrible conditions.

- The religious theory says that caste divisions were divinely designed

- The rigid social hierarchy placed Brahmins at the top and Dalits at the bottom, reinforcing oppression

Ambedkar was one of the most significant and determined critics of the caste system in India. Unlike reformists who sought to make adjustments within the existing caste structure, Ambedkar believed that caste was a deeply rooted social evil that needed to be completely annihilated. He saw the caste system as a major barrier to social equality, democracy, and human dignity. His ideas on caste abolition were radical and transformative, aiming to create a society based on liberty, equality, and fraternity. Ambedkar's analysis of caste was grounded in historical, social, and economic perspectives. He argued that the caste system was not just a division of labour but a division of labourers, where individuals were assigned specific occupations based on birth, preventing social mobility. This rigid social hierarchy placed Brahmins at the top and Dalits at the bottom, reinforcing oppression through religious doctrines and customs. According to Ambedkar, caste was a form of graded inequality where some groups were privileged while others faced systematic discrimination and exclusion.



- Ambedkar emphasised education as the essential measure for achieving caste annihilation.

Ambedkar proposed several measures to achieve caste annihilation. First and foremost, he emphasised the importance of education. He tirelessly worked towards ensuring that Dalits and other marginalised communities had access to education, seeing knowledge as the key to empowerment. He established institutions, promoted scholarships, and encouraged Dalits to achieve higher education, thereby enabling them to challenge the structures of discrimination.

- The Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha aimed to promote education among the oppressed

Ambedkar founded the Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha (Society for the Welfare of the Excluded) with the primary objective of promoting education among the oppressed sections of society. Ambedkar emphasised that education was the most powerful tool for empowerment, as it would enable the Dalits to break free from social and economic subjugation. The Sabha worked towards establishing schools, libraries, and hostels to ensure that Dalit children had access to education despite the widespread discrimination they faced. By encouraging literacy and knowledge, Ambedkar sought to equip his community with the means to fight for their rights. Apart from education, the Sabha also focused on political representation and economic empowerment of the Depressed Classes. It advocated for their inclusion in governance and worked towards securing reservations and political rights for them.

- Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha actively participated in civil rights movements and protests

Economic self-sufficiency was another major goal, and the Sabha aimed to provide vocational training and employment opportunities to help Dalits achieve financial independence. By addressing both political and economic issues, the Sabha sought to create a strong foundation for the upliftment of the marginalised sections of society. In addition to these efforts, the Sabha played a vital role in raising awareness and mobilising people against the injustices of the caste system. It encouraged Dalits to assert their rights, demand social dignity, and resist discriminatory practices. The Sabha also actively participated in civil rights movements and protests, laying the groundwork for the larger anti-caste struggles led by Ambedkar in the following decades. Through its multifaceted approach, the Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha became a milestone in the history of the Dalit movement, inspiring generations to fight for equality, dignity, and justice.

Another crucial aspect of Ambedkar's strategy was legal and constitutional reform. As the chief architect of the Indian Constitution, he played a vital role in ensuring that it provided safeguards against caste-based discrimination. Article 17 of

- Ambedkar argued that caste was deeply embedded in Hindu religious texts and practices

the Constitution abolished untouchability, making it illegal to discriminate against Dalits. Reservation policies were also introduced in education and employment to uplift historically oppressed communities. These legal measures were aimed at providing equal opportunities and breaking the cycle of caste-based exclusion. Despite legal protections, Ambedkar was aware that laws alone could not destroy caste. He strongly believed that Hindu society needed a fundamental ideological shift. In his seminal work, 'Annihilation of Caste,' he argued that caste was deeply embedded in Hindu religious texts and practices. He criticised Hinduism for legitimising caste-based discrimination and called for a complete rejection of the caste system. Unlike Mahatma Gandhi, who advocated for reforms within Hinduism, Ambedkar believed that caste was inseparable from the religion itself and could not be eradicated without a radical transformation of social and religious beliefs.

- Gandhi upheld the varna system, seeking reform within religion

Gandhi, though opposed to untouchability, upheld the varna system and sought to reform caste by removing its evils rather than dismantling it entirely. He believed in social upliftment through self-enlightenment and moral reform, referring to untouchables as Harijans (God's people). Ambedkar, on the other hand, saw caste as an inherently oppressive system rooted in Hindu scriptures and argued for its complete annihilation through legal, political, and social measures. Their most intense disagreement arose when Ambedkar demanded a separate electorate for Dalits, ensuring their independent political representation. Gandhi vehemently opposed this, fearing it would divide Hindu society, and went on a fast unto death to pressure Ambedkar into withdrawing his demand. Under public pressure, Ambedkar relented, leading to the Poona Pact of 1932, which granted Dalits reserved seats within a joint electorate. While Gandhi saw this as a victory for Hindu unity, Ambedkar remained dissatisfied, believing it compromised true Dalit empowerment. Their debate ultimately reflected the contrast between Gandhi's reformist approach and Ambedkar's radical vision for social justice.

- Ambedkar embraced Buddhism to escape caste oppression

Ambedkar's decision to convert to Buddhism in 1956 was a historic act of caste rejection. Along with thousands of his followers, he embraced Buddhism as a means to escape the social and religious oppression of the caste system. He saw Buddhism as a path to equality, rationality, and social justice. This mass conversion, known as the Dalit Buddhist Movement, continues to inspire people fighting against caste oppression



today. By rejecting Hinduism and adopting Buddhism, Ambedkar provided an alternative framework for social and spiritual liberation for Dalits.

4.1.3 Vision of Democracy and Social Justice

Ambedkar's vision of democracy extended far beyond its conventional understanding as a system of governance based on periodic elections and majority rule. For him, democracy was not merely a political arrangement but a comprehensive social philosophy that had to permeate all aspects of life, such as political, social, and economic. He firmly believed that a democracy that operated only at the level of electoral politics, without addressing deep-rooted social injustices and economic disparities, was both hollow and unstable. Ambedkar defined democracy as a way of life rooted in liberty, equality, and fraternity. Unlike a mechanical system of governance that determines who employs power, democracy, in his view, was a dynamic and ethical ideal aimed at fostering social harmony and justice. He argued that a truly democratic society must ensure that all individuals, regardless of caste, class, or gender, enjoy equal opportunities and dignity. Without this, democracy would remain an empty shell, liable to collapse under the weight of entrenched inequalities.

- Ambedkar defined democracy as a way of life rooted in liberty, equality, and fraternity

Ambedkar warned against reducing democracy to mere political representation. He maintained that democracy must be reflected in social institutions, family structures, and workplace environments. A society where birth determines one's social status contradicts the fundamental tenets of democracy. Therefore, democracy's true test lies in its ability to shatter hierarchical structures like the caste system and replace them with equitable social relationships. Ambedkar distinguished between political democracy and social democracy. Political democracy, which guarantees citizens the right to vote and elect their representatives, is necessary but insufficient. He argued that without social democracy, a system where liberty, equality, and fraternity become lived realities, political democracy would be unsustainable. He famously remarked:

- Democracy's true test is its ability to replace caste hierarchies with equity

¶ Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy. What does social democracy mean? It means a way of life which recognises liberty, equality, and fraternity as the principles of life.'

- Without social democracy, politics remains a tool for reinforcing hierarchies

Without social democracy, the political framework remains vulnerable to being drafted by dominant groups, reinforcing social hierarchies rather than dismantling them. He observed that in India, despite the adoption of democratic institutions, caste-based discrimination and economic disparity continued to persist, undermining the essence of democracy. Ambedkar recognised that Democracy's true test is its ability to replace caste hierarchies with equity and extend to the economic realm. Economic democracy, for him, was about ensuring that resources and opportunities were equitably distributed. He criticised capitalist structures that allowed wealth and power to be concentrated in the hands of a few, thereby enabling systemic oppression. He proposed state-led initiatives to address poverty, unemployment, and economic inequality. In his work, he advocated for land reforms, fair wages, and state intervention in key industries to protect the rights of workers and prevent the economic exploitation of marginalised communities.

- Ambedkar's economic vision was deeply tied to his commitment to social justice

Ambedkar's economic vision was deeply tied to his commitment to social justice. He argued that if democracy failed to provide economic security to its citizens, it would eventually degenerate into a system where the privileged few controlled the political machinery, rendering the masses powerless. To prevent this, he championed labour rights, fair wages, and affirmative action policies, ensuring the most disadvantaged groups had access to employment and economic opportunities. Ambedkar saw democracy as the most effective means to dismantle caste hierarchies. The caste system, being based on hereditary privilege and social exclusion, was fundamentally anti-democratic. It denied individuals the ability to choose their profession, associate freely, or participate in society as equals. Democracy, by contrast, emphasises individual rights, freedom of choice, and equal participation in public life.

- Ambedkar stressed that true democracy ensures equal rights and opportunities beyond periodic elections

For Ambedkar, democracy was not a self-sustaining system; it required continuous effort and vigilance. He warned against complacency, where democratic institutions existed in form but were subverted in practice. He was particularly critical of the tendency of Indian society to cling to hierarchical traditions while outwardly embracing democratic principles. He feared that without sincere efforts toward equality, democracy would become a facade, serving only the privileged classes. Quoting John Stuart Mill, Ambedkar urged citizens to avoid blindly following leaders or concentrating power in a few hands. He argued that democracy required an educated and active



citizenry willing to challenge oppression and hold authorities accountable. He emphasised that true democracy was not about periodic elections but about fostering an environment where all individuals could exercise their rights and fulfil their potential without fear or discrimination.

- Fulfilling Ambedkar's vision requires democracy to go beyond procedure and become a lived reality

Ambedkar's concept of democracy was revolutionary because it sought to transform Indian society. For him, democracy was not just about institutions but about an entire way of life that ensured justice, dignity, and equal opportunities for all. He viewed democracy as a tool to eradicate caste and economic inequality, advocating for structural changes in education, law, economy, and social relations. To realise Ambedkar's vision, democracy must continue to evolve beyond its procedural aspects and become a lived reality for all citizens. Ensuring equal access to education, economic security, and healthy legal protections against discrimination are necessary to sustain a truly democratic society.

- Ambedkar's vision for caste annihilation remains highly relevant in contemporary India

Even after Ambedkar's death, his vision for caste annihilation remains highly relevant in contemporary India. Although legal provisions have been put in place to combat caste discrimination, social and economic inequalities persist. Caste-based violence, honour killings, and exclusion from social and religious institutions still exist in Indian society. While reservation policies have helped many Dalits and backward communities to improve their economic status, they have also faced opposition from upper-caste groups, leading to tensions and debates over affirmative action.

- Ambedkar's vision demands ongoing efforts in education, economy, law, and social integration to end caste hierarchies

To achieve Ambedkar's vision, continuous efforts in education, economic empowerment, and social awareness are necessary. Society must move beyond symbolic gestures and work towards genuine social integration. Schools and universities must teach Ambedkar's ideas to create awareness about caste-based discrimination. Legal frameworks must be strictly implemented to ensure justice for the oppressed. Moreover, inter-caste interactions and marriages should be encouraged to break the barriers of caste. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's mission was not just about uplifting Dalits but about creating an egalitarian society free from caste-based hierarchies. His ideas on education, legal reforms, and religious transformation laid the foundation for a more just and inclusive India. However, caste annihilation is an ongoing struggle that requires persistent efforts. As Ambedkar famously said, 'I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women

have achieved,' highlighting that true progress lies in the empowerment of all marginalised groups. His vision continues to inspire movements for social justice, reminding us that the fight against caste is far from over but remains a crucial step towards a truly democratic society.

Summarized Overview

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a visionary leader, social reformer, and chief architect of the Indian Constitution, was born into a marginalised Dalit family and experienced caste-based discrimination from an early age. These hardships shaped his lifelong struggle against social injustice and his commitment to the upliftment of oppressed communities. He strongly advocated for the rights of Dalits, women, and other marginalised groups, emphasising education, economic empowerment, and political representation as essential tools for social change. His seminal work, *Annihilation of Caste*, critically analysed the rigid caste system and called for its complete abolition. Ambedkar led several significant social movements, including the Mahad Satyagraha in 1927, which demanded equal access to public water sources and temples for Dalits. As the chairman of the drafting committee of the Indian Constitution, he played a crucial role in embedding fundamental rights, reservations, and legal safeguards for marginalised communities. His contributions extended beyond social reform to economic policies, labour rights, and education. He firmly believed in democracy, equality, and fraternity as the foundation of a just society. In 1956, he embraced Buddhism in a historic mass conversion at Nagpur, inspiring millions of Dalits to seek social and spiritual liberation. His inheritance continues to shape movements for justice, equality, and human rights in India.

Self-Assessment

1. Explain the main ideas presented in *Annihilation of Caste* and why they remain relevant today.
2. How did Ambedkar contribute to the drafting of the Indian Constitution, and what key principles did he emphasise?
3. What were Ambedkar's views on democracy, and how did he see it as a tool for social transformation?
4. Why did Ambedkar believe that reforming Hinduism was impossible?



5. Describe the reasons behind Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism and its impact on Dalit communities.
6. Why did Ambedkar believe political power was essential to empower marginalised communities?
7. How did Ambedkar define the concept of 'social justice,' and what measures did he propose to achieve it?

Assignments

1. Write about the persisting issues of caste discrimination, economic inequality, and lack of representation, and suggest possible solutions for a more just society.
2. Dr. Ambedkar rejected Hinduism and converted to Buddhism as a means of social and spiritual liberation. Discuss how this decision influenced Dalit movements and analyse its relevance in today's fight against caste-based discrimination.
3. Analyse the significance of reservations in education and employment as advocated by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Discuss how these policies have impacted marginalised communities in contemporary society.
4. Assess the role of education as a tool for social empowerment, as emphasised by Ambedkar. Illustrate your answer with examples of contemporary initiatives that align with his vision.

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UNIT 2

Periyar

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- understand the core principles of Periyar's philosophy
- examine the oppressive nature of the caste system and Periyar's efforts to overcome the barriers of a caste-ridden society
- identify Periyar's contributions to women's empowerment and his opposition to gender-based discrimination
- analyse Periyar's critique of religion and his emphasis on scientific thinking for social progress

Background

In ancient India, the social structure was heavily influenced by the caste system, which organised society into distinct groups based on birth. Even though concepts like duty, ethics, and justice were prominently discussed in philosophical and religious texts, the rigid hierarchy often hindered the realisation of social justice and equality for all individuals. Movements like Buddhism emerged as a challenge to the caste system, advocating for a casteless society based on moral conduct rather than birth. However, over time, these reforms gradually faded, and traditional practices grew stronger, deepening caste-based discrimination. The hierarchical structure of society remained rigid, with practices such as untouchability and social exclusion severely affecting large sections of the population.

By the 20th century, figures like Periyar E.V. Ramasamy emerged as key advocates for humanism, social justice, and equality. Periyar's philosophy was deeply shaped by historical struggles against caste discrimination, gender inequality, and religious orthodoxy. He observed how religion was often used as a tool to perpetuate social



hierarchies and sought to eliminate these oppressive structures through rational thought and activism. His work highlighted how ancient social structures continue to shape society and emphasised the need for continued efforts to achieve equality and justice.

Keywords

Self-Respect, Rationalism, Social Justice, Caste Abolition, Atheism, Gender Equality, Economic Equality, Freedom

Discussion

- Periyar emphasised rationalism, self-respect, and social justice

Periyar E.V. Ramasamy's philosophy is rooted in the principles of rationalism, self-respect, and social justice. He was born on September 17, 1879, in Erode, Tamil Nadu, into a wealthy merchant family. His early exposure to the rigid caste system and the social injustices of his time deeply influenced his later life. Although he initially engaged in business and politics, his disappointment with the Indian National Congress and its failure to address caste-based discrimination led him to focus entirely on social reform. He believed that self-respect was the foundation of a just society and that no person should feel inferior because of caste, religion, or gender. He challenged old traditions, rejected blind faith, and encouraged people to rely on reason and logic rather than unquestioned beliefs.

- Periyar promoted critical thinking to challenge unfair systems

Periyar's impact goes far beyond his efforts in social reform. He was not only a leader who fought for equality and justice but also a gifted writer and powerful speaker. Through his writings and speeches, he shared his ideas with the world, inspiring countless people to think critically and challenge unfair systems. His works include books, essays, and speeches that address a wide range of issues, such as caste discrimination, gender inequality, religious superstitions, and the importance of rational thinking. These writings remain relevant even today, encouraging people to question outdated traditions and work toward a fairer and more just society. One of Periyar's most famous sayings, 'Question everything, reject what is unjust,' perfectly captures his approach to life and social change. He believed that blind acceptance of traditions, customs, or authority often leads to inequality and oppression. Instead, he urged people to use reason and logic to evaluate what is right and wrong. By questioning unjust practices and

rejecting those that harm society, individuals can contribute to meaningful social transformation.

- Periyar gave importance to Tamil identity, cultural pride, and autonomy

Periyar played an important role in protecting and promoting Tamil identity and culture. He was a strong advocate for linguistic pride and cultural autonomy. His ideas were instrumental in the rise of Dravidian politics. He believed that the preservation of the Tamil language and culture was essential for the empowerment of Tamil-speaking people and for resisting the imposition of external cultural and linguistic norms. Periyar's vision was not just about cultural preservation but also about asserting the political and social rights of South Indian communities. He led protests against the imposition of external cultural and linguistic norms in Tamil Nadu, arguing that it was a form of cultural imperialism. Periyar encouraged people to take pride in their Tamil heritage and to preserve their linguistic and cultural traditions. He advocated for the use of Tamil in education, administration, and public life, emphasising its richness and historical significance.

4.2.1 Major Influences in Shaping Periyar's Philosophy

- Periyar saw Tirukkural as a guide to equality

Periyar was deeply inspired by the ancient Tamil text, Tirukkural, written by Tiruvalluvar. He saw Tirukkural as a source of self-respect and a guiding force for humanity. Periyar believed that the teachings of Tirukkural transcended caste, religion, and the concept of God, and he found strong reflections of Dravidian culture within it. He considered Tiruvalluvar to be an atheist and admired his secular, rational, and humanistic ideas, which closely matched his own beliefs. For him, Tirukkural was not just a literary masterpiece but also an encyclopaedia of knowledge, a symbol of justice, and a guide to discipline. He appreciated Tiruvalluvar's intellectual and secular approach to life and society. Periyar strongly believed that knowledge and wisdom were not limited to any specific caste, race, or religion but were meant for everyone. He shared Tiruvalluvar's vision of social equality and unity, opposing discrimination based on birth. He was particularly fond of the Tirukkural verses that stressed equality.

The humanistic principles in Tirukkural became a cornerstone of Periyar's philosophy. He often quoted verses from Tirukkural to support his arguments and validate his views. Periyar was inspired by Tiruvalluvar's progressive ideas on marriage, women's rights, and family life. He praised



- Periyar followed Tiruvalluvar's progressive ideas.

Tiruvalluvar's advocacy for women's liberation, divorce, remarriage, property rights, and the concept of calling a bride a 'life partner.' Like Tirukkural, Periyar rejected outdated ritualistic practices, focusing instead on equality, justice, truth, and progress. He often used the ethical teachings of Tirukkural to strengthen his arguments and spread its noble ideas.

- Periyar was influenced by Vaikunta Swamikal and Jyotirao Phule

Along with the ancient Tamil text Tirukkural, Periyar's ideas were also shaped by both Eastern and Western thinkers. From the Eastern tradition, Vaikunta Swamikal played an important role in shaping Periyar's thought process, particularly through his advocacy of communal dining and equality. These ideas laid the groundwork for Periyar's Self-Respect Movement. Inspired by Swamikal, Periyar actively opposed caste discrimination, Brahminical dominance, and the perpetuation of meaningless rituals, striving to create a more equitable society. In the same way, Jyotirao Phule's progressive ideas left a lasting impact on Periyar. Phule's relentless fight against caste oppression and his emphasis on women's education aligned with Periyar's own vision. Phule's critique of nationalism, which ignored social reform and his unwavering focus on equality are closely related to Periyar's belief that true progress could only be achieved through the elimination of oppressive structures.

- Periyar was influenced by Sree Narayana Guru, Ramalinga Adigal, and Ambedkar

Sree Narayana Guru also influenced Periyar with his messages, which matched Periyar's rationalist ideas. Guru's focus on ending rituals, casteism, and untouchability helped to shape Periyar's views on humanism and equality. In the same way, Ramalinga Adigal's dream of a society without caste or class, along with his push for women's education, inspired Periyar's work for social reform. B.R. Ambedkar, a leading voice against caste discrimination, also deeply influenced Periyar. Both Ambedkar and Periyar shared common goals of social justice and rational thinking, which strengthened Periyar's determination to challenge outdated traditions.

- Periyar was influenced by Socrates' and Marx's philosophies

Periyar found inspiration from several Western thinkers whose ideas were closely associated with his vision of social reform. One such figure was Socrates, the ancient Greek philosopher known for his fearless questioning of established beliefs. Socrates encouraged people to use reason and think for themselves instead of unthinkingly following traditions. Similarly, Periyar promoted critical thinking and challenged religious superstitions and caste-based discrimination. Because of his dedication to rational inquiry and fearless questioning of

authority, Periyar was often referred to as the ‘Socrates of Tamil Nadu.’ Another major influence on Periyar was Karl Marx, the German philosopher and political thinker who developed the theory of class struggle and socialism. Marx argued that society was divided into two main groups the ruling class, which controlled wealth and power, and the working class, which was exploited. He believed that economic and social equality could be achieved by removing these divisions. Periyar adopted many of Marx’s ideas and applied them to Indian society, particularly in his Self-Respect Movement.

4.2.2 Rationalist-Approach

The rationalistic approach was a central pillar of Periyar’s philosophical and social ideology. At its heart, this way of thinking emphasises the primacy of reason, logic, and scientific approach over blind faith. Periyar argued that reliance on reason and evidence was essential for achieving a just and equitable society. He was particularly critical of religion, which he viewed as a mechanism for perpetuating caste-based hierarchies, gender inequality, and social oppression. He contended that religious texts and practices were often used to justify the exploitation of marginalised communities and to preserve existing social structures. For Periyar, rationalism was not merely an intellectual exercise but a tool for social liberation. He sought to demolish the structures of oppression by encouraging people to question and reject irrational beliefs and practices.

- Periyar emphasised reason and logic over blind faith

- Periyar advocated atheism, rationalism, and rejection of religious dogma

- Periyar promoted scientific thinking

Periyar openly identified as an atheist and encouraged others to reject belief in God and religion. He believed that atheism was essential for fostering rational thinking and scientific inquiry. Periyar’s atheism was not just a personal stance but a call for societal transformation, urging people to question and reject religious dogma. He criticised rituals such as temple entry restrictions, caste-based segregation, and the veneration of Brahminical authority. He also challenged superstitious practices, such as astrology and faith healing, which he saw as exploitative and irrational. He critiqued the dogmas of all religions, advocating for a secular and rational approach to life.

Periyar’s approach was both theoretical and practical, addressing the intellectual and social dimensions of rationalism. He believed that scientific thinking was essential for overcoming superstition and fostering progress. He encouraged people to embrace evidence-based knowledge and to question traditional beliefs that lacked a rational foundation. Periyar recognised the importance of education in promoting rationalism. He believed



that education should empower individuals to question authority and to think independently rather than passively accept traditional beliefs. His efforts in this area included establishing schools and institutions that promoted rationalist and humanistic principles.

- Periyar linked rationalism with humanism

Periyar's rationalistic approach was closely related to his commitment to humanistic values. He advocated for a society based on equality, justice, and compassion rather than on religious or caste-based hierarchies. His rationalist approach sought to replace dogma with empathy and to prioritise human welfare over ritualistic practices. This humanistic dimension of his philosophy made rationalism a tool for social reform rather than an abstract intellectual engagement. Through public speeches, writings, and activism, Periyar encouraged people to reject irrational practices and to embrace a rational and humanistic worldview.

4.2.3 Self-Respect and Social Equality

- Periyar's self-respect philosophy emphasised dignity

Periyar's philosophy of self-respect is a cornerstone of his social and ideological framework. This concept asserts that every individual, regardless of caste, gender, religion, or social status, inherently deserves to live with dignity and self-worth. It was revolutionary in the context of early 20th-century India, where rigid caste hierarchies and social inequalities dominated societal structures. Periyar's notion of self-respect was not merely about external equality but also about fostering an internal sense of pride and confidence in individuals, particularly those from marginalised communities. He argued that true liberation could only occur when people recognised their values and rejected the oppressive systems that denied them their humanity.

- Periyar linked self-respect to education and economic independence

Periyar linked self-respect to education and economic independence. He believed that true self-respect could only be achieved when individuals were empowered through knowledge and self-reliance. For Periyar, education was not just about learning to read and write; it was a powerful tool to help people think critically, question oppressive traditions, and stand up against injustice. He argued that education could free individuals from the grip of superstitions, caste-based hierarchies, and blind faith, enabling them to make informed decisions about their lives and society. Periyar also emphasised the importance of economic independence. He saw that many marginalised communities, especially those trapped in caste-

based labour systems, were economically dependent on others, which perpetuated their exploitation and denied them dignity. He believed that economic self-reliance was essential for breaking free from these exploitative structures. When individuals could earn their own livelihood and support themselves, they would no longer be forced to depend on oppressive systems or individuals for survival. This economic freedom, according to Periyar, was a crucial step toward achieving self-respect and equality.

- Periyar's self-respect philosophy challenged inequality through education and reform

Periyar's philosophy of self-respect became a driving force in the fight against social injustice and inequality, encouraging individuals to question oppressive traditions, challenge discriminatory practices, and reclaim their dignity through education, economic independence, and social reform. By addressing caste, religion, and gender-based discrimination, Periyar's vision aimed to create a society where every individual could live with freedom, equality, and self-worth. His work continues to inspire movements for social change, reminding us that true progress happens when individuals and communities stand up for their rights and recognise their own value.

4.2.3.1 Periyar's Vision on Women's Freedom

Periyar's concept of self-respect addressed gender equality and the rights of women in society. He firmly believed that the liberation and empowerment of women were essential for the overall progress of society. Periyar observed that traditional social structures, particularly those influenced by religious doctrines, systematically oppressed women. He strongly advocated for women's rights and challenged the patriarchal norms and practices that oppressed women and denied them their dignity and freedom. He spoke out against harmful traditions like child marriage, which robbed young girls of their childhood and opportunities for growth. He also criticised the dowry system, which treated women as burdens and often led to their exploitation and abuse. He challenged the beliefs that justified gender discrimination and argued that societal norms must be questioned if they perpetuate inequality. His critique was not just about cultural practices but was also a call to negate the ideological foundations that upheld women's subjugation. Periyar encouraged women to reject roles imposed upon them by tradition, advocating for self-respect and autonomy. According to him, freedom is not granted; it must be claimed through

- Periyar's self-respect philosophy advocated women's rights and equality



self-awareness and collective action. He inspired women to question societal expectations, reject subservient roles, and assert their right to live with dignity.

- Periyar advocated equal rights for women

For Periyar, rationalism was the key to overcoming the oppressive structures that enchained women. He urged both men and women to adopt a scientific temper and critical thinking, challenging superstitions and dogmas that justified inequality. His advocacy for education was not merely about literacy but about empowering individuals to think independently and question unjust traditions. He believed that an educated woman could not only improve her own life but also uplift her family and community. Periyar called for women's active participation in social and political life. He believed that women should have equal rights to voice their opinions, take on leadership roles, and shape the future of society.

- Periyar redefined chastity, marriage, and love based on equality

Periyar also redefined concepts such as chastity, marriage, and love from a rationalist perspective. He argued that chastity was often used as a tool to control women's bodies and choices, whereas true moral integrity should be based on personal ethics, not societal expectations. In the same way, he viewed marriage not as a sacred duty but as a partnership based on mutual respect and equality. His ideas challenged the traditional notions that confined women to roles of dependence and submission, promoting instead a vision of relationships grounded in freedom and personal choice.

4.2.3.2 Periyar's Critique of Caste

- Periyar's Self-Respect Movement fought against caste-based discrimination

Periyar believed that the caste system, strengthened by religious dogma and traditional practices, was the primary obstacle to social progress and individual freedom. He emphasised that individuals must first free themselves from the mental and social chains imposed by caste and religion to achieve true progress. To practise this philosophy, Periyar launched the Self-Respect Movement in 1925. This movement aimed to empower marginalised communities, particularly the lower castes, by encouraging them to reject caste-based identities and embrace a sense of dignity and equality. The movement sought to abolish the cultural and social practices that perpetuated caste discrimination and untouchability. Periyar advocated for inter-caste marriages, widow remarriage, and the abolition of caste-based titles as practical steps toward achieving self-respect.

- Periyar played a key role in the Vaikom Satyagraha

Periyar emerged as a towering figure in the anti-caste movement through his participation in the Vaikom Satyagraha of 1924. This historic agitation was an important moment in India's struggle for social justice, as it challenged the caste-based discrimination that denied lower-caste individuals the right to use public paths surrounding the Vaikom temple in Kerala. Periyar's involvement in the Satyagraha as a fearless social reformer gave him the title of *Vaikom Veer* (Hero of Vaikom). Periyar joined the agitation on invitation, together with his wife, and stood at the forefront of the movement in every sense. His participation was marked by unwavering commitment and leadership. He actively engaged in every consultative meeting, peace committee, and deputation, collaborating with other leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi and Sree Narayana Guru, who visited Vaikom during the agitation.

- Vaikom Satyagraha is a powerful metaphor for social justice

Periyar's influential role was such that he became a key interlocutor between the protesters and the authorities, earning the respect of all parties involved. Despite being the only prominent leader from outside Kerala, Periyar's contributions were so significant that he was invited to preside over the victory celebration of the Vaikom Satyagraha. His leadership and dedication to the cause left a permanent mark on the movement, which is remembered in national history as a powerful metaphor for social justice and the fight against caste-based oppression.

- Periyar opposed Gandhi's moderate caste reform approach

Periyar's radical critique of the caste system often placed him in conflict with Mahatma Gandhi, whose approach to caste reform was comparatively moderate. Periyar, on the other hand, was uncompromising in his demand for the complete annihilation of the caste system. This fundamental difference in ideology led to a growing rift between the two leaders. Periyar's dissatisfaction with Gandhi and the Indian National Congress grew increasingly stronger over time. He realised that the Congress and the mainstream nationalist movement were not suitable platforms for asserting the identity, status, and self-respect of lower-caste communities. In 1925, Periyar made the decisive move to resign from the Congress party, marking a turning point in his political and social activism. This decision reflected his commitment to prioritising the struggles of marginalised communities over the broader nationalist agenda, which he felt often sidelined caste-based injustices.

Periyar strongly opposed the caste system, both in his personal life and in society. In 1929, he publicly dropped



- Periyar rejected caste identity and promoted social equality

his caste surname, 'Naicker,' to reject caste identity. This act inspired many and promoted social change. He encouraged others to do the same to create unity and equality. His bold action had a deep impact, leading many people in Tamil Nadu to stop using caste surnames. Periyar's action was not merely symbolic; it was a powerful statement against the hierarchical and oppressive nature of the caste system. His emphasis on denying the Brahminical dominance and promoting the Dravidian identity laid the foundation for a more equitable society. However, his confrontational approach and vehement criticism of religion often drew criticism for being divisive and polarising.

Summarized Overview

Periyar E.V. Ramasamy's philosophy was based on rationalism, self-respect, and social justice. He opposed caste discrimination, religious superstitions, and gender inequality, advocating for a society where reason and logic guided human actions. His Self-Respect Movement aimed to free individuals from oppression, emphasising that no one should feel inferior due to birth, gender, or social status. He viewed Tamil identity as crucial for cultural and political empowerment and resisted external cultural influences. His writings and speeches challenged traditional authority, urging people to question and reject unjust practices. His famous saying, 'Question everything, reject what is unjust,' captured his commitment to rational inquiry and social equality.

Periyar was deeply influenced by thinkers like Tiruvalluvar, Vaikunta Swamikal, Jyotirao Phule, Sree Narayana Guru, and B.R. Ambedkar. He admired Tirukkural's secular and humanistic values and used its teachings to support his arguments for equality. From the West, Socrates' critical thinking and Karl Marx's ideas on class struggle shaped his vision of social change. His rationalistic approach led him to critique religion, superstitions, and oppressive customs, advocating for a secular and just society. Periyar was also a strong advocate for women's rights, opposing child marriage, dowry, and restrictions on women's education and freedom. He emphasised that self-respect, economic independence, and education were key to empowerment. His ideas continue to inspire social movements, reinforcing the importance of rational thinking and justice in society.

Self-Assessment

1. Explain Periyar's philosophy of self-respect and its connection to social equality.
2. How did Periyar contribute to the promotion of Tamil language and culture?
3. What was the significance of Periyar's involvement in the Vaikom Satyagraha of 1924?

4. How did Periyar's rationalistic approach challenge traditional religious beliefs and practices?
5. What role did education and economic independence play in Periyar's vision for social reform?

Assignments

1. Discuss Periyar's concept of self-respect and its impact on the social and political movements in Tamil Nadu.
2. Evaluate Periyar's rationalistic approach and its criticism of religious dogma. How did it shape his social reform efforts?
3. Analyse the contributions of Periyar in his fight against caste-based discrimination.
4. Discuss the importance of Periyar's critique of gender inequality and his advocacy for women's rights in the context of his broader social reform goals.
5. Periyar rejected traditional religious practices and advocated for atheism. Assess the strengths and limitations of his approach to achieving social justice and equality.

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UNIT 3

Savitribai Phule

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- understand the life and contributions of Savitribai Phule in education, social reform, and women's empowerment
- analyse the efforts of Savitribai Phule in establishing schools for marginalised communities, particularly women and Dalit-Bahujans
- evaluate how education served as a tool to challenge caste and gender-based discrimination in India
- examine the social reform initiatives led by Savitribai Phule to eradicate societal oppression and advocate for equality and justice.

Background

A deep-rooted social inequality existed in nineteenth-century India. Caste discrimination, gender oppression, and illiteracy were widespread, which kept large sections of society, especially women and lower-caste communities, away from education and opportunities. At that time, child marriages were common, women were expected to remain confined to household duties, and widows faced severe restrictions. Education was seen as a privilege meant only for upper-caste men, while Dalits and marginalised groups were denied even basic learning. Superstitions and rigid customs further strengthened this oppression. Amidst this darkness, Savitribai Phule emerged as a fearless pioneer of education and social reform. At a time when women were not even allowed to read and write, she became India's first female teacher and headmistress. She dedicated her whole life to educating girls and Dalit-Bahujans. Along with her husband, Jyotirao Phule, she fought against caste discrimination, untouchability, and gender injustice, believing that education was the key to true freedom and empowerment. Understanding her life and contributions helps us see how education can be a powerful tool for change.



Keywords

Women's Empowerment, Social Equality, Caste Discrimination, Educational Reform, Untouchability, Dalit Literature, Social Justice

Discussion

4.3.1 Early Life and Education

Savitribai was born on January 3, 1831, into a farming family near Pune, Maharashtra. She was the eldest daughter of Khandoji Neveshe Patil and Lakshmi. During that time, it was common for girls to be married at a very young age. In 1840, nine-year-old Savitribai married twelve-year-old Jyotirao Phule. Jyotirao later became a renowned thinker, writer, social activist, and anti-caste reformer, playing a key role in the social reform movement in Maharashtra. Savitribai started her education after her marriage. Due to her eagerness to learn, Jyotirao taught her to read and write at home. Jyotirao also trained her to become a teacher. She later passed her third and fourth-year exams from a regular school and developed a deep passion for teaching. Savitribai also received training at Ms. Farar's Institution in Ahmednagar and Ms. Mitchell's Normal School in Pune.

- Savitribai's passion for teaching made her a pioneering educator

4.3.2 Savitribai: A Pioneer of Education

Savitribai and Jyotirao Phule lived in a Dalit working-class locality in Pune, an environment that shaped their social consciousness. Phules believed that ignorance, caste discrimination, and language barriers were the root causes of suffering in India. They viewed education as the most powerful tool for overcoming these injustices, and they dedicated themselves to creating learning opportunities for marginalised communities, particularly for women and Dalit-Bahujans. To address this, they dedicated themselves to education and, in 1848, established India's first school for Dalit and Muslim girls in Pune, along with the 'Native Library.' At the time, Savitribai was still a teenager. Their decision to educate girls and marginalised communities faced strong opposition from their families and society. However, a friend named Usman Sheikh and his sister Fatima Sheikh supported them by providing shelter and a space to start the school. Savitribai became the school's first teacher, marking the beginning of her public life as a pioneer for women's education in modern India.

- Phules founded India's first school for Dalit and Muslim girls

- Savitribai Phule's vision of inclusive education

Recognising the need for inclusive education, the Phules also established schools for children from the Mang and Mahar castes, who were considered untouchables then. John Warden, the Chairperson of the Education Board, recognised the importance of their work during a visit in 1851. He praised Savitribai, a member of the Mali (gardener) caste, for her dedication to educating girls. Training programs for young married women were also conducted, further expanding opportunities for women. By 1852, the Phules were running three schools for girls. The first three institutions were established at Chiplunkar Wada (July 1851), Rasta Peth (November 1851), and Vetal Peth (March 1852), with enrolments of 48, 51, and 33 girls, respectively. These schools had dedicated teachers, including Vishnupant Moreshwar and Vitthal Bhaskar.

- Savitribai Phule is the first female teacher and headmistress in modern India

Savitribai Phule served as the headmistress of the first school, earning her the title of India's first female teacher and headmistress. Though only eight girls attended on the first day, the number quickly grew, reflecting the impact of their groundbreaking efforts in education reform. Unfortunately, all three schools were closed by 1858 for various reasons, including a lack of funding, differences in opinions about the curriculum, and withdrawal of government support. Despite these setbacks, Savitribai, Jyotirao, and Fatima Sheikh continued their mission to educate people from oppressed communities. The institutional work that began in 1848 shaped modern India's educational framework. The British government recognised their educational contributions, awarding the Phule family and naming Savitribai the best teacher in 1852.

- Savitribai faced relentless opposition while educating girls and the marginalised

Over the years, Savitribai started 18 schools, teaching children from different castes. Along with Fatima Sheikh, she taught women and those from downtrodden castes. Savitribai faced relentless opposition and harassment while pursuing her mission of educating girls and marginalised communities. Men would insult her with lewd remarks, throw stones and mud, or even fling cow dung and mud at Savitribai when she walked to school. But she remained strong, and to manage this, she carried an extra saree to change into. Despite this, she never stopped her work. The institution eventually appointed a guard to ensure her safety and that of the students. Savitribai responded to her harassers with remarkable grace and strength, saying, 'As I do the sacred task of teaching my sisters, the stones and cow dung you throw feel like flowers to me. May God bless you!' This story highlights her extraordinary courage.



4.3.3 Women's Empowerment and Social Justice Initiatives

- Savitribai founded Mahila Seva Mandal to empower women with awareness of their rights

Apart from establishing educational institutions, they aimed to challenge the oppressive caste and gender hierarchies of their time. In 1852, Savitribai founded the 'Mahila Seva Mandal' to raise awareness among women about their rights and social issues. She successfully organised a barbers' strike in Mumbai to stop the humiliating practice of shaving the heads of Brahmin widows. The strike gained national attention and was reported in 'The Times.' Women from England even sent letters congratulating them on their success. The Phules believed that education should prepare students for self-reliance. Thus, they advocated for schools to teach trades and crafts alongside academics. They created a curriculum tailored to the interests of children from poorer backgrounds. In 1854–55, they launched a literacy mission. In 1855, Savitribai and Jyotirao also opened a night school for farmers and labourers. They also worked to fight superstitions, caste pressures, and societal distractions like fairs and pilgrimages. Savitribai introduced financial support or stipends to address poverty for children who attended school to reduce dropouts.

- Savitribai Phule inspired students to explore their potential

Phule encouraged creativity among students, leading to remarkable achievements. Savitribai Phule encouraged young girls to write and paint, inspiring them to explore their potential. In 1855, Mukta, a 14-year-old Matang student of Savitribai Phule, wrote an autobiographical essay that became a significant milestone in Marathi literature. Her essay is considered one of the earliest examples of modern Dalit literature. In it, she boldly questioned why Brahmins claimed sole authority over the Vedas and argued that non-Brahmins were denied access to religious texts. She wrote, 'Does this not mean we are left without a religion? Oh God, please show us the right path.' The Editor of the *Dnyanodaya* newspaper was deeply impressed by the essay and published it. It was later included in the Education Report of the Mumbai Presidency and referenced in N.V. Joshi's book, *Pune Shaharache Varnana* (The Description of Pune City), published in 1868.

Savitribai also held regular parent-teacher meetings. The holistic approaches of Phule included educating parents and promoting the benefits of education to Dalit and Bahujan communities.

- Savitribai Phule pioneered education and social reform

Through her efforts, Savitribai became a pioneer in education and an enduring inspiration for future generations. Phules' efforts created a lasting impact by educating children and transforming societal attitudes toward learning and empowerment. In 1863, recognising the hardships faced by widows and marginalised women, they established the Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha, a care center providing shelter and support. This initiative protected helpless women from social stigma and harsh disciplinary measures. Despite financial constraints, they opened their home as a care center for widows, spreading awareness across Pune and pilgrimage sites. Their commitment to social justice not only provided immediate relief but also challenged oppressive societal norms, advocating for a more compassionate and inclusive society.

- Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha, which became the first infanticide prevention home in India

By 1884, 35 widows had sought refuge in their shelter. Savitribai personally assisted in delivering these women's babies and cared for both the mothers and their children. Unlike others who only talked about the issues, Savitribai and Jotirao took concrete steps to bring about change. Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha, which became the first infanticide prevention home in India. In 1874, they adopted a child from a widow. This adoption sent a powerful message to progressive members of society. Their adopted son, Yashavantrao, later became a doctor and married a woman from another caste. Savitribai focused on fighting social evils like child marriage and sati, which severely affected the lives of women. She worked hard to bring child widows into the mainstream by educating and empowering them, and she also encouraged their remarriage. However, these efforts faced strong opposition from the conservative upper-caste society.

- Savitribai Phule fought against caste discrimination and advocated equality

Savitribai Phule worked alongside her husband to fight against untouchability, the caste system, and discrimination. Together, they advocated for equal rights for lower castes and worked to reform Hindu family life. During a time when untouchables were treated as impure, they opened their well to provide water to the untouchables. Savitribai was also actively involved in the 'Satyashodhak Samaj' (truth-seekers society), a social reform society founded by Jyotirao on September 24, 1873, in Pune, aimed to challenge caste and religious traditions. The Samaj included members from various backgrounds, such as Muslims, Non-Brahmins, Brahmins, and government officials. Its goal was to free women, Shudras, Dalits, and other oppressed groups from exploitation. Through the Samaj,



they organised simple, low-cost ‘Satyashodhak marriages,’ eliminating dowry, priests, and unnecessary expenses, where the bride and groom exchanged vows as pledges. Savitribai led the women’s section of the Samaj and became its chairperson after Jyotirao died in 1890, continuing his work until her death.

- Savitribai’s poems reflect her commitment to social justice and equality

Savitribai and Jyotirao worked tirelessly to help those in need. They distributed free food in many areas and set up free food hostels across Maharashtra. In 1877, during a severe drought, Savitribai influenced the British government to initiate relief efforts. They went from village to village, collecting funds to provide relief. With the help of their friends, they started the Victoria Balashram in Dhankawadi, where they fed thousand poor people daily. Savitribai also raised her voice against caste and gender discrimination through her writings. Her poems, compiled in books like *Kavya Phule* and *Bavan Kashi Subodh Ratnakar*, reflect her commitment to social justice and equality. Savitribai Phule created some essential writings collected in a book titled *The Complete Works of Savitribai Phule*, edited by Dr. M. G. Mali.

- Savitribai Phule’s compassionate attitude towards the needy

The Phules opened a hostel in their home for students from faraway places who wanted to study. A student named Laxman Karadi Jaaya wrote in his memoirs about Savitribai’s kindness, saying she cared for the students more than a mother. Another student, Mahadu Sahadu Waghole, described her as generous and compassionate, always helping the poor by offering them food and clothing. Savitribai and Jotirao had a very loving and respectful relationship. Despite their modest lifestyle, Savitribai believed in giving to others, often saying, ‘What do we take with us when we die?’ Her kindness and humility left a lasting impression on everyone she met.

- The Phules fought for equality through education and reform

Jotirao and Savitribai Phule initiated a transformative cultural, social, and educational movement in India for women, Shudras, and Atishudras. Savitribai’s kindness, perseverance, and commitment encouraged generations to challenge discrimination and strive for equality. In 1897, during a severe plague epidemic, she selflessly cared for the sick, ultimately catching the disease while carrying an afflicted child to the hospital. She surrendered to the illness, leaving behind a legacy of compassion and courage. Due to their extensive social work and commitment to uplifting the oppressed, the Phules faced financial hardships. Despite their financial struggles, the Phules remained steadfast in their mission, dedicating their lives to social justice and education. Jotirao stood beside Savitribai in

their reform efforts, making their partnership a defining force in India's fight for equality. Their progressive vision and tireless dedication transformed lives, laying the groundwork for an inclusive society.

- Savitribai Phule laid the groundwork for an inclusive and democratic knowledge system

Savitribai Phule's contributions to education and social reform were deeply philosophical, reflecting ideas of justice, equality, and human dignity. Her vision aligned with the concept of epistemic justice, which argues that denying education to certain groups is a form of oppression. By challenging the caste system and patriarchy, she not only provided knowledge to marginalised communities but also questioned the very structure of knowledge itself. Her efforts align with critical pedagogy, a philosophical approach that views education as a means to empower the oppressed. In doing so, she transformed education from a tool of exclusion into a force for liberation. Her schools did not merely teach literacy but encouraged critical thinking and self-respect, making her an early advocate for education as a path to social change.

- By integrating practical reform with philosophical ideals, she reshaped the discourse on equality

Furthermore, Savitribai's work can be understood through the lens of feminist ethics, particularly the ethics of care. Rather than seeing education and reform as abstract ideas, she engaged with the lived realities of marginalised people, addressing their immediate struggles while pushing for long-term change. Her fight against widow oppression, her adoption of an orphaned child, and her role in the Satyashodhak Samaj demonstrate a deep commitment to collective well-being. She believed that education should not only provide knowledge but also cultivate moral responsibility and social awareness. In this way, her philosophy was not just about learning but about learning to create a just society. Her legacy continues to inspire feminist, Dalit, and social justice movements today, proving that education is most powerful when it challenges injustice and builds a more inclusive world.

Summarized Overview

Savitribai Phule was an important educator in advancing women's education and challenging caste and gender-based discrimination in 19th-century India. Along with her husband, Jyotirao Phule, Savitribai worked tirelessly to break barriers in a society deeply rooted in caste and gender-based discrimination. For this, they established the first school for Dalit and Muslim girls in 1848 despite facing severe societal opposition. Committed to inclusive education, the Phules opened multiple schools and



introduced literacy programs for marginalised communities. Savitribai also led various social reform initiatives, such as the Mahila Seva Mandal, widow care through Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha and efforts against untouchability. Her resilience in overcoming societal obstacles, her advocacy for women's rights, and her compassionate work during the 1897 plague epidemic highlight her legacy of courage and selflessness. The Phules' contributions laid the foundation for social justice, equality, and educational reform, inspiring future generations to challenge oppressive structures and build a more inclusive society.

Self-Assessment

1. What were the challenges Savitribai Phule faced while educating girls and marginalised communities in 19th-century India?
2. How did Savitribai Phule contribute to widow welfare, and what initiative did she start to support them?
3. What was the significance of the 'Mahila Seva Mandal'?
4. How did Savitribai and Jyotirao Phule promote social equality through the 'Satyashodhak Samaj'?
5. How did Savitribai Phule's educational and social initiatives lay the foundation for future reforms in India?

Assignments

1. Analyse the role of education as a tool for social reform in the life and work of Savitribai Phule. How did her initiatives help empower marginalised communities?
2. Discuss the relevance of Savitribai Phule's efforts in the present-day context. How can her model of inclusive education be applied today?
3. Elaborate the significance of the Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha established by Savitribai Phule. How did this initiative contribute to changing societal attitudes toward widows?

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Suggested Reading

1. Sundararaman, T. (2008, December 12). Savitribai Phule First Memorial Lecture. NCERT Memorial Lecture Series. Organised in collaboration with Maniben Nanavati Women's College, Mumbai.
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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

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