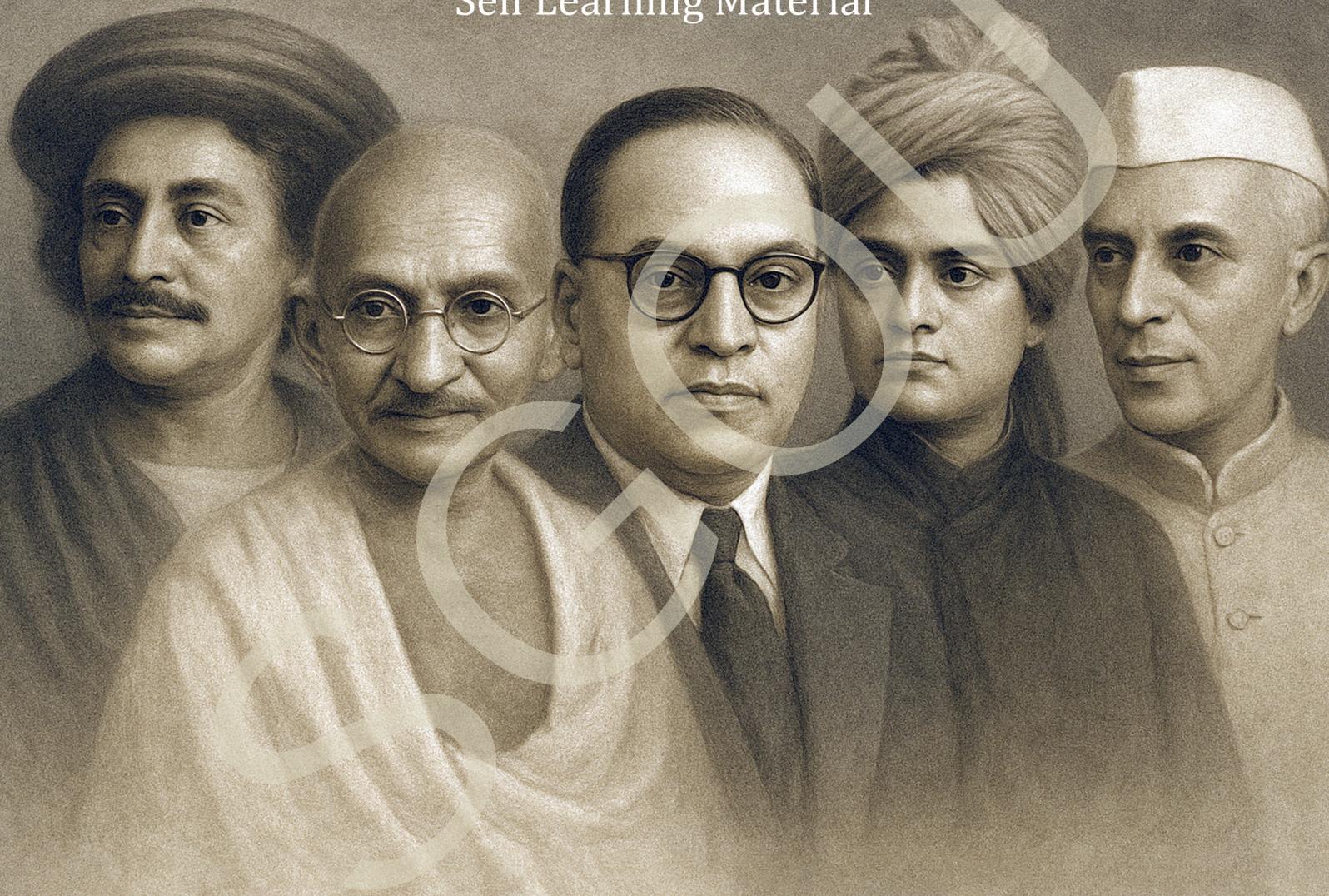# Indian Political Thought

COURSE CODE: M23PS09DC

Postgraduate Programme in Political Science
Discipline Core Course
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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Indian Political Thought

Course Code: M23PS09DC

Semester - III

Discipline Core Course
Postgraduate Programme in Political Science
Self Learning Material
(With Model Question Paper Sets)

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

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INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

Course Code: M23PS09DC
Semester- III
Discipline Core Course
Postgraduate Programme in Political Science

SREENARAYANAGURU
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Regards,
Dr. Jagathy Raj V.P.   01-06-2025

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BLOCK 1
Age of Renaissance

UNIT 1

Raja Ram Mohan Roy

Learning Outcomes

After studying this unit, students will be able to:

- understand the role of Raja Ram Mohan Roy in shaping early Indian nationalism through social and religious reform
- critically assess Roy's interpretation of modernity and its influence on Indian society
- analyse Roy's efforts to harmonise Western liberal ideas with Indian philosophical traditions
- evaluate how Roy's advocacy for education and civil liberties contributed to national awakening

Background

In the early 19th century, India witnessed significant social and political changes under British colonial rule. Traditional systems were on the verge of decline, and Western education was beginning to influence many sections of society. This period witnessed the emergence of a new group of educated Indians who began to think critically about the need for reform. Raja Ram Mohan Roy emerged as a leading figure in this transformation. He recognised the importance of combining the best elements of Indian tradition with modern values such as reason, equality, and justice. Through his efforts to implement religious, social, and educational reforms, Roy tried to build a more just and progressive society. His ideas reflected both Indian spiritual thought and Enlightenment ideals, making him one of the foremost modern Indian thinkers. His legacy provided a strong foundation for later movements for national awakening and social change.

Nationalism, Modernity, Reform, Rationalism, Civil Liberties, Western Education

Discussion

1.1.1 Political Thought of Raja Ram Mohan Roy

"If mankind is brought into existence, and by nature formed to enjoy the comforts of society and the pleasure of an improved mind, they may be justified in opposing any system, religious, domestic or political, which is inimical to the happiness of society, or calculated to debase the human intellect." — **Raja Ram Mohan Roy.**

Under British colonial rule, Bengal witnessed the emergence of a new middle class shaped by Western education. This environment gave rise to a group of reform-minded thinkers who absorbed the values associated with Western learning, including rationalism, critical thinking, individualism, secularism, and a universal humanistic outlook. These values contributed to a fresh intellectual and cultural awakening in India, and Raja Ram Mohan Roy played a pioneering role in this transformation.

☐ Emergence of a new middle class

The liberal and reformist ideas emerging in nineteenth-century India were influenced by the ideals of the European Renaissance, which revived classical rationalism and rejected medieval scholastic traditions. However, the Indian awakening was unique in many respects. It had to respond to India's deeply pluralistic religious environment and address the lack of harmony among different communities. Raja Ram Mohan Roy sought to reconcile religious differences and foster a vision of freedom and equality that transcended national boundaries. He charted an independent course guided by these principles.

☐ Revived classical rationalism

Recognised as a foundational figure of modern India, Raja Ram Mohan Roy led the efforts in religious, social, and educational reform within Hindu society. He questioned outdated traditions and sought to restore the moral and rational essence of Hinduism through monotheism. He believed that true human

☐ Questioned outdated traditions

realisation lies in inner consciousness and that religious reform must precede social progress. He highlighted the idea that belief in a single supreme being is a common element across different cultures and that differences in religious practices often lead to unnecessary divisions.

In pursuit of these ideals, Raja Ram Mohan Roy established several organisations to promote religious reform and social progress. These included the Atmiya Sabha, the Calcutta Unitarian Association, and later, the Brahmo Sabha. The Brahmo Samaj, as it came to be known, advocated a form of Hindu monotheism and encouraged spiritual reflection without the use of rituals or idolatry. It emphasised moral conduct and compassion as the basis for religious life, encouraging people to recognise the divine through service and acts of benevolence.

The gatherings of the Brahmo Samaj initially lacked formal structure, but they promoted the idea of universal worship centred on the concept of one God. This idea was inspired by his engagement with ancient Indian philosophical texts, particularly the Upanishads. A major step was taken with the creation of the Brahmo Trust Deed, which laid the foundation for public worship that transcended religious divisions and aimed to instil a spirit of social service.

Ram Mohan Roy's rejection of idolatry and advocacy for monotheism was central to his conviction that religion should be grounded in reason and morality. He believed that a rational understanding of religion could promote unity and justice and that such a transformation was essential for the modernisation of society. His efforts helped establish a new moral framework for Indian society and laid the intellectual foundation for future reform movements.

1.1.1.1 Social Reforms of Raja Ram Mohan Roy

Raja Ram Mohan Roy played a transformative role in initiating social reform in colonial India. Deeply disturbed by the prevailing social evils, he sought to eradicate oppressive customs that had become entrenched in Indian society under the guise of religious tradition. His reformist zeal was guided by a strong sense of justice and humanitarianism, aiming to uplift the condition of women and challenge regressive practices.

Among his earliest efforts was the formation of the Atmiya Sabha in 1814, a Calcutta-based discussion group that sought

❑ Service and acts of benevolence

❑ Idea of universal worship

❑ Advocacy for monotheism

❑ Reformist zeal

to challenge entrenched social norms, including idolatry, caste rigidity, and ritualism. This forum encouraged rational thinking and dialogue among like-minded reformers. However, Roy's most notable intervention came in the form of his campaign against sati, the custom that forced widows to immolate themselves on their husbands' funeral pyres. Roy vehemently opposed this practice from a young age, not only on moral grounds but also by using scriptural arguments to demonstrate its non-essentiality in Hinduism. His tracts and appeals to British officials, combined with rising public awareness, culminated in the official ban of sati through Regulation XVII of 1829, under the governance of Lord William Bentinck.

☐ Campaign against sati

Roy also tackled other prevalent issues like child marriage, polygamy, and the sale of girls, which he saw as detrimental to the dignity and well-being of women. He became a strong advocate of female education, asserting that education was vital for women's empowerment and their ability to make autonomous decisions. Furthermore, he worked towards legal reforms that would grant women property rights, thus challenging the patriarchal structures that denied them financial independence.

☐ Well-being of women

His concern for social equality extended beyond gender issues. He firmly criticised caste-based discrimination, arguing that caste divisions were the root of disunity among Indians. He stressed the idea that all human beings are equal in the eyes of God, thereby attempting to restore a sense of moral and social cohesion.

☐ Criticised caste-based discrimination

Raja Ram Mohan Roy's efforts were instrumental in laying the foundation for modern Indian society. His reform initiatives questioned long-standing traditions and sparked a wider movement towards social justice. His approach-grounded in both rationalism and humanitarian values-set a precedent for later reformers and made a significant contribution to the evolution of Indian social thought.

☐ Movement towards social justice

1.1.1.2 Religious Reforms of Raja Ram Mohan Roy

The religious reform initiatives of Raja Ram Mohan Roy were marked by a quest to rationalise and modernise Hindu religious thought. Influenced by both Eastern and Western philosophical traditions, Roy believed that religion should be rooted in reason, ethics, and universal values rather than ritualistic practices and dogma. His efforts aimed to cleanse religion of superstition and promote a more inclusive and enlightened spiritual outlook.

☐ Modernise Hindu religious thought

Commitment to monotheism

Roy's early work, 'Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin' (A Gift to Monotheists), published in 1803, reflects his deep commitment to monotheism and his critique of ritualism. Drawing on the ethical dimensions of Islam and Christianity, he argued that the essence of religion lay in its moral teachings. He maintained that devotion should be directed towards a single divine being, as opposed to the polytheistic and idolatrous tendencies prevalent in traditional Hinduism.

Idol worship

The critique of idol worship presented by Roy holds considerable academic significance. He conceptualised idol worship as not merely irrational, but also as a generator of superstition that obscures the more profound spiritual and philosophical truths inherent within religion. Roy argued that such practices divert individuals from comprehending the moral imperatives of religious existence, thereby promoting an uncritical adherence to tradition.

Rational and ethical approach

Roy's religious philosophy advocated for interfaith harmony and tolerance. Although he criticised several aspects of Christian doctrine-especially its emphasis on miracles and the divinity of Christ-he respected the ethical teachings of Jesus. In his 1820 work, "Precepts of Jesus," he sought to distinguish the moral insights of the New Testament from its supernatural aspects, promoting a rational and ethical approach to reading religious texts.

Brahmo Samaj

The culmination of Roy's religious reform agenda came with the establishment of the Brahmo Samaj in 1828. This institution represented a synthesis of his ideas, rejecting idol worship, caste hierarchies, and meaningless rituals while promoting a faith grounded in rationalism, humanism, and monotheism. The Brahmo Samaj provided a platform for social and spiritual reform, influencing generations of thinkers and activists in India.

Religious reform and tolerance

Raja Ram Mohan Roy's religious reforms aimed to reconstruct the concept of spirituality through a framework that emphasises rationality and ethical consideration. He endeavoured to foster an integration of various religious traditions while simultaneously repudiating dogmatic beliefs and practices. His initiatives not only invigorated Hindu philosophical discourse but also played a significant role in the larger movement advocating for religious reform and tolerance within India.

1.1.1.3 Raja Ram Mohan Roy: Pioneer of Western Education

Raja Ram Mohan Roy occupies a prominent position in Indian history as a pioneering proponent of Western education. During a period when Indian society was entrenched in superstition and social inertia, Roy recognised that the avenue to progress resided in enlightening the populace through contemporary education. He firmly believed that traditional educational systems, although not entirely lacking in imparting knowledge, did not foster intellectual curiosity or moral refinement. The prevailing method of education merely equipped individuals to secure a basic livelihood, without promoting critical reflection or ethical development.

□ Proponent of Western education

Roy was deeply dissatisfied with the East India Company's limited and utilitarian approach to education. The government's scattered efforts in establishing educational institutions were primarily aimed at producing native assistants for British judges, such as muftis and pandits, rather than genuinely enlightening the Indian population. In contrast, Roy strongly believed in the potential of Western knowledge and values to modernise Indian society. He felt that the time had come for India to engage meaningfully with global intellectual developments and join the ranks of enlightened nations.

□ Importance of western knowledge and values

His active engagement with the British authorities eventually led to the establishment of a modern institution in 1816, often referred to as a Maha Vidyalaya. This was among the first seminaries in India aimed at providing comprehensive education to Indian youth. The impact of this initiative was far-reaching. Not only did it equip students with modern knowledge, but its graduates also went on to found other schools and make significant contributions to educational expansion across the country.

□ Maha Vidyalaya

Roy's commitment to education was not restricted solely to males. He fervently advocated for the education of females, perceiving it as vital for social advancement. His focus on female education stemmed from the recognition that an educated woman has the capacity to impact her family and, consequently, society positively. This perspective was both uncommon and revolutionary for his era.

□ Female education

In 1822, he established the Anglo-Hindu School, which served as a model for integrating Indian subjects with Western

sciences and humanities. The institution emphasised analytical thinking and a scientific ethos, marking a transition from rote memorisation to a more dynamic educational approach. In 1826, Roy founded the Vedanta College, which aimed to promote his monotheistic beliefs while also providing instruction in modern disciplines. This dual strategy embodied his vision of reconciling India's spiritual heritage with contemporary knowledge systems.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy's contribution to educational reform laid the foundation for a new era in Indian intellectual and cultural life. His initiatives not only challenged obsolete traditions but also helped India transition from medieval scholasticism to a modern framework of learning. His vision and efforts made him a pioneer in promoting Western education in India, and his legacy continues to inspire generations.

1.1.1.4 Political Ideas of Raja Ram Mohan Roy

Raja Ram Mohan Roy played a foundational role in shaping the early political thought of modern India. His ideas reflected a deep concern for civil liberties, constitutionalism, and democratic governance under colonial rule. While he admired certain liberal aspects of British rule, he was also a firm critic of its oppressive tendencies. His political views were rooted in a profound appreciation for human liberty and the necessity of reform, both social and political, to secure India's progress.

1.1.1.4.1 Advocacy for Rights, Constitutionalism, and Civil Liberties

Liberty was the cornerstone of Raja Ram Mohan Roy's religious, social, and political ideology. His efforts against idolatry, his fight for the abolition of Sati, his promotion of modern Western education, advocacy for women's rights and press freedom, as well as his call for the separation of powers and codification of laws, all stemmed from his profound dedication to human freedom. Roy famously called liberty the "priceless possession of mankind." He was the pioneering Indian intellectual who introduced the concept of political freedom to Indian society.

Though Roy acknowledged the advantages of British rule in promoting social reforms, he did not support perpetual foreign domination. He viewed British governance as a transitional phase necessary for India's social progress, with political

freedom as a natural outcome. His vision of liberty was universal, not restricted by nation or community. He supported global movements aimed at advancing human freedom and detested all forms of social, religious, or racial restrictions on liberty.

❏ Civil liberties

Roy's commitment to civil rights was pioneering. He recognised and was grateful for the civil liberties granted to Indians under British law-rights similar to those enjoyed by citizens in England. While he did not compile a formal list of civil rights, his writings and activism reflected a strong advocacy for rights such as life, liberty, freedom of opinion and expression, religious freedom, and the property right. Among these, he regarded freedom of opinion and expression as most vital. For him, it included the creative freedom of mind and the right to articulate one's thoughts through various media.

❏ Freedom of expression

Roy argued that freedom of expression benefited both rulers and the ruled. He believed that ignorance made people susceptible to violent revolts against authority, whereas an enlightened population would resist only the misuse of power, not governance itself. He asserted that a free press had never been the cause of revolutions; on the contrary, its absence had often contributed to unrest due to unaddressed grievances. A free press, he maintained, could help both government and people achieve their best. However, Roy was pragmatic about limitations: he accepted reasonable restrictions on press freedom in India, mainly to prevent sedition or promote communal hatred. Nevertheless, he strongly opposed arbitrary limits imposed by colonial bureaucracy, deeming them unjustified.

Rajaram Mohan Roy and the Freedom of Expression

- Roy called freedom of opinion and expression the most vital civil liberty.
- For him, expression wasn't just about speech—it was about mental freedom and the right to question.
- He used newspapers, petitions, and public debate to awaken civic consciousness.
- Opposed colonial censorship that blocked dissenting views.
- Believed that a free press helps both rulers and the ruled by promoting transparency.

Rule of law

In constitutional matters, Roy was a steadfast proponent of the rule of law and an impersonal legal authority. He viewed constitutional government as essential to safeguarding human freedoms. Inspired by Montesquieu and Blackstone, Roy advocated for the separation of powers to prevent executive overreach and preserve individual liberty. He preferred legislative authority to remain with the British Parliament rather than be localised in India, fearing that unrestrained colonial governance might hinder personal freedoms.

Gradual reforms

Roy advocated for gradual reforms rather than abrupt changes, believing that slow, thoughtful improvements were more enduring. His political liberalism extended into economic thought as well. He upheld the sanctity of the right to property and emphasised the role of a strong middle class in socio-political progress. He supported the protection of poor peasants against exploitation by zamindars and recommended reducing state demands on landlords. He endorsed the preservation of the ryotwari system and India's agrarian foundation, alongside the encouragement of modern scientific industries.

Role of state

Unlike many Western liberal thinkers, Roy believed the state had a crucial role in initiating social reforms, such as safeguarding tenants' rights and intervening in cases of entrenched inequalities. For him, the state was not merely a neutral arbiter but an active agent of social justice and modernisation.

1.1.1.4.2 Political Liberalism and Internationalism

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was one of the earliest Indian thinkers to adopt and articulate a liberal political vision. Deeply influenced by Enlightenment thought and Western liberal philosophy, Roy emphasised individual liberty, the rule of law, constitutional governance, and the rejection of arbitrary authority. He consistently upheld the view that constitutional government, based on impersonal legal authority rather than personal rule, was the best guarantee for securing human freedom. His opposition to despotic rule and insistence on civil liberties reflected a firm belief in the transformative power of freedom as a foundational value in both personal and political life.

Liberal political vision

Roy's liberalism was evident in his advocacy for secularism, freedom of conscience, and religious reform. He challenged orthodoxy in both Hinduism and Islam, encouraging rational interpretations of religious texts. His vision promoted religious

tolerance and the coexistence of different communities within a pluralistic society. Roy's commitment to freedom of thought and expression was closely tied to his belief that intellectual advancement was possible only in an atmosphere free from dogma and fear. His demand for a free press and the right to express opinions without arbitrary restrictions was a significant contribution to the development of civil liberties in India.

In the realm of economic thought, Roy advocated for free trade and competitive markets while also expressing concern for the plight of peasants and the economically disadvantaged. He was in favour of modern industry and scientific advancement but did not ignore the need to protect rural communities from the exploitative practices of landlords and colonial revenue systems. He advocated for the protection of tenant rights and called for governmental interventions in cases where the social and economic rights of individuals were threatened. His economic ideas demonstrated a liberal concern for both growth and equity, combining respect for individual property rights with support for regulatory reforms aimed at social justice.

Roy's liberal political thought was not confined to the national context. He was one of the first Indian thinkers to articulate an internationalist perspective that recognised the interconnectedness of human societies. He promoted the idea of universal brotherhood and peaceful coexistence among nations. His vision of a shared moral order extended beyond national boundaries and encompassed the concept of a universal religion that upheld the shared ethical values of all faiths. Roy saw intercultural dialogue as essential for human progress and believed that no single tradition held a monopoly on truth.

This internationalist outlook was further reinforced by his belief that India's regeneration could not be achieved in isolation. He recognised the importance of learning from the scientific, intellectual, and political developments in other societies. While he valued India's ancient heritage, he argued for its reform and modernisation through the selective adoption of progressive ideas from the West. His engagement with the global intellectual currents of his time marked a significant departure from the insular thinking of many of his contemporaries.

Rabindranath Tagore later observed that Roy was among the very few in his time who truly understood the spirit of modernity. According to Tagore, Roy had grasped the significance of the emerging global order marked by interdependence, cooperation,

and shared human values. This recognition of the universal character of modern civilisation enabled Roy to bridge traditional Indian thought with contemporary global ideas.

Roy's awareness of the internal social barriers to political freedom also shaped his political philosophy. He believed that caste divisions, religious superstition, and social inequality were significant obstacles to national advancement. His efforts to reform these aspects of Indian society were not merely moral or religious but were tied to his larger political project. In his view, social and religious reform was essential for creating the conditions necessary for political consciousness and collective self-governance. By attacking oppressive customs and promoting education and rationality, Roy laid the intellectual foundation for a modern Indian polity.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy's political liberalism was thus comprehensive in scope, encompassing civil, political, economic, and cultural dimensions. His advocacy of civil rights, secular values, constitutionalism, and international cooperation made him a key figure in the evolution of Indian political thought. His contributions anticipated the democratic and pluralistic ideals that would later become central to India's national identity. His life and ideas continue to resonate in contemporary discourses on democracy, secularism, and global justice.

1.1.1.4.3 Judicial Reforms of Raja Ram Mohan Roy

During the early 19th century, the judicial system under the East India Company was undergoing a significant transition. It was plagued by numerous inadequacies, particularly in terms of accessibility, cultural sensitivity, and linguistic barriers. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, as a social reformer deeply concerned with justice, was vocal in his criticism of the prevailing legal system and advocated meaningful reforms to ensure fair and impartial administration of justice. He particularly emphasised the need for greater Indian participation in judicial processes and administration.

Opposition to the Indian Jury Bill

One of the key moments in Roy's judicial activism was his opposition to the Indian Jury Bill of 1826. This legislation, passed by the British Parliament on 5 May 1826, allowed both Indians and Indo-Britons to serve as jurors in criminal cases before the Supreme Courts. However, the Bill institutionalised a form of

judicial discrimination. While Indo-Britons were granted the right to serve on both grand and petty juries in trials involving both Christians and non-Christians, Indians were restricted to petty juries. They could only serve in trials involving fellow natives. They were expressly excluded from sitting on grand juries and from judging Christian defendants.

❐ Communal divisions

Roy and many of his contemporaries saw this provision as an attempt to deepen communal divisions by assigning judicial roles along religious lines. In response, a joint petition was drafted and signed by members of both the Hindu and Muslim communities on 17 August 1829. Roy took the initiative to forward this petition to Mr J. Crawford, the agent of Calcutta's residents in England. In his letter, Roy sharply criticised Mr Wynn, the then President of the Board of Control, for introducing religious discrimination into the judicial system.

❐ Discriminatory clause

Roy highlighted the inequity of subjecting Hindu and Muslim defendants to trial by Christian jurors-European or native-while exempting Christians, including Indian converts, from being judged by non-Christian jurors. He expressed strong concern that such a policy not only undermined the judicial dignity of Indian citizens but also violated fundamental principles of justice and equality. He argued that this discriminatory clause had the potential to generate widespread dissatisfaction and alarm among the Indian public, especially those familiar with liberal political principles.

❐ Mobilising opinion

Roy's letter to Mr Crawford also emphasised the importance of maintaining constructive ties between India and the British Empire. He made it clear that such relations must be based on fairness and mutual respect rather than imposed hierarchies. The petition was eventually presented in the British House of Commons on 5 June 1829, prompting sharp debates in the European press. The press notably recognised the influential role played by Roy in mobilising opinion against religious discrimination in legal institutions.

❐ Legal equality

Through such interventions, Ram Mohan Roy not only defended the rights of Indians within the colonial judicial framework but also underscored the importance of legal equality, non-discrimination, and the moral basis of law. His efforts in this domain represent a significant early contribution to the evolution of legal consciousness and reform in colonial India.

1.1.1.5 Humanist Vision of Raja Ram Mohan Roy

Raja Ram Mohan Roy's humanist outlook was rooted in his deep commitment to liberal ideals and his desire to reform an orthodox, patriarchal, and socially rigid Indian society. He saw British colonial rule not only as a source of oppression but also as an opportunity to integrate India economically and introduce modern rational values. While acknowledging the material benefits of colonial integration under the East India Company, Roy consistently resisted discriminatory laws and customs, demanding reform from both the colonisers and the colonised. His vision was not confined to one society or culture; instead, he believed that universal norms should guide political, religious, and cultural reform across civilisations.

❐ Modern rational values

Roy was a proponent of building a society based on principles of tolerance, empathy, and reason. He envisioned a world in which both Eastern and Western traditions could contribute to a shared humanist culture. As an advocate of cosmopolitanism, he emphasised brotherhood, cooperation, and liberation. He believed that diverse cultural traditions-such as rational and deistic aspects of Islamic thought, Western liberal and scientific attitudes, and the spiritual and communitarian values of Asia-should be blended to create a more humane and inclusive world.

❐ Shared humanist culture

According to Roy, genuine social progress required the removal of institutional and ideological barriers, including those erected by governments and entrenched religious orthodoxy. He saw the misuse of religion as a significant obstacle to human unity. To overcome this, he proposed a universal spiritual synthesis built on the worship of a monotheistic God and the belief in the essential unity of all religious experiences. In one of his writings, he expressed his aspiration in these words: "May God render religion destructive of differences and dislike between man and man and conducive to the peace and union of mankind."

❐ Obstacle to human unity

Roy extended this vision beyond national boundaries. While he did not provide a formal structure for a global political system, he advocated transcending the concept of national sovereignty to address humanity's shared problems. His goal was to move toward a rational, humanist world order in which artificial divisions-national, religious, or cultural-would be replaced by mutual respect and moral unity.

❐ Global political system

As observed by Brajendranath Seal, Roy's contribution lay in paving the way for a synthesis between Eastern and Western values, uniting them against the broader canvas of common humanity. In doing so, he became a pioneer in shaping the global discourse on culture and civilisation. He was seen not merely as a reformer of Indian society but as a precursor to the ideal of a unified human civilisation-"a prophet of the coming Humanity."

1.1.1.6 Raja Ram Mohan Roy on Nationalism and Modernity

Raja Ram Mohan Roy lived during a period that witnessed significant transformation in Indian society. The collapse of Mughal power, the rise of British rule, and the spread of Western education created a new context. Roy responded to this by calling for reform in Indian society. He believed that social and religious change was necessary before India could develop as a modern nation.

Roy did not see British rule as entirely negative. He was aware of its exploitative nature, but he also saw that it brought new ideas, such as liberty, education, and legal rights. He hoped these would help Indian society grow stronger. He supported modern education, especially in science and philosophy. At the same time, he worked to revive the ethical teachings of Indian scriptures, such as the Vedas and Upanishads.

He opposed many social evils of his time. These included caste discrimination, sati, polygamy, and the denial of education to women. He believed that such practices weakened Indian society. His reform efforts, such as campaigning against sati and supporting women's rights, were part of a larger plan to rebuild society on moral and rational grounds.

Roy understood that political independence could not be achieved without first educating and awakening the people. He did not call for revolt against British rule. Instead, he used petitions, newspapers, and legal tools to raise awareness. He founded journals like *Sambad Kaumudi* and *Mirat-ul-Akbar* to promote public debate and civic education.

For Roy, modernity represented progress through reason, reform, and human dignity. He aimed to merge the best values of Indian tradition with the meaningful ideas from the West. While he was not against religion, he opposed blind faith and priestly control. He advocated for monotheism and ethical living as the true objectives of religion.

Margin notes:
- ❒ Synthesis between Eastern and Western values
- ❒ Call for reform
- ❒ Supported modern education
- ❒ Opposed social evils
- ❒ Civic education
- ❒ Progress through reason

Roy's idea of nationalism was not based on hatred of foreigners. It was based on the belief that a reformed and educated Indian society could one day govern itself. He believed that political freedom would follow social change. His focus was on creating a moral and informed citizenry.

Through his actions and writings, Rajaram Mohan Roy helped prepare the ground for modern Indian nationalism. His work marked the beginning of a new phase in Indian political thought. He showed that national development must begin with social and cultural reform. His vision of a modern India was shaped by reason, justice, and the hope for a better future.

Summarised Overview

Roy was a pioneer of Indian modernity who championed religious reform, monotheism, and the abolition of social evils like sati and child marriage. Through institutions like Brahmo Samaj, he advanced rational religion and moral conduct. He fought for civil liberties, especially freedom of the press, and advocated codified law, constitutionalism, and women's education. Roy's critique of idolatry and caste was based on ethical and scriptural reasoning. He saw modernity as a blend of Enlightenment values and Indian traditions. His liberalism embraced internationalism and supported gradual reform under colonial rule. Roy's political ideas stressed individual rights and the rule of law. His educational efforts helped produce a modern public sphere. He envisioned religion as rational and universal. His opposition to the Jury Bill showed his stand for equal legal rights. Roy is remembered as the father of modern Indian political reform.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. Why is Raja Ram Mohan Roy often called the "father of Indian Renaissance"?

2. How did Roy combine Indian spirituality with Western rational thought in his reforms?

3. What was the main aim of the Brahmo Samaj founded by Roy in 1828?

4. How did Roy use the press to awaken political and social awareness in colonial India?

5. What arguments did Roy make against the practice of sati?

6. In what ways did Roy promote women's rights and education?

7. How did Roy understand liberty and civil rights under British colonial rule?

8. What was Roy's role in the debate over the Indian Jury Bill of 1826?

9. Explain Roy's idea of nationalism in the context of modernity and reform.

10. What was Roy's vision of religion and why did he oppose idolatry?

Assignment

1. Discuss how Rajaram Mohan Roy's reformist activities laid the foundation for Indian nationalism.

2. Explain Roy's approach to religious reform and its relevance to modern Indian thought.

3. How did Raja Ram Mohan Roy use the press as a tool for political and social awareness?

4. In what ways did Roy reconcile traditional Indian values with modern Western ideas?

5. Analyse the role of Brahmo Samaj in promoting Roy's vision of social and spiritual reform.

6. How did Roy's educational initiatives contribute to India's intellectual awakening?

7. Discuss the concept of modernity in the context of Roy's engagement with liberalism and rationalism.

8. Critically examine Roy's understanding of nationalism in a colonial society.

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

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Dayananda Saraswathy

Learning Outcomes

After studying this unit, students will be able to:

- evaluate the role of the Arya Samaj in promoting education, social reform, and religious revivalism

- examine Dayananda's ideas on state, governance, and his concept of Vedic Swaraj

- assess the impact of his teachings on women's empowerment, caste reform, and the nationalist movement in India

Background

Dayananda Saraswathy, originally named Moolshankar, was one of the important thinkers of modern India. He lived during a time when Indian society was grappling with social evils and the influence of foreign cultures. British colonial rule not only affected the political freedom of the country but also led to a decline in the confidence of the people. Many Indians were beginning to follow European customs without understanding their traditions. In this environment, Swami Dayananda emerged as a strong voice who wanted to restore self-respect and national pride. He turned to the Vedas, which he believed held the key to India's regeneration.

He was deeply committed to the upliftment of women and the removal of caste-based discrimination. He opposed practices like idol worship, animal sacrifice, child marriage, untouchability, and infanticide. He considered these to be later distortions that had no place in the original Vedic tradition. He believed that a new social order was necessary and that this change could be achieved through education and self-awareness. Dayananda was not just a religious reformer. He was also a social thinker and a revivalist who wanted to rebuild Indian society through truth and knowledge. His idea of reform was based on returning to the original spirit of the Vedas. He described the Vedas as the oldest and most reliable source of true knowledge about God, the self, and the universe. For him, religion was not about rituals but about moral living and spiritual discipline.

Vedic Swaraj, Arya Samaj, Social Reform, Rule of Law, Rational Religion, Caste Reform

Discussion

1.2.1 Political Thought of Dayananda Saraswathy

□ Moral and political challenges

Dayananda Saraswathy's political thought cannot be separated from his social and religious ideas. He saw the decline of Indian society not only as a moral problem but also as a political challenge. In his view, the root of the political crisis was the weakening of the moral foundation of society. He believed that a nation could not become strong unless its people lived by truth and dharma. He looked at Indian society as a physician would examine a patient. Before offering any solution, he travelled across the country to study the condition of the people. He concluded that the country's social, political, and religious weaknesses could be corrected only through the knowledge of the Vedas.

□ Focus on individual freedom

Dayananda did not speak in the language of political revolutions. However, his ideas carried profound political significance. His focus on individual freedom, human dignity, and moral responsibility was closely tied to the concept of national awakening. He inspired people to think for themselves and not blindly follow old customs. He wanted individuals to understand their rights and duties through the lens of Vedic knowledge. His idea of self-rule was not limited to government but extended to self-discipline and spiritual freedom.

□ New social structure

He believed that politics must be guided by ethics. Leadership had to come from those who were truthful and dedicated to the public good. For him, the purpose of education was not only to earn knowledge but also to prepare citizens for responsible living. He called for a new social structure based on equality, justice, and collective well-being. In this way, he laid the groundwork for a political thought rooted in Indian tradition yet open to change and reform.

Dayananda's thought was deeply national in spirit. He challenged the cultural domination of the West at a time when many Indians were turning away from their heritage. He spoke with conviction about the strength of Indian civilisation and its ability to meet the needs of modern life. He did not reject the modern world but asked Indians to meet it with self-respect and critical thinking. His contributions laid a strong foundation for later reformers and thinkers who would carry forward the struggle for national self-rule and social transformation.

❑ Self-respect and critical thinking

1.2.1.1 Arya Samaj: A Movement for Religious and Social Reform

Arya Samaj was founded by Maharshi Dayananda Saraswati on 10 April 1875 in Bombay. The social and religious conditions in India at that time were alarming. British rule had created a sense of dependence and loss of confidence among many Indians. Alongside this, Christian missionaries were actively working to convert large sections of the population. They often presented Indian religion and culture in a negative light. This created confusion and concern in society.

❑ Existed confusion in society

Dayananda Saraswati believed that many social problems had their roots in religious ignorance. He felt that the original teachings of the Vedas had been forgotten or misinterpreted. He aimed to guide people back to these early teachings, which he believed were pure and truthful. The Arya Samaj, meaning Society of the Nobles, was formed to promote truth, knowledge, and ethical living.

❑ Religious ignorance

The movement opposed practices like idol worship, pilgrimages, animal sacrifice, and the power of the priestly class. These were seen as later additions to Hinduism, not supported by the Vedas. Dayananda encouraged people to study the scriptures for themselves and rely on reason and morality in their actions. He believed that blind faith had no place in a just society. To provide clear direction for the work of the Arya Samaj, ten principles were adopted in 1877 at a meeting held in Ajmer. These principles included belief in one formless God, the importance of truth, the need to spread knowledge, and the duty to work for the good of all. The Samaj also encouraged members to follow rules that support both personal growth and the welfare of the larger society.

❑ Opposed practices like idol worship

One of the critical steps taken by Arya Samaj was the Shuddhi movement. This was started to bring back into the Hindu fold

people who had converted to other religions. It also tried to prevent new conversions by giving support to people from weaker sections. This was seen as a way to protect the identity and unity of Hindu society.

The Arya Samaj also focused on education. It believed that education should be available to everyone, including women. Dayananda supported the idea of compulsory education and wanted subjects like Vedic knowledge, philosophy, science, and art to be taught. He believed that only an educated population could understand its duties and claim its rights. The Samaj also worked for widow remarriage and stood against child marriage. These efforts aimed to provide women with a better life and a more prominent place in society.

Arya Samaj became active in many regions of North India. It established schools, supported social services, and encouraged people to think critically about traditions. Its values inspired many who later participated in the freedom struggle. Dayananda Saraswati did not ask people to reject religion. He asked them to understand it better and live by its true spirit. Arya Samaj was a call to improve society by using reason, ethics, and self-respect. It offered a way to meet the challenges of colonial rule without losing cultural roots. Through its focus on reform, it helped prepare the ground for a more aware and confident society.

1.2.1.2 Opposition to Religious Dogma

Dayānanda Saraswati strongly opposed many religious practices that had become common in his time. He rejected idol worship completely. He believed that worshipping statues or images distracted people from the true idea of God. For Dayananda, God was formless and beyond any physical shape. He argued that true devotion must be directed to one supreme God, rather than to many gods or idols.

He also criticised the ritual ceremonies that were common in Hinduism. These rituals often involved complicated sacrifices, offerings, and prayers. Dayananda saw these rituals as useless and harmful because they divided society and led to the exploitation of poor people. Many rituals were based on superstition and blind faith. He wanted religion to be a path of knowledge and truth, rather than empty traditions.

Dayananda based his religious ideas on the Vedas, the oldest scriptures of India. He argued that the Vedas teach monotheism

- belief in one God. According to him, God is eternal and all-powerful. God is everywhere and knows everything. He is the creator of the world and the Vedas. Dayananda pointed out that worshipping many gods had caused divisions among people. It weakened social unity and moral strength.

He also rejected many stories from Indian mythology that described gods in human form and depicted various gods with distinct powers. Dayananda said these stories confused people and led to idol worship. He sought to revive the original Vedic teachings, which emphasised inner purity, moral living, and the pursuit of truth. Religion, for him, was about controlling the body and mind, living righteously, and finding liberation from ignorance and suffering.

1.2.1.3 Critique of the Caste System and Untouchability

Dayananda Saraswati was a strong opponent of the caste system as it was practised in his time. He explained that the original system of varnas mentioned in the Vedas was different from the rigid caste system. During the Vedic period, society was divided into four varnas based on an individual's qualities, actions, and nature. These were the Brahmins, Kṣatriyas, Vaiṣyas, and Śudras.

The Brahmins were responsible for learning and teaching spiritual knowledge. Kṣatriyas were warriors and rulers who protected society and maintained social order. Vaiṣyas worked in trade, agriculture, and business. Śudras served the other three varnas by performing various types of work. Dayānanda said this division was practical and based on people's natural abilities, not birth. Over time, this flexible system became rigid. People started to believe that caste was fixed by birth. This led to discrimination and social injustice. Dayānanda strongly opposed this change. He said all humans are equal in nature. No one is born superior or inferior.

He also condemned untouchability, a practice that treated some groups as impure and excluded them from society. He called untouchability cruel and against the teachings of the Vedas. Dayananda wanted everyone to have the right to learn and read the Vedas, regardless of caste. He challenged the Brāhmins' monopoly on religious knowledge. He believed that denying people access to sacred knowledge was wrong and caused social division.

❐ Belief in one God

❐ Revive the original Vedic teachings

❐ Opponent of the caste system

❐ All humans are equal in nature

❐ Condemned untouchability

Dayananda's views on caste were revolutionary. He wanted caste to be seen as a political and social arrangement to organise society. It should not be a religious or birth-based distinction. His ideas aimed to create a fair and just society where everyone could live with dignity and respect.

1.2.1.4 Educational Reforms and Social Upliftment

Dayananda Saraswati believed that ignorance was the root cause of many social problems. He thought that people's misunderstanding of religion and social customs led to many evils. To address this, he focused on spreading knowledge and education. He established numerous Gurukuls where his followers could study the Vedas and learn moral values. These schools aimed to produce enlightened individuals who would lead society towards reform and progress. Education was not just about learning facts but about developing good character and understanding moral duties.

After Dayananda's death, his followers founded the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic (DAV) College Trust and Management Society. The first DAV school opened in Lahore in 1886. These institutions combined traditional Indian values with modern education. They played a crucial role in social reform and the awakening of national consciousness.

Dayananda believed that education should be accessible to all people, regardless of caste or gender. He said that the state or king had the responsibility to ensure compulsory education for all. Education should impart knowledge, instil morality, and foster social responsibility. It would help create a just and prosperous society. Through education and social reform, Dayananda hoped to restore the true spirit of Indian culture and religion. His vision was a society based on equality, truth, and justice where everyone could live with dignity.

1.2.1.5 Swami Dayananda Saraswathy and Women Empowerment

Swami Dayananda Saraswathy, the founder of Arya Samaj, made a significant contribution to the discourse on women's empowerment in 19th-century India. At a time when women were subjected to deep social inequalities and rigid customs, Dayananda's call for reform was grounded in his interpretation of Vedic teachings. He viewed many prevailing practices concerning women as distortions without Vedic sanction and

sought to reconstruct social norms based on moral and rational principles. Dayānanda Saraswati was also a champion for women's rights. He opposed many social customs that harmed women. Practices like child marriage, polygamy, and purdah (secluding women) were against his teachings. He strongly condemned sati, the burning of widows, which was common in some parts of India. He said the Vedas supported none of these practices.

He was especially concerned about the plight of widows. In traditional society, widows were forced to live in isolation and could not remarry. Dayananda wanted to change this. He suggested "nigoga," a form of companionship for widows. Later, he supported widow remarriage. He believed widows should have the right to live with dignity and happiness. Dayananda said marriage was a sacred and lifelong bond. He insisted that marriages should be based on the character and qualities of the partners. Marriage without the consent of both parties was likely to cause unhappiness. Forced marriages were harmful to both men and women. He also emphasised the importance of education for women. According to him, no society can progress without educating women. Women make up half of the population, and their development is essential for the welfare of the entire society. He supported inter-caste marriages and social mixing, such as eating together. These practices could break down caste barriers and promote social harmony.

Dayananda's work laid the foundation for many social reforms aimed at achieving equality and justice for women and marginalised groups.

Opposition to Child Marriage and Widowhood

One of Dayananda's earliest and most emphatic interventions was against the social evils of child marriage and enforced widowhood. He argued that the Vedas did not sanction these practices and were responsible for the degradation of women in Indian society. The plight of child widows, who were denied remarriage and condemned to a life of suffering, deeply moved him. As a response, he initially proposed the concept of 'nigopa'-a form of non-permanent cohabitation between widows and widowers-and eventually supported full widow remarriage. His views were a direct challenge to the orthodox interpretation of Hindu dharma and opened new possibilities for women's agency and dignity.

□ Againist Forced marriages

□ Concept of 'nigopa'

Education for Women

Dayananda viewed education as a crucial tool for empowering women. He advocated for compulsory education for both boys and girls, considering it a state responsibility. He argued that education should not be limited to practical skills but must include grammar, philosophy, the Vedas, science, medicine, music, and art. For Dayananda, an educated society was the foundation of a reformed and awakened nation, and educating women was essential for building such a society. He emphasised that a truly educated man needed an equally educated wife, linking women's education not just to personal freedom but also to the progress of the family and society.

Role of Arya Samaj in the Upliftment of Women

The Arya Samaj, founded in 1875, institutionalised Dayananda's reformist vision. It took active steps toward improving the condition of women. In the 1880s, the Samaj began promoting widow remarriage and organised initiatives to advance girls' education. These efforts aimed to dismantle the rigid structures that confined women to domestic and subordinate roles. Dayananda believed that the upliftment of women was not just a social necessity but a moral obligation. His emphasis on equality, education, and moral reform placed women's empowerment at the heart of Arya Samaj's social agenda. Through his teachings and institutional initiatives, Swami Dayananda Saraswathy laid the groundwork for the women's reform movement in modern India. His reinterpretation of religious texts and strong advocacy for education created a new path for challenging gender hierarchies and fostering an environment of equality and dignity for women.

1.2.1.6 Political Ideas of Dayananda Saraswathy

Swami Dayananda Saraswathy's political ideas were deeply rooted in the teachings of the Vedas. He held that the Vedas are a source of eternal truths applicable to all aspects of life, including politics. He viewed them not just as religious texts but as practical guides for governance and social order. Dayananda believed that sciences such as medicine, astronomy, music, and economics are all based on Vedic knowledge. Therefore, political science and the rules governing a state should also align with Vedic principles. His political philosophy was a call to return to these ancient texts to restore social harmony and national strength.

□ Progress of the family and society

□ Women's reform movement

□ Align with Vedic principles

Theory of State

Dayananda did not engage in speculative theories about how the state originally came into existence. Instead, he focused on describing what a well-structured state should look like and what its goals should be. He argued that the state's purpose is not limited to providing security or material wealth. The state must work to fulfil four main objectives, which Dayananda called the fourfold goals of life: Dharma (religion or moral duty), Artha (material prosperity), Kama (enjoyment and pleasure), and Moksha (liberation or salvation). A good state must help its citizens achieve balance among these goals. It should promote not only economic and social welfare but also moral and spiritual growth. Dayananda believed that only a state that supports all these goals can lead to true freedom from worldly bondage and suffering.

The Form of Government

Dayananda strongly opposed autocratic rule, where one person holds all the power. He warned that such absolute power would lead to selfishness and unfairness. In his work, Satyarth Prakash, he made it clear that giving unchecked authority to a single ruler is dangerous because the ruler's interests can overshadow the public good. Instead, he favoured a system where the people choose rulers and where power is distributed. Although he supported the idea of a president or leader to symbolise the unity of the state, he insisted that the right to govern should come from the people themselves. This reflects a republican form of government, where the people have a say in selecting their leaders. Yet, Dayananda also respected the traditional idea of divine kingship as described in the dharma shastras, but only if the ruler was wise and knowledgeable. For him, good governance depends on the ruler's ability to understand dharma and to act in the interest of all citizens.

The Three Assemblies

Dayananda introduced the concept of three assemblies working together to govern the state effectively. These are the political or legislative assembly, the educational assembly, and the religious assembly. He believed these bodies should cooperate to create laws and policies that promote the happiness and welfare of the people. Each assembly has its own area of authority. The educational and religious assemblies should have autonomy and not be interfered with by the political assembly.

However, the political assembly cannot completely ignore educational and spiritual matters, as these areas profoundly affect society. This division of power shows Dayananda's belief in a balanced government where different institutions work together, respecting each other's roles but united in the common goal of serving the people.

Rule of Law

Dayananda gave the highest importance to the rule of law. He taught that the law is the true ruler of the land, not any individual king or leader. This idea is based on Vedic teachings that say, "Just law alone is the true king." The law maintains order and protects society by being fair and impartial. Dayananda emphasised that while human rulers may rest or become corrupt, the law is always active and unbiased. The law must be administered with justice to promote virtue, wealth, and happiness among the people. If the law is applied unjustly, it will destroy the state and the ruler's authority. He insisted that no one, including kings or high officials, should be above the law. When a ruler breaks the law, the punishment should be much harsher than for ordinary citizens. Dayananda rejected special courts for kings or nobles, believing that justice must be equal for all. This strict respect for law was meant to safeguard the state from tyranny and corruption.

❑ Rejected special courts for kings

Functions of Government

For Dayananda, the government's role was to serve the community as a whole. It must protect the state from threats both inside and outside. Beyond security, the government should help people achieve their highest life goals, including spiritual growth. He accepted the existence of private property and social differences but warned that the rich should not misuse their power or wealth against the community. He emphasised the importance of a strong military in protecting the nation's independence. Dayananda believed that without a capable and well-organised defence force, the state could not survive foreign threats or internal disorder.

❑ Serve the community

Furthermore, he saw the government as a guardian of the vulnerable. It had a duty to support those who could not help themselves, such as the elderly, the sick, and children. He specifically mentioned the need to care for the families of deceased government officials. However, he also believed that those who lead immoral or harmful lives should not receive

❑ Guardian of the vulnerable

government help. This condition reflected his belief that support must encourage good behaviour and social responsibility.

Concept of Vedic Swaraj

Swami Dayananda Saraswathy's concept of Vedic Swaraj is deeply rooted in the ancient Vedic tradition, where governance involved the active participation of the people through assemblies and the election of the ruler. According to Dayananda, the state's structure included a king and three assemblies: religious, legislative, and educational. These assemblies together exercised sovereignty with the consent of the people. The highest office in this system was that of the president or Raja of the assembly, which was open to any qualified person. The rājā was neither a hereditary monarch nor a divine representative but an elected leader chosen by the learned and capable members of the assemblies and approved by the people. His authority was not absolute but derived from the people, making him a trustee of the state rather than its owner. If he acted against dharma or failed in his duties, the people had the right to remove him.

Dayananda described in detail the qualifications and education necessary for a ruler. In *Satyartha Prakasha*, especially in the chapter on rajdhārma or the science of government, he drew from the Vedas and Manusmṛiti to stress that a ruler must be just, impartial, well-educated, and compassionate. The ideal ruler should be powerful yet beloved by his people, able to understand their deepest thoughts and merciful in judgment. He should enlighten the people by spreading knowledge, justice, and righteousness while eliminating ignorance and injustice. The ruler's role was likened to the sun illuminating the world, the fire burning wickedness, and the moon bringing joy to good people. He should manage the state's wealth wisely and keep society safe from criminals and those who do wrong.

In Dayananda's vision of government, dharma, public opinion, and the advice of wise assembly members served as essential checks on the ruler's power. He believed that people were governed not by a single man or assembly but by dharma, the eternal law that forms the basis of social and political order. Dharma was superior to the state and limited the ruler's power. For Dayānanda, law was the true king and the supreme authority. He quoted the Vedic teaching that just law alone is the absolute ruler and true religion. The law maintains order, protects the people, and remains vigilant even when rulers are negligent. When administered with justice, the law promotes

virtue, wealth, and happiness. Without proper enforcement of the law, society would fall into chaos and corruption. Both rulers and subjects have duties to uphold the law for the nation's prosperity.

Dayananda also emphasised the importance of maintaining a strong army to protect the state's independence. He argued that a capable defensive force was necessary to guard against external threats. The government's role included protecting those unable to support themselves, such as the elderly, infirm, and children. However, aid was given only to those who deserved it, reflecting the belief that social welfare should encourage responsibility and good conduct. His overall goal was to revive Vedic principles, promote rationalism, and effect social reform in response to colonial and religious challenges. He was critical of Western influence and Islam, as well as those who blindly sought Western modernisation. Dayananda's system of governance ensured that elected assemblies held the ultimate authority to make laws. The king's role was to implement laws and policies made by the assemblies, and he could not act independently without their advice and approval. This made governance a collective process based on consultation rather than autocratic rule.

❑ Governance as collective process

Vedic Moral State

- For Dayananda, true politics began with Dharma—a just moral order based on the Vedas.
- The state's duty was not just to provide safety, but to promote truth, discipline, and virtue.
- Introduced the idea of three assemblies—political, educational, and spiritual—to maintain balance.
- Called for a welfare state that cares for the weak but punishes immorality.
- Rejected autocracy and stressed the people's right to remove corrupt rulers.
- His vision of Vedic Swaraj offered a morally grounded democracy.

Dayananda's concept of Vedic Swaraj thus envisioned a form of self-rule grounded in ancient tradition but committed

to justice, equality, and good governance. Power was derived from the people and exercised within the limits set by dharma, the eternal law. The state was a cooperative structure between elected assemblies and a qualified ruler accountable to the people. This political model aimed to restore moral order, promote social welfare, and build national strength through balanced and participatory governance.

Summarised Overview

Dayananda promoted a return to Vedic values as the basis for religious and national regeneration. He founded Arya Samaj in 1875 to oppose superstition, caste discrimination, and idol worship. His political thought was rooted in dharma, advocating ethics in public life and republican governance. He upheld Vedic Swaraj, with elected assemblies and moral rulers guided by law. Dayananda's views opposed autocracy and favoured decentralised decision-making. He pushed for universal education and women's rights, linking knowledge to empowerment. He championed widow remarriage and inter-caste marriage. The Shuddhi movement aimed at reconversion and Hindu unity. He rejected hereditary caste and declared all humans equal by nature. His reinterpretation of the Vedas gave politics a spiritual-ethical dimension. Dayananda believed in a just state governed by rule of law and dharma. His influence shaped later reformist and nationalist thought in India.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. How did Dayananda Saraswathy describe the importance of the Vedas for social, political, and spiritual knowledge?

2. Why did Dayananda say "Go Back to the Vedas" during colonial rule and social decline?

3. How did Arya Samaj show Dayananda's views against rituals, idol worship, and blind beliefs?

4. How did Dayananda connect social reform with revival of religion?

5. How does the Shuddhi movement try to change the idea of Hindu identity?

6. How did Dayananda explain Vedic Swaraj in terms of political ethics and governance?

7. What were the three assemblies suggested by Dayananda for running a state?

8. How did Dayananda support women's empowerment using Vedic ideas?

9. What was Dayananda's view on caste hierarchy, and how did he explain the difference between varna and caste?

Assignment

1. Discuss Swami Dayananda Saraswathy's idea of Vedic Swaraj. How did it differ from Western models of governance?

2. Evaluate the role of Arya Samaj in promoting social reform and national consciousness.

3. How did Dayananda Saraswathy challenge religious orthodoxy and promote rational interpretation of the Vedas?

4. Analyse the impact of Dayananda's advocacy for women's rights in colonial India.

5. In what ways did Dayananda Saraswathy's teachings contribute to the nationalist awakening in India?

6. Discuss the significance of education in Dayananda Saraswathy's reform agenda.

7. Examine Dayananda's critique of the caste system. How did he reinterpret the concept of varna?

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UNIT 3

Jyothirao Phule

Learning Outcomes

After studying this unit, students will be able to:

- analyse Phule's critique of the caste system and its implications for Indian political thought
- evaluate Phule's contributions to mass education and women's empowerment
- examine the role of the Satya Shodhak Samaj in promoting equality and social justice
- assess the significance of Phule's ideas in the development of anti-caste and social reform movements in India

Background

The 19th century was marked by a significant shift in Indian intellectual life, as thinkers across the country responded to colonial domination and internal social decay. While reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Dayananda Saraswathy laid the foundations for modern Indian social and religious thought through reinterpretation of tradition, Jyotirao Phule advanced a radical critique of caste-based inequality and patriarchy. Born into a lower-caste family, Phule brought a unique perspective shaped by lived experiences of exclusion and oppression. He is popularly known as Jyotiba. In contrast to other reformers who worked primarily within upper-caste or Brahminical frameworks, Phule's focus was on dismantling the social order that sustained caste and gender hierarchies. His contributions were foundational in the emergence of anti-caste politics, popular education, and the idea of universal human dignity in modern India.

Caste System, Sudras, Ati-Sudras, Women's Education, Social Justice, Satya Shodhak Samaj, Anti-Caste Politics

Discussion

1.3.1 Political Thought of Jyothirao Phule
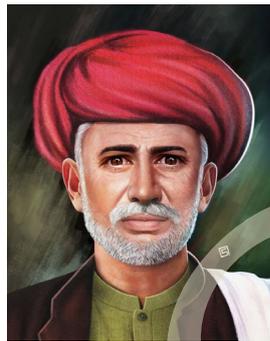
Phule's reform movement began in response to personal humiliation caused by caste prejudice, and it evolved into a comprehensive challenge to the Hindu social order. Influenced by the writings of Thomas Paine, he believed that the moral and intellectual upliftment of the oppressed could only come through education. He not only advocated for but actively established schools for girls, Dalits, and the poor at a time when even the idea of education for these groups was considered radical. His educational philosophy was aimed not just at literacy but at critical consciousness-an awakening of the mind to the injustices of the caste system.

☐ Challenge to the Hindu social order

Phule was one of the first Indian thinkers to offer a social theory of caste as a system of domination rather than mere ritual hierarchy. He argued that Brahminical hegemony was maintained through religious texts, priestly rituals, and monopoly over education and administration. His reinterpretation of Hindu scriptures and mythology sought to expose the constructed nature of caste inequality. He challenged religious narratives that upheld the supremacy of Brahmins, and he likened the condition of the Sudras and Ati-Sudras to slavery.

☐ Challenged religious narratives

Politically, Phule viewed British rule as a temporary opportunity to break the Brahmins' hold over education and government. He urged the colonial administration to invest in the education of lower castes and women and criticised the state for spending disproportionate resources on higher education for elites. He utilised political platforms, such as the Poona Municipality, and legal petitions to voice his concerns. His rejection of the early Indian National Congress was based on his belief that it represented only elite upper-caste interests, not the Indian people as a whole.

☐ Utilised political platforms

Through the establishment of the *Satya Shodhak Samaj* in 1873, Phule institutionalised his reform agenda. The organisation welcomed all castes and promoted rationalism, social justice, and equality. It encouraged inter-caste dining and marriage, conducted simple non-Brahminical wedding rituals, and aimed to eliminate psychological and religious slavery. Phule's emphasis on the unity of the oppressed and his critique of both social and economic exploitation laid the groundwork for future movements, including those led by B.R. Ambedkar.

Phule's legacy lies in his insistence that true reform must dismantle systemic injustice, not merely reinterpret tradition. His vision of a just society demanded education, dignity, and equal opportunity for all. He was a pioneer of radical humanism in Indian thought, advocating for the rights of women, Dalits, and peasants in a society still deeply bound by inequality.

1.3.1.1 Equality and Justice for All

Jyothirao Phule's ideas were based on the simple but powerful belief in equality and justice for everyone. He said equality means no one should have special privileges, and everyone should get fair and equal chances in life. He believed that all men and women are created free by God and that everyone has the right to enjoy their fundamental human rights. Phule taught that no person or group has the right to control or look down on another because of their religion or political beliefs. Everyone has the right to own property and to think and speak freely, as long as they don't harm others. He firmly believed that anyone, regardless of their background, should be allowed to serve in government or public office if they were capable. This was a new and bold idea at a time when society treated people very differently just because of their birth or caste.

Critique of the Social Order and Caste System

Phule spoke out strongly against the unfair social system that led to many human sufferings and inequality. He saw the caste system as the root cause of these problems. Phule disagreed with the common belief that God created the caste system and that it was an integral part of the Hindu religion. He explained that the Brahmins were conquerors who came from outside India, possibly from Iran. They defeated the original people living here and forced the caste system on society to keep their power. They made strict and cruel rules to keep the lower castes, especially the Sudras and Ati-Sudras (untouchables), weak and controlled.

Sidebar notes:
- *Satya Shodhak Samaj*
- Just society
- No one should have special privileges
- Brahmins twisted stories and texts

These people were mistreated and denied fundamental human rights, and even their touch or shadow was seen as polluting. Phule showed how Brahmins twisted stories and texts to support this unfair system that kept millions enslaved for hundreds of years.

1.3.1.2 Socio-Political Ideas of Jyotiba Phule

Jyothirao Phule's political ideas centred on challenging the caste system and Brahminical domination in Indian society. He believed that the actual social order should be based on individual merit, not birth or caste. Phule was critical of Hinduism as it was practised, especially the way Brahmins used religion to justify their control over others. In his play **Tritiya Ratna**, he exposed how Brahmins exploited poor peasants by keeping them ignorant and superstitious. This was not just a religious critique, but a political one, as it questioned the very foundation of social power in the Hindu caste hierarchy.

❒ *Tritiya Ratna*

Phule argued that the caste system was a social and political tool created by Brahmins to keep themselves in power. He did not reject Hinduism entirely but distinguished between its original teachings and the way Brahmins had distorted those teachings for their benefit. For Phule, caste was not a divine law but a man-made system that caused inequality and suffering. He believed that British rule, despite its flaws, had disrupted Brahmin hegemony by introducing English education and new political institutions. This shift provided an opportunity to challenge the existing social order. Phule saw education as a powerful political weapon to break Brahmin control over knowledge, administration, and religion. Literacy, especially in English, gave access to political power and social mobility. He also supported conversion to Christianity as a political escape route from caste oppression, seeing it as a way to gain dignity and freedom outside the Hindu social order.

❒ Caste was not a divine law

Phule's political thought was revolutionary for his time because he combined social reform with a vision of political equality. He wanted a society where all castes could participate fully in political and social life. His criticism of Hindu scriptures and Brahminical authority was a direct challenge to the political power Brahmins exercised through their control of religion. He questioned the divine justification for caste and sought to replace it with a society based on fairness and justice. His ideas laid the groundwork for later movements that demanded political rights and representation for marginalised groups in India.

❒ Society based on fairness and justice

1.3.1.3 Satya Shodhak Samaj and Phule's Fight Against Caste and Gender Discrimination

In 1848, a personal incident became a turning point in the life of Jyothirao Phule, igniting his lifelong battle against caste and gender discrimination. Phule was invited to attend a wedding hosted by a Brahmin friend, but upon discovering his caste, the bridegroom's relatives insulted and humiliated him. Deeply hurt by this public affront, Phule walked out of the ceremony and resolved to confront the deep-rooted injustices embedded in the Hindu caste hierarchy. He recognised the oppressive structure of the caste system and decided to devote his life to creating a more equitable and just society. The incident awakened in him a revolutionary spirit that sought not only to challenge traditional norms but to transform the existing social order completely.

❑ Deep-rooted injustices embedded

Phule was profoundly influenced by the radical democratic ideals of Thomas Paine, particularly after reading *The Rights of Man*. He became convinced that education was the primary tool for liberation. In particular, he believed that the emancipation of women and oppressed castes could only be achieved through access to knowledge. At a time when women's education was almost unheard of, Phule took the radical step of educating his wife, Savitribai Phule, who went on to become the first female teacher in modern India. Together, they opened a girls' school in 1851, breaking barriers in a society where female literacy was discouraged and often condemned. Phule later established more schools, including institutions specifically meant for the children of lower castes, such as the Mahars and Mangs. His efforts were not limited to education; he also sought to improve the lives of widows, who were among the most marginalised members of society. Recognising the widespread social abuse faced by child widows, he created an ashram to shelter them and advocated for widow remarriage, challenging both caste norms and patriarchal customs.

❑ Influenced by the radical democratic ideals

Phule did not merely criticise caste from a moral standpoint-he actively fought to dismantle its structures. He launched a fierce critique against the Brahmin orthodoxy, accusing it of using religion as a tool for domination and exploitation. According to him, the upper-caste Brahmins had for centuries manipulated religious doctrines to maintain their privileged status and subjugate the Shudras and Atishudras. He opened his home to people of all castes, symbolising his vision of an egalitarian society. Despite facing severe criticism and accusations of being influenced by British missionaries, Phule

❑ Opened his home to people of all castes

remained firm in his beliefs. He acknowledged the positive role played by some Christian missionaries in promoting education, but his movement was rooted in indigenous concerns and driven by his deep commitment to social justice. Interestingly, some progressive Brahmins supported his initiatives, demonstrating the inclusivity of his vision.

In 1873, Phule founded the *Satya Shodhak Samaj*, or "Truth-Seeking Society," to promote social equality and dismantle caste-based discrimination. The society offered a platform for oppressed castes to organise and assert their rights. Phule's initiative was both social and spiritual. He reinterpreted Indian history and religious texts to expose how Brahminism had created and sustained an unjust social order. He believed that ancient scriptures, such as the Vedas and Smritis, were written to preserve Brahmin hegemony and that they had no divine authority. He was the first to coin the term "Dalit" to describe those oppressed by the caste system collectively. Membership in the *Satya Shodhak Samaj* was open to all, regardless of caste or religion. In a remarkable act of social defiance, Phule constructed a public water tank outside his house in 1868, inviting people of all backgrounds to use it and even share meals with him, thus challenging notions of ritual purity and untouchability.

The *Satya Shodhak Samaj* had a clear set of aims and objectives. Its foremost mission was to free the lower castes from religious and social slavery. Phule envisioned a society where truth and humanity guided everyday interactions. He believed that all human beings are children of the same God and hence equal, deserving of the same rights and dignity. The society sought to eliminate injustice against the lower castes, liberate labourers from the grip of exploiters, and cultivate a morally healthy and just social life. It aimed to raise awareness among Shudras and Atishudras about their rights and to liberate them from mental, spiritual, and economic bondage. The *Samaj* promoted simple marriages devoid of Brahmin priests and rituals, symbolising resistance to Brahminical control over personal and spiritual matters. By preaching the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, the movement laid the groundwork for a new social order based on liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Phule's work through the *Satya Shodhak Samaj* represented a bold and visionary step towards creating a just and inclusive society. His efforts went beyond social reform-they aimed at social transformation. He redefined the role of religion, politics,

❐ Truth-Seeking Society

❐ Promoted simple marriages

and education in public life, giving voice to the marginalised and challenging centuries-old structures of oppression. His movement questioned the very foundations of social inequality and proposed a radical new vision grounded in truth, reason, and human dignity. The legacy of Phule and the *Satya Shodhak Samaj* continues to inspire struggles for social justice in India today.

1.3.1.3 Phule's Approach to Social Reform and Education

Phule believed in education as the key to social and political change. He fought to educate women and lower castes who were denied knowledge by orthodox society. He and his wife, Savitribai, opened schools that welcomed students from all castes, a radical act at the time. His *Satyashodhak Samaj* was more than a social group; it was a political movement. It pushed for widow remarriage, opposed caste discrimination, and debated Hindu scriptures to expose Brahmin misuse of religion for power. The Samaj worked to build a new social order based on truth and equality.

Phule understood that political change could not happen without social awareness and education. By educating the oppressed, he aimed to prepare them to claim their political rights and challenge Brahmin dominance in governance and administration. While he saw British colonial rule as disrupting the caste system, he was aware that it also had limits and injustices. Phule's political vision did not depend blindly on colonial power but used the new political space to advance the cause of equality.

In practice, Phule was a political organiser who combined ideas with action. His work influenced later leaders like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi. Phule's challenge to Brahminical power and his push for political and social rights made him a pioneer in Indian political thought, focusing on social justice and inclusion. His vision was for a society where caste would no longer define a person's political rights or social status.

Challenging the Caste System and Brahmin Dominance

Phule firmly opposed the varṇa and caste system, which he believed were not given by God but were man-made tools of oppression. He argued that Hindu religious texts falsely claimed divine approval for the caste system to deceive and control the

Redefined the role of religion

A political movement

Cause of equality

Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi

Opposed the varna and caste system

lower castes. Using his understanding and contemporary ideas, Phule explained that the Brahmins, whom he identified as Aryans, were invaders who came from outside India-possibly Iran-and conquered the original inhabitants. After settling in North India, they created myths, religious rituals, and unjust laws to keep power in their own hands.

According to Phule, the caste system was a clever invention by the Brahmins to maintain their dominance. Brahmins gave themselves the highest rights and privileges, while Shudras and Ati-Shudras (those considered untouchables) were treated with great hatred. Their mere touch or shadow was seen as polluting. Phule re-read Hindu stories and pointed out that the avatars of Vishnu symbolised stages of Aryan conquest. From that time, the Brahmins had kept the Shudras and Ati-Shudras in lifelong bondage. He compared their suffering to that of African slaves in America, arguing that the oppression of Shudras was even worse.

☐ Maintain brahmins dominance

He criticised Brahmin dominance in all fields-religious, social, and political. They utilised their higher education to secure prominent positions in administration, law, and village life. In villages, Brahmins, such as the Kulkarni, acted as accountants, advisors, and moneylenders, reducing village leaders, like the Patil, to mere figures. At every level of government, Brahmin officials exploited the poor and illiterate, often misleading British authorities to serve their interests. Phule, who came from the Shudra community, was deeply committed to uplifting not just Shudras but also Ati-Shudras. He believed these oppressed communities should unite and fight for an equal society. This is why Dr. B. R. Ambedkar later considered Phule as his intellectual guide.

☐ Criticised brahmin dominance in all fields

Advocating Gender Equality and Reforming Marriage Practices

Phule was equally concerned about the condition of women in Indian society. He often stated that women, like men, are entitled to equal rights. He believed that mentioning "men" did not automatically include "women," so he made sure to always mention women specifically in his writings on human rights. Phule pointed out that just as Brahmins kept Shudras in ignorance to dominate them, selfish men had denied education to women to maintain male control.

☐ Equal rights

He was particularly troubled by the traditional marriage system. He spoke out against harmful customs such as child

marriage, the practice of marrying young girls to old men, polygamy, the ban on widow remarriage, and the social mistreatment of widows. Phule advised Shudra farmers not to marry off their young children and to limit themselves to one wife. He gave serious thought to how marriages should be conducted and introduced a new, simple, and modern type of marriage ceremony for members of the *Satya Shodhak Samaj*.

Phule's ideas on gender were not limited to equality-he even believed that women were superior to men in many ways. His views were progressive for his time and laid the foundation for future movements for women's rights in India. Jyotiba Phule was a pioneer in fighting against the caste system and advocating gender equality. He used reason and critical thinking to challenge deeply rooted social customs and religious practices. His contributions continue to inspire those who work for a just and equal society.

1.3.1.4 Educational Philosophy of Phule

Jyothirao Phule was one of the earliest and strongest advocates of mass education in colonial India. His ideas were rooted in the belief that education was not just a privilege but a fundamental human right that must be extended to all, especially those who had been historically excluded. His submission to the Hunter Commission in 1882 is a foundational document in the history of Indian education. In this statement, Phule highlighted the need for free and compulsory education and argued that the government must take responsibility for educating the poor, who were the primary source of its revenue through taxes. According to him, the denial of education to the lower castes was a significant reason for their continued social and economic subordination.

Phule insisted that the government was unjust in using public funds to promote higher education, which primarily benefited the elite. He firmly believed that primary education should receive more attention, as it was directly useful for the daily lives of ordinary people. He also emphasised the importance of cultivating a general interest in education among the masses and eliminating all social and financial barriers to access. In his view, an education system focused only on the upper classes could never bring about real progress. Instead, he called for an inclusive system that served the needs of all communities, particularly the oppressed castes and women.

☐ Modern type of marriage ceremony

☐ Just and equal society

☐ Free and compulsory education

☐ Inclusive system of education

Phule's vision of education was both social and moral. He viewed education as a tool for fostering self-respect, cultivating critical thinking, and promoting the values of justice, equality, and compassion. He believed that the poor and the oppressed needed education not just to improve their material condition but to awaken their minds and understand their rights. According to Phule, education should help individuals distinguish between right and wrong and give them the strength to fight against exploitation and injustice. He wanted education to be a force for individual empowerment and collective transformation.

In his educational philosophy, the teacher's role was central. Phule argued that primary school teachers must be well-trained and adequately paid. He sought to recruit teachers from lower castes so that they could secure respectable employment and also serve as role models for their communities. He believed that efficient teachers should be paid higher salaries, as they played a key role in shaping the minds of future generations. He also emphasised that a relevant and practical curriculum was essential for making education meaningful. According to him, education should include practical subjects such as agriculture, health, history, ethics, and grammar, which could directly benefit people in their daily lives.

Phule connected education with broader social goals. He believed that the progress of lower castes and women was possible only through education. He often said that a lack of education leads to a lack of wisdom, which in turn leads to injustice, poverty, and continued oppression. Therefore, for Phule, education was not only a personal benefit but a social necessity. He believed that the only way to bring about a just and equal society was by universalising education and removing all forms of discrimination based on caste, gender, and religion. He was also critical of Lord Macaulay's downward filtration theory, which ignored the masses and promoted education only for the elite. Phule rejected this idea and demanded a system where education was accessible to all, starting from the bottom.

One of Phule's significant contributions was his work in educating women and marginalised communities. He opened a school for girls in 1848 and later started schools for girls from backward castes. At a time when women's education was discouraged and even considered sinful, Phule took bold steps to make it possible. He believed that educated women would become aware of their rights and challenge the customs that oppressed them. Similarly, the education of Shudras and

☐ A force for individual empowerment

☐ Role of teachers

☐ Broader social goals

☐ Backward class movement

untouchables would help them claim equality and dignity in all aspects of life. Through these efforts, Phule laid the foundation for the backward class movement in India.

His educational philosophy included several key principles. First, he believed that education should be universal, compulsory, and free. Second, he argued that education should serve the needs of society and help people become productive and responsible citizens. Third, he insisted that education must be practical and must promote moral and human values. Fourth, he sought a curriculum that reflected both rural and urban needs and included subjects relevant to people's everyday lives. Ultimately, he believed that education should prepare individuals for both personal growth and social responsibility.

Phule's ideas continue to remain relevant in contemporary India. The principles enshrined in Articles 45 and 21A of the Indian Constitution-on free and compulsory education-can be seen as the realisation of his lifelong dream. He stands out as one of the earliest champions of social justice in the field of education. His efforts were not only about increasing the number of schools but also about making education meaningful, accessible, and equitable. Phule saw education as a means of achieving liberty, equality, and fraternity-values central to any democratic society.

1.3.2 Jyothirao Phule's Vision of Social Upliftment through Colonial Reform

Jyothirao Phule lived during a time when colonial rule had begun to open new possibilities for lower castes and women in India. Unlike the traditional Hindu social order, which restricted education and job opportunities to upper castes, British policies offered the potential for a more equal society. Phule believed that British rule could break the chains of caste-based oppression, especially the dominance of the Brahmins. Although the British had their interests, Phule saw their rule as a chance to uplift the lower castes and promote social justice. His loyalty to the colonial government was not blind-it came from the hope that it would help build a more just society.

Embracing Colonial Rule as a Means of Social Justice

Phule saw British rule as a relief from the centuries-old social and economic domination by the Brahmins. He welcomed the colonial government's decision to allow people from all castes

☐ Universal, compulsory, and free education

☐ Means of achieving liberty, equality, and fraternity

☐ Build a more just society

to attend schools and colleges. He noted that high-caste rulers in pre-colonial India used to collect taxes from the poor but spent nothing on their welfare. In contrast, he believed the British were more likely to work for the benefit of the lower castes, including the Shudras and Ati-Shudras. Phule urged the British to take concrete steps, such as replacing Brahmin officials with non-Brahmins or even British officers if necessary, as he believed the latter would be more impartial. He also asked for reforms such as the abolition of the *balutedari* system, a caste-based system of village occupations. He wanted legal changes to end customs that suppressed women and untouchables. Phule hoped that if the British provided education and employment to lower castes, they would remain loyal to the colonial regime.

❐ Welcomed colonial government

Though Phule formed the Satya Shodhak Samaj to raise awareness among lower castes, he avoided direct political confrontation with the British. He often warned against the Indian National Congress and other political groups formed by upper-caste elites. Phule believed these groups only represented the interests of the Brahmins and would eventually try to restore their dominance under the banner of nationalism.

❐ He avoided direct political confrontation

Advocating Educational Reform and Critiquing Colonial Shortcomings

Despite his general support for British rule, Phule was not afraid to criticise its failures, particularly in education. He observed that the British government allocated more funds to higher education, which primarily benefited upper-caste students while neglecting primary education for the masses. He highlighted that most government revenue came from the labour of the poor, and therefore, a larger portion of it should be used for their education and development.

❐ British government allocated more funds

Phule noted that upper-caste people monopolised administrative jobs because they had access to education, and he urged the government to include more lower-caste people in these roles. He was deeply concerned that the British education system continued to favour literary castes and ignored the practical needs of poor students. He also criticised the quality of education in primary and secondary schools and the unjust distribution of scholarships.

❐ Ignored the practical needs of poor students

Moreover, Phule raised concerns about the British officials being disconnected from rural India. He pointed out that most

officers didn't understand the language or the problems of the peasants, which allowed Brahmin bureaucrats to mislead them. As a member of the Poona Municipality, Phule demonstrated his commitment to the poor by opposing wasteful spending and drawing attention to rural suffering. On one occasion, he wore the clothes of a poor farmer to a formal dinner, using the opportunity to show British officials the harsh realities faced by ordinary people.

Phule viewed British rule through the lens of his strong commitment to eradicating caste discrimination and promoting equality for everyone. Although he recognised the reforms brought by colonial authorities, he was quick to highlight their shortcomings, particularly in addressing the needs of the underprivileged and marginalised. His writings and activism consistently championed social justice, as he dreamed of a future where education and authority would be accessible to all, rather than exclusively enjoyed by a select few.

1.3.3 Jyothirao Phule's Economic Vision and Agrarian Concerns

Jyothirao Phule was deeply concerned about the economic challenges faced by Indian society, especially those related to agriculture. While his social reform efforts focused on Shudras, untouchables, and women, his economic concerns were centred around the plight of the peasantry. Unlike many high-caste nationalists who supported industrialisation as the solution to India's problems, Phule believed the real solution lay in improving agriculture, which was the backbone of India's economy.

Causes of Agrarian Crisis in Phule's Perspective

Phule observed that Indian agriculture was in crisis due to several reasons. One major issue was that more people were depending on farming for their livelihood, as earlier job opportunities in local armies or administrations had disappeared. Additionally, farmers who used to depend on forests for their needs, such as firewood, fodder, and fruits, were affected when the British government took control of forest lands through the new forest department. These lands, including hills and grazing fields, were now restricted.

The British had also increased land taxes, even though farmers' incomes were falling. This made farmers vulnerable

to moneylenders, and many lost their land due to unpaid debts. Brahmin officers in government departments like revenue, irrigation, and the judiciary also exploited farmers. Rural craftsmen and cottage industries suffered because British-made goods, which were cheaper and of better quality, flooded the Indian markets. This forced many artisans out of work, increasing unemployment in rural areas.

Phule's Remedies for the Agrarian Problem

Phule proposed practical solutions based on his deep understanding of the rural economy. He believed that agriculture could only become profitable if proper infrastructure were developed. He suggested building tanks and dams to ensure a steady water supply for farming. He also recommended that the government take initiatives such as soil conservation, animal breeding, modern farming education, and organising agricultural exhibitions.

Phule argued that agricultural banks would not succeed unless farming itself became profitable. He asked the government to reduce taxes and other burdens on farmers. He showed that after paying taxes, a farmer's family had very little left for living, while Brahmin and British officers earned far more. Phule recognised that British colonial rule was damaging the rural economy, even though he had initially supported British governance for its modern ideas. He identified that wealth was being drained not just to Britain but also from the rural poor to the urban elite, especially to the Brahmin class. Notably, Phule did not divide farmers into different economic classes. He saw the peasantry as a whole being exploited, regardless of their financial standing. His views presented an early understanding of rural exploitation that went beyond class and focused on caste and structural inequalities.

Jyotiba Phule offered a clear and compassionate analysis of India's agrarian problems. His approach combined a strong sense of justice with practical solutions for improving agriculture and rural livelihoods. He remains a key figure in highlighting the economic struggles of the lower castes and peasantry in colonial India.

1.3.4 Jyothirao Phule's Vision of a Universal and Just Religion

Jyotiba Phule believed that real liberation for the lower castes and untouchables required not only a challenge to the social

❑ Increasing unemployment

❑ Proper infrastructure

❑ Understanding of rural exploitation

❑ Strong sense of justice with practical solutions

structure and colonial economy but also a profound critique of religion-particularly Hinduism. Inspired by the radical ideas of Thomas Paine, Phule envisioned a new kind of religion founded on equality and truth. He rejected traditional beliefs and practices, offering an alternative called Sarvajanik Satya Dharma (Public Truth Religion), which focused on justice and human dignity for all.

Breaking Away from Hinduism and Caste-Based Religion

Phule believed in a single God and considered all human beings as equal children of that God. He rejected idol worship, religious rituals, fatalism, the idea of incarnations, and the role of priests or gurus as intermediaries between humans and the divine. He did not consider any scripture to be sacred or divinely revealed. Unlike M.G. Ranade and the Prarthana Samaj, who tried to reform Hinduism from within, Phule completely broke away from it. He argued that Hinduism, primarily through texts such as the Vedas and Smritis, had been used by Brahmins to dominate the Shudras and the untouchables.

According to Phule, the entire structure of Hinduism was based on caste inequality and Brahmin supremacy. He strongly criticised the *Prarthana Samaj* and *Brahmo Samaj*, accusing them of being controlled by educated Brahmins who had benefited from the taxes paid by lower castes. Phule claimed these groups tried to protect the Brahmin-dominated religious system under the guise of reform. Instead of merely correcting Hinduism, Phule sought to replace it with a religion based on liberty, equality, and the search for truth without the help of any holy books or priests.

Principles of Phule's Universal Religion

Although Phule rejected Hinduism, he did not oppose the idea of religion itself. His *Sarvajanik Satya Dharma* was based on human equality and universal brotherhood. He believed religion should unite people, not divide them based on caste, language, or nationality. Christianity influenced his views, but he did not support religious conversion. Like Thomas Paine, he was critical of all religions, including Christianity, and believed no single religion held the complete truth.

Phule's vision of religion was practical and inclusive. He imagined a family where members could follow different religions peacefully-a wife might be a Buddhist, her husband a Christian, and their children could follow other paths. He

believed there was some truth in every religion, and no one religion had the full answer. Phule also criticised the British colonial government for supporting religious institutions like temples with public money, especially when that money came from lower castes. He felt the state should not support unjust religious customs or turn a blind eye to discrimination. Jyotiba Phule's idea of religion was far ahead of his time. He dreamed of a universal faith grounded in truth, justice, and equality. His efforts to create a religion without caste discrimination showed his deep commitment to social reform and human dignity.

Summarised Overview

Phule was a radical critic of caste, Brahminical hegemony, and patriarchy, advocating equality and social justice. He founded the Satya Shodhak Samaj in 1873 to promote truth, education, and liberation of lower castes and women. Phule viewed caste as an instrument of domination and argued that Brahmins misused religion to maintain power. He pioneered girls' education and opened schools with his wife Savitribai. Phule compared caste oppression to slavery and advocated dignity for Shudras and Ati-Shudras. He promoted widow remarriage, opposed child marriage, and supported conversion as a path to freedom. His reinterpretation of religious texts challenged upper-caste supremacy. He believed British rule disrupted caste dominance and used that space for reform. Phule's legacy inspired future anti-caste movements, including Ambedkar's. His educational philosophy stressed critical consciousness and civic equality. His social humanism laid the foundation for radical democratic thought in India.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. How did Phule use his own life experiences to understand caste and Brahmin oppression?

2. What points did Phule raise to reject caste hierarchy in Hindu religious texts?

3. How did Phule see British rule in relation to Brahmin control over Indian society?

4. Why was education important in Phule's efforts to free women and lower castes?

5. How did the Satya Shodhak Samaj question social rules and religious power?

6. How did Phule try to build a new society based on truth and equality?

7. What did Phule mean by universal religion, and how was it different from Brahminical Hinduism?

8. What methods did Phule suggest for improving the lives of Shudras and Ati-Shu-dras?

9. How did Phule's reform ideas help shape future anti-caste and Dalit movements?

Assignment

1. How did Jyotirao Phule's personal experiences shape his critique of the caste system?

2. Evaluate the educational philosophy of Jyotirao Phule in the context of 19th-century Indian society.

3. Discuss the aims and significance of the Satya Shodhak Samaj.

4. In what ways did Phule challenge the religious justification for caste and gender discrimination?

5. Compare the approaches of Rajaram Mohan Roy, Dayananda Saraswathy, and Jyotirao Phule to social reform.

6. How did Phule link economic exploitation with caste oppression?

7. Analyse Phule's views on British colonial rule. Was he a supporter or a critic?

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Suggested Reading

1. Deshpande, G. P. (Ed.). (2002). *Selected writings of Jotirao Phule*. LeftWord Books.

2. Marwaha, N. (2010). *Dalit movement in India: Role of Jyotirao Phule and B.R. Ambedkar*. Kalpaz Publications.

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4. Omvedt, G. (1976). *Cultural revolt in a colonial society: The non-Brahman movement in Western India, 1873–1930*. Scientific Socialist Education Trust.

5. Pandey, G. (1990). *The construction of communalism in colonial North India*. Oxford University Press.

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.

BLOCK 2
Nation and Nationalism

Bal Gangadhar Tilak

Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- understand the ideological foundations of Bal Gangadhar Tilak's contribution to Indian Nationalism
- analyse Tilak's conception of Swaraj as both a political and moral ideal
- examine the role of culture, religion, and education in Tilak's nationalist strategies

Background

Towards the end of the 19th century, many Indians had become increasingly discontented with British rule. The earlier approach led by the Moderates, who relied on petitions and peaceful appeals for reform, began to lose public support. This gave rise to a more vigorous phase of the national movement known as Extremism. Bal Gangadhar Tilak became a central figure during this period. Deeply influenced by India's cultural values and philosophical traditions, Tilak introduced a new kind of nationalism-one that did not rely solely on political opposition but also emphasised a revival of moral strength and cultural pride. For Tilak, Swaraj was more than a political objective; it was a sacred duty and a sign of inner awakening for the people of India.

Keywords

Swaraj, Extremism, Cultural Nationalism, Vedanta, Ganapati Festival, Shivaji Festival, Swadeshi

2.1.1 The Emergence of Extremism in Indian Nationalism

In the early years of the Indian freedom movement, a significant distinction emerged between two groups of leaders: Moderates and Extremists. This difference was based on their approach to British rule. The Moderates believed that British rule had some benefits, especially when compared to the political disorder that existed before colonial rule. They thought that the British had introduced - modern laws, education, and railways and that, over time, India could achieve self-government through peaceful and gradual reforms. However, this loyalty to the British started to weaken, especially after the partition of Bengal in 1905. Many Indians saw the partition as a deliberate move by Lord Curzon to divide the population along religious lines. This created unrest and made people question the fairness of British policies. Extremist leaders like Bipin Chandra Pal began to ask how one could remain loyal to a government that was unjust and repressive. For him and other Extremists, British rule was not a gift but a burden, and it could never serve the real interests of the Indian people.

The Extremists strongly criticised the Moderates for misleading the nationalist cause. They believed that the path of slow reform and loyalty to the Empire was ineffective. In contrast, they promoted a new nationalist outlook based on open opposition to imperialism. This ideology also inspired many revolutionary and militant movements during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Another key difference was their idea of self-government. The Moderates sought limited self-rule within the British Empire, similar to what Canada and Australia had achieved. However, the Extremists demanded complete swaraj or self-rule. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, one of the prominent leaders of this group, made the famous statement: "Swaraj is my birthright, and I shall have it." According to him, without self-rule, there could be no real progress-whether in education, industry, or social reform. His words reflected the urgency and depth of the Extremist vision.

❏ Extrimist view of British rule

❏ The urgency and depth of the Extremist vision

Bipin Chandra Pal also clearly stated that the goal of the Extremist movement was to end British control over Indian policies. He demanded that England should give up its right to decide the future of the Indian people. The Extremists believed that absolute freedom meant Indians should make their laws and govern themselves. Unlike the Moderates, the Extremists were not opposed to using force if necessary. They felt that violence could be justified if it helped the national cause. The Moderates, on the other hand, preferred peaceful and constitutional methods to avoid a direct clash with the British government. The Extremists supported bold measures like boycotts, swadeshi (use of Indian-made goods), and strikes. These were first used during the protest against the Bengal partition in 1905 and soon became part of the larger national movement. Tilak defended the boycott by arguing that it could make British rule more difficult and ineffective, as the system relied on Indian cooperation. He urged Indians working in British offices to resign so that the system would collapse from within.

At the same time, the Extremists promoted Swadeshi goods and rejected foreign products, especially those made in Britain. This strategy hit British industries hard and helped build a sense of economic independence. The economic boycott was seen as a powerful tool because it had the potential to directly hurt British profits while spreading nationalist awareness among the masses. Another difference lay in how the two groups viewed Indian capacity for self-rule. The Moderates often believed that Indians were not yet ready for complete independence. The Extremists strongly opposed this view. Tilak argued that freedom was a right, not something to be earned based on "fitness." He believed that Indians could learn self-government only by practising it, not by waiting for approval from the British.

The Extremist struggle also included the idea of self-sacrifice. Many young revolutionaries were inspired to give their lives to the country. Public actions, such as strikes and boycotts, were one side of the movement, but there was also a secret and militant side. Some Extremists supported violent attacks against British officials, hoping to scare the rulers and inspire the people. Such acts, although controversial, drew attention to the nationalist cause and were often discussed in both government and nationalist media.

Western liberal thinkers, such as Gladstone and Burke, influenced the Moderates. In contrast, the Extremists found their

❐ Indians should govern themselves

❐ Economic boycott

❐ Idea of self-sacrifice

inspiration in Indian thinkers and spiritual leaders. The writings of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and the teachings of Swami Vivekananda were essential. Bankim's novel Anandamath and its song "Vande Mataram" became symbols of national pride. The song praised the motherland as a goddess, combining patriotism with religion. Vivekananda's messages about the strength of Indian civilisation gave confidence to the youth and encouraged them to work for the nation.

The Extremist movement brought a new energy to Indian nationalism. It rejected the slow methods of the Moderates and called for direct action. Leaders like Tilak, Pal, and Lajpat Rai not only changed the language of nationalism but also gave it a stronger, more emotional foundation rooted in Indian traditions. Their legacy continued to influence later leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi, who adapted some of their methods in a new political context.

2.1.2 Tilak: The Champion of Extremism

Bal Gangadhar Tilak was a pivotal figure during the extremist phase of Indian nationalism. Operating from Maharashtra, Tilak redirected the freedom struggle through courageous ideas, cultural initiatives, and grassroots activism. He opposed the moderate leadership within the Congress by dismissing their reliance on gradual reforms and loyalty to the British. Tilak's approach invigorated the national movement with a powerful emotional resonance, advocating for immediate swaraj, or self-rule, as an inalienable right of every Indian. He leveraged religion, history, and traditional festivals as sources of inspiration and tools for political mobilisation. Through his actions and rhetoric, Tilak laid the groundwork for a more assertive nationalism that altered the trajectory of India's independence struggle.

Before actively participating in the Indian National Congress, Tilak's role as an ideologue and organiser was already apparent. His newspapers-Kesari in Marathi and Mahratta in English-were instrumental in disseminating nationalist ideas. He firmly believed in the necessity of politically educating the masses, and his writings criticised British rule while fostering political awareness among his readers. When colonial authorities closely monitored public gatherings and speeches, Tilak utilised religious and cultural events to cultivate a nationalist spirit. In 1893, he turned the Ganapati festival into a major public celebration that conveyed messages of unity and resistance. Three years later, he established the Shivaji festival to honour the Maratha king's

legacy as a symbol of courage and anti-imperialist defiance. These festivals aimed not to restore monarchies but to spark pride in India's illustrious history and cultivate a collective identity based on national pride.

Despite being accused of fostering religious revivalism, Tilak clarified that he aimed to enhance political awareness through culturally familiar forms. He argued that Indians needed to regain their confidence in their heritage to overcome foreign domination. During a time of severe colonial oppression, cultural expressions emerged as one of the few secure means to convey political messages. His skilful blend of tradition and political intent rendered his approach both practical and relatable.

☐ His skilful blend of tradition and political intent

Tilak's popularity surged in Maharashtra. In 1896, he successfully led a boycott of foreign cloth in protest against unfair cotton taxes. He championed a no-tax campaign during the famine of 1896–97, voicing the concerns of peasants whom the Moderates largely overlooked. His courageous actions during the plague outbreak in Pune further elevated his public image. Though he was briefly detained after a British official's assassination, no direct evidence linked him to the incident, and he was subsequently released. His writings in Kesari became notably more forceful, articulating the widespread resentment against British policies.

☐ Boycott of foreign cloth

Tilak's political philosophy starkly contrasted with that of the Moderates. He opposed slow reforms and called for swaraj without delay. While his notion of swaraj did not initially entail complete independence, he sought a government administered by Indians accountable to the populace. He asserted that Indians should manage their own finances, enact their own laws, and appoint their officials. Additionally, Tilak introduced the concept of praja-droha-the people's moral right to oppose an unjust government. He asserted that if a government neglects its responsibilities and becomes oppressive, it forfeits its moral right to govern. Nevertheless, he recognised the dangers of mass uprisings under colonial rule and advocated for limited actions to avoid severe crackdowns.

☐ Opposed slow reforms

Despite his compelling nationalist message, Tilak's methods faced criticism. His strong adherence to Vedantic thought and conservative Hindu practices made him seem traditionalist. His opposition to the Age of Consent Bill of 1890, which aimed to raise the minimum marriage age for girls, showcased his hesitance to

☐ Focus on Hindu symbols and festivals

endorse specific social reforms. While leaders like M.G. Ranade advocated for the bill as a necessary step for women's welfare, Tilak viewed it as British interference in Hindu customs. Tilak's focus on Hindu symbols and festivals also raised communal tensions. His involvement in the Cow Protection movement and the overtly religious nature of the Ganapati and Shivaji festivals gave him a religious image. However, it is essential to recognise that under strict colonial oversight, religious platforms provided one of the few avenues for organising and disseminating political ideas. Tilak strategically employed these spaces to sustain the nationalist spirit.

Tilak's impact on Indian nationalism was both profound and enduring. He criticised moderate leaders for mimicking Western concepts and neglecting India's cultural heritage. He demonstrated that political mobilisation could be rooted in local traditions and emotional connections with the populace, utilising strategies such as swadeshi, boycotts, and strikes that later became essential tools for resistance in the Gandhian phase of the movement. Gandhi later adapted these ideas into a broader, more inclusive framework with the inspiration derived from Tilak's trailblazing efforts.

❏ Local traditions and emotional connections

Bal Gangadhar Tilak is celebrated as one of the most dynamic and visionary leaders of the early freedom movement. He transformed Indian nationalism from a polite request into a fervent demand. His assertive political stance, cultural mobilisation, and advocacy for Swaraj generated new political energy that inspired countless individuals. Despite his conservative tendencies, Tilak's role in moulding a bold and self-assured nationalist identity remains unparalleled in the history of India's fight for independence.

❏ Transformed Indian nationalism

2.1.3 Swaraj: Moral Self-Governance and National Freedom

Bal Gangadhar Tilak's idea of Swaraj was profound, blending philosophical richness with a committed political approach. To him, Swaraj represented more than just the political aspiration to end British colonial rule; it was a comprehensive vision of freedom that included moral self-governance, spiritual growth, and cultural resurgence. Tilak's interpretation of Swaraj was significantly shaped by his deep engagement with Hindu philosophy, especially the Bhagavad Gita, which he studied during his imprisonment in Mandalay. In his significant work, Gita Rahasya, Tilak reinterpreted the Gita's lessons as a call

❏ Comprehensive vision of freedom

to actively engage in life's responsibilities, executed with detachment yet full awareness of moral duty-an idea known as karma yoga. This interpretation countered the prevalent misreadings that suggested the text promoted withdrawal or renunciation.

Tilak held that every person has a divine right to freedom, stemming from the timeless spiritual link between the self and the Absolute. His well-known statement, "Swaraj is my birthright, and I shall have it," revealed his deep-seated belief that political freedom is not a privilege but an inherent right to be reclaimed. Moreover, he asserted that Swaraj extended beyond mere political concerns. True Swaraj required the inner emancipation of individuals exercising self-discipline, moral integrity, and spiritual fortitude. A nation comprised of such enlightened individuals would naturally be able to govern itself, rendering political sovereignty both meaningful and sustainable.

❐ Political freedom is not a privilege

Additionally, Tilak's vision of Swaraj incorporated cultural and educational elements. He criticised the colonial education system for disconnecting Indians from their cultural heritage and fostering a generation estranged from its roots. For Tilak, achieving Swaraj necessitated reviving India's age-old philosophical traditions, cultural practices, and indigenous knowledge. This cultural renaissance was crucial for restoring the nation's self-respect and spiritual vitality, which was severely undermined by colonialism. Thus, Swaraj represented not just political independence but also a renewal of India's collective spirit.

❐ Cultural and educational elements

Tilak's approach to Swaraj sharply contrasted with that of many moderate leaders in the Indian National Congress during the late 19th century. While moderates pursued gradual reforms and sought amicable relations with the British government, Tilak endorsed a more confrontational stance. He contended that freedom could only be attained through mass mobilisation, public agitation, and unwavering moral resistance rather than through petitions or polite requests. His leadership marked a pivotal shift in Indian nationalism-from elite discourse to a mass movement rooted in the hopes and energies of everyday people. Tilak's focus on popular involvement, cultural pride, and ethical duty transformed the freedom struggle into a vast movement that fundamentally challenged the legitimacy of colonial rule.

❐ Shift in Indian nationalism

Tilak's concept of Swaraj was distinctive in its all-encompassing vision, intricately weaving political, moral, and

spiritual elements. It called for an India where self-rule was both a privilege and a duty, necessitating not only the termination of foreign control but also the renewal of individual and collective strength. This integrated vision continues to shape Indian political thought, illustrating how Swaraj remains a vibrant ideal that intertwines freedom with moral and cultural self-realisation.

2.1.4 Influence of Vedanta on Tilak's Political Philosophy

The wisdom of the Vedas and the rich heritage of Indian philosophical traditions profoundly inspired Bal Gangadhar Tilak. His deep faith in the moral and spiritual foundations of Indian culture was most clearly articulated in his work Gita Rahasya, where he interpreted the Bhagavad Gita not as a guide to renunciation but as a manual for action rooted in selflessness. He strongly advocated the principle of Nishkama Karma-acting without selfish motives-and emphasised that one's sense of responsibility should ascend from the individual to the family, then to society, and finally to the nation. According to Tilak, a person should not act only for personal gain. Instead, one's actions should benefit the family, society, and the nation. He suggested an ascending order of thought: start with the self, then care for the family, next the society, and finally the nation.

Tilak believed that if a person works for the nation's welfare, they are also working for their own growth. Just as a rupee is made up of a hundred paise, the individual is a part of the nation. If the nation moves forward, so does the individual. If the nation suffers, the people suffer as well. For Tilak, nationalism began from the desire to help others. When that spirit of service is directed toward the nation, it becomes patriotism or national love. He also said that this spirit can grow to include the whole world and all of humanity. But he noted that between the individual and humankind lies the nation. A person must first serve the nation. All citizens share a common goal-national progress. If the nation prospers, everyone gets a chance to grow. If the nation is weak, all citizens are affected.

Tilak spoke about the idea of a 'Global Nation,' but he pointed out that history offers no examples of such a model. Ideas like love and equality are good in theory, and many agree with them. But they are hard to find in real life. On his 61st birthday, on 23 July 1917, Tilak made an emotional appeal to his fellow citizens. He said that the motherland had expectations

from its children, and all must come together to serve her. He urged people to set aside their differences and work together for the nation. He called the country a form of God, 'Rashtra Dev', and said it must be worshipped with action.

Tilak also believed that the desire for freedom is like the soul- it never dies. If there is no nationalism, the nation is lifeless. For him, freedom and nationalism were essential to keep the country alive and strong. Both were deeply connected and equally important.

❑ Desire for freedom

2.1.5 National Unity, Religious Harmony, and Secular Vision

Tilak always wanted unity between Hindus and Muslims. He believed this unity was necessary for building a strong nation. In his view, Hindus form the majority in India, and Hindutva, understood as cultural identity rather than religion, could help unite the people. He said that all who are born and raised in India-whether Hindu, Muslim, or of any other faith-should see India as their motherland. Their hopes and dreams should be tied to the progress of India.

❑ Unity between Hindus and Muslims

Tilak asked people to keep their personal pride, doubts, and differences aside and work for the nation. He believed in unity through diversity. He spent time and effort convincing leaders from different religions to come together. His efforts played a significant role in the Lucknow Congress of 29 December 1916. At this event, he gave his famous call for freedom: "Freedom is my birthright, and I shall have it." The Lucknow Pact, which followed, brought Hindus and Muslims together to demand freedom from British rule. Tilak supported parliamentary democracy. His idea of the nation was shaped by Vedic thought. According to him, Vedic dharma teaches people to help others and accept different views. This open-mindedness has been a part of Indian society for thousands of years. Tilak said that India included many religions, languages, and cultures and that this diversity was a strength. He believed that Indian nationalism must reflect this unity in diversity.

❑ Supported parliamentary democracy

On 5 May 1905, Tilak posed a crucial question: Are the people of India one nation? His answer was yes. He argued that a genuine patriot should embrace hardships. Character is forged through overcoming challenges. In Tilak's view, there is no dichotomy between spiritual values and patriotic responsibilities. He saw society as a living entity that must

❑ Inclusive nationalism

evolve over time; failure to adapt leads to weakness. But he was hopeful-he said that Indian society was not dead, only asleep, and that it would soon awaken. Patriotism, according to him, meant bringing together all groups and communities. The goal was to create a broader, more inclusive nationalism.

In 1919, at a small meeting in Mumbai at the home of Dr. Velkar, Tilak spoke to leaders from across India, including Bipinchandra Pal, Satyamurti from Madras, Chakkarang Chitti from Andhra, Harchand Vishambar Sindha, Divan Chaman Lall from Punjab, and Dr. Gopinath Bordoloi from Assam. Tilak told them that India had many internal differences. But he gave a powerful image: if Indians boarded a boat to England, they would start their journey with many differences. By the time they reached the port of Aden, many of those differences would fade. As the boat crossed the Red Sea and reached the Suez Canal, even more differences would disappear. Eventually, no differences would remain. The shared experience of slavery would unite them. For Tilak, the reality that India was trampling under foreign rule was the strongest reason to forget all divisions and fight together.

❐ Shared experience of slavery

Through such words and actions, Tilak gave a clear message of nationalism, inclusiveness, and secularism. He believed in a free India that belonged to all its people, regardless of religion or background.

2.1.6 Cultural Nationalism: Swadeshi, Ganapati and Shivaji Festivals

Tilak skillfully used culture and tradition as tools to awaken national consciousness among the Indian masses. He understood the power of collective identity, especially in a society deeply rooted in religious and historical sentiment. Rather than appealing solely to reason, Tilak tapped into the emotional and cultural instincts of the people to create unity and mobilise them for the national cause. He recognised that the common people of India shared a deep emotional connection with religion, and that cultural symbols like festivals, flags, and slogans could ignite the spirit of nationalism far more effectively than intellectual arguments alone.

❐ Power of collective identity

To instil a sense of cultural nationalism, Tilak made strategic use of traditional Indian practices. Among the methods he adopted were the promotion of Swadeshi, the celebration of national festivals, and movements based on shared identity. His approach is clearly reflected in a speech delivered at the Bharat Dharma Mahamandala, where he stated that the Hindu

❐ Cultural nationalism

religion was not just a spiritual path but also provided moral and social bonds among the people. He believed that India had once been united during the Vedic period as a self-contained and self-reliant nation. According to him, the loss of this unity led to national decline, and it was the duty of contemporary leaders to restore that ancient unity.

The Swadeshi movement became one of the most effective ways through which Tilak stirred the nationalist spirit. Especially during the agitation against the partition of Bengal, the call for Swadeshi had a powerful influence on the masses. People enthusiastically boycotted foreign goods and turned to Indian-made alternatives. Tilak utilised this movement not only to oppose British policies but also to educate people on the importance of self-reliance and economic independence. Through Swadeshi, he instilled the idea that political freedom could only come through cultural and economic strength.

Equally important were the Ganapati and Shivaji festivals, which Tilak transformed from local or religious events into public expressions of collective identity. The Ganapati festival, once confined to private religious affairs, became a public celebration under Tilak's leadership, and he succeeded in drawing large crowds and building a sense of unity among people from different backgrounds by making this festival a national affair. The Shivaji festival, honouring the Maratha king who resisted Mughal rule, became a symbol of courage and resistance against foreign domination. These festivals were not merely cultural events-they became platforms for political education and mobilisation, according to Tilak. The impact of these efforts was noted even by British observers. In his book The Indian Unrest, Valentine Chirol wrote that these two festivals-one focused on religious devotion and the other on historical pride-gave Tilak a powerful base from which he could carry forward his campaign of political awakening. They allowed him to reach out to the masses with ideas of patriotism in a form they could connect with emotionally and culturally.

Tilak was a wise political thinker and an astute leader. He did not invent the festivals, but he transformed them into instruments of national unity and awakening. As N.C. Kelkar observed, Tilak's brilliance lay in giving these festivals a collective and political character. By turning traditional practices into occasions for national expression, he succeeded in creating a spirit and enthusiasm for the freedom movement among people who had never before seen themselves as part of a larger political struggle.

Swadeshi movement

Ganapati and Shivaji festivals

Instruments of national unity

But Tilak's cultural nationalism has also faced scholarly criticism. Prominent historian Romila Thapar has pointed out that while Tilak's use of religious symbolism helped unite sections of the population, it also risked alienating non-Hindu communities. In her analysis of Indian nationalism, Thapar argues that over-emphasis on Hindu identity in nationalism could weaken the inclusive fabric of the Indian national movement and make it vulnerable to communal divisions later. She notes that although the festivals promoted a sense of unity, they were still embedded in Hindu traditions, which may have made it difficult for Muslims, Christians, and other minorities to feel equally included in the nationalist platform.

Similarly, Sumit Sarkar questions whether Tilak's effective mobilisation methods may have introduced a sectarian tone into nationalist politics. He argues that employing religious imagery-particularly in the diverse context of colonial India-could have lasting implications for communal harmony. For example, the celebration of Shivaji, while grounded in regional pride, also recalls Hindu resistance to Muslim rule, potentially exacerbating religious divisions. Conversely, some scholars, like Partha Chatterjee, view Tilak's approach as a necessary response to colonial modernity. He contends that Indian nationalism needed to establish its cultural language, separate from the Western liberal model. In this light, Tilak's integration of culture and politics marked an early effort to promote Indian values within a political framework despite not being entirely devoid of exclusionary implications.

Cultural Nationalism

- Tilak promoted cultural symbols like the Ganapati festival and Shivaji Jayanti to awaken national pride.
- Believed that religion, history, and public rituals could unite Indians emotionally and politically.
- Emphasised Hindu civilisation as the foundation of Indian identity, but used it to mobilise collective resistance, not exclusion.
- His use of festivals turned private religious expression into public political assertion.
- Saw India's past as a source of inspiration, not fatalism-especially figures like Shivaji who symbolised resistance.

(margin notes)

❑ Alienating non-Hindu communities

❑ Sectarian tone into nationalist politics

Tilak's cultural nationalism was founded on a profound understanding of Indian society. He employed traditional festivals and the Swadeshi movement not merely as cultural expressions but as effective strategies to foster unity and inspire patriotism. While Tilak's strategies effectively brought large sections of society into the national movement, they also sparked important debates about the role of religion in politics and the challenges of building a truly inclusive nationalism. These issues remain relevant today as they help us understand the complex and layered history of Indian nationalism.

2.1.7 Educational Philosophy of Tilak

Bal Gangadhar Tilak saw national education not just as a way for individuals to improve themselves, but as a powerful tool to build the nation. For him, education was deeply connected to the dream of Swaraj, or self-rule. As early as 1882, just after being released from a short-term prison sentence, he addressed a large gathering and said something that clearly summed up his belief: "The key to our progress is the education of our people." While many reformers of his time focused on how education could improve society or the economy, Tilak was one of the first to discuss its political influence.

He held that education could foster pride in India's culture and history while uniting people in the struggle for independence. Tilak envisioned education as more than just rote memorisation; he believed it should empower individuals to comprehend their roots, learn from the wisdom of the past, and build confidence in their own identity. For Tilak, the purpose of education was nation-building-it had to nurture pride in Indian civilisation and support the larger goal of independence.

One of his strongest criticisms was directed at the British model of education. He felt it was designed to produce obedient clerks who would serve the colonial administration, not free-thinking citizens who could lead the country. He admired how Japan had developed an independent education system that boosted national pride and self-reliance. In India, by contrast, education had become a colonial tool, disconnected from the lives and values of the people. Tilak wanted to change that. He believed true national education should teach Indians about their own culture, history, and responsibilities as future citizens of a free country.

Tilak outlined four key pillars for national education: religious education, education in the vernacular, industrial education, and political education. When Tilak spoke of religious education, he didn't mean religious preaching or strict orthodoxy. His aim was cultural revival. He wanted students to understand the spiritual richness of their traditions so they could feel proud of them. He believed that only when people respected their religion could they truly respect their country. At the same time, he made it clear that all religions should be respected. For example, he said Hinduism should be taught to Hindus and Islam to Muslims, but both should learn to honour and accept each other's beliefs.

Vernacular education, or learning in one's mother tongue, was another key part of his vision. Tilak criticised the forced use of English in schools. He believed it created a gap between students and their culture and wasted precious years in language learning. Instead, he argued that people could truly be educated only in the language they grew up speaking and thinking in. This, he felt, was essential to reaching the masses and building a sense of national unity.

Tilak also pushed for industrial education. He was deeply concerned about India's economic backwardness and admired how countries like Germany and Japan had made huge progress by focusing on vocational and technical education. He wanted Indian students to learn practical skills that would help the country become self-reliant. This tied directly into his broader support for Swadeshi-relying on Indian-made goods and services-and freeing the country from economic dependence on the British.

Lastly, political education was central to his idea of a national education system. Tilak believed that just being literate was not enough. People also needed to understand politics and governance so they could demand their rights and work for self-rule. He pointed out how Western countries taught children about their political systems from an early age, while Indian education avoided such topics. He wanted Indian children to learn about their history of resistance, their right to self-government, and their duties as future citizens of a democratic nation.

Even after breaking ties with the Deccan Education Society, Tilak never stepped away from his educational mission. He travelled widely across Maharashtra, giving public talks about the importance of an education system rooted in Indian values and political awareness. He saw national education as part of a

larger political programme, along with the Swadeshi movement and the boycott of foreign goods.

Tilak had strong objections to the Macaulay-style British education system. He felt it produced Indians who might look Indian outwardly but were mentally disconnected from their own people and culture. In contrast, the schools inspired by Tilak's ideas worked to provide affordable education to underprivileged students and taught them values like self-help, cultural pride, and national service. Tilak's role in shaping the movement for national education was not just theoretical-he helped build institutions that reflected these values on the ground. His educational philosophy laid the groundwork for future nationalist education initiatives and offered a bold challenge to colonial dominance in the field of learning.

□ Challenge to colonial dominance in the field of learning.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak emerged as a powerful voice in India's freedom movement, bringing with him a unique mixture of cultural pride and political intensity. For him, the struggle for independence was not merely about breaking free from foreign rule-it was about awakening a nation's soul and reconnecting people with their heritage. Through his use of traditional festivals, sharp editorials, and community mobilisation, he turned everyday symbols into tools of resistance. His stirring declaration-"Swaraj is my birthright"-continues to resonate as a call for dignity and self-respect. Although some viewed his views as orthodox, there is no denying that his vision gave strength and direction to a rising national consciousness. Tilak's legacy endures as one of courage, conviction, and unwavering commitment to India's future.

□ Call for dignity and self-respect

Summarised Overview

Tilak was one of the earliest assertive nationalists who saw Swaraj as a moral-spiritual duty and national necessity. He interpreted the Gita as a call to action, promoting selfless service (Nishkama Karma) for the nation. His concept of nationalism was culturally rooted, linking individual duty to national welfare. Tilak's use of public festivals like Ganesh Utsav helped mobilise mass sentiment. He combined political resistance with cultural awakening and promoted Swadeshi as economic nationalism. Deeply influenced by Vedanta, Tilak viewed Rashtra (nation) as divine and freedom as sacred. He advocated for national education that combined vocational skills with civic awareness. His secular outlook supported Hindu-Muslim unity in nation-building. He opposed caste hierarchy and urged social reform within Hindu society. Tilak saw historical figures like Shivaji as national heroes and moral exemplars. He resisted the British colonial model of education,

promoting indigenous values instead. His legacy endures as a blend of religious faith and political militancy. Tilak's idea of Swaraj was comprehensive-spiritual, moral, and political. He remains a foundational figure in Indian nationalism.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. How did Tilak reinterpret Hindu scriptures to promote the idea of Swaraj?
2. What was the significance of the Gita Rahasya in Tilak's political philosophy?
3. In what ways did Tilak contrast between Western and Indian notions of nationalism?
4. How did Tilak link religion and politics in his nationalist discourse?
5. How did Tilak view the British rule in relation to India's cultural regeneration?
6. What methods did Tilak advocate for achieving political freedom?
7. How did Tilak defend the use of assertive means in nationalist struggles?
8. In what ways did Tilak's interpretation of history shape his political outlook?
9. How did Tilak's nationalism differ from moderate reformers of his time?
10. How did Tilak interpret the idea of Swaraj as a birthright?

Assignment

1. Discuss Tilak's concept of Swaraj and explain how it differed from the moderates' interpretation of self-rule.
2. Examine Tilak's interpretation of the Bhagavad Gita and its role in shaping his idea of active resistance.
3. How did Tilak promote the Swadeshi movement as a tool for political and cultural regeneration?
4. Analyse the significance of Tilak's statement 'Swaraj is my birthright and I shall have it' in the context of early nationalist politics.
5. Evaluate Tilak's views on nationalism with reference to his religious symbolism and revivalist strategies.
6. Critically assess Tilak's approach to Hindu-Muslim unity. How did he address the communal question in Indian politics?
7. Explain Tilak's contribution to the Home Rule Movement and its impact on Indian nationalism.

8. Discuss the relevance of Tilak's economic ideas, especially in the context of his critique of colonial policies.

9. What were the key differences between Tilak's political ideology and that of contemporary leaders like Gokhale or Gandhi?

10. Evaluate the long-term influence of Tilak's political thought on the Indian freedom struggle and political mobilisation.

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

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UNIT 2

V D Savarkar

Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- understand the major themes in V.D. Savarkar's political and social thought
- examine his vision of Swadharma and Swarajya in the context of nationalist ideology
- evaluate Savarkar's contributions to social reform, especially his critique of caste and untouchability
- reflect on the impact and controversies surrounding his ideas in shaping modern Indian political discourse

Background

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar emerged as a prominent figure in the early 20th-century nationalist movement. While many leaders focused on political freedom in terms of territory and institutions, Savarkar placed strong emphasis on cultural unity as the foundation of nationhood. His formulation of Hindutva sought to define Indian identity through shared heritage and civilisational values. Apart from his controversial political ideology, Savarkar also worked towards significant social reform, advocating for the abolition of caste and the adoption of rational social practices. He reinterpreted Indian history, especially the 1857 uprising, as a conscious national effort toward independence. Although his ideas have drawn both admiration and criticism, Savarkar's contributions remain a crucial part of the wider Indian political thought.

Keywords

Hindutva, Cultural Nationalism, Swadharma, Swarajya, Hindu Rashtra, National Identity

2.2.1 Political Thought of Savarkar

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883–1966) was a significant and thought-provoking figure in modern Indian political thought. Unlike many other leaders of the national movement who spoke mainly of territorial unity, Savarkar gave importance to the idea of cultural unity. He believed that India's national identity could be strengthened by recognising its shared - civilisational roots. His idea of nationalism, which he called Hindutva, was centred on the belief that a common cultural heritage played an essential role in shaping the nation.

☐ Hindutva

Savarkar's views have been interpreted in many different ways. Some scholars highlight his early role as a courageous nationalist and bold revolutionary who fought for India's freedom in challenging times. Others have critically examined the political implications of his ideas. Regardless of these differing perspectives, Savarkar's contribution to Indian political thought remains influential and continues to generate discussion. At the heart of Savarkar's thinking was the belief that India's national character was profoundly shaped by its long-standing cultural traditions. He felt that reviving and respecting India's ancient values could help in building a strong and united society. The idea of Hindutva, as explained by Savarkar, was not limited to religious belief, but was more about a sense of belonging to a common civilisation, history, and culture. His goal was to bring unity and purpose to national life through this shared cultural understanding.

☐ Shaped by long-standing cultural traditions

In modern Indian thought, two streams have emerged that express different ways of engaging with Hindu traditions. One focuses on Hinduism as a personal and spiritual path, guiding individuals in their ethical and moral lives. This approach emphasises peace, tolerance, and individual inner growth. Thinkers like Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan are often associated with this perspective. The other stream, represented by the idea of Hindutva, views cultural identity as a collective strength. It suggests that shared heritage, values, and customs can help people feel more connected to one another and to the nation. In this view, cultural traditions are not just private matters but also help shape public life and national unity. Savarkar played a key role in developing and defining this idea.

☐ Cultural identity as a collective strength

While Savarkar is often remembered for formulating the concept of Hindutva, his interests and contributions were broad. He was one of the earliest Indians to refer to the 1857 uprising as the First War of Independence. He actively participated in the freedom struggle and wrote extensively on social and cultural reform. He encouraged efforts to improve society, including calls for unity, self-reliance, and educational progress.

This unit aims to explore the social and political ideas of Savarkar in an analytical way. It focuses particularly on his concept of cultural nationalism and how it fits into the broader history of Indian political thought. The objective is to understand his ideas in context, without endorsing or rejecting them, and to reflect on their continuing relevance in discussions on nationhood and identity.

2.2.1.1 Savarkar's View of History: Pride in Heritage and the Struggle for Freedom

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar was deeply critical of the long periods when India came under foreign rule. He believed that the land he called 'Hindusthan' naturally belonged to those rooted in its cultural traditions. In his view, the arrival and dominance of foreign powers disrupted the country's own identity. Even though he recognised the capabilities of rulers like Akbar, he felt that they represented a different cultural background. From his standpoint, Indian society needed to remember and honour leaders who had defended their heritage. One such figure he deeply admired was Chhatrapati Shivaji. Savarkar often praised Shivaji's courage and military strength, and he encouraged fellow Indians to follow the example of their brave ancestors.

Savarkar's historical thinking is evident in his 1925 work, Hindu Pad Padshahi, where he discusses the rise of Maratha power in Maharashtra. He saw Shivaji's leadership as a strong response to the political situation of the time, especially when other regions were under the control of powerful empires. Savarkar presented Shivaji's rule not just as a success story but as a model of how Indian values could shape governance. He even felt that the bravery of the Marathas went beyond that of earlier rulers like Harshavardhana and Pulakesin. He admired the way Shivaji ruled and believed it followed the principles of swadharma (right conduct) and swaraj (self-rule), which he saw as being at the heart of India's traditional way of life. He also appreciated Shivaji's administrative policies, particularly those that emphasised justice and accountability. For Savarkar, this

kind of governance truly reflected the needs and spirit of the people.

His reflections on modern Indian history also carried this nationalist tone. One of his most important contributions was his re-reading of the Revolt of 1857. At a time when British writers referred to it as a small-scale army rebellion, Savarkar argued that it was, in fact, the first real war of independence. He firmly rejected the idea that the revolt was only about issues like military discipline or religious fear. He also disagreed with those who believed it was led only by a few rulers trying to protect their own interests. Instead, he saw the uprising as a powerful indication that the people of India yearned for freedom from foreign rule.

Savarkar respected the bravery of the freedom fighters of 1857. He saw them as people who gave everything, even their lives, for the future of their country. He believed their courage came from a deep commitment to Indian ideals. According to him, values like swadharma and swaraj were not just ancient words but living principles that guided the struggle for freedom. He also admired leaders like Nana Sahib, who dreamed of building a united and independent India. To support his views, Savarkar even referred to the opinions of some European thinkers who described the 1857 uprising as a widespread movement involving a large number of people. Writers like Charles Ball and Justin McCarthy, for example, saw the revolt as more than a military event-they believed it reflected the will of an entire nation.

Savarkar used this interpretation to make a wider point about the fight for freedom. He believed that under certain conditions, when people are oppressed and peaceful appeals are not enough, resistance becomes necessary. He admired the determination of those who fought in 1857 and said that their actions were a response to a harsh and controlling system. He explained this view using examples from different parts of the world where people had taken similar steps to achieve their own freedom. His point was not to promote violence but to highlight that great courage is sometimes needed to bring justice.

Even though Savarkar's ideas were closely linked to the concept of Hindutva, his approach to Indian history was based on national pride and self-respect. While many historians might not fully agree with his views on specific historical figures, his belief in the importance of swadharma and swaraj remains

❏ Re-reading of the Revolt of 1857

❏ Reflected the will of an entire nation

❏ Peaceful appeals are not enough

❏ Views that challenged colonial writings

significant. In his opinion, these values were essential for building an independent and confident India. By presenting the 1857 uprising as the first step toward freedom, he offered a fresh view that challenged both colonial writings and narrow interpretations. Through this, Savarkar helped shape a powerful and lasting perspective on India's journey to independence.

2.2.2 Social Thoughts of Savarkar

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's concept of Hindutva and his vision of a Hindu Rashtra went far beyond political aspirations-they were deeply embedded in his desire for comprehensive social reform. He was not content with political independence alone; he believed that real freedom could only be achieved if society itself was restructured on rational and progressive lines. For Savarkar, national strength came not only from political unity or cultural pride but also from a socially cohesive and morally awakened population. Thus, the transformation of Indian society was central to his overall nationalist project.

❏ Comprehensive social reform

Savarkar strongly believed that Indian society needed to adapt to the demands of the modern world. He did not view society as something fixed or unchanging. Rather, he considered it a living organism that must evolve over time. Several philosophical ideas from Western thinkers influenced his understanding of social change. These ideas helped shape the foundation of his arguments for reform in India. In particular, he was drawn to three broad philosophical principles that he believed were universally applicable.

❏ Three broad philosophical principles

First, he accepted the notion that struggle is a natural part of life. Whether in nature or in human society, survival often depends on the ability to adapt and grow. Those who resist change or are unable to adjust to their circumstances are eventually left behind. Savarkar applied this principle to Indian society, suggesting that to remain vibrant and strong, it must continually reform itself. He saw this adaptability as essential to the long-term survival and progress of the Hindu community and Indian society more broadly.

❏ Struggle is a natural part of life

Second, Savarkar rejected the idea of absolute non-violence as a practical or natural philosophy. He believed that both violence and non-violence had roles in human evolution and that neither could be fully removed from the human condition. While not advocating violence for its own sake, he did argue that self-defence and resistance against oppression were

❏ Rejected the idea of absolute non-violence

morally justified. In his view, strength and courage were virtues that every society needed to cultivate, especially in a colonial context where Indians were subjected to foreign rule.

For Savarkar, acting morally did not simply mean avoiding conflict or harm-it also meant having the courage to oppose injustice when the situation demanded it. He believed that moral values were not fixed or absolute. Instead, ideas like right and wrong had to be understood in relation to the circumstances in which they occurred. Factors such as time, place, and purpose were essential in judging whether an action was ethical. In his view, if an act-even one involving the use of force-was intended to end exploitation, foreign domination, or social injustice, it could be considered justifiable.

Guided by this understanding, Savarkar applied these principles to Indian society. He emphasised the need for people to reassess traditional practices in light of contemporary realities. In his opinion, holding on to outdated customs without questioning their relevance could prevent social growth. He believed that meaningful progress would only come if society was open to change and willing to adapt its values to suit evolving needs. In his view, a dynamic and forward-looking society must be ready to change to meet the needs of its people. For this reason, he promoted the idea of vivek (discretion or rational judgment) in public life.

One of the areas where Savarkar's commitment to reform was most visible was in his criticism of the caste system. He was deeply disturbed by the rigid social divisions that had developed within Hindu society over centuries. He strongly opposed the Chaturvarnya system, which, in his opinion, had lost its original spirit and had instead become a tool of inequality and discrimination. The worst outcome of this system, according to him, was the practice of untouchability, which he saw as morally unacceptable and socially destructive. He believed that such practices had weakened Hindu society from within, making it easier for foreign powers to exert their influence.

A key target of his criticism was the caste system, which he regarded as one of the greatest weaknesses undermining Hindu society. He saw it as responsible for the community's decline and deterioration. Savarkar rejected the ancient chaturvarna system, which divided society into fixed classes based on old-fashioned beliefs rather than any rational or scientific principles. He considered this system the foundation for harmful practices

☐ Moral values were not fixed or absolute

☐ Idea of vivek in public life

☐ Opposed the Chaturvarnya system

☐ Condemned untouchability

like untouchability. Savarkar condemned untouchability as a serious social injustice, created by those who violated the true ethical teachings of Hinduism. He was bold enough to question even the authority of ancient scriptures, including the Vedas, if they upheld customs that obstructed social progress.

He believed that blind faith and outdated traditions hindered society's growth and development. Untouchability, he argued, contradicted the spirit of human brotherhood by encouraging inequality, causing divisions, and leading to social conflict and distrust. Savarkar was deeply committed to ending this practice and expressed a hope that it would be eradicated during his lifetime. He even wished that after his death, people from all castes, including those considered untouchable, would come together to perform his last rites.

In 1927, he strongly condemned the cruel treatment of untouchables, saying it was worse than how animals are treated and that it violated basic human dignity. Savarkar urged Hindus to unite by addressing and removing the flaws within their society. He believed that political unity under the idea of Hindutva could never be strong unless the majority were freed from social disgrace and discrimination.

For Savarkar, ending untouchability was crucial not only for uniting Hindus but also as a matter of justice, ethics, and genuine Hindu values. His social philosophy aimed to elevate the moral standards of the people and eliminate divisive and cruel customs, establishing an essential foundation for national unity and progress.

Savarkar argued that for Hindus to regain their past strength and unity, they must first overcome their internal divisions. Social discrimination, he believed, had no place in a modern nation. He urged Hindus to embrace the values of equality, brotherhood, and dignity for all. His approach to this issue was not merely moral but strategic-he felt that social unity was a necessary condition for national strength. He emphasised that a society divided by caste could not stand united against external challenges.

A key aspect of Savarkar's social thinking was his approach to religious texts and traditional authority. Although he acknowledged the cultural and historical importance of scriptures like the Vedas, he did not believe that they should be followed without question. For him, no tradition-regardless of how ancient or sacred-should be accepted if it went against

❏ Opposed blind faith and outdated traditions

❏ Urged Hindus to unite

❏ Elevate the moral standards

❏ Embrace the values of equality, brotherhood

❏ Religios texts need to be revisited

logic or fairness. He clearly stated that if any religious text supported inequality or acted as a barrier to progress, it needed to be revisited and understood in the context of present-day values. This viewpoint was quite bold for his time and showed his strong belief in reason, critical thinking, and the relevance of science in guiding social reform.

☐ Encouraged people to think independently

Savarkar called for a critical and reflective approach to all aspects of social life. He encouraged people to think independently, question received wisdom, and adapt their customs to suit changing realities. He placed great emphasis on developing a scientific temper in society and believed that education and rational thinking were key to social upliftment. For him, tradition should not be a barrier to progress-it should serve as a guide that could be revised as necessary to meet the needs of the time.

In essence, Savarkar's social thought combined the moral seriousness of reform with the practicality of political strategy. He wanted to build a society that was strong, united, and capable of shaping its own destiny. He believed this could only happen if people gave up irrational divisions and embraced shared values based on reason, equality, and justice. His vision was both cultural and modern: cultural, because it sought to draw strength from India's civilisational roots; and modern, because it insisted on change, openness, and rationality.

☐ His vision was both cultural and modern

☐ Inclusive nation

Above all, Savarkar hoped to create a society that would stand tall in the face of future challenges. He believed that true freedom would be incomplete without internal reform. His emphasis on questioning, critical thinking, and social harmony continues to offer valuable insights for understanding the role of reform in building a modern and inclusive nation.

2.2.3 Savarkar's Views on Hindutva

V.D. Savarkar's concept of Hindutva went beyond religious belief and took the shape of a political philosophy rooted in shared culture, historical continuity, and collective identity. His idea of a Hindu Rashtra was influenced by his strong faith in the lasting power of India's ancient civilisation, while also being shaped by the social and political realities of his time. It was both a reflection of cultural pride and a response to the challenges faced by Indian society during the freedom struggle.

☐ A political philosophy rooted in shared culture

For Savarkar, Hindutva offered a way to unite Hindus and address the divisions that had weakened the community. It was

not just about affirming cultural pride, but also about responding to contemporary challenges, such as communal representation, social fragmentation, and colonial rule. Savarkar positioned himself as a voice for what he called the "majority interest." He developed an ideology that aimed to counter several ideas with which he disagreed: the demand for communal parity from the Muslims, the Congress Party's vision of nationhood based on territory rather than culture, the separate identity claims of the Depressed Classes, and the internal divisions within Hindu society. His broader goal was to consolidate Hindu society on a shared cultural and national platform. This idea, though formally developed later in his writings, was rooted in his early intellectual upbringing. He had grown up believing that the revival of Hindu society-and by extension, India-depended on the re-establishment of a culturally unified Hindu Rashtra.

To begin defining Hindutva, Savarkar posed a central question: who can be called a Hindu? His answer was based on three main ideas-territory (rashtra), race or lineage, and culture (sanskriti). According to him, a Hindu is someone who regards the land stretching from the Indus River to the seas as both their fatherland (pitrubhumi) and their sacred land (punyabhumi). This region, historically referred to as Bharatvarsha, formed the geographical core of his idea of the Hindu nation.

On the question of ancestry, Savarkar stated that Hindus were those whose origins could be traced back to the ancient Saptasindhu region, the land of the Vedas. This racial dimension was not intended to promote superiority, but rather to highlight the historical roots of the Hindu people. He claimed that anyone born in this cultural environment and shaped by its traditions, regardless of sect, remained Hindu by inheritance and feeling. Even if they followed different philosophical schools or social customs, what defined their 'Hinduness' was a shared lineage and emotional connection to the land.

Culturally, Savarkar saw Hindus as united by a shared history, language, and civilisation. He pointed to Sanskrit as the symbolic language of this unity-preserving not just literature but the values, beliefs, and practices that had developed over centuries. To him, Hindus were bound together by a common reverence for their cultural heritage, which he described using the word "Sanskriti." This term expressed more than just religion and reached into every aspect of civilisation. Hindu culture, in his view, was a continuous legacy rooted in ancient traditions, language, religious history, and social customs that

had been preserved for centuries. His ideology focused on Hindu solidarity, where cultural, historical, religious, social, and linguistic bonds created a united nation. This unity formed the foundation of the Hindu Rashtra as a political entity, marked by a shared national identity and internal cohesion.

Regarding minority communities, he opposed separate electorates and advocated for equal rights and fair participation for all minorities in political and civil life. He rejected any special privileges but supported justice and equality for all groups. He also emphasised the need for moral and social renewal among Hindus, believing that real progress would occur when Hindu interests and responsibilities were aligned. For him, Hindutva was not just a cultural or social concept but a form of nationalism, requiring the removal of all barriers that divided Hindus and hindered their unity.

Savarkar made an important distinction between Hindutva and Hinduism. For him, Hinduism was primarily a religious term, encompassing different sects and schools of thought like Vaishnavism, Shaivism, and others. In contrast, Hindutva was a cultural and national identity that went beyond religion. He believed that reducing Hindutva to just Hinduism created unnecessary boundaries. Communities like Sikhs, Jains, Lingayats, and others, despite having distinct practices, shared the same cultural and ancestral roots. In Savarkar's view, they remained part of the broader Hindu identity because they considered this land both their birthplace and spiritual centre.

However, he made a clear distinction when it came to converts to other faiths. While acknowledging their Indian roots, he held that those who did not see India as their punyabhumi-their sacred land-could not be included in the Hindu fold. This was the dividing line he drew between Hindus and followers of religions like Islam and Christianity, whose holy places lay outside India. Through this definition, Savarkar was aiming to promote unity among Hindus while marking boundaries around the idea of national identity. He was working towards the idea of Hindu sangathan, or organised Hindu unity. By doing so, he sought to create a strong, cohesive majority that could claim political leadership in India. In his formulation, Hindutva and Indianness were closely linked. A true Hindu patriot, according to him, was by default a loyal Indian patriot because their love for the nation came from a sense of both cultural and spiritual connection to the land.

❐ A form of nationalism

❐ Distinction between Hindutva and Hinduism

❐ Promote unity among Hindus

In this framework, Savarkar described nationalism as a form of cultural unity rooted in the majority community. He argued that since Hindus formed the majority and shared a common culture, their identity naturally shaped the national character of India. He saw no contradiction in equating Hindu nationalism with Indian nationalism and viewed this as a natural outcome of historical and cultural development.

Importantly, Savarkar's idea of Hindu Rashtra was not without space for minorities. He clarified that non-Hindu communities would be given protection for their religion, language, and culture-as long as they respected the rights and identity of the Hindu majority. He insisted that just as minorities expected freedom to preserve their way of life, Hindus too must be allowed to protect their traditions.

Savarkar believed that the cultural identity of the Hindu majority should be safeguarded, and in his view, it was unacceptable for any group to assert influence in a way that undermined this identity. This belief also guided his opposition to the idea of separate electorates for Muslims. He firmly held that political rights and representation should be based on common national citizenship, not on religious lines, as he felt this would weaken the unity and integrity of the nation. He felt that such concessions would give one community an unfair advantage over the rest and weaken national unity. For him, self-rule (Swarajya) meant freedom for all Indians under a common national identity-not a mere replacement of one ruling group with another. He made it clear that Indians had not struggled against British rule only to bring about new divisions among themselves.

Savarkar's idea of Hindutva blended both cultural pride and political ideology. He wanted to unite all Hindus through a shared sense of history, values, and traditional identity. His vision of a nation was rooted in cultural unity and a deep emotional connection to the motherland. For him, the strength and independence of India depended largely on the collective identity and unity of its Hindu population.

2.2.4 Swadharma and Swarajya

Savarkar was a committed nationalist revolutionary who firmly believed in swadharma (one's personal duty) and swarajya (self-rule). He viewed these two ideas as closely linked and vital to India's struggle for independence. In his view, the

main reasons behind the 1857 revolt were the determination to uphold swadharma and the aspiration to gain swarajya. He explained that although independence is a natural right, it had been taken away from Indians through political slavery. This loss sparked a powerful and sacred desire for self-rule, which became the root cause of the revolt.

❑ Revolt was inevitable

Savarkar highlighted that throughout Indian history, love for religion and love for one's government have been closely linked. He agreed with Guru Gobind Singh's view that the history of India is filled with brave people who fought fearlessly for their religion, even at the cost of their lives. He argued that the issue of greased cartridges, which offended religious feelings, was only one incident among many like the annexation of Awadh. The revolt was inevitable because the government was trying to destroy the religious identity of Indians, not just because of any single wrong act.

❑ Real cause

He believed the 1857 struggle, which spanned from Peshawar in the northwest to Calcutta in the east, was inspired by noble goals of protecting religion and the homeland. The fear over the cartridges and territorial annexations were temporary triggers, but the real cause was the desire to save both religion and the nation-a nation blessed with temples and mosques.

❑ True war for independence

In 1909, Savarkar described the 1857 uprising as a true war for independence, a dharmayudh or holy war where both Hindus and Muslims fought side by side-Muslims defending their religion and Hindus defending theirs. For him, swadharma and swarajya were closely linked because without religion, self-rule loses its meaning, and without self-rule, religion becomes powerless. The sword of swarajya must always protect swadharma. Savarkar urged people to put aside personal differences and unite in defending their nation's interests.

❑ A unified and robust nation

The life and thoughts of V.D. Savarkar have sparked extensive academic debate. Some scholars regard him as a key figure whose ideas helped shape a more assertive and rigid nationalism in India. Critics such as jyotirmaya sharma contend that his ideas added a distinctive intensity to the nation's political dialogue, influencing certain perspectives that still resonate in today's politics. Throughout his life, Savarkar was dedicated in his commitment to cultivating a unified and robust nation, guided by a well-defined ideological vision.

Observers, such as Dixit, have pointed out that Savarkar's concepts did not gain widespread approval among the general populace. His political philosophy, regarded by many as overly restrictive, often struggled to resonate with the everyday issues and feelings of the broader community.

Despite these critiques, Savarkar's role in the development of Indian political ideology remains noteworthy. His reinterpretation of the 1857 rebellion as the First War of Independence provided a compelling new perspective on Indian nationalism. Although his ideas continue to spark discussions, it is undeniable that his intellectual contributions have had a profound influence on the evolution of political discourse in India.

Summarised Overview

Savarkar's political thought centred on cultural nationalism and the ideology of Hindutva. He defined a Hindu as one who regarded India as both fatherland (pitrubhumi) and holy land (punyabhumi). His nationalism emphasised shared ancestry, culture, and civilisation over religious belief. Savarkar interpreted the 1857 revolt as a unified national struggle for independence. He was a strong critic of caste discrimination and worked for Hindu social unity. His ideal of Hindu Rashtra aimed at strengthening national identity through cultural cohesion. Though controversial, Savarkar also believed in scientific rationalism and reform. He advocated for a modern, militarised, and self-reliant India. He distinguished between Hindutva and Hinduism, presenting the former as a cultural-political concept. He rejected appeasement politics and warned against religious separatism. His social reform aimed at breaking barriers of untouchability and ritualism. Savarkar's views on minorities called for loyalty to Indian culture. He was a strategic nationalist who prioritised unity through shared heritage. His ideas remain influential in contemporary nationalist discourse. Savarkar's legacy is both celebrated and contested in modern India.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. How did Savarkar define the concept of Hindutva?

2. In what way did Savarkar distinguish between Hinduism as a religion and Hindutva as a cultural identity?

3. What role did Savarkar assign to history in shaping Hindu nationalism?

4. How did Savarkar's idea of the Hindu Rashtra address the question of minorities?

5. What was Savarkar's position on caste and untouchability?

6. In what ways did Savarkar's nationalism differ from that of Gandhi or Tilak?

7. How did Savarkar justify the use of political violence in anti-colonial struggles?

8. What criticism did Savarkar offer against appeasement politics during colonial rule?

9. How did Savarkar envisage a strong and unified Hindu political identity?

Assignment

1. Critically assess Savarkar's idea of cultural nationalism and its role in defining Indian national identity.

2. Discuss Savarkar's reinterpretation of the 1857 revolt as the First War of Independence and its impact on nationalist historiography.

3. Evaluate Savarkar's understanding of Swadharma and Swarajya and their centrality to his nationalist ideology.

4. How did Savarkar link social reform with national regeneration? Examine his critique of caste and untouchability.

5. Analyse Savarkar's views on Hindu Rashtra and his criteria for defining Hindu identity.

6. What were Savarkar's criticisms of Congress-style territorial nationalism and separate electorates? How did he propose to resolve India's communal issues?

7. Examine the philosophical influences and rationalist principles in Savarkar's social thought.

8. Critically evaluate the legacy of Savarkar's political thought in contemporary debates on nationalism and identity.

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UNIT 3

Mohammed Ali Jinnah

Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- understand Muhammad Ali Jinnah's early political commitment to secular constitutionalism and national unity
- analyse the evolution of his thought leading to the formulation of the Fourteen Points and the Two-Nation Theory
- reflect on the tension between Jinnah's liberal-democratic ideals and his later separatist demands

Background

The earlier units explored the ideological foundations of Indian Nationalism and the contributions of leaders who sought to reconcile religious plurality with the goals of national unity. This unit builds on that foundation by turning to Muhammad Ali Jinnah, a leader whose political journey reflects both the promise and the limits of that reconciliation. Initially a strong proponent of Hindu-Muslim unity and constitutional methods, Jinnah's later advocacy for a separate Muslim state has often overshadowed his deep commitment to democratic and secular principles. Understanding this evolution is essential for grasping the complex interplay of religion, state, and secularism in modern South Asian politics.

Keywords

Secularism, Communal Harmony, Constitutionalism, Minority Rights, Separate Electorates, Two-Nation Theory

2.3.1 Political Thought of Jinnah
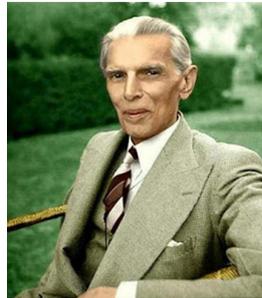
Mohammed Ali Jinnah's early political thought was rooted in liberal constitutionalism, shaped by his legal training and experience in the Indian National Congress. He envisioned a united India where Hindus and Muslims could cooperate through mutual respect and negotiated safeguards. His opposition to separate electorates and insistence on - joint Hindu-Muslim demands during the 1920s demonstrate his commitment to national integration. However, the failure of Congress-League negotiations and the lack of adequate Muslim representation in constitutional proposals gradually shifted his position. Jinnah's Fourteen Points articulated his insistence on minority rights-not as communal privilege but as preconditions for genuine democratic participation.

❑ Insistence on minority rights

His later critique of religious orthodoxy in both Hindu and Muslim communities reflected his belief that communal peace required a secular and rational public sphere. Even after the creation of Pakistan, Jinnah championed religious freedom and equal citizenship, explicitly rejecting theocratic governance. His address to Pakistan's Constituent Assembly on 11 August 1947 remains a landmark statement on secularism and state neutrality in religious matters. His lifelong tension between communal identity and national unity remains a critical lens through which to study the state-religion dynamic in South Asia.

❑ Critique of religious orthodoxy

2.3.1.1 Nationalism and Constitutionalism

Mohammad Ali Jinnah's early political thought was deeply based on the values of liberalism and secularism. He drew considerable inspiration from Western liberal thinkers, particularly John Morley and John Stuart Mill. Among their works, Morley's On Compromise left a lasting impression on Jinnah. It awakened in him a firm belief in constitutional democracy, individual rights, and the importance of reasoned dialogue in public life. These ideals would go on to shape the foundation of his political engagement in India. A self-professed admirer of Morley, Jinnah also found inspiration in the writings of Edmund Burke and Mill, whose arguments stirred both his intellect and conscience. Indian political stalwarts such as

❑ Political Inspirations

Dadabhai Naoroji, Pherozeshah Mehta, and Gopal Krishna Gokhale also left a lasting mark on his political evolution. His participation in the 1906 Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress as secretary to Naoroji marked his formal entry into nationalist politics.

An incident from that session revealed his early awareness of racial discrimination. Reflecting on the British attitude, Jinnah once remarked to his sister that if Naoroji was considered "black," then he must have been "darker," sharply concluding that this prejudice meant fair treatment from British politicians was an illusion. From that moment, he became a stringent opponent of racial bias in all its forms. Jinnah firmly believed in the relevance of civil liberties and consistently advocated for the protection of individual rights. To him, national self-determination was not just a political slogan but a fundamental principle that shaped the destiny of a people. He repeatedly underscored the importance of freedom of expression, warning that without it, a society would lose its vitality-just as a rose bush languishes without sunlight and air.

□ Relevance of civil liberties

His opposition to British colonialism was unwavering. Jinnah consistently exposed the repressive nature of colonial governance and relied on constitutional methods and reasoned argument to question its authority. Though deeply committed to constitutionalism, he was never silent in the face of injustice; he believed that loyalty to law should not come at the cost of moral courage. His opposition to separate electorates was based on his belief that communal divisions were a direct threat to Indian nationalism. Until 1912, he was among the sharpest critics of the Muslim League's pro-British and communal approach. Aga Khan, the first honorary president of the League, later recalled that Jinnah was their most formidable opponent at the time, fiercely condemning the idea of separate electorates for Muslims as divisive and detrimental to national unity. Jinnah opposed all forms of communalism, whether from Hindus or Muslims, viewing them as obstacles to building a secular and egalitarian Indian state.

□ Opposed all forms of communalism

His commitment to this ideal was evident when he proposed a resolution that rejected the extension of separate electorates to municipal and local levels. During the 1912 Congress and Muslim League meetings held in Bankipur, he attended the League's council session not as a member but as a Congressman. He acknowledged the League's broader vision that year. In

□ self-governance through constitutional reforms

his speech, he articulated the ultimate goal of achieving self-governance through constitutional reforms, national unity, and cooperation among different communities.

Jinnah formally joined the Muslim League in 1913, encouraged by Mohammad Ali and Wazir Hasan. However, he was clear that his membership would never compromise his loyalty to the broader national cause. He continued to advocate for Hindu-Muslim unity and urged leaders from both communities to collaborate for India's independence. At League meetings, Jinnah consistently spoke in favour of inclusive nationalism and gradually transformed the League's direction by pushing back against its loyalist elements. At the Agra session of the Muslim League in 1913, he strongly opposed the concept of communal representation. He urged Muslims to abandon the idea of separate electorates, warning that such divisions would create irreparable splits within Indian society. During the 1913 Congress session in Karachi, Jinnah supported a resolution that welcomed the League's endorsement of self-government, highlighting how the League's commitment to cooperation among communities mirrored that of the Congress.

❏ Endorsement of self-government

Jinnah repeatedly affirmed that the League shared the Congress's nationalist outlook and was prepared to collaborate in advancing India's freedom. His role was pivotal in forging the 1916 Congress-League pact, commonly known as the Lucknow Pact, which marked a significant step toward Hindu-Muslim unity. He also played a key role in reconciling the moderates and extremists within the nationalist movement. As president of the Muslim League, Jinnah led it towards a nationalist path, underlining how India was awakening to a shared purpose and a growing territorial patriotism. He described a new India-energetic, aspiring, and determined to reclaim its right to self-governance.

❏ Reconciling the moderates and extremists

Jinnah urged the Congress to acknowledge Muslim concerns, especially regarding fair representation in legislative bodies. He believed this would encourage the League to work alongside the Congress in demanding shared reforms. His political motto-"India for the Indians"-reflected his overarching vision for India. In 1917, addressing the League session, he advised Muslims not to fear Hindu domination under democratic rule, calling such fears a myth propagated to prevent cooperation. He asserted that India should be ruled not by Hindus or Muslims alone but collectively by its people.

❏ Collective rule

Jinnah encouraged both the Congress and the League to jointly draft a reform plan and then present it to the British authorities as a unified demand. This approach, he believed, would demonstrate the shared national resolve for self-rule. His principled stance was also evident during the Delhi War Conference in 1918, where he opposed British recruitment of Indian soldiers without offering a genuine promise of constitutional reforms. He argued in a telegram to the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, that only a free nation could genuinely contribute to the war effort with sincerity. He demanded that responsible government be granted within a specific timeframe, with the Congress-League scheme forming the first step toward that goal.

At the Provincial War Conference in Bombay, Governor Willingdon expressed doubts about the Home Rule League's support for the British war effort. Jinnah, however, was blunt in his criticism of the British government's vague promises. He said the educated class in India needed to feel they were equal citizens of the Empire to support the war entirely. Mere words were insufficient-what was needed was action, and that too without delay. Even Gandhi, despite their growing political differences, acknowledged the depth of Jinnah's position. Gandhi later noted that Indians were sceptical of joining the army when the government had failed to earn their trust. Questions about the morality of fighting for an empire that denied Indians their fundamental rights were common, highlighting the validity of Jinnah's concerns.

Jinnah was also vocal in opposing repressive laws, such as the Rowlatt Act, which was introduced to suppress the nationalist movement. He denounced the Act as the 'Black Bill', arguing that no civilised government could ever endorse such legislation. In a powerful letter to the Viceroy, he resigned from the Imperial Legislative Council, calling it a puppet body and condemning the Act as a coercive instrument of a bureaucracy out of touch with the people. He believed such laws had uprooted the foundations of justice and violated constitutional rights without genuine cause. For Jinnah, a government that enacted such a law during peacetime had no claim to be called civilised.

In 1920, at the joint Congress-Muslim League session in Nagpur, Gandhi proposed the adoption of non-cooperation as a peaceful means to attain Swaraj. While the idea found broad support among Congress leaders, Jinnah stood alone in his opposition. He believed the movement was impractical and

□ Shared national resolve for self-rule

□ The validity of Jinnah's concerns

□ Opposed the Rowlatt Act

□ Staunch defender of civil liberties

warned that it would not succeed in overthrowing the British Empire. Despite the resolution passing amid applause, Jinnah voiced concern over the direction the movement was taking, cautioning Gandhi to reconsider before it was too late. British MP Colonel Wedgwood observed that if more Indian leaders shared Jinnah's integrity and resolve, India would have achieved freedom much sooner. Throughout this phase of his life, Jinnah remained a staunch defender of civil liberties, the rule of law, and justice. He passionately argued for the reinstatement of B. G. Horniman, the deported editor of The Bombay Chronicle, stating that individual liberty was central to any constitutional system. In a personal recollection, the Raja of Mahmudabad recounted how Jinnah once questioned him during a meeting-asking whether he saw himself first as a Muslim or as an Indian. When the young man replied that he was a Muslim first, Jinnah corrected him, declaring: "My boy, no, you are an Indian first and then a Muslim."

In 1937, presiding over a League session, Jinnah led the organisation in adopting a resolution demanding complete independence for India. He urged the Congress to unite with the League and form a common front, reiterating that the nature of government mattered less than its character-what was needed was a government "of the people, by the people, for the people." Addressing students at Osmania University, he described himself as a practical nationalist committed to securing India's freedom. He remarked that while the meaning of "nationalism" had evolved, he still regarded himself as a true nationalist in the most sincere sense of the word.

2.3.1.2 Shift in Jinnah's Political Thought and the Emergence of the Fourteen Points

Mohammad Ali Jinnah's political philosophy underwent a dramatic transformation from being an advocate of Hindu-Muslim unity to becoming the principal voice of Muslim separatism in India. In his early political career, Jinnah was a member of the Indian National Congress and a strong believer in secular constitutionalism. He earned the title "Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity" for his efforts to bridge the communal divide. But, over time, a series of political developments disillusioned him, pushing him to redefine the framework within which Muslim identity and interests could be secured.

The turning point came with the Nehru Report of 1928, which proposed dominion status for India. It failed to accommodate

□ Practical nationalist

□ Transformation of his political philosophy

key Muslim concerns such as separate electorates, cultural safeguards, and religious autonomy. For Jinnah, this marked the end of the possibility of fair power-sharing within a unified nationalist movement. He considered the Congress's stance in the Nehru Report not only dismissive but a reflection of Hindu majoritarian tendencies masked in the language of secularism. In response, at the All India Muslim League session held in Delhi in March 1929, Jinnah presented what came to be known as the Fourteen Points, outlining a framework for constitutional reform that would protect Muslim identity, rights, and representation within any future Indian polity. Jinnah's Fourteen Points thus represent not merely political demands but a crystallisation of his evolving political thought, one that gradually moved from inclusive nationalism to community-based federalism and finally toward the ideological justification for separatism.

2.3.2 The Fourteen Points of Jinnah (1929)

In 1929, Muhammad Ali Jinnah articulated his Fourteen Points in response to the escalating political tensions and growing concerns of Muslims in colonial India. His proposals stemmed from a genuine commitment to protecting democratic values, cultural freedoms, and equitable involvement for the Muslim community. His points signified a wider aspiration for justice, federal equity, and inclusive governance. These principles marked a significant milestone in India's constitutional and political trajectory, which later culminated in the formation of Pakistan.

These are the 14 Points:

Federal Constitution with Provincial Autonomy: Jinnah envisioned a decentralised India where the provinces enjoyed autonomy. He feared that a centralised state would lead to Hindu dominance and marginalise Muslims politically and culturally.

One-Third Muslim Representation in Cabinets: This demand reflected his insistence on power-sharing. For Jinnah, symbolic presence was not enough; Muslims needed structural guarantees of representation at decision-making levels.

Effective Minority Representation Without Diluting Majorities: This provision sought to protect minorities in every province without inverting demographic realities. It was a plea for balanced federalism, not communal supremacy.

One-Third Muslim Seats in the Central Legislature: Jinnah feared numerical inferiority in an all-India framework and sought to institutionalise political safeguards to avoid permanent marginalisation.

Separate Electorates with an Option for Joint Electorates: This point is often seen as the cornerstone of communal representation. Jinnah argued that separate electorates were essential to secure genuine Muslim voices, though he left room for future convergence.

No Territorial Redistribution Affecting Muslim Majorities: This was an apparent attempt to preserve Muslim demographic strongholds from being weakened through gerrymandering.

Full Religious Freedom: Jinnah's secular credentials are evident here. He insisted that all communities, not just Muslims, should enjoy the freedom of worship, association, and the right to religious propagation.

Community Veto in Legislatures on Sensitive Matters: This clause proposed a practical mechanism to prevent the imposition of laws that deeply offended a particular religious community, ensuring communal harmony through constitutional checks.

Separation of Sindh from Bombay Presidency: Sindh had a Muslim majority but was administratively tied to Hindu-majority Bombay. Jinnah viewed this as political dilution and demanded separate status.

Equal Reforms in NWFP and Balochistan: These frontier provinces were underdeveloped and underrepresented. Jinnah's demand here extended the federal logic of equality and inclusiveness to all regions.

Fair Share in Government Services and Local Bodies: Jinnah recognised that underrepresentation in administrative services could lead to structural disempowerment. He advocated proportional inclusion based on merit and efficiency.

Protection of Muslim Culture and Institutions: This included protection for Islamic education, personal law, language, and religious trusts. It reflected a cultural-nationalist concern for preserving Muslim identity within a pluralist India.

One-Third Muslim Ministers in Every Cabinet: This reinforced his call for proportional power-sharing. It was aimed at preventing tokenism and ensuring substantive representation.

No Constitutional Changes Without Consent of Federating Units: This was a federalist safeguard to prevent unilateral imposition by the Centre, particularly in matters affecting Muslim-majority provinces.

Critical Evaluation and Reaction

❐ Regressive and communal

Jinnah's Fourteen Points were politically radical for their time-not because they were unjustified, but because they institutionalised the idea of Muslims as a separate political community. Critics from the Congress, particularly Jawaharlal Nehru, dismissed them as regressive and communal. Nehru termed them "ridiculous," arguing that they undermined the idea of a unified Indian nationalism. Congress leaders saw Jinnah's demands as incompatible with democratic principles of representation based on individual rights rather than religious identity.

❐ Parting of the ways

However, from the standpoint of Muslim leadership, especially the elites and professionals in minority provinces, these demands were seen as protective, not divisive. For Jinnah, these points reflected legitimate fears of cultural and political marginalisation in a Hindu-majority nation. While Jinnah himself was still operating within a constitutional and federalist framework, the rejection of these points by the Congress marked, in his own words, a "parting of the ways." The Fourteen Points did not immediately lead to separatism, but they created the ideological scaffolding for it. By elevating religious communities to the level of a constitutional category, they laid the groundwork for the Two-Nation Theory, formally announced in 1940. In retrospect, the Fourteen Points were Jinnah's final attempt at negotiating a pluralist India. Their rejection pushed him, and a growing section of Muslim political opinion, toward the belief that separate nationhood was the only viable solution.

❐ Transition from secular constitutionalism

Jinnah's Fourteen Points mark a pivotal moment in Indian political thought. They epitomise the transition from secular constitutionalism to communal federalism, ultimately feeding into the logic of partition. Far from being merely communal demands, they reveal a sophisticated and strategic vision of political safeguards rooted in federalism, minority rights,

and cultural autonomy. Their rejection sealed the collapse of composite nationalism and opened the door to the Two-Nation Theory.

2.3.4 The Two-Nation Theory: Origins, Evolution, and Legacy

In the late stages of British rule, India experienced significant political transformation and social awakening. Though colonial policies gradually permitted greater Indian involvement in governance, they also fostered deeper communal divides. A key development in this context was the establishment of separate electorates in 1909, enabling Muslims to elect their own representatives in legislative councils. While this was touted as a protective measure for minorities, it set the stage for perceiving communities through a religious lens.

☐ Perceiving communities through a religious lens

Around this period, the All India Muslim League was founded in 1906 to advocate for Muslim interests, particularly among the elite who feared being marginalised in a democracy dominated by Hindus. Unlike the Indian National Congress, which aimed for broad national unity, the League concentrated on securing political rights for Muslims alone. Initially, the League did not challenge British rule but instead functioned within the colonial system to safeguard its constituency. As the nationalist movement gained momentum, the challenge of incorporating India's varied communities into a unified political framework grew more intricate. The Nehru Report of 1928 outlined a vision for India's self-governance but overlooked the Muslim League's requests for separate electorates and additional protections. In response, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, a former Congress member and supporter of Hindu-Muslim unity, introduced his Fourteen Points in 1929. At that time, these points were not a call for separation but a demand for substantial representation and autonomy for Muslims within a united India.

☐ Autonomy for Muslims within a united India

From Negotiation to Separation

Jinnah's demands initially expressed a wish for peaceful coexistence within a federal and diverse India. He sought constitutional guarantees that would enable Muslims to preserve their identity and rights without being merged or marginalised. However, circumstances following the 1937 provincial elections changed this perspective. The Indian National Congress established governments in multiple provinces. Still, it refused to share power with the Muslim League, heightening concerns

☐ Equitable treatment

that Muslims would be politically excluded in a future Indian state. The League seized this opportunity to gather support. Reports such as the Pirpur Report, which alleged that Congress-led governments discriminated against Muslims, circulated widely. Although most of these claims faced factual scrutiny, their impact was significant. The League began to assert that Muslims and Hindus had inherently divergent political and cultural interests, emphasising that Muslims could not rely on equitable treatment within a Hindu-majority democracy.

The Turning Point: Lahore Resolution and Beyond

The pivotal moment occurred in March 1940 when the Muslim League adopted the Lahore Resolution. For the first time, the concept of a separate Muslim nation was firmly presented in the political arena. Jinnah shifted his portrayal of Muslims from a minority seeking rights to a distinct nation entitled to sovereignty. Although the resolution did not specifically mention the name "Pakistan," it called for independent states in Muslim-majority areas of the subcontinent. The concept came to be known as the Two-Nation Theory, which asserted that Hindus and Muslims exist as two separate nations, each possessing its own religion, culture, history, and way of life. Consequently, Muslims required their own nation to safeguard their identity. This represented a shift from the notion of a unified Indian nationhood, grounded not in economic or territorial considerations but rather in cultural and religious identity.

☐ Concept of a separate Muslim nation

Voices That Disagreed

Notably, not all Muslims supported the Two-Nation Theory. Many viewed it as a perilous route that could fracture not just the land but also the nation's unity. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a well-respected Islamic scholar and senior Congress leader, was one of the most vocal opponents of this theory. He argued that Muslims were integral to India's social fabric, with their futures intertwined with the larger Indian society.

☐ Maulana Abul Kalam Azad

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, often referred to as "Frontier Gandhi," also stood firmly against the theory. His Khudai Khidmatgar movement in the North-West Frontier Province promoted non-violence and secular nationalism. These leaders emphasised the long-standing coexistence of Hindus and Muslims, who had celebrated festivals and shared languages, cuisine, and customs for centuries. They contended that religion should not serve as the foundation for drawing new national boundaries. Moreover, it is significant that after Partition,

☐ Long-standing coexistence of Hindus and Muslims

millions of Muslims opted to stay in India, rejecting the notion that their faith obligated them to leave. Their ongoing presence and engagement in India's democracy challenge the core assumptions of the Two-Nation Theory.

Colonial Strategy and the Politics of Division

The involvement of the British in this developing situation is significant. Confronted with an increasing and united call for independence, the colonial authorities found it advantageous to foster divisions among communities. The strategy of "divide and rule" had long been a staple of British policy, but it became more evident in the 1930s and 1940s. By backing communal organisations such as the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha, the British made the case that India was too divided to govern independently. Notably, while Congress led the anti-colonial movement through extensive mobilisation and civil disobedience, many communal groups prioritised identity issues and distanced themselves from the independence struggle. Their political objectives often leaned more towards protecting elite interests rather than addressing the social and economic challenges faced by ordinary people.

❐ Communal groups prioritised identity issues

Partition and the Human Cost

In 1947, following years of political turmoil, the aspiration for an independent India was realised-but it came with a tragic outcome. The country was split into two nations: India and Pakistan. This division led to one of the most devastating periods in modern history. Regions like Punjab, Bengal, and Delhi experienced widespread communal violence. Families were shattered, entire communities were destroyed, and over ten million individuals were uprooted from their homes. Almost a million lives were lost. Although Partition succeeded in establishing Pakistan as a nation, it failed to bring about peace or resolve the communal tensions it aimed to alleviate. Instead, it often exacerbated these issues, giving rise to new challenges such as displacement, identity crises, and enduring animosity between the two nations.

❐ Over ten million individuals were uprooted

The Secular Indian Response

India responded to the trauma of Partition by reaffirming its dedication to secularism and pluralism. The architects of the Indian Constitution made significant efforts to establish India not as a Hindu state, but as a secular republic where diverse religions could live together. Fundamental rights were designed

to guarantee religious freedom, cultural autonomy, and equal citizenship. This commitment has faced challenges. The impacts of Partition still shape political discussions on both sides of the border. In India, certain political factions refer to the Two-Nation Theory to question the loyalty of Indian Muslims, while in Pakistan, Islamic nationalism is fundamental to its national identity. Nevertheless, India's resilient democratic system and secular principles act as a strong deterrent against communal ideologies.

Remembering to Move Forward

The Two-Nation Theory was not an unavoidable consequence of India's diversity but rather a political choice shaped by mistrust, fear, and colonial manipulation. While it led to the formation of Pakistan, it left a deeply scarred subcontinent behind. The theory's central idea-that religion defines nationhood-remains controversial, particularly in a region where people of different faiths have coexisted for centuries.

Summarised Overview

Jinnah began his political career as a liberal constitutionalist advocating Hindu-Muslim unity. Inspired by Morley and Mill, he valued secularism, dialogue, and constitutional reform. He was an early opponent of separate electorates, fearing communal division. His ideal was a democratic, inclusive India with safeguards for minorities. However, after political setbacks, he articulated the Fourteen Points in 1929 to protect Muslim interests. Jinnah's later support for the Two-Nation Theory reflected a shift toward Muslim separatism. Despite this, he continued to advocate for civil liberties and religious freedom. His 1947 speech to Pakistan's Assembly affirmed secular governance and minority rights. Jinnah criticised orthodoxy in both Hindu and Muslim communities. His political journey reflects the tension between inclusive nationalism and identity-based politics. He viewed constitutional methods as essential but was disillusioned by Congress's majoritarianism. Jinnah's transformation shows the limits of communal harmony under colonial rule. His legacy is central to debates on partition, secularism, and minority rights. He remains a complex figure balancing secular ideals with strategic identity politics. Jinnah's thought shaped the state-religion dynamic in South Asia.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. How did Jinnah's early political thought reflect constitutionalism and moderation?
2. In what ways did Jinnah defend minority rights within the framework of Indian nationalism?
3. How did Jinnah respond to the Nehru Report and the issue of separate electorates?
4. What were the main arguments of Jinnah's Fourteen Points?
5. How did Jinnah conceptualise the idea of Pakistan in the 1940s?
6. What was Jinnah's position on the role of religion in the state?
7. How did Jinnah's Two Nation Theory evolve from his earlier liberal views?
8. In what ways did Jinnah critique the Congress Party's approach to Muslim representation?
9. What role did Jinnah play in negotiating constitutional safeguards for Muslims?
10. What was the reaction of secular Muslim leaders to Jinnah's demand for Pakistan?

Assignment

1. Critically evaluate Jinnah's early political commitment to secular constitutionalism and national unity. How did this shape his role in the Indian National Congress and his opposition to communal politics?
2. Discuss the major political developments that led to Jinnah's shift from a liberal nationalist to the architect of Muslim separatism. How did the Nehru Report of 1928 become a turning point?
3. Analyse the content and context of the Fourteen Points (1929). How do they reflect Jinnah's evolving concerns about minority rights, constitutional safeguards, and federalism?
4. How did Jinnah reconcile his earlier liberal-democratic ideals with his later demands for a separate Muslim state? Reflect on the contradictions and continuities in his political thought.
5. Examine Jinnah's address to Pakistan's Constituent Assembly on 11 August 1947. What does this speech reveal about his views on secularism and the role of religion in the state?
6. Evaluate the Two-Nation Theory in light of Jinnah's political evolution. How did it develop from the rejection of the Fourteen Points and what were its philosophical and strategic foundations?

7. What role did the Congress-League conflict, especially post-1937 elections, play in Jinnah's advocacy for Muslim nationhood? Assess his response to the alleged marginalisation of Muslims.

8. How did Jinnah conceptualise nationalism, self-governance, and federalism during the early and later phases of his career?

9. Critically assess how Jinnah's Fourteen Points laid the ideological groundwork for partition. Was it a final negotiation for pluralism or a strategic move towards separation?

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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.

BLOCK 3
Democratic Tradition

UNIT 1

Mahatma Gandhi

Learning Outcomes

After studying this unit, students will be able to:

- understand the foundational principles of Gandhian democratic thought, including non-violence (*ahimsa*), *satyagraha,* and *swaraj*
- analyse Gandhi's approach to decentralised governance and his model of *Gram Swaraj*
- critically assess Gandhi's vision of *Sarvodaya* and its implications for a class-less, cooperative society

Background

Mahatma Gandhi emerged as a transformative figure in both the Indian national movement and the global tradition of democratic thought. Born in 1869, Gandhi's life traversed continents and causes-from civil rights activism in South Africa to the leadership of mass resistance in colonial India. His political ideas did not follow conventional Western paradigms of democracy. Instead, Gandhi rooted his democratic vision in Indian philosophical traditions, especially the principle of ahimsa (non-violence), which he reinterpreted as a dynamic force for civic action and ethical governance.

Unlike his predecessors who concentrated on urban elites, Gandhi's focus was on the marginalised, the rural poor, and the socially excluded. His approach was grounded in ethics and self-discipline, where inner transformation was as vital as political liberation. Gandhi's vision of swaraj (self-rule) went beyond independence from colonial rule; it included moral autonomy, village self-governance, and economic self-sufficiency. In his political thought, democracy was not merely about institutions but about the development of morally mature individuals capable of self-governance and peaceful coexistence.

Discussion

3.1.1 Democratic Tradition and Gandhian Political Thought

❑ *Swaraj*

Gandhi's contribution to democratic development lies in his unique synthesis of ethics, politics, and spirituality. His idea of *Swaraj* was not limited to the political independence of the state but emphasised the individual's capacity for self-restraint, self-realisation, and service to others. Democracy, for Gandhi, was a moral order based on truth (satya), non-violence (ahimsa), and the empowerment of the weakest.

❑ *Gram Swaraj*

His model of *Gram Swaraj* represented the decentralisation of power, where each village was envisioned as a self-sustained unit with its governance through elected Panchayats. This bottom-up approach to democracy challenged the centralised model of governance and aligned with Gandhi's belief that centralisation breeds coercion and alienation, while decentralisation fosters participation and moral responsibility.

❑ *Satyagraha*

Through *Satyagraha*, Gandhi introduced a form of civil resistance rooted in spiritual courage and self-sacrifice. He believed that unjust laws should be opposed through peaceful means and that truth and moral conviction could bring about lasting social transformation. His campaigns-whether against colonial laws, untouchability, or communal hatred-were grounded in nonviolent action and aimed at awakening the conscience of both the oppressor and the oppressed.

❑ *Sarvodaya*

His concept of *Sarvodaya* (the welfare of all) extended his democratic vision to encompass social and economic life. It called for a just and equitable society based on cooperative values, trusteeship, and the dignity of labour. Unlike modern capitalist or socialist systems, Gandhi's economic vision emphasised simplicity, small-scale production, and local self-reliance, making it more human-centered.

Thus, Gandhi's political decentralisation was not just administrative-it was ethical, cultural, and deeply democratic. It empowered individuals, strengthened communities, and upheld the values of justice, equality, and peace. Even today, in the face of centralised authority, ecological crises, and social inequality, Gandhi's ideas offer a compelling alternative grounded in local democracy and moral responsibility.

3.1.1.1 Gandhi's Vision of Nonviolent Democracy: Ethics, Self-Rule, and Human Maturity

Mahatma Gandhi was much more than a freedom fighter or the father of the Indian nation. He was one of the most original contributors to non-Western democratic thought in the twentieth century. Gandhi's concept of democracy was based on ethics, civic responsibility, and nonviolence. Without his influence, the notion of nonviolent resistance as a method for democratic change would likely not have become such a powerful global tool against authoritarianism.

Gandhi redefined the ancient Indian principle of *ahimsa* (non-harm), found in Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, and transformed it into a political strategy for democratic action. This reinterpretation allowed *ahimsa* to function as a relevant and practical method for building democracy in societies struggling with colonial domination or authoritarianism. For Gandhi, nonviolence was not merely a tactic but a moral foundation for political life, in which the ethical and the political were inseparable.

Gandhi's concept of democracy emphasised inclusivity, mutual respect, and open dialogue. He stood firmly against religious and national fanaticism, rejecting the opponent-based political mentality. His vision transcended traditional party politics, voting, and power struggles; it focused on organising society based on moral and ethical principles. Gandhi was sceptical of both elitism and populism, maintaining that leadership should not be swayed by popular opinion when it conflicts with reason or conscience. He believed that true democracy could only emerge from citizens who had attained a certain degree of self-awareness and understanding maturity.

Gandhi's emphasis on human maturity led him to view democracy as more than a governance system; it represented a journey of personal development and self-governance. He highlighted Swaraj, which encompassed more than mere

political independence. It included individual autonomy, self-discipline, and inner transformation. Gandhi contended that without internal freedom and self-control, political liberty would be empty. His well-known assertion, "The outward freedom that we shall attain will only be in exact proportion to the freedom to which we may have grown at a given moment," underscores the profound link between personal values and democratic existence.

Gandhi utilised the idea of Swaraj to critique modernity, especially the Western approach to industrial and material advancement. In Hind Swaraj, he cautioned that simply substituting British rulers with Indian ones while retaining exploitative systems was insufficient. True Swaraj, for Gandhi, necessitated a comprehensive change, not just in political institutions, but also in economic systems, societal behaviours, and individual awareness.

Gandhi's idea of democracy was ultimately a vision of human solidarity. It shifted the focus of politics from state power and security to compassion, cooperation, and ethical conduct. Instead of relying on force or fear, Gandhi promoted a culture of nonviolence that could reshape society from within. In doing so, he replaced the Hobbesian model of state-led security with a model based on empathetic community action and moral responsibility.

3.1.1.2 Gandhian Concept of Satyagraha

Gandhi's notion of satyagraha served as the foundation of his political ideology and actions. It encompassed a steadfast commitment to truth and a non-violent stance against injustice. While many associate satyagraha with nonviolence, it's crucial to note that in Gandhi's early efforts-particularly those between his South African experiences and the protests against the Rowlatt Act-satyagraha was mainly perceived as a hatred-free protest. Ahimsa, or non-violence, became a key component only post the anti-Rowlatt satyagraha of 1919. Prior to that, although ahimsa shaped his perspective, it was not the central theme in discussions of political action. From 1919 forward, Gandhi placed a stronger emphasis on the significance of ahimsa in tandem with satyagraha, drawing from Indian scriptures to validate its importance in political mobilisation.

Satyagraha, for Gandhi, was never just about resisting a specific law or event. It was a means to effect profound social

and political change. It was grounded in the idea that injustice should be challenged through soul-force, not physical violence. As Gandhi stated in *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, "We do not desire to make armed assaults on the administrators, nor to unseat them from power, but only to get rid of injustice." He envisioned satyagraha as an organised, moral, and truthful form of political action that involved the participation of the masses.

He believed that even ordinary people, including peasants, could be educated in the practice of satyagraha. As he said, "The people of India are perfectly fit to receive the training of satyagraha. India knows dharma, and where there is knowledge of dharma, satyagraha is a straightforward matter." Gandhi also recognised that some feared satyagraha could lead to violence, but he dismissed such concerns as misplaced. He insisted that satyagraha, once sincerely adopted, would not lead to violent outcomes.

The Rowlatt Satyagraha was a turning point for Gandhi. It showed him the power of mass discontent and also affirmed his belief in the effectiveness of satyagraha. Gandhi declared that even those who were not satyagrahis could join the movement, provided they opposed the unjust Rowlatt Act. "There will be such a response throughout the length and breadth of India as would convince the Government that we are alive to what is going on in our midst." However, Gandhi did not believe that any form of civil disobedience was appropriate. Reflecting on early experiences, he noted, "I am... making new discoveries... he only is able and attains the right to offer civil disobedience who has known how to offer voluntary and deliberate obedience to the laws of the State in which he is living." This clearly demonstrates that Gandhi viewed satyagraha as a highly disciplined form of protest, one that requires self-restraint and moral clarity.

He warned against unorganised demonstrations and called for disciplined mass action. "The great task before the nation today is to discipline its demonstrations if they are to serve any useful purpose." For Gandhi, true satyagraha involved clearly articulated courses of action, strict moral training, and obedience to leadership. A satyagrahi was expected to follow their leader with trust and dedication, just as a soldier follows a commander.

Satyagraha was also a method of political resistance entirely distinct from passive resistance. Gandhi explained in *Hind Swaraj* that "passive resistance is a method of securing rights

by personal suffering; it is the reverse of resistance by arms... If I do not obey the law, and accept penalty for its breach, I use soul-force. It involves sacrifice of self." He further added that, "passive resistance is an all-sided sword; it can be used anyhow; it blesses him who uses it and him against whom it is used."

In Gandhi's view, satyagraha was not physical force but soul-force. It was about changing relationships in society without causing harm. He argued that if someone used this method for an unjust cause, only he would suffer for his mistake. "Every man can claim to be right only as per his judgment. If he believes something to be wrong, he must avoid it and suffer the consequences."

The practice of satyagraha could take many forms, such as fasting, non-cooperation, civil disobedience, or self-imposed suffering. These actions could be individual, group-based, or involve mass mobilisation. Gandhi believed that for large-scale satyagraha to succeed, moral discipline was essential. Leaders had to maintain the moral compass of the movement, even if the common people could not live up to the same high standards. Although Gandhi believed in national and even international applications of satyagraha, he admitted that it worked best in democratic settings where public opinion and moral persuasion mattered. Still, he held that any human problem, no matter how big, could be addressed through non-violent resistance.

3.1.1.3 Gandhian Concept of Ahimsa

Ahimsa, or non-violence, was more than just a rejection of violence for Gandhi. It was the highest form of moral living. He defined it as both "passive and active love, refraining from causing harm and destruction to living beings as well as positively promoting their well-being," as noted in Bhikhu Parekh's *Gandhi*.

In its negative form, ahimsa meant not hurting others, physically or mentally. In its positive form, it required the greatest love and charity, even towards wrongdoers. Gandhi explained this idea by saying, "If I am a follower of ahimsa, I must love my enemy or a stranger to me as I would my wrong-doing father or son." He insisted that ahimsa included truth and fearlessness. Therefore, ahimsa was not simply a technique of protest-it was a deep moral commitment that shaped a person's actions and thoughts.

Jawaharlal Nehru supported this idea by describing non-violence as "a positive and dynamic method of action... not meant for those who meekly accept the status quo." He said that it aimed to "create a ferment in society and thus to change existing conditions." Ahimsa was not passive acceptance but a powerful tool for social change.

Gandhi believed that moral actions came from unselfish desires. He wrote in Young India, "All selfish desires are immoral, while the desire to improve ourselves for the sake of doing good to others is truly moral... The highest moral law is that we should unremittingly work for the good of mankind."

Though Gandhi followed ahimsa as a personal creed, he introduced it to the Congress and Indian politics as a practical method to resolve real problems. He once said, "It is never as a creed that I placed it before India... I placed it before the Congress as a political weapon, to be employed for the solution of practical problems." Ahimsa thus served as a guiding principle in Gandhian politics. It made resistance meaningful by removing ill will and promoting a higher moral standard. It shaped the entire strategy of satyagraha. Without ahimsa, satyagraha would lose its soul.

Gandhi compared the satyagrahi to a soldier who may not know all the theory but follows his leader's command with sincerity. He said, "It is enough if he trusts his commander... and is ready to suffer unto death without bearing malice against the so-called enemy." In individual resistance, every satyagrahi could be his own leader, but in mass movements, the leader's role was central. In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi wrote that "real beauty is in doing good against evil." He clearly distinguished between passive resistance and satyagraha by stressing that the former might still carry inner violence and hatred. In contrast, satyagraha demanded inner purity and compassion.

Gandhi believed that satyagraha and ahimsa together formed the basis of a truly democratic society. They allowed people to participate in public life with dignity, resist injustice without hatred, and seek change through love and truth. In Gandhi's vision, this was the highest form of democracy-one that combined political action with moral depth. While satyagraha and ahimsa were not guaranteed to solve every problem, Gandhi showed that they could offer powerful ways to address injustice, especially in a democratic setting. He refused to compromise on these ideals, even when it meant withdrawing movements at

their peak. In doing so, he set a standard for democratic action that placed ethics at its very core.

Together, these concepts reflect Gandhi's deep belief in the power of truth and non-violence as essential tools for democratic living and social change.

3.1.2 Gandhian Concept of Swaraj and Democracy

Gandhi's vision of swaraj stands at the heart of his political and philosophical legacy. More than a demand for independence, it was a call for moral, spiritual, and communal regeneration. In *Hind Swaraj*, he warned, "It is swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves." This notion extended beyond political self-rule to a more profound commitment to self-discipline, ethical living, and the transformation of society from within. His democratic ideals, too, were founded on non-violence, decentralisation, and service to the weakest sections of society.

The Multi-Dimensional Idea of Swaraj

The concept of swaraj, literally meaning "self-rule" or "self-restraint" in Sanskrit, held profound significance in Gandhi's political philosophy. More than a call for political independence, swaraj in Gandhi's thought was a multidimensional ideal encompassing moral, spiritual, social, and economic self-governance. It served as both an idea and a strategy in India's freedom movement, uniting diverse social groups under a shared vision of liberation.

Political, Economic and Spiritual Autonomy

Gandhi defined swaraj not merely as freedom from British rule, but as a deeper form of autonomy rooted in moral responsibility. For him, true swaraj implied national independence, political and economic freedom for the individual, and, most importantly, spiritual freedom. While the first three were often viewed in a negative light-as the absence of foreign domination, exploitation, and poverty-spiritual swaraj was seen as positive, representing the inner transformation of individuals and society.

Swadeshi and Village-Centred Economy

He linked swaraj closely with swadeshi, seeing it not just as an economic programme but as the practical foundation of self-rule. Swadeshi promoted local industries, such as khadi, and

- □ Vision of swaraj

- □ Moral, spiritual, social, and economic self-governance

- □ Deeper form of autonomy

discouraged dependency on foreign goods, helping to revive village economies. Gandhi believed that economic swaraj required an end to mass industrialisation, which he viewed as dehumanising and unsuitable for India's rural population. Instead, he supported small-scale, labour-intensive production rooted in local resources and traditions.

❐ Economic swaraj

Gram Swaraj and Decentralisation

Gandhi's idea of swaraj also implied political decentralisation. He envisioned self-governing village republics, or gram swaraj, where power resided directly with the people. These villages would manage their affairs, resolve disputes, maintain order, and promote economic activity. For Gandhi, true democracy meant self-rule through individual and collective self-discipline. Each person would be their ruler, never acting as a hindrance to others. In such a society, governance would be moral and participatory rather than hierarchical and bureaucratic.

❐ Political decentralisation

Inner Freedom and Advaita Philosophy

Gandhi further insisted that swaraj was inseparable from inner transformation. He saw it as a form of self-mastery grounded in the Vedantic concept of advaita, or non-duality- the belief in the fundamental unity of all beings. Thus, swaraj was both a political goal and a spiritual pursuit. The removal of external oppression was necessary but not sufficient. It had to be accompanied by a rejection of internalised colonial values and the embrace of indigenous traditions and ethical living.

❐ Form of self-mastery

Democracy as a Moral Order

In Gandhi's view, democracy was not merely a system of governance but a moral order that emphasised duties over rights. It was a way of life based on non-violence, dialogue, and mutual respect. For him, the state was a "soulless machine" that could easily become oppressive. He imagined a stateless society where governance emerged organically from shared values and community-based institutions.

❐ Stateless society

Ethical Foundations and Modern Critique

Swaraj, as Gandhi conceived it, represented the sovereignty of the people rooted in their moral agency. It involved active participation in public life, the pursuit of truth, and the cultivation of self-restraint. The absolute freedom he sought was not just

❐ Sovereignty of the people

azadi from the British but a transformation of society from the grassroots, led by self-aware individuals and self-reliant communities. This was the heart of Gandhian democracy: a moral and decentralised polity where power flowed upward from the people rather than being imposed from above.

❐ Critique of modern civilisation

At the core of Gandhi's vision was a critique of modern civilisation, particularly its materialism and reliance on industrialism. He argued that large-scale industries destroyed village economies, increased unemployment, and created a society obsessed with consumption. Instead, Gandhi proposed an alternative grounded in the dignity of labour, local self-sufficiency, and simplicity. His ideas on production, education, sanitation, and conflict resolution were all based on moral principles derived from traditional Indian knowledge systems.

❐ Rebuilding of communities

Gandhi's ideal society was one in which each individual developed a sense of duty rather than entitlement, where freedom was earned through self-discipline and service to others. This was the meaning of true democracy for Gandhi-a form of governance sustained not by coercion or bureaucracy, but by shared moral commitments. In this framework, institutions mattered less than the values and character of the individuals who comprised them. As Gandhi declared, "Real swaraj will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused." Thus, Gandhi's idea of swaraj and democracy remains relevant not just as a historical ideal but as an ethical framework for imagining a more just and humane society. It calls for the rebuilding of communities, fostering moral responsibility, and grounding democratic practice in everyday life. His vision presents an enduring challenge to modern notions of progress, reminding us that true freedom begins with self-rule.

3.1.3 Gandhi's Vision of Gram Swaraj: The Village as a Republic

❐ Survival and prosperity of villages

Mahatma Gandhi imagined a self-reliant and self-governed village as the cornerstone of Indian swaraj, or true independence. For him, India lived in its villages, and unless these villages thrived, the very soul of India would be lost. Through his writings in *Young India* and *Harijan*, Gandhi repeatedly emphasised that India's survival depends on the survival and prosperity of its villages. He believed that India had to choose between two models: one rooted in its ancient village life and the other shaped by colonial cities. In his view, the dominance of cities had led to the exploitation and decline of rural India.

He argued that a non-violent and truly independent India must reverse this trend and give villages their rightful place in the nation's structure.

Gandhi's idea of *Gram Swaraj* was not just administrative decentralisation; it was a holistic and ethical model. Each village was envisioned as a self-contained republic, capable of meeting its essential needs while being interdependent with others for non-essential goods. A village, in this model, would produce its own food and clothing, maintain public spaces like schools, playgrounds, waterworks, and theatres, and function through cooperative practices. Activities such as education were to be compulsory and rooted in local needs. Agriculture would focus on useful crops and exclude harmful substances like opium and tobacco.

❐ Holistic and ethical model

He also outlined certain moral and structural principles of Gram Swaraj. First, it was centred on the dignity and happiness of human beings. Physical labour, according to Gandhi, was not just economic but moral-a way of life and a form of sacrifice. Economic equality was crucial, and wealth, if in excess, should be held in trust for the greater good. Decentralisation of power-economic, political, and social-was essential to avoid violence and ensure justice. Swadeshi, or self-reliance, was encouraged not as a rejection of foreigners but as an expression of love and service towards one's community. The ultimate goal was self-sufficiency, where every village could manage its own affairs, including governance through Panchayati Raj-a five-member council elected by adult villagers. These councils would handle legislation, administration, and justice for the community.

❐ Self-sufficiency

To build such a society, Gandhi recommended two key tools: *satyagraha* (non-violent resistance) and constructive work. The latter included promoting khadi, rural industries, religious harmony, removal of untouchability, health, and education reform. Gandhi called himself a "practical idealist" because he combined a deeply moral vision with pragmatic steps during the freedom movement and after independence. Gandhi's concept of Gram Swaraj holds significant relevance in a democratic society. It brings decision-making closer to the people, encourages participation, and promotes accountability. The model offers a vision of development rooted in sustainability, cooperation, and moral responsibility-ideals often missing in today's centralised governance systems. In times when urbanisation and globalisation challenge local autonomy, Gandhi's ideas offer a path toward inclusive development and environmental harmony.

❐ Decision-making closer to the people

However, many scholars have raised critical concerns. Some argue that Gandhi's model is overly idealistic and neglects the complexities of modern economic and administrative systems. Critics point out that villages are not always egalitarian spaces; caste hierarchies, gender discrimination, and poverty persist, making local governance vulnerable to entrenched power structures. Others have noted that the vision lacks scalability in a rapidly industrialising and technologically advancing world. While Gandhian ideals inspire grassroots democracy, critics caution against romanticising village life without addressing its internal inequities.

3.1.4 Gandhi's Concept of Sarvodaya: The Upliftment of All

Gandhi's idea of *Sarvodaya*, meaning the welfare or upliftment of all, stands as a central pillar of his political and social philosophy. He first used the term in 1908 when he translated John Ruskin's essay *Unto This Last* into Gujarati and titled it *Sarvodaya*. What began as an intellectual exercise soon became a deeply rooted ideal that shaped Gandhi's vision of an ideal society-one based on justice, equality, love, and non-violence. For Gandhi, Sarvodaya was not merely a goal but a way of life that should guide every aspect of individual and collective action.

In Gandhi's view, Sarvodaya meant building a decentralised society where both political and economic power were shared by all, not concentrated in a few hands. This idea rested on the belief that every individual-regardless of occupation, status, or background-had equal value and a role in nation-building. A Sarvodaya society would be driven by cooperative labour, mutual care, and the spiritual and material development of all its members. It would reject exploitation, encourage trusteeship of wealth by the privileged, and prioritise the needs of the poorest, particularly the antyodaya-those at the very bottom of society.

Gandhi envisioned this model as a peaceful alternative to both capitalist and socialist systems, which he criticised for being overly materialistic and violent in nature. He argued that true development must protect cultural and spiritual values while ensuring basic needs for all. In such a system, politics would no longer be about power, but about service (lokniti), and economic activities would focus on local self-reliance through tools like swadeshi, bread labour, and non-possession (aparigraha). The village would be the centre of this society,

□ Grassroots democracy

□ Ideal society

□ Cooperative labour

□ Local self-reliance

governed by participatory Panchayats and guided by ethics rather than competition or consumerism.

Sarvodaya was not just a theoretical model. Gandhi and his followers lived it out in their ashrams, where ideals such as plain living, truth, and compassion were practised daily. Later, leaders like Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan carried forward the Sarvodaya movement through initiatives like the Bhoodan and Gramdan campaigns, which aimed at voluntary land redistribution and community self-governance. These efforts represented a continuing struggle to realise Gandhi's dream of a classless, self-sufficient, and compassionate India.

❐ Community self-governance

Sarvodaya offers an inspiring vision for democratic societies by placing the well-being of every individual at its core. It extends the meaning of democracy beyond electoral politics to social justice, economic fairness, and ethical governance. By promoting decentralisation, Sarvodaya aligns with the principles of participatory democracy and sustainable development. In a world facing inequality, climate crisis, and alienation, Gandhi's emphasis on local empowerment and moral politics remains highly relevant.

❐ Participatory democracy

However, the concept has faced several criticisms. Critics argue that Sarvodaya is too idealistic and not suited to modern complex economies. Its rejection of industrialisation and emphasis on rural life have been seen as impractical in the context of globalisation and technological advancement. Others have pointed out that Gandhi's vision of a classless society underestimated the deep-rooted caste hierarchies and power imbalances in Indian villages. His economic ideas, rooted in moral values rather than formal economic theory, were sometimes dismissed as lacking pragmatism or scalability.

❐ Too idealistic

In spite of these criticisms, Sarvodaya remains a powerful ethical framework. It challenges us to rethink development, governance, and social justice not just in terms of economic growth, but in terms of human dignity, ecological balance, and mutual responsibility. Gandhi's Sarvodaya is a reminder that the true measure of a society's progress lies in how it treats its most vulnerable members.

❐ Powerful ethical framework

3.1.5 Gandhi's Theory of Trusteeship: A Non-Violent Economic Alternative

Gandhi's idea of *trusteeship* represents a unique approach to economics, rooted in ethics, spirituality, and non-violence.

It rests on the belief that wealth does not belong solely to the individual who possesses it, but ultimately to the entire society. Gandhi proposed that those who hold wealth, talents, or resources beyond their basic needs should consider themselves as trustees-caretakers who use their excess not for personal luxury but for the benefit of others, especially the poor and marginalised. This idea was deeply influenced by the *Ishopanishad*, which teaches renunciation and the use of resources in service of all beings, and Gandhi's broader principle of non-possession (*aparigraha*).

Trusteeship is not about charity or philanthropy. Gandhi made a clear distinction between the two. Philanthropy often carries a sense of ownership and pride in giving. Trusteeship, in contrast, demands a shift in attitude. The trustee does not see the wealth as "his" to give away, but as something held in trust for the benefit of others. Gandhi believed that if such a mindset could become part of collective consciousness, it could lead to a more just, balanced, and compassionate society. The development of Gandhi's trusteeship theory evolved over three phases-from his return to India from South Africa, through the mid-1930s to the 1940s, and finally during the years immediately before independence. His aim was to offer a non-violent and morally grounded alternative to both capitalism and socialism. Capitalism, with its emphasis on private accumulation, and socialism, with its focus on state control, both overlooked the spiritual and ethical dimensions of economic life. Gandhi's trusteeship sought to preserve individual dignity while ensuring social equity.

Influenced by the *Ishopanishad*

Preserve individual dignity

Gandhi on Trusteeship and Wealth Ethics

- Gandhi developed the idea of **trusteeship**, where wealthy individuals must treat their property as a **trust for society**.

- He rejected both socialism and capitalism; instead, he wanted **voluntary moral restraint** by the rich.

- Believed true economics must be **ethical, non-exploitative, and serve the poorest (Antyodaya)**.

- Gandhi's economic vision is less discussed but offers a **moral critique of accumulation and inequality**.

In practical terms, Gandhi suggested certain core principles. The rich should not use their wealth selfishly, and there should be limits on how much one can earn. The pattern of production must be shaped by societal needs, not greed. Political and economic power should be exercised with a sense of duty, not dominance. The society Gandhi envisioned would be one where everyone works according to their capacity and receives according to their need. Importantly, Gandhi's notion of trusteeship extended beyond material wealth to non-material assets like talent, skill, or artistic ability. He argued that individuals gifted with exceptional talents must also act as trustees and share the benefits of their abilities with society. Thus, the principle aimed to check all forms of power-economic, political, intellectual, and cultural-by embedding them in service and moral responsibility.

Gandhi did not advocate for the immediate legal enforcement of trusteeship. Instead, he believed in changing hearts and minds first, beginning at the village level. He saw legislation as valid only when it reflected the moral consensus of the people. Therefore, trusteeship was not a short-term compromise or a tactic during the freedom struggle. It was a central pillar of his vision for a new society built on non-violence, truth, and compassion.

3.1.6 Gandhian Political Decentralisation: A Contribution to Democratic Development

Mahatma Gandhi was not only a champion of India's independence but also a profound thinker and practitioner of non-violence, truth, tolerance, and democratic values. His political philosophy aimed at transforming the oppressive and exploitative systems that affected the poor, the marginalised, and the oppressed. At the heart of this transformation lay the principle of decentralisation-a vision of democracy that went beyond elections and institutions to empower individuals and communities from the ground up. For Gandhi, decentralised governance was essential for achieving genuine democracy, social justice, and human dignity.

Gandhi believed that every individual must possess the capacity to resist injustice and assert their agency. This idea of self-respect and self-rule was tied to his broader vision of Swaraj, which included the removal of untouchability, communal unity, and economic self-reliance. He did not believe in following religious or political authority without question. Instead, he

Check all forms of power

Changing hearts and minds

Essential for achieving genuine democracy

Reshaping the political structure

stressed the importance of thinking for oneself and making moral choices based on reason. For him, exploitation was the real source of violence, and he felt that any system-whether political or economic-that ignored this reality could never be truly fair or just. Thus, Gandhi's vision was not only about freedom from colonial rule but about reshaping the political structure itself to ensure dignity and equality for all.

Political Decentralisation and Democracy

Political decentralisation, as Gandhi envisioned it, was the antidote to the concentration of power in centralised state structures. It was based on the belief that real democracy can only be achieved when power is shared with the people at the grassroots. Decentralisation involves transferring decision-making authority to local units such as village councils or Panchayats, thereby enabling direct participation of citizens in governance. It aligns with the values of pluralism and inclusiveness by ensuring that governance reflects the diverse interests and aspirations of the people.

Unlike forms of democracy dominated by centralised party politics or elite interests, Gandhian decentralisation emphasises voluntary cooperation, simple living, and self-reliance. It seeks to empower individuals not just politically, but morally and spiritually. Gandhi saw centralisation as inherently coercive and incompatible with non-violence. He argued that any system built on centralised authority inevitably requires force to sustain itself, which undermines both ethical governance and civic empowerment. In Gandhi's democratic framework, the village is the basic unit of political life. Power flows upward from the smallest units, rather than downward from a distant centre. The Panchayat plays a central role-not just in local administration, but in shaping education, health, sanitation, justice, agriculture, and trade. This model seeks to replace bureaucratic control with community initiative, and uniform policies with locally appropriate solutions. Gandhi's Sarvodaya (welfare of all), Swaraj, and Swadeshi were all deeply tied to this vision of decentralised democracy.

Democratic Values in Gandhian Decentralisation

Gandhi's conception of democracy is grounded in human values such as liberty, equality, justice, and solidarity. In this model, democracy is not merely a method of electing rulers but a moral way of life that values dignity, truth, and collective well-being. His decentralised model aims to ensure:

<aside>
□ Transferring decision-making authority

□ Power flows upward from the smallest units
</aside>

- **Liberty:** Both personal and political, allowing individuals the freedom to participate in decisions that affect their lives.
- **Equality:** Not just formal equality before the law, but substantive equality in access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making power.
- **Justice:** Ensuring that all citizens, regardless of class, caste, religion, or gender, are treated fairly.
- **Common Good:** Encouraging cooperative living and mutual respect as the basis for social organisation.
- **Popular Sovereignty:** Power truly rests with the people, not just through votes but through everyday participation and collective responsibility.

In his critique of both capitalist and centralised socialist models, Gandhi maintained that democracy must be about *raising the standard of life*, not merely the standard of living. He warned that concentration of power-whether political or economic-blinds individuals to injustice and breeds exploitation. Therefore, decentralisation was not merely a policy preference for Gandhi; it was an ethical necessity and a spiritual commitment.

In the context of today's challenges-rising inequality, erosion of civic trust, and political centralisation-Gandhi's idea of decentralised democracy remains deeply relevant. The *Panchayati Raj* system in India, which was formalised after independence, reflects many of Gandhi's ideas, although the spirit of decentralised self-governance is still evolving in practice. Moreover, Gandhian decentralisation offers insights into sustainable development, participatory governance, and the promotion of social harmony. It stands in contrast to hierarchical, top-down approaches that often alienate citizens and perpetuate exclusion. Gandhi's model is not only a political alternative but a moral framework aimed at building communities based on non-violence, justice, and mutual respect.

Gandhi's vision of political decentralisation was a profound contribution to democratic theory and practice. It combined ethical principles with practical strategies to empower the weakest sections of society. Through decentralisation, Gandhi imagined a political order rooted in the village, guided by moral values, and committed to the holistic development of

☐ *Raising the standard of life*

☐ Building communities based on non-violence

☐ About participation, service, and truth

individuals and communities. His idea of democracy was not about power, but about participation, service, and truth. In a time when democratic institutions across the world are under strain, the Gandhian model offers a powerful reminder that genuine democracy must be built from below-on the foundations of justice, equality, and self-rule.

Summarised Overview

Gandhi's idea of democracy was grounded in ethics, non-violence (ahimsa), and moral self-rule (Swaraj). He rejected Western materialism and promoted a village-based, decentralised polity. His concept of Sarvodaya aimed at the welfare of all, especially the marginalised. Gandhi's political philosophy viewed the state as a moral agent rather than a coercive power. He believed that only ethically guided individuals could sustain democratic life. Satyagraha was his method of active, truthful resistance rooted in conscience. Trusteeship offered an alternative to capitalism, based on voluntary wealth-sharing. Gandhi's notion of Swaraj emphasised self-restraint, duty, and participatory governance. He prioritised duties over rights, linking freedom to social responsibility. His concept of Gram Swaraj envisioned empowered local communities. Gandhi critiqued modern industrial civilisation for fostering exploitation and alienation. He merged spiritual insight with political activism. His views continue to influence peace movements and participatory democracy. Gandhi saw democracy as a moral process, not just a political system. His life exemplified leadership rooted in truth and service.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. How did Gandhi define freedom in moral, spiritual, and social terms?

2. What is the relevance of truth (Satya) and non-violence (Ahimsa) in Gandhi's political ethics?

3. How did Gandhi's views on Swaraj differ from the nationalist mainstream?

4. In what ways did Gandhi's idea of trusteeship provide an alternative to capitalism and socialism?

5. How did Gandhi respond to caste discrimination and untouchability?

6. What was Gandhi's critique of modern Western civilisation in *Hind Swaraj*?

7. How did Gandhi link village economy with national regeneration?

8. How did Gandhi define the relationship between religion and politics?

Assignment

1. Critically examine Gandhi's concept of non-violent democracy. How did he integrate ethics, self-rule, and human maturity into his democratic vision?

2. Explain Gandhi's idea of Swaraj as both individual self-governance and national autonomy. How did it critique modern industrial civilisation?

3. Discuss the role of satyagraha in Gandhian political thought. How did Gandhi distinguish it from passive resistance?

4. Analyse Gandhi's theory of Trusteeship. In what way did it offer a non-violent alternative to capitalism and socialism?

5. How did Gandhi link non-violence (ahimsa) to political action? Discuss with reference to his campaigns and writings.

6. Examine Gandhi's view that democracy must emerge from morally disciplined individuals. What implications does this have for leadership and citizenship?

7. Gandhi emphasised duties over rights in a democracy. Discuss this ethical foundation of Gandhian democratic thought.

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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.

UNIT 2

Jawaharlal Nehru

Learning Outcomes

After studying this unit, students will be able to:

- understand Nehru's vision of democracy and its application in postcolonial India
- examine Nehru's role in nation-building, secularism, and democratic institutionalisation
- critically analyse Nehru's foreign policy, particularly his role in non-alignment and international peace efforts
- evaluate the dilemmas Nehru faced in reconciling ideology with realpolitik

Background

Jawaharlal Nehru, a prominent figure in India's freedom struggle and its first Prime Minister, played a decisive role in shaping the political identity of modern India. While inspired by Gandhi's ideals, Nehru developed a vision that combined constitutional democracy with economic planning and secular nationalism. He saw democracy not merely as a mechanism of governance, but as a way of life based on rationality, tolerance, and ethical conduct. His leadership during the crucial years of national integration and institutional consolidation laid the foundation for India's political and economic trajectory.

Keywords

Democratic Institutions, Secularism, Non-alignment, Panchsheel, Nation-Building, Socialism, Planning Commission

3.2.1 Democratic Tradition and Nehruvian Political Thought

□ Realist approach to power
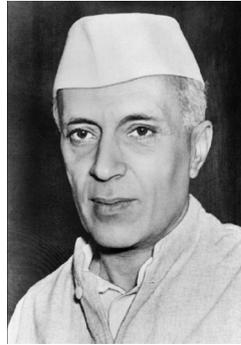
Nehru's democratic ideals were put to the test in practice, particularly during challenging decisions such as the integration of princely states and the dismissal of the elected Communist government in Kerala. Though committed to democratic principles, Nehru often made pragmatic choices that seemed to contradict his ideological stance. His management of the Kashmir issue and alliance politics within the Congress reveals a realist approach to power, one that prioritised national unity over idealist commitments. These actions reflect the inherent tension between his values and the demands of governance in a postcolonial state.

As a democrat, Nehru championed parliamentary institutions, free speech, and the rule of law. He resisted authoritarian tendencies despite being the dominant figure in Indian politics. His appreciation for opposition voices and constitutional morality was evident in his conduct in Parliament and his handling of public inquiries. However, his intervention in Kerala in 1959, which involved dismissing an elected government under political pressure, invited criticism and exposed the fragility of democratic values when confronted by immediate political compulsions.

□ Fragility of democratic values

□ Panchsheel Agreement

Nehru's internationalism was equally significant. He envisioned a world governed by peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and cooperative development. His policy of Non-Alignment emerged as a bold attempt to give voice to newly decolonised nations outside the Cold War binary. Through initiatives such as the Bandung Conference and the Panchsheel Agreement, Nehru sought to redefine global politics in moral terms. However, his disillusionment following the 1962 Sino-Indian War highlighted the limitations of idealism in international affairs and exposed the strategic vulnerabilities of India's foreign policy.

Despite these challenges, Nehru's contributions to democratic thought remain substantial. He laid the groundwork for institutional democracy in India while promoting a secular and

inclusive national identity. His emphasis on decentralisation, economic planning, and scientific rationalism gave direction to India's developmental efforts. Nehru's political life reflects the complexities of leading a diverse, newly independent nation-where ideals often had to contend with harsh realities. His legacy is best understood not as flawless adherence to democratic ideals but as a sincere, if sometimes conflicted, attempt to realise them in an evolving nation-state.

3.2.2 Nehru's Model of Nation-Building

Jawaharlal Nehru, though widely seen as Gandhi's political successor, had his own vision for modern India. His approach was rooted in realism and shaped by the conditions India faced at the time of independence. The country was emerging from the trauma of partition, poverty was widespread, illiteracy was high, and the social fabric had been weakened by years of colonial divide-and-rule. Nehru once described the moment of independence as one of both pride and pain, stating in his famous Tryst with Destiny speech: "The achievement we celebrate today is but a step, an opening of opportunity, to the greater triumphs and achievements that await us."

Nehru believed that India's future had to be built on strong foundations of democracy, secularism, scientific progress, and social justice. These values were not just political goals but the means to shape a cohesive, modern nation-state. As he remarked in *The Discovery of India*, "The future is dark, uncertain. But we may still shape it aright if we have the will and the vision to do so." For Nehru, the act of building the Indian nation was not simply administrative-it was moral and cultural in character. India gained independence at a difficult time in world history. The devastation of the Second World War had just ended, but the Cold War was taking shape. Nehru was deeply aware of the ideological dangers posed by the new global polarisation. He refused to align India with any military bloc, advocating instead for peace and non-alignment. As historian Bipan Chandra notes, Nehru's internationalism "reflected not a lack of patriotism but an enlightened concern for human civilisation."

Nehru's model of nation-building began during the freedom movement itself. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Nehru combined a deep love for his own country with an interest in world history and civilisation. His *Glimpses of World History* reveals a mind that searched for universal patterns of progress and justice. It was through this global lens that he imagined a

modern India-independent yet interconnected, traditional yet forward-looking.

Secularism: A key feature of Nehru's nation-building was secularism, which he defined not as hostility to religion but as respect for all faiths and the preservation of a rational public sphere. "Religion is a personal matter and should have no concern with the State," Nehru asserted. He believed that superstition and religious dogma were obstacles to progress. K.P. Karunakaran observes that Nehru was "rebellious against ritualistic orientations" but remained aware of the emotional strength of India's religious traditions. His aim was to safeguard public life from communalism while honouring personal belief.

❏ Safeguard public life from communalism

Nehru on Secularism

- Nehru believed secularism was essential to hold India's diverse society together.

- For him, secularism meant equal respect for all religions, and non-involvement of the state in religious matters.

- Strongly opposed communalism, calling it anti-modern and divisive.

- Linked secularism to scientific temper, democracy, and pluralism.

- Defended the idea of a single Indian identity, where citizenship transcended religion.

- Nehru's secularism was not anti-religion, but pro-reason and pro-unity.

Diversity addressed: Language and regional identity also presented significant challenges. The linguistic diversity of India was immense, and the question of a national language created deep anxieties, especially in southern states. Nehru addressed these tensions carefully by initiating the J.V.P. Committee (Jawaharlal, Vallabhbhai, and Pattabhi) and language commissions to ensure that no single language would dominate the cultural space of India. He believed in accommodating diversity within unity and held that "unity in diversity" should be the guiding spirit of Indian democracy.

Economic Justice: Economic justice was another pillar of Nehru's vision. He believed that political democracy would be incomplete without addressing poverty, inequality, and feudal land ownership. Nehru did not follow Gandhi's village-based economic model but believed in modernisation through industrialisation. In his words, "It is socialism that will ultimately solve our problems, not capitalism." He implemented large-scale land reforms, abolished the zamindari system, and promoted planned economic development through five-year plans. He also formed the Kalelkar Commission to address caste discrimination and promote social equality.

While Nehru respected the constitutional structure, he saw the state as a tool for social transformation. He often said that "Politics must be in command, not administration," highlighting his belief that governance should be led by political will and public interest. According to historian Ramachandra Guha, "Nehru combined the authority of a Prime Minister with the vision of a philosopher-statesman." Nehru's development model gave special attention to industrial growth, scientific education, and technological innovation. He saw these as essential to reducing economic disparity and strengthening national self-reliance. He famously said, "It is science alone that can solve the problems of hunger and poverty, of insanitation and illiteracy, of superstition and deadening custom and tradition." Thus, the establishment of institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), heavy industries, and the Planning Commission was central to his modernising project.

Despite these efforts, Nehru's approach had its limitations. Some critics argued that his model was too centralised and state-driven. However, Nehru defended this by pointing to the need for rapid transformation in a country burdened by centuries of poverty and inequality. He remained committed to democratic ideals, even as he utilised the state machinery to accelerate development. Nehru's model of nation-building was multi-dimensional. It embraced democratic governance, secular public life, economic planning, and cultural inclusiveness. He believed that India's unity and progress depended on striking a balance between tradition and modernity, diversity and equality, and freedom and responsibility. As Granville Austin notes, "Nehru's vision was not merely to govern India, but to build India-an India that was democratic, just, secular, and humane."

❐ Large-scale land reforms

❐ Philosopher-statesman

❐ Secular public life and economic planning

Nehru's Democratic Vision: Institutions, Participation, and Decentralisation

Jawaharlal Nehru was not only India's first Prime Minister but also the principal architect of its democratic framework. While he briefly admired the Soviet governance model in the 1930s, he ultimately endorsed a parliamentary system founded on liberal principles and universal adult suffrage. For Nehru, democracy transcended a mere governmental structure-it represented a moral approach to addressing public matters through dialogue, persuasion, and peaceful negotiation. He frequently stated that one of democracy's most significant aspects is the self-discipline of its citizens. The less external control a government must exert, the stronger and more developed the democracy will become.

3.2.3 Democracy as a Way of Life

For Jawaharlal Nehru, democracy was not limited to a system of governance or periodic elections-it was a broader cultural and ethical way of life. He believed democracy involved tolerance, reasoned dialogue, and the willingness to resolve conflicts through persuasion rather than force. He once said that democracy must be seen as a form of self-discipline within the community, where less external control indicates greater internal maturity. This moral underpinning distinguished Nehru's understanding of democracy from mere procedural politics.

Safeguarding Institutions and Constitutional Morality

Nehru held deep respect for democratic institutions, especially the Parliament, which he regarded as the living symbol of the people's sovereignty. Even as the most powerful leader of independent India, he never attempted to centralise authority or bypass constitutional checks. He regularly attended Parliament sessions, apologised for delays, and welcomed dissent from opposition benches. He understood that sustaining democracy required more than legal safeguards-it demanded constant ethical commitment from its leaders.

His handling of the Mundhra case exemplifies this. When allegations arose regarding the misuse of public funds, Nehru did not dismiss the matter, even though it involved his close associates. Instead, he appointed a commission of inquiry and accepted its recommendations. This demonstrated his belief that public officials must remain accountable to the people, and institutional integrity must not be compromised for personal loyalty.

Inclusivity, Opposition, and Political Restraint

Nehru strongly believed that a healthy democracy needed a vibrant opposition. He showed remarkable political restraint even when he had unchallenged control over both the party and the government. On several occasions, he suggested that opposition leaders defeated in general elections be brought into Parliament through by-elections. This reflected his view that democracy thrives not in silence but in continuous dialogue and reasoned debate. His temperament was inclusive, and he viewed democratic power as a responsibility rather than a reward. Throughout his political life, he resisted any urge to concentrate power or weaken rival voices. This self-imposed restraint marked him as a democrat not only in theory but also in practice.

Democracy Beyond Numbers: Participation and Equality

Nehru rejected a majoritarian interpretation of democracy. For him, democracy was not merely a matter of vote counts but a commitment to equality, non-discrimination, and shared participation. He did not define it through majority-minority binaries but emphasised the universal rights of citizenship. In his words and actions, Nehru highlighted that democracy is meaningful only when it uplifts the marginalised and enables every citizen to contribute to nation-building.

He believed that India's plural and diverse society could only be held together through participatory politics where all communities had a sense of belonging. Democracy, in his vision, must therefore be integrative, ensuring that no group feels excluded or subordinated.

Decentralisation and Grassroots Democracy

A key pillar of Nehru's democratic vision was decentralisation. He saw local self-governance as a means to empower people directly and foster participatory development. He introduced the Community Development Programme in 1952 and the National Extension Service in 1953, which aimed at involving rural communities in their own development processes. These initiatives laid the foundation for the Panchayati Raj system, which Nehru formally inaugurated in Rajasthan in 1959. On that occasion, he reminded the nation that democracy was not new to India. He referred to the ancient Panchayat system where all individuals-men and women-participated in political and

economic life as equals. For Nehru, modern decentralisation was not a Western transplant but a continuation of India's indigenous democratic tradition.

Economic Democracy and Social Justice

Nehru was deeply committed to the idea that political democracy could not survive in the absence of economic democracy. He believed that real freedom could only be achieved when poverty, inequality, and social injustice were addressed. Land reforms, the abolition of the zamindari system, and the promotion of industrialisation were central to this vision. He advocated state-led economic planning not as an end in itself but as a means to ensure fair development and reduce socio-economic disparities. Nehru envisioned an India where industrial progress would generate employment and bridge the rural-urban divide. His model emphasised not private profit but collective advancement through public welfare.

A Democratic Ethic Rooted in Indian Values

While Nehru borrowed the framework of parliamentary democracy from Britain, he sought to Indianise it. His vision moved beyond the elitist tendencies of Western liberal democracy. He aimed to build a system that was sensitive to India's unique social conditions-caste hierarchies, regional diversities, and economic inequalities. He aligned more closely with Gandhi's idea of moral politics and with thinkers like C.B. Macpherson, who argued for democracies to serve the interests of the many rather than a privileged few. Nehru's ideal of service, ethical leadership, and human dignity formed the foundation of what he hoped would be a participatory and just society.

Legacy and Continuing Relevance

Jawaharlal Nehru laid the groundwork for Indian democracy not just through institutions but through example. His leadership combined constitutional discipline, intellectual openness, and a deep trust in the people. Even during crises, such as the 1962 war with China, he did not resort to authoritarianism. Instead, he accepted criticism and worked through constitutional channels. His model of democracy-rooted in inclusion, accountability, dialogue, and development-remains a powerful framework in today's world where democratic values are often strained. Nehru's belief that democracy is a continuous process of

☐ Land reforms

☐ Participatory and just society

☐ Democracy as a continuous process

nurturing institutions and educating citizens still offers lessons for both policymakers and the public.

3.2.4 Nehru's Secularism: The Cornerstone of India's Strength and Unity

Jawaharlal Nehru regarded secularism as an essential condition for India's unity and democratic future. For him, a secular state was not an irreligious one but one that respected all religions equally without aligning itself with any particular faith. He believed that the government must stand above sectarian identities and provide equal space for all communities to live, worship, and express themselves freely. A secular India was not hostile to religion; it ensured that no religion could dominate the political domain. Nehru's views echoed the long-standing Indian tradition of tolerance. Growing up in a multi-religious environment and studying abroad, he interacted with people of diverse faiths and traditions. His understanding of Indian civilisation, shaped by his readings in Buddhism, Jainism, and Hindu thought, made him deeply aware of the value of spiritual plurality. He appreciated religion as a cultural force but firmly opposed its use in politics. In his view, religion should remain a personal matter, and the state should be committed to reason, equality, and neutrality in matters of faith.

❐ Indian tradition of tolerance

The colonial policy of divide and rule had intensified communal divisions, eventually leading to the partition of the country. Nehru was clear in his conviction that communalism, whether in the form of minority separatism or majority domination, was a threat to India's unity. He viewed religious identity as a private matter and believed that political loyalty should belong to the nation, not to any particular religious group. Unlike Gandhi, who allowed religion to shape his public philosophy, Nehru drew a sharp line between public governance and personal belief. Though he respected Gandhi's intentions, he chose a rational and humanist approach to national integration. Nehru's secularism was both principled and practical. He supported freedom of religion but never hesitated to criticise religious orthodoxy or superstition. He promoted scientific temper and rational thinking as tools to challenge obscurantism. His vision of India was one where citizens were united not by a common faith but by shared values of justice, equality, and democratic participation.

❐ Both principled and practical

Throughout his career, Nehru refused to exploit religion for political advantage. He never courted votes by appealing to

religious sentiments. Instead, he consistently upheld the moral ideals of mutual respect, human dignity, and universal ethics. He saw religious harmony not as a political arrangement but as a reflection of the nation's moral maturity. For him, human values were always superior to sectarian claims. Nehru's secularism was not borrowed from the West; India's pluralist heritage shaped it. He envisioned a democratic India where people of all faiths could coexist without fear or favour. He believed that by honouring diversity and separating religion from statecraft, India would not only preserve peace but also become a stronger, more united nation.

Nehru's secularism was the foundation of his nation-building project. It was the guiding principle behind his policies, speeches, and personal conduct. By promoting a rational and inclusive vision of citizenship, he laid the groundwork for a democratic culture that could withstand the pressures of religious division and political populism. His legacy remains vital even today, reminding us that a truly secular democracy is one where unity is achieved not through uniformity but through respect for difference.

3.2.5 Nehruvian Socialism: Merging Democracy with Economic Justice

Nehruvian socialism was a unique blend of democratic governance and socialist ideals, shaped by Nehru's deep commitment to both political freedom and economic justice. His vision was not of a revolution led by violence but of a society gradually transformed through democratic institutions and planned development. In the words of Acharya Narendra Deva, Nehru's philosophy was best described as "democratic socialism," combining the principles of liberty with social equity.

Nehru played a leading role in introducing socialist thought into India's freedom movement, especially between 1920 and 1938. He believed that true political independence was incomplete without economic freedom and that a just society must aim to eliminate class divisions and create equal opportunities for all. He envisioned a classless and egalitarian India where both the country and its individuals could flourish. His exposure to socialist ideas began during his early years in Britain, where he came into contact with the Fabian Society. His interest in socialism deepened during his time in prison in the 1920s, when he studied the Russian Revolution and began to reflect seriously

on questions of economic justice and social organisation. By the 1930s, Nehru had developed a clearer vision of socialism suited to Indian conditions. He wanted the Indian National Congress to adopt these ideals within a democratic framework.

In his own words, Nehru expressed the belief that socialism did not mean the denial of individual freedoms. Instead, he saw it as a system that could offer more meaningful freedom than capitalism ever had. He envisioned a society where individuals enjoyed freedom of conscience, thought, and enterprise, as well as limited ownership of private property. But more importantly, socialism, he felt, would offer the kind of freedom that arises from economic security-something that, at the time, was enjoyed only by a privileged few. Nehru commenced implementing tangible initiatives to realise this vision. During the 1931 Karachi Session of the Congress, which he led, resolutions were adopted that encompassed fundamental rights and economic reforms. Although he chose not to join the Congress Socialist Party in 1934, he persisted in advocating for socialism through the mainstream Congress, while upholding his identity as a democratic socialist.

In 1938, he established the National Planning Committee to chart out a framework for economic development. While the committee's work was delayed due to the political situation, Nehru's commitment to socialism only strengthened after independence. As Prime Minister, he had the opportunity to put his ideas into action. He remained in office for 17 years, using this period to lay the foundations for both political democracy and economic planning. Nehru envisioned socialism not through the lens of state coercion but through democratic consensus and structured planning. He made a clear distinction between Indian socialism and the Soviet model, choosing a peaceful path that respected democratic rights. He believed that planned industrialisation was essential to fight poverty, reduce inequality, and ensure social welfare.

The Industrial Policy Resolution of 1948 reflected Nehru's approach to building a mixed economy, where both public and private sectors coexisted, but with the state playing a guiding and regulatory role. Later, the Congress resolutions at Avadi and Bhubaneswar affirmed the party's commitment to a socialistic pattern of society and democratic socialism, respectively. In practice, Nehru's policies led to the expansion of state control over key sectors of the economy, heavy industries, infrastructure, and public services. His government regulated private industry

❏ Fundamental rights and economic reforms

❏ Democratic consensus and structured planning

❏ Expansion of state control over economy

to align it with national development goals. Though political democracy remained intact, his economic policies moved India significantly towards socialism. During his tenure, the state played a central role in economic planning, resource allocation, and investment, all aimed at reducing disparities and ensuring collective welfare.

Nehru's legacy lies in his ability to integrate social justice with democratic values. He did not view socialism as a foreign ideology but as a path rooted in India's historical concern for equality and welfare. His efforts to combine planning, state-led growth, and democratic governance helped shape the early decades of independent India, giving it both direction and purpose.

3.2.6 Nehru's Vision of Development: Planning and Industrial Growth

Jawaharlal Nehru is often remembered as the architect of modern India. His commitment to development was shaped by the contrast he experienced during his formative years-prosperity in Britain and widespread poverty in India. This dual exposure had a profound influence on his thinking. While he was initially drawn to communist ideals, he ultimately embraced socialism, particularly of the democratic variety, to address the challenges facing independent India. Poverty was the most significant obstacle in his way. As the country's first Prime Minister, Nehru held both political authority and party control, allowing him to implement a vision that went beyond political independence. He believed that democracy alone could not fulfil the aspirations of the Indian masses without parallel economic progress. For Nehru, development was not merely about infrastructure; it was about building a just, inclusive, and self-reliant society.

His approach to development was closely tied to national unity. India, with its vast diversity, needed a shared economic purpose to overcome social fragmentation. Nehru felt that only an open, federal, and democratic framework could contain the multiple pressures of caste, region, language, and religion. A rigid or coercive model, in his view, would not survive long in a society as plural as India. Nehru envisioned a developmental state-one that would use the tools of planning and policy to direct economic growth while ensuring social justice. He believed that small-scale industries and cottage enterprises were necessary in the short term to alleviate poverty and provide employment. However, he did not see them as a permanent solution. To

□ Social justice with democratic values

□ Just, inclusive, and self-reliant society

□ Developmental state

eliminate poverty in a sustained manner, he believed India needed to industrialise on a large scale. The modern world was driven by industry and science, and Nehru was convinced that a nation that failed to industrialise would remain weak and vulnerable to foreign influence.

Although the Constituent Assembly did not formally include economic planning in the Constitution, Nehru pushed forward with his agenda. He established the Planning Commission through a parliamentary resolution and assumed its chairmanship. The Commission was tasked with leading India's transition to planned economic development, with a focus on equity and justice. Nehru's planning strategy encompassed essential elements. Primarily, it emphasised production in agriculture and industry, backed by science and technology. Additionally, it promoted a mixed economy that facilitated the coexistence of public and private sectors. Key industries such as steel, coal, oil, transportation, atomic energy, and river valley projects were designated for state ownership, leaving other sectors available for private enterprise. This balanced methodology was formalised by the Industrial Policy Resolution of 1948.

He also recognised the importance of human resource development. Education, skill training, and administrative reforms were considered essential to implementing plans efectively. Nehru's development model always emphasised the integration of economic growth with social justice. He was not content with numerical growth alone; he sought development that would uplift the lives of the poor and disadvantaged. The Five-Year Plans became the framework for this strategy. The First Five-Year Plan (1951–1956) focused on agriculture, irrigation, community development, and basic infrastructure. It was modest in scale but set the foundation for future efforts. The Second Plan, more ambitious, aimed at rapid industrialisation and was influenced by the ideas of statistician P. C. Mahalanobis. It prioritised heavy industries and state-led investment to create employment and reduce import dependence. Natural disasters and food shortages, however, posed significant challenges. The Third Plan aimed to accelerate growth and sought a self-sustaining economy, with targets that far exceeded those of its predecessors.

Nehru believed that planning was necessary to avoid the chaos and inequality often associated with unregulated markets. He wanted India's economy to grow in a planned and balanced way, avoiding the extremes of both capitalism and state

❑ Promoted a mixed economy

❑ Prioritised heavy industries

❑ Policy independence

absolutism. While he welcomed technological assistance from industrialised countries, he ensured that India maintained its policy independence. He collaborated with nations like Russia, Germany, and Britain to support industrial growth.

Despite these efforts, many of Nehru's dreams of rapid industrialisation remained incomplete during his lifetime. The question of whether efficient economic planning could thrive within a democratic system, where political debates and public accountability often slowed implementation, remained open. Yet, Nehru's contribution in laying the institutional and ideological groundwork for India's long-term economic strategy cannot be denied. Nehru's development philosophy was a blend of idealism and pragmatism. He envisioned a modern, self-reliant India driven by science, industry, and equity. His model attempted to reconcile individual liberty with collective progress, national unity with regional diversity, and state planning with democratic governance. Even if the outcomes were uneven, the framework he created continues to influence India's development discourse to this day.

❐ State planning with democratic governance

3.2.7 Nehru's Vision: Balancing Nationalism and Internationalism

Jawaharlal Nehru emerged as a key political figure during a time when a powerful wave of nationalism drove the Indian freedom struggle. As a practical statesman and visionary, he recognised the urgency of achieving political independence to awaken national consciousness. However, he also brought a critical lens to prevailing forms of nationalism, especially those shaped by colonial experiences and early Congress leadership. He pointed out that before Gandhi's arrival, Congress leaders were largely liberal in their outlook, often admiring British institutions while seeking only gradual reforms. Nehru, on the other hand, believed that colonial rule had deeply penetrated India's land, people, and economy-there was no room for compromise.

❐ Penetrated India's land, people, and economy

He analysed British colonialism in three phases. The first involved early occupation and administrative control. The second, in the 19th century, was marked by economic exploitation-India became a supplier of raw materials and a market for British goods. The third phase, beginning around World War I, was defined by financial exploitation and investment colonialism. This analysis revealed how colonial rule systematically drained

❐ Opposed cultural revivalism or political extremism

India's resources and propped up feudal and reactionary forces. Nehru's response was to stir national pride and unity, but he was cautious not to let nationalism fall into the trap of cultural revivalism or political extremism.

He was critical of a form of nationalism that becomes arrogant or hostile-what he called a degeneration into chauvinism. For Nehru, nationalism had to be modern, forward-looking, and rooted in the collective good. He believed in a nationalism that resisted colonial domination but also respected diversity and promoted human progress. His nationalism was shaped by values such as democracy, secularism, and socialism. Nehru also saw the limitations of excessive nationalism. He warned against turning national identity into a tool of division or aggression. While deeply committed to India's independence, he understood that the world was increasingly interconnected. Hence, even as a nationalist, he extended his political thought into the realm of internationalism. He was among the earliest leaders in the Global South to make this connection, organising the Asian Relations Conference in 1947 to bring attention to the fall of colonialism and the rise of new national movements.

For Nehru, internationalism was not in contradiction with nationalism-it was its natural extension. He defined internationalism as a principle of cooperation among sovereign nations, based not on fear or force but on mutual respect and peaceful coexistence. He believed that nations must act together to resolve global challenges, recognising their interdependence and shared responsibilities. Nehru's international outlook was grounded in a moral and political vision that he had already articulated in his earlier writings, particularly in *The Discovery of India*. His foreign policy was shaped by a strong desire for peace, global cooperation, and an end to colonial domination. He proposed a set of foundational ideas for the postcolonial world order:

1. There is no real alternative between world conquest and world association. Nehru believed that power politics and global divisions had become outdated and ill-suited to the emerging realities of the modern world.

2. Cooperation among nations must be based on equality and mutual benefit. He stressed the need to uplift backward and colonised nations to a common level of development and cultural dignity, eliminating racial discrimination and domination.

☐ Internationalism

☐ Strong desire for peace and global cooperation

3. No nation will tolerate domination and exploitation any-more. In Nehru's view, the spread of global consciousness had made it impossible for oppressed people to remain in-different to their own poverty while others flourished.

These principles were not merely idealistic but reflected Nehru's desire to create a just and fair international order, particularly for Afro-Asian countries that had long suffered under colonialism. He once said: "Hundreds of millions in Asia and Africa have become increasingly conscious of themselves and their destiny… They are nationalistic, but this nationalism seeks no domination… They welcome all attempts at world cooperation and an international order."

Nehru's most notable diplomatic contribution was the doctrine of Non-Alignment, which meant that India would not align itself with either the Western bloc led by the United States or the Eastern bloc led by the Soviet Union.

The foundation of this policy lay in the Panchsheel agreement between India and China in 1954, which laid down five principles of peaceful coexistence:

1. Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sov-ereignty

2. Mutual non-aggression

3. Mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs

4. Equality and mutual benefit

5. Peaceful coexistence

The Bandung Conference in 1955 marked the first public appearance of the Non-Aligned Movement, where Nehru and leaders from other Asian and African countries articulated an alternative international vision. The conference adopted a Ten-Point Declaration, which included the following principles derived from the United Nations Charter:

❏ Ten-Point Declaration

1. Respect for fundamental human rights and for the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter

2. Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations

3. Recognition of the equality of all races and all nations, large and small

4. Abstention from intervention or interference in the internal affairs of another country

5. Respect for the right of each nation to defend itself, singly or collectively

6. (i) Abstention from collective defence arrangements serving the interests of any one power
(ii) Rejection of pressure tactics by any powerful country

7. Refraining from threats or use of force against the territorial or political independence of any country

8. Settlement of international disputes by peaceful means such as negotiation, conciliation, arbitration, or judicial settlement

9. Promotion of mutual interests and cooperation

10. Respect for justice and international obligations

Although Non-Alignment was not always successful in asserting its full potential due to resource constraints and political pressures, it offered an ethical and independent voice for newly decolonised states. Nehru's commitment to peaceful coexistence was also evident during the Suez and Hungarian crises of 1956. He condemned the Anglo-French intervention in Egypt, calling it "naked aggression, a reversion to colonialism, a violation of the UN Charter." Similarly, he criticised the Soviet invasion of Hungary despite being ideologically closer to the Soviet Union.

However, Nehru's moral vision was challenged when India faced the Chinese invasion in 1962. The conflict highlighted the limits of diplomatic idealism without adequate military preparedness. This moment deeply disillusioned Nehru, who had placed his faith in the Panchsheel principles. Despite such setbacks, Nehru's role in shaping the post-war world order was significant. His efforts gave a new moral tone to international relations, particularly for newly independent nations. He envisioned a world free from domination, war, and inequality. His idea of a cooperative global society still resonates today, especially in an era where global civil society and non-state actors are increasingly influential.

Nehru's internationalism may not have always achieved its immediate goals, but it initiated new conversations in global politics. His approach to diplomacy and global peace set the stage for a more inclusive, ethical, and humane international order. His ideals remain a valuable contribution to the continuing

❐ To resource constraints and political pressures

❐ Envisioned a world free from domination

evolution of international relations. Nehru's words captured the heart of his internationalism when he said that nations must learn to live in tolerance, respecting each other's sovereignty and cooperating toward a shared future. If the world remained divided-each nation asserting its superiority or righteousness-it would fail its own destiny. Instead, Nehru envisioned a world moving towards unity, where peace and understanding paved the way for one human race.

3.2.8 The Dilemma of a Democrat

Jawaharlal Nehru has often been described as an admired enigma-a nationalist turned statesman who, once in power, found himself navigating the tensions between his ideological commitments and the practical challenges of governance. As a freedom fighter, Nehru had espoused radical ideals and openly criticised authoritarian structures, but once he became the Prime Minister of India, these ideals were often tested by political realities. Leading a party as ideologically diverse as the Congress, Nehru developed a strategy of accommodation. He chose to engage with opposing elements within the party rather than exclude them, believing he could keep reactionary tendencies in check so long as they remained within his fold. In his own words, "Most of my ministers are reactionary and scoundrels; but as long as they are my ministers, I can keep some check on them."

This balancing act was most visible in his approach to integrating princely states into the Indian Union. While the vast majority of the 565 princely states agreed to join the Indian federation, three cases-Junagadh, Hyderabad, and Kashmir-posed serious challenges. Junagadh, a Hindu-majority region ruled by a Muslim prince who chose to accede to Pakistan, was taken over by Indian forces and later officially integrated after a referendum. Similarly, Hyderabad, ruled by the Nizam who was inclined towards Pakistan, was brought into the Union through a military operation. Kashmir presented a more complex dilemma. Although the ruler initially wished to remain independent, a tribal invasion from Pakistan forced him to seek India's protection and sign the Instrument of Accession.

For Nehru, Kashmir symbolised more than a territorial issue. Its accession was significant in two ways: it challenged the two-nation theory by integrating a Muslim-majority region into secular India, and it reinforced his vision of India as a pluralist, non-sectarian nation. He once observed that Kashmir was not merely a geographic frontier but the ideological frontier of

□ A world moving towards unity

□ A nationalist turned statesman

□ Princely states

□ Kashmir

secular India. Yet, this idealism was clouded by subsequent events. Nehru's alliance with Sheikh Abdullah soured after suspicions arose regarding Abdullah's alleged alignment with Pakistan, leading to his arrest and the installation of a puppet government. Though Nehru had internationalised the Kashmir issue, he resisted a plebiscite as advised by the United Nations, fearing a possible outcome that would go against India's position.

Another instance that exposed Nehru's democratic dilemma was the dismissal of the elected Communist government in Kerala in 1959. The government, led by E.M.S. Namboodiripad, had come to power through a democratic mandate. Nehru initially accepted this result as part of the democratic process, despite his general distrust of Indian Communists. However, political unrest, especially after the passage of the Education Act, and the growing pressure from factions within the Congress, led Nehru to support the dismissal of the government through presidential intervention. Though he acknowledged that the decision went against democratic conventions, he justified it as an act imposed by circumstance. This act, widely criticised, left a dent in Nehru's democratic image. Contemporary reports indicated that his action was motivated more by narrow party calculations than genuine concern for constitutional propriety.

❐ EMS government

Both the Kashmir crisis and the Kerala dismissal highlight a consistent pattern in Nehru's statecraft: a willingness to compromise on democratic values for the sake of national unity or political expediency. These decisions underscore the tension between his ideological convictions and his role as a pragmatic nation-builder. When he found himself unable to persuade his colleagues or the party to uphold certain ideals, he often yielded to the compulsions of realpolitik.

❐ Compulsions of realpolitik

Nehru's contradictions did not stem from a lack of commitment to democracy, but from the challenge of reconciling his moral vision with the practical burdens of governance. His experiences reveal the complexity of translating ideology into state policy, especially in a newly independent, diverse, and fragile nation. While his legacy as a democrat remains intact in many respects, these episodes serve as reminders that even the most principled leaders are often forced to navigate murky waters when ideals confront political realities.

❐ Ideals confront political realities

Summarised Overview

Nehru saw democracy as a fusion of liberal institutions and Indian socio-cultural conditions. He favoured parliamentary democracy, secularism, and scientific modernity. His vision of nation-building involved planning, industrialisation, and inclusion. Nehru promoted economic democracy through land reforms and public welfare. He emphasised secularism as a condition for national unity and coexistence. Nehru saw religion as a private matter and opposed communalism in politics. His ideal of democratic governance was grounded in ethical leadership and service. He viewed democracy as a process of educating and empowering the masses. Nehru aligned with thinkers like C.B. Macpherson, supporting participatory development. His foreign policy embraced non-alignment, international cooperation, and peace. He opposed authoritarianism and remained committed to constitutional process even in crises. Nehru respected tradition but prioritised reason, dialogue, and reform. His democratic legacy includes institutions, values, and a developmental state. He upheld civil liberties, pluralism, and dialogue within a constitutional framework. Nehru remains a key architect of postcolonial Indian democracy.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. How did Nehru define nationalism in relation to India's cultural diversity?

2. What was Nehru's view on the relationship between science, rationality, and politics?

3. How did Nehru conceptualise secularism in the Indian context?

4. What were the key features of Nehru's democratic socialism?

5. How did Nehru reconcile the idea of planning with political democracy?

6. What was Nehru's understanding of social justice and economic equality?

7. How did Nehru frame national unity in a multi-religious and multi-lingual society?

8. How did Nehru interpret the legacy of colonialism in shaping India's foreign and domestic policies?

9. How did Nehru reconcile nationalism with internationalism in his thought?

Assignment

1. Analyse the democratic challenges Nehru faced in reconciling ideology with real-politik.

2. Explain Nehru's vision of nation-building. How did he address challenges like diversity, poverty, and illiteracy?

3. Critically evaluate Nehru's commitment to secularism. How did he define the role of religion in a democratic state?

4. Nehru called democracy "a way of life." Discuss the cultural and ethical dimensions of his democratic philosophy.

5. How did Nehru's views on socialism balance individual freedom with collective welfare?

6. Discuss Nehru's approach to planning and industrial growth. How did it reflect his vision of a modern and self-reliant India?

7. What were the key features of Nehruvian internationalism? Analyse the role of Non-Alignment and Panchsheel in this context.

8. Evaluate Nehru's contributions to the establishment of democratic institutions in India. How did he promote parliamentary culture and constitutional morality?

9. Compare Nehru's democratic thought with that of Gandhi, especially in terms of centralisation and economic development.

10. Nehru's idea of democracy emphasised inclusivity and participation. How did his policies reflect this commitment?

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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.

UNIT 3

Dr.B R Ambedkar

Learning Outcomes

After studying this unit, the learner will be able to:

- understand Ambedkar's concept of democracy
- examine the relationship between social justice and political democracy
- recognise the moral and ethical foundations of Ambedkar's democratic thought

Background

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was one of the foremost thinkers of modern India who gave a new direction to the idea of democracy. His concept of democracy was not limited to the formation of government or the functioning of institutions. He believed that democracy should be based on equality, justice, and respect among all individuals. For Ambedkar, democracy had to be both political and social in nature. While political democracy gives people the right to vote and participate in governance, social democracy ensures dignity, fairness, and equal opportunity in everyday life. His understanding of democracy came from his personal experiences of caste-based discrimination and his deep study of history, law, and philosophy. In his view, democracy was a way of life rooted in the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Keywords

Democracy, Social Justice, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, Caste, Constitutional Morality,

3.3.1 Democratic Tradition and Ambedkar's Political Thought

Ambedkar viewed democracy as a system that must bring real change to people's lives. He strongly believed that without social and economic justice, political democracy would remain incomplete. In his speeches and writings, he often expressed his concern that granting the right to vote alone was not enough, especially in a society deeply divided by caste and inequality.

He emphasised that democracy should be built on the idea of associated living, where individuals respect one another and live together with mutual care. He also argued for constitutional morality-meaning that both the government and society should act according to the values enshrined in the Constitution. Ambedkar wanted democracy to become a shared practice, not just a political arrangement. For him, fraternity was the key value that could bind society together and make democracy meaningful.

Ambedkar's idea of social democracy involved the complete removal of caste-based discrimination and the promotion of human dignity. He did not see democracy as just a Western idea to be copied, but something that needed to be rooted in Indian conditions. He supported parliamentary democracy but was aware of its limitations, especially when it failed to include the voices of the marginalised. Ambedkar also believed in state-led efforts to bring about economic equality, but he opposed any form of dictatorship. His democratic vision was both practical and ethical. It combined legal safeguards with a deep sense of moral responsibility. His legacy reminds us that a democratic society must be inclusive, just, and respectful of the rights of all people, especially the most disadvantaged.

3.3.1.1 Ambedkar's Idea of Democracy, State and Society: A Path to Social Justice

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar viewed democracy not just as a political system but as a peaceful way to achieve deep social and economic change. For him, democracy meant transforming people's lives without violence, especially for the downtrodden. He preferred parliamentary democracy over presidential systems because he felt it allowed more participation and avoided the risk of

□ Idea of associated living

□ Deep sense of moral responsibility

□ Preferred parliamentary democracy

centralising power in the hands of one leader. In his words, democracy is not just rule for the people, but by the people and of the people.

Being a member of the marginalised Dalit community, Ambedkar saw democracy as a way to bring his people into the political fold. He believed that fair representation could help correct historical injustices. To achieve this, he pushed for constitutional safeguards such as reservations and the creation of political platforms for Dalits. However, Ambedkar also had to compromise. His ideas for constitutional socialism were not fully accepted in the Constituent Assembly. As a result, he settled for a liberal democratic model with features like reserved seats in legislatures, public sector reservations, and Directive Principles aimed at social and economic justice.

❐ Correct historical injustices

Ambedkar's approach was influenced by John Dewey's philosophy of pragmatism. He believed in adjusting ideas to suit the reality of the time. This is why he focused not only on the system of governance but also on improving the life of the individual. In his view, individual freedom was not possible unless social and economic inequalities were addressed. Apart from these contributions, Ambedkar also worked to ensure protection for minorities in a democracy. He felt that the idea of majority rule was flawed if it ignored the interests of minorities. To fix this, he proposed the idea of relative majority and suggested that the Prime Minister and Cabinet should be selected based on consensus rather than dominance of numbers. He proposed the following points to safeguard minorities:

❐ Protection for minorities

- Majority rule is flawed both in theory and practice. A majority community can be given relative representation, but not absolute dominance.
- The size of representation of the majority should not be so high that it can form a government even with the support of the smallest minorities.
- Seat allocation should be done in a way that even if the majority joins with a major minority, their combined strength should not become overwhelming.
- If all minorities come together, they should be able to form a government without needing the majority's help.

- Representation should be weighted: weaker minorities (socially, economically, educationally) should get more support than those who are already relatively better off.

Ambedkar believed in building institutions for the success of democracy but also understood that democracy is a continuous process. People must engage with one another and remain open to redefining democracy for future generations. As the chairperson of the drafting committee, Ambedkar played a key role in shaping the Indian Constitution. He clearly stated that without checks and limitations, power can lead to tyranny. He advocated not just for political democracy but also for economic democracy, where every citizen could live a life of dignity. He argued that nationalisation of land and industries was essential to achieving real justice. Ambedkar also expressed discomfort with the compromises he had to make. He openly criticised Article 31 related to the right to property. He said it was not something the Drafting Committee wanted but was the result of internal disagreements within the Congress party. While some leaders, like Sardar Patel, insisted on full compensation for landowners, others had different views. Ambedkar accepted the decision but called the article "ugly" and something he did not like.

Despite these limitations, Ambedkar believed that being part of the Constitution-making process gave him an opportunity to work for both his community and the nation. His deep understanding of law and governance stood out throughout the debates, and he remains a central figure in shaping democratic India. Ambedkar's vision remains deeply relevant in today's India. His emphasis on social justice, minority rights, and economic democracy addresses the core challenges that still exist in Indian society. Democracy cannot be meaningful unless all citizens-regardless of caste, class, or religion-have an equal chance to participate and prosper. His focus on representation, constitutional safeguards, and state responsibility offers a blueprint for inclusive governance even today.

3.3.1.2 Ambedkar's Critique of Brahminical Hinduism and the Hindu Social Order

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's powerful critique of the Hindu caste system laid the foundation for his vision of democracy in India. His intellectual journey began early, and at the age of 25, he wrote his first scholarly paper Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development, where he explored how caste had

□ Chairperson of the drafting committee

□ Blueprint for inclusive governance

□ Against inequality and oppression

become a tool of social control in Hindu society. Later, in his widely known work *Annihilation of Caste*, he wrote, "The Hindu social order is a veritable chamber of horrors," firmly placing caste at the heart of his argument against inequality and oppression.

Ambedkar argued that caste was not just a social custom but a religiously sanctioned system that created a rigid and unequal social order. It divided society into hierarchical groups and enforced strict rules of endogamy, restricting marriage within caste lines. What made this system particularly damaging was that it assigned different rights-civil, cultural, educational, and economic-to each caste and denied any freedom to move from one to another. Ambedkar observed that in this system, "Privileges for the few are rendered into disabilities for the many," as described in *The Hindu Social Order: Its Essential Principles.*

❒ Rigid and unequal social order

He described how Brahmins, at the top of the social pyramid, had exclusive access to knowledge, education, and rituals like teaching the Vedas, receiving gifts, and officiating religious ceremonies. They could adopt any occupation, while the lower castes, especially the untouchables, were restricted to the most degrading forms of labour. Yet, these groups were denied even the most basic right to question or change their conditions. The impure jobs were forced on them, and any defiance brought swift social and economic boycotts.

❒ Swift social and economic boycotts

Ambedkar pointed out that this system sustained itself not merely through tradition but through mechanisms of penalty. Anyone violating caste norms was met with punishment-social exclusion, economic deprivation, or physical intimidation. In his work *Annihilation of Caste*, he noted, "The Caste System is not merely a division of labour. It is also a division of labourers." It denied human dignity, individual merit, and fraternity-all essential elements of a democratic society. He also highlighted how caste destroyed the very concept of individuality. According to him, the Hindu social order refused to recognise individual worth and insisted on collective identity based on caste. It made people internalise separation, exclusion, and hierarchy. "The Hindu has an instinct to be different, to be separate and to be distinct," he noted, which was rooted in the belief that different classes were born from different parts of the divine body.

❒ Destroyed the concept of individuality

One of the most damaging aspects of this system was *graded inequality*. It wasn't just that some were higher and others lower; every caste stood above another in a vertical ladder of discrimination. This idea was not just social but deeply moral and spiritual, backed by scriptures. As Ambedkar pointed out, "No sphere of life is untouched that is not regulated by the principle of graded inequality." He also criticised the fixation of occupations by birth, as outlined in the *Manusmriti,* which left no room for individual talent or social mobility.

He raised a fundamental question: Why did the oppressed continue to follow such a harsh system? The answer lay in the power structure-those at the top used penalties and control over resources to maintain dominance. Deepak Lal, in The Hindu Equilibrium, supported this idea, stating, "The economic and non-economic aspects of the system mutually reinforced each other."

3.3.1.3 Ambedkar on Rights, Remedies, and Democratic Safeguards

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's role in the Constitution-making process was marked by deep insight as well as caution. Although he was entrusted with the responsibility of drafting the Constitution, his speeches and writings reveal that he did not always agree with the key decisions of the Assembly. His apprehensions were particularly visible in his reaction to the Objectives Resolution moved by Nehru, which began the formal journey of Constitution-making.

Ambedkar criticised the Resolution for not including remedies to protect fundamental rights. He felt that rights, in the absence of mechanisms for enforcement, would remain hollow. As he rightly noted, the principle that "no man's life, liberty and property shall be taken without the due process of law" was missing. This absence, according to him, left too much power in the hands of the executive, which could interpret the rights of citizens as it deemed fit. At the same time, Ambedkar was firm in stating that rights could not be absolute. While concluding the debate on the draft Constitution, he clarified that rights must carry reasonable limitations. Responding to criticisms about the Constitution's fundamental rights, he said that the distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental rights did not lie in whether they were absolute. Non-fundamental rights emerged from private agreements, while fundamental rights were "gifts of the law." He explained that since they were granted by the State, the State could also impose restrictions.

☐ Graded inequality

☐ Objectives Resolution

☐ Fundamental rights

Ambedkar introduced the Directive Principles of State Policy as a unique feature of Indian democracy. These were not common in constitutions elsewhere during the 1940s, and he considered them an innovation. Though not enforceable by courts, these principles were intended to serve as constant reminders to the ruling government of its duty toward social justice. Ambedkar described them as "instruments of instructions" and predicted their true value would be realised when those in power would have to answer to the electorate. He made it clear that although courts could not enforce them, the people would hold the government accountable at the time of elections. He emphasised this when he said, "What great value these Directive Principles possess will be realised better when the forces of right contrive to capture power."

The backdrop of partition made the task of framing the Constitution more delicate, especially regarding the rights of minorities. Despite this, Ambedkar ensured that essential protections were granted to minorities within the Constitution. When these provisions were criticised, Ambedkar strongly defended them. He said, "It is wrong for the majority to deny the existence of minorities. It is equally wrong for the minorities to perpetuate themselves." In his view, the solution lay in recognising minorities while also working toward a future where they could merge with the broader national community. His hope was to bridge the divide between the majority and minorities, encouraging integration rather than permanent separation.

Ambedkar's statements reflected a balance between realism and idealism. He believed that rights should be protected and enforceable, but not absolute. He saw Directive Principles as a moral compass for future governments, and minority safeguards as necessary for national unity. His thoughtful engagement with these ideas shows his deep commitment to democratic governance that is both principled and pragmatic.

3.3.2 Ambedkar and the Hindu Code Bill: A Milestone for Women's Rights

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's concern for equality did not stop at caste and class. He was equally disturbed by the systemic discrimination faced by women, especially within Hindu society. He believed that any society claiming to be just and democratic could not ignore half its population. The Hindu

❏ Directive Principles of State Policy

❏ Integration rather than permanent separation

❏ Balance between realism and idealism

❏ Sought practical remedies

Code Bill was Ambedkar's bold attempt to bring justice to Hindu women through legal reform. Historically, Hindu women were denied equal rights and treated as subordinate beings. The influence of ancient texts like the Manusmriti cemented this inequality through rigid customs, such as sati, child marriage, and the denial of property rights. Ambedkar, in his writings like Annihilation of Caste, pointed out that caste and gender oppression were deeply intertwined. But it was through the Hindu Code Bill that he sought practical remedies.

Ambedkar was aware that tradition denied Hindu women equal status. However, he also pointed out that there were examples within Hindu tradition that offered some rights to women. His effort through the Bill was not just to introduce something new but to "repair" what had become unjust. He was, as Sharmila Rege rightly observed in her work, a figure whom Indian feminists should reclaim for his unwavering commitment to women's rights.

In Parliament, while presenting the Bill, Ambedkar outlined its major proposals:

- Abolition of the birthright principle and replacing it with the right of survivorship.
- Granting daughters an equal share in property.
- Transforming a woman's limited estate into full ownership.
- Introducing the principle of monogamy.
- Legalising the right to divorce.

To justify the need for reform, Ambedkar even cited the conservative British philosopher Edmund Burke, who once said that "those who want to conserve must be ready to repair." Ambedkar echoed this in Parliament, saying that if we truly wish to preserve Hindu society, we must be open to repairing its broken parts. Despite the urgency of the reforms and the support of leaders like Nehru, the Bill faced strong resistance from both male and female members of the Hindu community. When it failed to pass, Ambedkar resigned from his position as India's first Law Minister. He called out the government for allowing such a crucial reform to be "buried untold and unsung."

In his powerful words, "No law passed by the Indian legislature in the past or likely to be passed in the future can be compared

to it in point of its significance. To leave inequality between class and class, between sex and sex which is the soul of Hindu society, untouched and to go on passing legislation relating to economic problems is to make a farce of our Constitution and to build a palace on a dung heap." Though the original Bill was not passed during his lifetime, parts of it were later introduced in separate legislation from 1955 onwards. Yet, Ambedkar's dream of a fully just legal system for women remains only partially fulfilled.

3.3.3 Annihilation of Caste: A Call for Social Justice and Democratic Values

B.R. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* remains one of his most powerful and enduring works. Originally written as a speech for the annual conference of the Jat-Pat Todak Mandal in Lahore in 1936, it was never delivered due to objections from the organisers who found its critique of the caste system too radical. Eventually published as a book, it became one of Ambedkar's most influential texts, deeply critical of the Hindu caste order and passionately advocating for its complete eradication in the interest of building a just and democratic society.

In this work, Ambedkar firmly asserts that the caste system is not only unjust but also anti-social. It is built on false ideas like hereditary division of labour and racial purity, which have no place in a society aspiring towards equality. Far from serving society, caste has caused deep harm, especially to Dalits, and has fragmented Indian society into isolated groups. It denies any meaningful collective ethics, deadens public conscience, and limits sympathy, charity, and merit only within caste boundaries. For Ambedkar, such a system stands in direct opposition to liberty, equality, and fraternity - the very ideals on which a democratic society must rest.

One of Ambedkar's core criticisms targets the concept of Chaturvarnya, the fourfold division of society in Hindu thought, which he finds both impractical and harmful. He rejects the idea that individuals can be boxed into fixed categories and highlights the contradictions within the system - it overlooks individual potential, offers no equal legal framework, and ignores the status of women. Even if made workable, he argues, it would still be a deeply unjust and oppressive order. Ambedkar does not stop at criticism. He moves towards action, offering inter-caste marriage as the only genuine way to dissolve caste boundaries. Shared blood, he says, creates real kinship, and only

when people begin to see each other as kindred spirits will the deep-rooted divisions of caste begin to disappear. In contrast, measures like abolishing sub-castes or promoting inter-caste dining, though well-intentioned, are inadequate because they do not challenge the internalised caste consciousness.

Ambedkar was also realistic about the barriers. He observes that caste draws its power from religious sanction. Therefore, any serious effort to dismantle caste must challenge the sacred authority of religious texts like the Vedas and Shastras, which uphold it. However, this path is fraught with difficulty. The Brahminical class, benefiting the most from the current system, is unlikely to support such reform. Other castes, too, may resist because they derive a sense of superiority from their position within the graded caste hierarchy. To clarify his stance, Ambedkar distinguishes between the rules of religion - which justify exploitation and must be abolished - and the principles of religion, which can be preserved to support a more egalitarian spiritual order. His vision is not of a godless society but of one where religion aligns with democratic values.

❐ More egalitarian spiritual order

> **Annihilation of Caste**
> - Dr. B.R. Ambedkar regarded caste as the antithesis of democracy.
> - He declared that political freedom without social equality is incomplete and hollow.
> - His famous work Annihilation of Caste demanded the total rejection of the caste system, not reform.
> - Ambedkar urged Dalits to educate, agitate, and organise against structural oppression.
> - His emphasis on constitutional morality, fraternity, and dignity laid the ethical foundation of Indian democracy.
> - For Ambedkar, true freedom required the complete destruction of caste hierarchy.

In closing his address, Ambedkar challenges Hindus to reflect deeply on their traditions. He urges them to critically assess whether their current beliefs serve the survival and well-being of society. He asks whether the entire social inheritance should

be preserved or selectively passed on, and whether Hindus should continue to live in the shadow of the past or embrace the future. Above all, he reminds them that change is the law of life, and holding on to outdated values will only hinder social progress. Through *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar not only offers a scathing critique of the social injustices inherent in Hindu society but also places his faith in its ability to reform. While uncompromising in his condemnation of caste, he retains a vision of a reimagined Hindu society aligned with the ideals of democracy. His work stands as both a challenge and a guide for those striving to build an India grounded in justice and human dignity.

3.3.4 Ambedkar's View on Social Democracy

Political democracy was never seen as the final goal by the leaders who shaped modern India. They believed it should serve as a pathway to achieving deeper forms of social and economic democracy. Yet, both the realities and counterarguments about Indian society today show that inequality and injustice still persist. Over the years, policies and politics centred around social justice seem to have reached a standstill. However, even a dead end offers an opportunity to pause, reflect, and correct our course. Optimism must guide us forward - just as it did during colonial times when hope gave birth to the idea of a free India.

Dr B.R. Ambedkar was one of the key figures who embodied that hope. He was not only the principal architect of the Indian Constitution but also a far-sighted thinker. In the making of the Constitution, he brought together both political ideals and socio-economic values. As historian Ramachandra Guha notes, this was a union of national and social revolutions-combining the fight for democratic rights with the struggle for dignity and equality. While national revolution focused on liberty and political freedom, the social revolution aimed to uplift the oppressed. Though Ambedkar contributed to drafting one of the finest constitutions in the world, he was deeply critical of the state of India's political democracy. For him, democracy was not an end in itself but a powerful tool to achieve justice and equality. As he succinctly put it, "Democracy is just another name for equality and justice." When these values are missing, the system becomes undemocratic in nature.

3.3.4.1 Ambedkar's View on Social Democracy

Ambedkar was not a philosopher confined to theories. He was a doer-a teacher, lawyer, economist, and, most importantly,

□ Outdated values hinder social progress.- ability to reform

□ Social and economic democracy

□ Tool to achieve justice and equality

a representative of the marginalised. His life was dedicated to fighting for human dignity and self-respect. As someone who stood for transformative politics, Ambedkar saw democracy as more than political representation. He believed in the development of the whole person-intellectually, emotionally, and socially. In his final address to the Constituent Assembly on November 25, 1949, Ambedkar stressed that political democracy cannot survive without social democracy. His deep concern was evident when he warned, "Political Democracy cannot last unless it rests on the base of Social Democracy." This was not just a warning-it was his vision.

For Ambedkar, social democracy was not an abstract ideal but a way of life based on three essential values: liberty, equality, and fraternity. These were not separate principles but deeply interconnected. One could not exist without the other. A democracy that lacks any of these three values loses its meaning. Ambedkar believed that democracy was not about the structure of governance-whether parliamentary or otherwise-but about how people live and relate with one another. In his view, democracy was a form of "associated living," rooted in shared experiences, mutual respect, and cooperative values. If only a small group controls the cultural and political symbols of a society, the entire system becomes undemocratic. True democracy must emerge from social relationships built on equality. Ambedkar also believed that state socialism, guided by democratic values, was necessary to counter the dangers of authoritarianism or elite domination. For him, democracy represented an ideal society where every individual had the chance to grow and live with dignity.

However, he was painfully aware that the caste-based divisions in Indian society obstructed the realisation of this ideal. His criticisms of political democracy came from the persistent social inequalities that had remained unaddressed for centuries. Ambedkar clearly distinguished between freedom and power. While his ideas are widely celebrated today, their real essence is often overlooked. Many political leaders portray him as a heroic figure, but Ambedkar himself warned against hero-worship. Turning him into an icon, without following his ideas, has led to a hollow version of social justice.

Post-independence India has experimented with several policies aimed at social transformation. However, many of these initiatives have now stagnated. Social exclusion, discrimination, and violence continue to exist, often without accountability.

Electoral politics, driven by numbers and competition for power, has sidelined the vision of social democracy. During elections, promises of justice and empowerment are made, only to be forgotten soon after. As Rammanohar Lohia pointed out, Indian democracy has led to 'sectional elevation'-where benefits are unevenly distributed. Political mobilisation around caste, religion, or identity is used more for gaining power than for addressing core issues. Ambedkar's vision of a socially just democracy remains largely unfulfilled.

The gap between political and social democracy in India reflects a painful journey. While power and knowledge have remained in the hands of a few, Ambedkar's presence continues to be felt every time the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity are under threat. His words remind us: "Beware of Parliamentary Democracy, it is not the best product as it appears to be." His idea of social democracy challenges the present state of Indian society and points us toward what still needs to be done.

3.3.5 Rights of the People

Ambedkar strongly believed that a just society must be built on the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. He highlighted these ideas repeatedly, especially to show how they were missing in the lives of untouchables. For him, individual rights were necessary to change the unequal social structure and to ensure that everyone, especially the marginalised, could live with dignity. Ambedkar believed that rights are not simply given by law but are part of a person's nature. He supported the idea that society should accept these rights and act on them, rather than depend only on legal guarantees. He once said that rights are safe only when society is ready to recognise and support them. If society is not ready, even the best laws or courts cannot protect those rights in practice.

But Ambedkar was also aware of how deeply caste discrimination affected people's lives. Because of this, he felt it was necessary to protect rights through the Constitution. While he supported the natural theory of rights in principle, in practice, he argued for legal protections because Indian society had not yet developed the moral strength to uphold those rights on its own. This balance between ideals and realities was also seen during the debates in the Constituent Assembly. Although Ambedkar stood for rights like liberty and life, he also supported measures like preventive detention during emergencies. He explained that in extraordinary times, some restrictions might be necessary for

the safety of the country. This shows that Ambedkar adjusted his views based on the situation, always trying to keep a realistic balance between rights and responsibilities.

3.3.5.1 Constitutional Democracy

Ambedkar believed deeply in democracy, but not just as a political system. For him, democracy also meant social and economic equality. He said that liberty, equality, and fraternity must go together. If one is missing, the idea of democracy becomes weak. These three principles were at the heart of his thinking. He supported the British parliamentary system because he felt it offered space for both individual rights and collective welfare. He also believed that democracy must be rooted in the rule of law, where everyone is equal before the law and no one is above it. This would ensure that basic freedoms are protected.

❐ Individual rights and collective welfare

At the same time, Ambedkar knew that India's situation was different from Britain. He was against the idea that democracy should mean rule by the majority alone. He warned that when efficiency joins with class interests, it can become a tool to suppress weaker groups. Therefore, he supported a federal system that suited India's needs and also took ideas from other countries, like the American system's strong Constitution and independent judiciary. Ambedkar's approach to democracy was practical. He didn't stick to theories. Instead, he looked at what would work best for India, where caste, religion, and inequality had a strong influence on public life.

❐ Tool to suppress weaker groups

3.3.5.2 Social Justice

Ambedkar considered social justice as the core of Indian democracy. He believed that giving political rights alone was not enough. Unless there were strong efforts to improve the social and economic conditions of the oppressed, democracy would remain incomplete. For Ambedkar, social justice meant using legal and policy measures to improve the lives of the marginalised. He wanted these measures to be part of the law, not just acts of kindness. He knew that in India, inequality was often seen as natural. So, unless the government was required by law to act, change would be very slow.

❐ Not just acts of kindness

One of his main demands was political representation for the depressed classes. He felt that unless Dalits had their own voice in political institutions, their issues would remain ignored. That's why he pushed for special safeguards in the Constitution.

On reservation

Ambedkar also supported reservation in government jobs. He thought it would serve two important purposes. First, when more Dalits joined public service, they would gain respect in society. Second, a steady government income would help them come out of poverty. Together, social respect and economic stability would help them build better lives.

Marginalised could demand equality

Ambedkar did not see these policies as gifts from the upper castes. He believed they were rightful claims. He wanted Dalits to understand that these were their rights and to fight for them if needed. He didn't want their progress to depend on the goodwill of others. Ambedkar's idea of social justice became the foundation of many protective and supportive policies in India after independence. His vision helped shape a system where the marginalised could demand equality, not as charity, but as a right.

Summarised Overview

Ambedkar believed democracy must be rooted in social justice, not just political form. He viewed caste as the biggest barrier to liberty, equality, and fraternity. His critique of Hinduism focused on its justification of hierarchy and untouchability. Ambedkar distinguished between political and social democracy, stressing the latter's urgency. He drafted the Indian Constitution to protect fundamental rights and ensure equality. His idea of constitutional morality called for ethical governance and legal discipline. Ambedkar viewed the state as a tool for social transformation and justice. He argued for annihilation of caste as a precondition for real democracy. Ambedkar promoted fraternity as a social bond essential for democratic life. He converted to Buddhism, seeking moral equality and spiritual freedom. Ambedkar's emphasis on dignity, rights, and representation shaped India's democratic fabric. He opposed both majoritarian nationalism and religious orthodoxy. His legacy inspires ongoing movements for Dalit rights and social equity. Ambedkar envisioned democracy as a lived, inclusive, and ethical practice. His ideas remain vital to India's fight against exclusion and inequality.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. How did Ambedkar define democracy beyond mere political representation?
2. What was Ambedkar's critique of the caste system in *Annihilation of Caste*?
3. How did Ambedkar connect liberty, equality, and fraternity in a democratic society?

4. Why did Ambedkar emphasise constitutional morality in democratic governance?

5. What role did Ambedkar assign to the state in ensuring social justice?

6. How did Ambedkar explain the contradiction between political equality and social inequality in India?

7. How did Ambedkar advocate for safeguards for the Scheduled Castes in the Indian Constitution?

8. How did Ambedkar understand fraternity as essential to democracy?

Assignment

1. Explain Ambedkar's conception of democracy as not just a form of government but a way of associated living.

2. Discuss the relationship between political democracy and social justice in Ambedkar's thought. Why did he prioritise social reform?

3. Evaluate Ambedkar's critique of caste as a system of graded inequality and its implications for democracy.

4. Ambedkar warned of the gap between political democracy and social democracy. Discuss this tension and its relevance today.

5. How did Ambedkar view the role of religion in a democratic society? Analyse his critique of the Hindu social order.

6. Examine Ambedkar's contribution to the Indian Constitution in ensuring rights for the marginalised.

7. In what ways did Ambedkar propose to democratise Indian society beyond formal political institutions?

8. How does Ambedkar's democratic vision continue to influence debates on caste, justice, and equality in contemporary India?

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BLOCK 4
Ideas of Freedom

UNIT 1

Swami Vivekananda

Learning Outcomes

After studying this unit, students will be able to:

- understand the core ideas of Swami Vivekananda's social and political thought
- analyse his reinterpretation of Vedanta as a foundation for ethical society and nationalism
- evaluate his contributions to discourses on freedom, equality, caste, gender, and religious harmony

Background

Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), although not a traditional political thinker, played a pivotal role in the socio-cultural awakening of modern India. His teachings addressed spiritual, social, and political issues with a vision that linked personal transformation to national regeneration. Known primarily for introducing Indian spiritual thought to the West, his philosophy transcended narrow religious doctrines, offering a deeply humanist worldview. His thoughts were shaped by his mentor, Sri Ramakrishna, and informed by his experiences in both colonial India and abroad. Vivekananda's idea of freedom was not limited to political liberation but extended to spiritual and moral emancipation.

Keywords

Neo-Vedanta, Spiritual Nationalism, Daridra Narayana, Practical Vedanta, Universalism,

4.1.1. Political Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda

☐ Inspirational impact

Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) is regarded as a pivotal figure in shaping modern Indian thought and national identity. His ideas, life, and public activities have been viewed in various ways, partly due to his evolving intellectual views and his willingness to revisit and revise his positions over time. Although he avoided active politics, colonial records, such as the Sedition-Committee Report of 1918, recognised his indirect influence on the nationalist movement. Revolutionary youth often cited his writings alongside religious texts, showing the inspirational impact of his message in fostering anti-colonial feelings.

☐ Shaped modern Hinduism

Vivekananda's intellectual input significantly shaped modern Hinduism. Although he criticised some orthodox practices, his explanations of Vedantic philosophy helped develop a clearer understanding of Hindu identity today. During his travels abroad, especially in Bengal, conservative critics questioned his caste background. Nevertheless, he later became a symbol of strong cultural nationalism, notably during the Swadeshi movement.

4.1.1.1. Vivekananda's concept of Humanism and Universalism

☐ Rooted in the Vedantic tradition

Swami Vivekananda's influence extends beyond spiritual teachings and religious reform, shaping Indian political and philosophical thought. His ideals for a fair, compassionate, and unified society demonstrate a profound commitment to human dignity and universal brotherhood. Rooted in the Vedantic tradition, Vivekananda's humanism was neither sectarian nor confined to ritualistic spirituality. He emphasized the development of the whole person physically, intellectually, morally, and spiritually and insisted that service to humanity is the highest form of worship. His universalism, on the other hand, drew from a profound recognition of the essential oneness of all religions and peoples. At a time when society is fractured by religious identity and exclusionary nationalism, revisiting his ideas provides a valuable framework for promoting harmony, inclusiveness, and ethical citizenship.

The Ethical Foundation of Vivekananda's Humanism

Vivekananda's humanism was rooted in the belief that divinity exists within every person. He viewed God not as a distant figure but as an intrinsic part of each individual. This perspective made serving the poor, oppressed, and marginalised a form of worship—an act of devotion to what he called "Nara-Narayana" (Man-God). For him, true religion was found not in rituals or scriptures but in demonstrating compassion and practising selfless service. Human dignity was fundamental to his philosophy, and he emphasised that everyone, regardless of caste or gender, deserves respect and care.

☐ Man-God

His focus on human development was holistic, viewing it as an internal process rather than just material growth. He emphasised cultivating values, self-discipline, and moral responsibility. For Vivekananda, building character was essential for a strong and free society. Education was not just about gaining knowledge, but also about nurturing the soul and reinforcing willpower. His idea of "man-making" education aimed to create citizens who were morally upright and socially responsible.

☐ Man-making education

> ### Divinity of Man
>
> - Vivekananda proclaimed that every human being is potentially divine.
>
> - He rejected inherited hierarchies that degrade human dignity, especially caste-based exclusion.
>
> - Saw the Atman as equally present in all—regardless of gender, class, or birth.
>
> - His call, "Arise, awake," was a demand to realise one's own inner strength and dignity.
>
> - Believed service to man is service to God, equating social work with spiritual practice.

Service as the Highest Form of Religion

A key element of Vivekananda's humanism is his concept of service. He regarded helping the suffering and the poor as a spiritual obligation, not mere charity. Within this view, social service and nation-building took on sacred importance. His famous saying, "Service to man is service to God," was more

☐ Concept of service

than just words; it was a core principle guiding his philosophy. This perspective made his approach inherently democratic and inclusive.

He envisioned a society where individuals grow not in isolation, but in connection with others. The well-being of the community, especially its weakest members, was integral to human progress. His message challenged social hierarchies and caste-based discrimination, urging people to look beyond narrow social divisions and embrace a larger sense of solidarity. This spiritual-social synthesis laid the foundation for ethical citizenship, rooted in empathy and a sense of duty.

Humanism and the Crisis of Modern Western Thought

Vivekananda critically analysed the differences between Indian and Western traditions. He noted that although the West made significant material and intellectual progress, it lacked inner peace and moral guidance. Western humanism, rooted in Greek and Roman influences, marginalised large groups like enslaved individuals and non-believers. As Christianity gained prominence, this humanism became even more limited within the confines of theological exclusivism.

The violent history of religious wars in Europe, especially the Thirty Years' War and the two World Wars, according to Vivekananda, shattered the moral and spiritual core of Western civilisation. The shift from faith in God to faith in man was ultimately replaced by faith in materialism, which bred alienation and inner emptiness. The collapse of religious and humanistic ideals in the West created a vacuum that neither science nor technology could fill. Vivekananda's humanism offered an alternative, rooted in spirituality but not dogmatic; social yet deeply personal; moral yet free from coercion.

Vedantic Humanism and Interfaith Harmony

Vivekananda's humanism was deeply connected to his Advaitic worldview. He based his ideas on the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, which emphasise that the fundamental nature of all existence is unified. In this tradition, the individual soul (Atman) in each person mirrors the universal spirit (Brahman). This perspective allowed Vivekananda to promote the spiritual equality of all people and recognise the significance of every religion.

At the 1893 Parliament of World Religions in Chicago, he left a lasting impression by advocating for religious tolerance

Sidebar notes:
- ❏ Challenged social hierarchies
- ❏ marginalised large groups
- ❏ Faith in God to faith in man
- ❏ Advaitic worldview

and mutual respect. He dismissed the notion of religious dominance, stating that all religions are different paths that lead to the same ultimate truth. His criticism of dogmatic inflexibility was not aimed at any single religion; instead, he viewed exclusivism as the primary obstacle to harmony. He remarked, "If anyone dreams of the exclusive survival of his religion and the destruction of others, I genuinely pity him from the bottom of my heart." Vivekananda's universalism was practical and grounded in India's spiritual tradition, emphasising religious pluralism rather than abstract cosmopolitanism. He proposed a method for managing religious differences through mutual understanding and shared ethical principles.

4.1.2. Vivekananda's Vision of Nationalism and Its Humanist Core

Vivekananda's nationalism was deeply connected to his humanist values. He was troubled by poverty, ignorance, and stagnation in Indian society, viewing them as moral and political failures. He held that political independence from colonial rule was crucial, but without internal reform and social consciousness, such freedom would be meaningless. His idea of the nation was centred on moral renewal rather than territorial boundaries or ethnic pride. He advocated for a new India founded on self-respect, compassion, and spiritual resilience. To him, nationalism involved awakening the collective conscience and fostering values such as sacrifice, service, and unity. This form of nationalism was inclusive rather than sectarian. It did not create divisions between religions, nor did it try to erase India's diverse nature. Instead, it acknowledged the richness of India's spiritual traditions and sought to foster a just and compassionate society.

Misappropriations and Contemporary Relevance

Recently, Vivekananda's name has been frequently invoked in exclusionary political discourses. His image is employed to support Hindu supremacist views, and his teachings are selectively quoted to advance majoritarian agendas. However, this misrepresents his genuine message. Although he was proud of his Hindu roots, he never promoted the superiority of any religion. His respect for Islam, Christianity, and other faiths is well-recorded. He once stated that India's future depends on the harmony between Vedantic thought and Islamic practice, represented by the phrase 'Vedantic brain and Islamic body.'

While this idea might seem hierarchical, it reflects a deeper vision of unity and collaboration. He viewed religion not as a source of division but as a moral guide for creating a better society.

In today's climate of religious polarisation, hate speech, and social fragmentation, Vivekananda's call for unity, respect, and self-realisation remains profoundly relevant. His vision is not just spiritual but deeply political in its emphasis on ethical citizenship and communal harmony.

❏ Call for unity, respect, and self-realisation

4.1.3. Concept of Universalism

Swami Vivekananda's concept of universalism highlights his commitment to the spiritual unity of humanity. He aimed not just for religious tolerance but for a profound harmony rooted in acknowledging a shared divine essence in all beings. His universalism, grounded in Vedantic oneness, he expressed through speeches and writings, notably at the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago. This idea extended beyond religious contexts to include cultural, ethical, and civilizational conversations.

❏ Spiritual unity of humanity

Meaning and Basis of Vivekananda's Universalism

Vivekananda's universalism originates from the Advaita Vedanta tradition, which views all existence as interconnected expressions of a single, underlying reality. This perspective considers differences such as caste, creed, race, or religion—as superficial and illusory. True knowledge, in this context, lies in realising the unity of all existence. For Vivekananda, spiritual unity was not merely an abstract concept but a vital principle for fostering harmony. He emphasised that spiritual growth involves transcending sectarian boundaries and adopting a universal brotherhood that includes everyone.

❏ Transcending sectarian boundaries

He expressed that all religions are diverse routes guiding to the same objective, emphasising that everyone has the right to pursue the path best aligned with their nature. He said, "Each must absorb the essence of others while maintaining their individuality and progressing in their own way." This idea supports both unity and diversity, not one overshadowing the other, but as interconnected components of human spiritual growth.

❏ Human spiritual growth.

Vedanta and Universalism

Vivekananda's universalism is fundamentally based on Advaita Vedanta. He held that the ultimate reality, Brahman infinite, formless, and all-pervading is the foundation of everything. Each soul (Atman) is a reflection of this Brahman. As a result, serving another person is equivalent to serving the divine. This perspective drove him to assert that the core of religion lies in spiritual enlightenment and compassionate service, rather than strict dogmas.

❐ Serving another person

He believed that various religious symbols such as the cross, crescent, and idol serve as "pegs to hang the spiritual ideas on." While they are essential for human comprehension, none of these symbols represents the ultimate truth. The true, absolute reality resides beyond symbols and rituals. Thus, Vivekananda's universalism also urges us to go beyond external religious symbols and recognise the inner unity they reflect.

Inner unity

4.1.4. Swami Vivekananda's Views on Freedom

Swami Vivekananda's view of freedom extends beyond just political or economic aspects, deeply embedded in the spiritual and moral core of the human being. For him, freedom was more than a fundamental right; it was the essential basis of human life and advancement. His concept of freedom drew extensively from Vedantic philosophy, yet also emphasised the importance of personal dignity, ethical duty, and societal welfare. In his perspective, genuine freedom involves a harmony between the inner spiritual life and external worldly existence.

❐ Spiritual and moral core

Freedom as a Prerequisite for Growth

According to Vivekananda, "Freedom is the first condition of growth.What you do not make free, will never grow…… Let men have the light of liberty. That is the only condition of growth.   (CWSV, Vol. 2: 115). This assertion forms the cornerstone of his thought. He believed that human development be it moral, spiritual, intellectual, or material is impossible without the condition of freedom. Every individual is born with an innate potential that requires freedom to realise itself. Without freedom, individuals cannot evolve into complete human beings.

❐ Human development

Individual Autonomy in Spiritual and Material Realms

Vivekananda's view of freedom extends beyond society and politics. He viewed humans as having both spiritual and material aspects, each requiring personal autonomy to develop. This duality calls for balance spiritual pursuits should not hinder material progress, and materialism should not overshadow inner growth. His perspective encourages achieving harmony between these elements through moral and spiritual discipline.

The Doctrine of Karma and the Rejection of Determinism

Western scholars often saw the Eastern concept of karma as denying personal freedom. Vivekananda disagreed, emphasising that karma does not cause fatalism. Instead, he pointed out how karma empowers individuals by showing that their actions determine their destiny. He explained that the law of karma provides an opportunity for people to transcend mere cause and effect through deliberate moral actions. Therefore, individuals are not doomed; they can act as moral agents and transform themselves."If what we are now has been the result of our own past actions, it certainly follows that whatever we wish to be in future can be produced by our present actions;so we have to know how to act."(CWSV Vol.l :31)

Critique of Western Conceptions of Freedom

Vivekananda strongly criticised the Western idea of freedom, which he believed focused too much on the body and the external world. While Western cultures highlighted individual rights and political liberty, they often overlooked the inner self. He warned that unlimited personal freedom can foster selfishness and harm others. He emphasised that the right to use one's body, mind, and resources should be exercised responsibly, without causing injury to others, and with a dedication to social equality.

4.1.5. Social and Political Thought of Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda may not be counted among traditional political theorists like Plato, Rousseau, or Marx, yet his reflections offer significant insight into the social and political conditions of India and present a framework for addressing contemporary challenges. His engagement was not with politics

in the conventional sense but with the moral, spiritual, and social regeneration of the nation. Vivekananda envisioned India as a divine entity; his writings reflected his intense devotion to the spirit of Mother India. He advanced the ideal of love as a foundational principle of political thought, a theme rarely foregrounded by classical or modern theorists.

Integration of Spiritual and Material Dimensions

❏ Spirituality

Vivekananda sought to harmonise the material and spiritual aspects of life. He argued that there was no contradiction between the two—instead, they were mutually reinforcing. He criticised Western societies for subordinating religion to material progress, which he believed had led to spiritual impoverishment. In contrast, he held that in India, spirituality must remain the foundation of all social and political life. For him, spirituality was the guiding thread of India's national identity and the basis for its social reconstruction.

Concern for the Masses and Social Inequality

❏ Emphasis on equality

Vivekananda's travels across India exposed him to the intense suffering of the poor. He was deeply disturbed by poverty, caste oppression, and the exclusion of the masses from social progress. He criticised priestly dominance and caste-based discrimination as barriers to national development. He did not accept socialism as a flawless system but saw value in its emphasis on equality. In his words, "half a loaf is better than no bread." He imagined an ideal state where the best of all historical social traits priestly knowledge, military discipline, commercial spirit, and social equality—could coexist, stripped of their inherent evils. He recognised that no society is perfect or ideal, as it is always in a state of flux. Hence, he discouraged rigid reforms and instead promoted the idea of moving forward with time. Adaptability, according to him, is the key to societal progress.

Upliftment of the Poor and the Idea of Daridra Narayana

❏ Daridra Narayana

For Vivekananda, the neglect of the poor was a national sin. He declared that no political strategy would succeed unless the masses were educated, nourished, and cared for. He popularised the term "Daridra Narayana" to emphasise the divinity of the poor, asserting that service to the poor is service to God. He rejected any conception of God that ignored human suffering. He believed in educating the poor, feeding the hungry, and dismantling exploitative religious structures. In his view, man is

not merely an economic being but a spiritual one with immense potential.

Equality and Liberty

Vivekananda believed in the essential divinity of all human beings. His vision of liberty was not limited to political rights but extended to the freedom of thought, expression, diet, clothing, and marriage, so long as it did not harm others. He saw liberty as the expansion of the human spirit, enabling the development of both the individual and society. He called upon every person to awaken their inner soul, believing that once this inner power was activated, all virtues power, goodness, and purity would naturally follow.

❑ Expansion of the human spirit

Critique of Caste and Advocacy for Social Equality

Although Vivekananda did not advocate for the outright abolition of the caste system, he vehemently opposed untouchability and associated social evils. He encouraged people to transcend caste prejudices and cultivate love and universal brotherhood instead. He believed that the present age belonged to the Śūdras, arguing that they deserved their rightful place in society. His vision was of a classless, egalitarian society where pain and pleasure are distributed more justly.

❑ Classless, egalitarian society

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Vivekananda was a strong advocate of gender equality. He believed that women had equal capacities as men in governance, education, and spiritual life. He saw no essential difference between men and women in terms of intellect or morality. According to him, the ancient Indian tradition placed women as equals in religious and social life, as reflected in the Vedic practice of husband and wife offering sacrifices together. He criticised later texts like the Purāṇas that denied these rights and upheld the Vedas as affirming women's dignity. He insisted that women must receive equal opportunity and education for society to progress. He valued the distinct strengths of women patience, endurance, and moral uprightness and believed that the universe maintains its balance through the harmony of masculine and feminine energies.

❑ Advocate of gender equality

4.1.6. Neo-Vedanta and Practical Vedanta

Vivekananda reinterpreted Advaita Vedānta to respond to the challenges of his time, leading to what is known as Neo-

Vedanta. Unlike the classical Advaita of Śaṅkaracharya or the reformist Neo-Vedanta of the Brahmo Samaj, Vivekananda's approach was more inclusive, dynamic, and socially oriented. He retained the spiritual core of Advaita but infused it with a pluralistic worldview shaped by the socio-religious context of 19th-century Bengal.

His Neo-Vedanta was heavily influenced by Sri Ramakrishna, who believed in the experiential unity of all religions. Ramakrishna's emphasis on the divine play of Mother Kali, religious tolerance, and universalism profoundly shaped Vivekananda's ideas. While Ramakrishna focused on spiritual experience, Vivekananda translated this into action through what he called "Practical Vedanta" linking the individual to both God and society through service (seva). He believed that spiritual realisation must find expression in everyday life, especially in acts of compassion and social reform. Vivekananda's Neo-Vedānta also incorporated both Indian spiritual wisdom and Western scientific thinking. He embraced the Upaniṣadic distinction between *aparā vidyā* (material knowledge) and *parā vidyā* (spiritual knowledge), arguing that both are necessary for a harmonious and tolerant society.

Spiritual Nationalism and Cultural Unity

Vivekananda's concept of nationalism was rooted in spirituality. He believed that the Indian nation could only be revived through spiritual awakening and moral rejuvenation. Unlike modern secular nationalism, his idea of the nation was tied to the idea of universal brotherhood. His message was not just meant for India but for humanity at large. He affirmed that India had never attempted to subjugate others, and its moral strength lay in its spiritual vision. For him, true nationalism meant unity in diversity, spiritual awakening, and the ethical uplift of society. He is credited with infusing Indian nationalism with a spiritual ethos, laying the foundation for a collective identity grounded in Vedānta and universal human values.

As K.M. Panikkar noted, Vivekananda gave the Hindu movement a sense of nationalism and a pan-Indian outlook. His speech at the 1893 Parliament of Religions in Chicago symbolised this global message of spiritual unity, asserting the Vedāntic vision of ekam eva advitīyam—the One without a second. Swami Vivekananda's social and political thought is deeply embedded in his spiritual worldview. Though not a

political theorist in the formal sense, his reflections on caste, poverty, gender, nationalism, and Vedānta provide a rich framework for reimagining Indian society. He emphasised service to the poor, spiritual equality, and the harmonisation of material and spiritual life. His Neo-Vedānta offered a universal, inclusive vision that sought to awaken both the individual and the nation. In essence, Vivekananda's thought continues to serve as a moral and spiritual compass for India's democratic and social aspirations.

Summarised Overview

Swami Vivekananda's concept of freedom was rooted in spiritual liberation rather than just political independence. He saw the divine in every human being and believed that true freedom is the realisation of the Atman, or the inner self. His philosophy, drawn from Advaita Vedanta, emphasised moral responsibility, social equality, and universal brotherhood. Vivekananda redefined nationalism as spiritual regeneration and cultural unity, which he termed "spiritual nationalism." He rejected rigid caste hierarchies and championed gender equality, religious harmony, and service to the poor as essential to national awakening. His Practical Vedanta linked spiritual truth with daily action, placing the upliftment of the marginalised at the centre of his humanism.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. How did Vivekananda redefine religion as a tool for social transformation?

2. In what ways did he connect Vedantic ideas with practical service to the poor?

3. What was his critique of caste in relation to spiritual truth?

4. What was his role in reviving Indian self-respect on the global stage?

5. Why did Vivekananda believe in the divinity of the human soul as a basis for equality?

6. How did Vivekananda define the mission of the Ramakrishna Mission?

7. How did his concept of Universal Religion promote religious tolerance?

8. What was his view on the role of service (Seva) in social life?

Assignment

1. Critically analyse Swami Vivekananda's concept of Practical Vedanta and its role in shaping modern Indian social thought.

2. Discuss Swami Vivekananda's vision of nationalism. How did he link it to spirituality and service?

3. Evaluate Vivekananda's views on caste and class. How did he address social inequality within Hindu society?

4. Examine Swami Vivekananda's contributions to the idea of universalism and religious harmony.

5. Analyse the feminist implications of Swami Vivekananda's thought. How did he perceive the role of women in society?

6. To what extent can Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta be seen as a response to colonial modernity and Western materialism?

7. Explore the contemporary relevance of Vivekananda's teachings in addressing religious polarisation and ethical citizenship in India.

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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.

UNIT 2

Mahatma Gandhi

Learning Outcomes

After studying this unit, students will be able to:

- understand the ethical and spiritual foundations of Gandhi's concept of freedom
- analyse Gandhi's idea of *Swaraj* as self-rule and collective responsibility
- examine the role of non-violence as a political and moral principle in Gandhi's thought
- evaluate the core ideas over which the Ambedkar debate evolved

Background

Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) remains one of the most influential figures in Indian political and moral thought. Although best known for his leadership of the national freedom struggle, Gandhi's vision of freedom extended far beyond political independence. He combined spiritual philosophy, ethical practice, and a deep concern for social justice in his definition of freedom. His concept of *Swaraj* emphasised not just the removal of colonial rule, but also personal moral discipline, non-violence, and social reform. In Gandhi's framework, true freedom required self-restraint, inner transformation, and collective responsibility, making it both a political and ethical journey.

Keywords

Swaraj, Non-violence, Satyagraha, Ahimsa, Aparigraha, Gram Swaraj, Moral Autonomy

4.2.1. Gandhi on Freedom
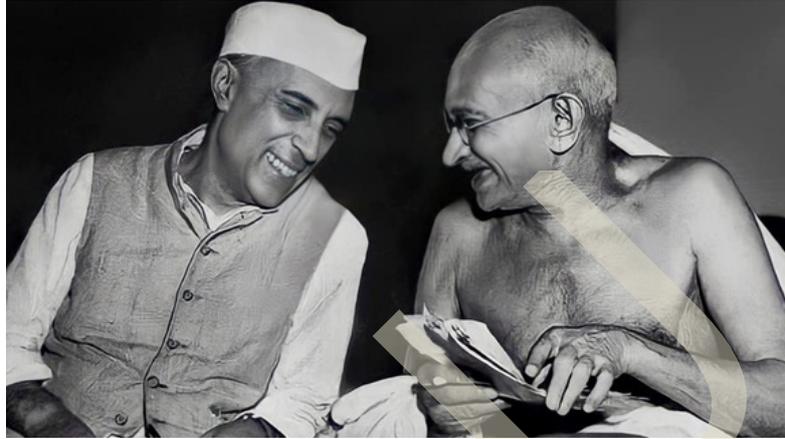
Gandhi's idea of freedom extended beyond simply ending colonial rule. He saw it as a profound moral, spiritual, and social journey that involved self-purification, ethical self-governance, and inner discipline. While his perspective was influenced by Indian philosophical traditions, it also responded to the complex social realities of colonial modernity. Instead of viewing freedom solely as political independence, Gandhi regarded it as swaraj—self-rule on both individual and collective levels, including political autonomy, social justice, and personal responsibility.

❑ Profound moral, spiritual, and social journey

The Ethical and Spiritual Foundations of Gandhi's Freedom

At the core of Gandhi's thought was the idea that true freedom begins with the individual. He often stated that *swaraj* must first be attained within, through mastery over one's desires, prejudices, and ego. In this sense, freedom was not about acquiring power but about developing self-control. He drew from Indian traditions such as the *Gita*, Jain and Buddhist ethics, and elements of Christian morality to frame freedom as a moral discipline rooted in non-possession (*aparigraha*), truth (*satya*), and non-violence (*ahimsa*).This spiritual interpretation was practical. Gandhi believed that genuine participation in public life necessitated moral discipline. He thought political freedom without ethical responsibility as Hollow and risky. Consequently, he rejected violent and materialistic notions of liberation, insisting that both the ends and the means must embody moral purity.

❑ Moral discipline

4.2.1. Swaraj as Self-Rule and Collective Responsi-bility

Gandhi's concept of freedom extended beyond individuals to encompass communities and society as a whole. He challenged Western liberal ideas of individualism, emphasising that true freedom is based on interdependence and moral responsibility rather than isolated autonomy. For Gandhi, self-rule (swaraj) involved the self-governance of villages, institutions, and ultimately the entire nation through decentralised and participatory systems. He introduced the concept of Gram Swaraj, where each village would be economically self-sufficient and politically autonomous, promoting equality and dignity among all its residents.

❐ Concept of Swaraj

Social reform was integral to Gandhi's concept of freedom, not just an addition. He viewed issues like untouchability, caste discrimination, and gender inequality as direct barriers to swaraj. To Gandhi, a society plagued by injustice and hierarchy could never achieve true freedom. His effort to combat untouchability was more than reform; it was a move to reshape Indian society around principles of moral and social equality.

❐ Barriers to swaraj

Non-Violence as the Political Practice of Freedom

Non-violence (*ahimsa*) was not simply a strategy for Gandhi it was a way of living freedom in practice. He believed that freedom attained through violence was inherently unstable and morally compromised. True non-violence, as he conceived it, was not the absence of conflict but the capacity to confront injustice without hatred. This idea applied as much to interpersonal relations as it did to national and international politics.

❐ Way of living freedom

Gandhi's insistence on non-violence was closely tied to his understanding of truth (*satya*). He claimed that no one possessed absolute truth, and therefore, coercion in any form was morally unjustifiable. *Satyagraha*, his method of non-violent resistance, was a disciplined search for truth that recognised the humanity of the opponent. This ethical stance complicated conventional notions of freedom as domination or conquest. For Gandhi, non-violence was not a retreat from struggle but a higher form of it one that elevated both the self and the adversary.

❐ Non-violent resistance

Freedom Beyond the Nation-State

Another critical aspect of Gandhi's thought was his reluctance to equate freedom solely with the nation-state. While he

led India's independence movement, his conception of liberty was sceptical of state power. Gandhi feared that after achieving political independence, India might replace British imperialism with a new form of internal domination through centralised authority, industrial capitalism, and bureaucratic control. His emphasis on voluntary association, local governance, and moral leadership demonstrates his preference for a stateless, cooperative society. For Gandhi, freedom was not a one-time achievement through the creation of a nation, but an ongoing ethical effort to overcome domination in all forms—social, economic, and spiritual.

Gandhi's idea of freedom was not a single event like decolonisation, but a lifelong journey of moral growth, personal responsibility, and collective change. He expanded the meaning of freedom to include self-control, equality, justice, and non-violence. His rejection of both political violence and structural injustice gave his concept of freedom a strong moral force, but also made it vulnerable to criticism for being idealistic or unrealistic. Still, Gandhi's philosophical vision continues to inspire debates on the ethical foundations of politics, reminding us that freedom without justice, or power without responsibility, can never be truly freeing.

4.2.2. Critiques and Limitations of Gandhi's Concept of Freedom

While Gandhi's vision of *swaraj* offered a deeply ethical and spiritually grounded idea of freedom, it has not gone without critical scrutiny. Several historians, political theorists, and social reformers have raised questions about the limitations, ambiguities, and practical shortcomings of his approach. These critiques range from concerns about idealism, caste conservatism, and gender biases to the suitability of his methods in a modern industrial democracy.

Idealism and Moral Absolutism

One of the most common criticisms of Gandhi's conception of freedom is its firm reliance on moral idealism. Scholars like Perry Anderson in The Indian Ideology (2012) argue that Gandhi's ethical framework, while spiritually profound, was impractical for the messy realities of political mobilisation. Anderson asserts that Gandhi's "absolutist faith in non-violence" created a gap between his philosophical principles and the political needs

☐ Ongoing ethical effort

☐ Rejection of both political violence and structural injustice

☐ Spiritually grounded idea of freedom

☐ Moral idealism

of a large, diverse population. He questions whether the moral burden Gandhi placed on individuals was realistic, especially in a colonial context marked by structural violence and repression.

Likewise, historian Judith Brown, in her work Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope (1989), acknowledges Gandhi's inspirational role but notes that his moral absolutism often alienated political allies. His insistence that means must always align with ends made compromise difficult during times of political crisis. Brown points out that Gandhi's refusal to support violent revolution or armed resistance sometimes limited the effectiveness of the nationalist movement, especially when British repression was severe.

☐ Alienated political allies

Ambiguity on the Caste System

Perhaps the most significant and sustained critique has come from B.R. Ambedkar, who challenged Gandhi's failure to confront the Hindu caste system directly. In Annihilation of Caste (1936), Ambedkar argued that Gandhi's dedication to the varna system—as a division of labour rather than hierarchy was fundamentally flawed. He regarded Gandhi's focus on Harijan upliftment as paternalistic and inadequate, since it did not aim to eradicate caste but to reform it from within.

☐ Reform caste from within

Ambedkar pointed out that Gandhi's defence of varnashrama dharma, especially in his earlier writings such as Hind Swaraj (1909), revealed a deep conservatism in his social outlook. While Gandhi later softened his views and ultimately declared that "caste has to go," Ambedkar believed that his ongoing faith in the moral virtues of caste divisions weakened the fight for social equality. Christophe Jaffrelot, in Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability: Fighting the Indian Caste System (2005), explains how Gandhi's approach tended to favour harmony over justice, thus delaying the more radical transformation that Ambedkar aimed for.

☐ Delayed more radical transformation

4.2.2.1. Gendered Conception of Freedom

Feminist scholars have also criticised Gandhi's idea of freedom for its patriarchal undertones. While Gandhi supported women's participation in the national movement, his understanding of women's roles remained rooted in traditional expectations of purity, sacrifice, and domesticity. Madhu Kishwar, in her essay "Gandhi on Women" (Economic and Political Weekly, 1985), argues that Gandhi saw women mainly as moral guardians of

☐ Patriarchal undertones

the nation. Although he gave women a platform in the public sphere, he did not fundamentally challenge gender hierarchies or advocate for political equality in a modern feminist sense.

Uma Chakravarti, in her book Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens (2003), highlights that Gandhi's symbolism of womanhood primarily through figures like Sita and Draupadi tended to reinforce idealised notions of womanly virtue, often neglecting the structural roots of gender oppression. This, she argues, limited the transformative potential of Gandhi's social vision.-

❐ Idealised notions of womanly virtue

Anti-Modern Bias and Economic Romanticism

Another area of critique lies in Gandhi's scepticism of industrialisation, science, and modern statecraft. In Hind Swaraj, Gandhi famously denounced Western civilisation and industrial modernity as dehumanising and spiritually hollow. While his advocacy for decentralised village economies and swadeshi production offered a critique of exploitative capitalism, critics have argued that this romanticised the past and ignored the developmental needs of a modern nation. Akeel Bilgrami, in *Gandhi's Integrity: The Philosophy Behind the Politics (2014)*, offers a more sympathetic view of Gandhi's anti-modern stance but still acknowledges the tension between his ethical critique of modernity and the practical needs of a poor, post-colonial society. Similarly, Ramachandra Guha, in Environmentalism: A Global History (2000), values Gandhi's ecological foresight but recognises that his economic ideas were often too utopian to address large-scale poverty and underdevelopment effectively.

❐ Utopian idead

Ambivalence Toward the State

Gandhi's distrust of the modern nation-state and his preference for a moralised civil society also invite critical attention. While his vision of decentralised governance (Gram Swaraj) was ethically compelling, critics argue it lacked institutional clarity. Partha Chatterjee, in Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World (1986), observes that Gandhi failed to articulate a robust theory of the post-colonial state. His reluctance to embrace state power made it difficult for him to engage with the complexities of legal justice, redistribution, and administrative responsibility in an independent India.

❐ Distrust of the modern nation-state

The critiques of Gandhi's idea of freedom reveal both the strengths and vulnerabilities of his thought. His emphasis on

moral integrity, non-violence, and social responsibility made him a unique figure in modern political philosophy. However, his reluctance to dismantle entrenched social hierarchies, his romanticism of village life, and his moral absolutism have limited the practical application of his ideas in post-independence India. Yet, even his critics acknowledge the enduring ethical challenge posed by his vision—a reminder that political freedom must be matched by justice, equality, and inner transformation.

4.2.3. Gandhi–Ambedkar Debate on Caste and Untouchability

The ideological clash between Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is a central element in modern India's political and social history. Although both leaders aimed to uplift the oppressed, particularly the untouchables, they held diverging views on how to achieve this. Gandhi viewed caste and untouchability as moral and spiritual issues that could be reformed from within Hindu society. Conversely, Ambedkar regarded them as systemic social discriminations rooted in religious doctrine, requiring structural political reforms to dismantle. This conflict was most evident during the period surrounding the Poona Pact and continued to influence their subsequent interactions.

Contrasting Visions of Untouchability and Social Reform

Both Gandhi and Ambedkar recognized the seriousness of untouchability, but their views on its origins and solutions differed. Gandhi regarded it as a social evil and a deviation from true Hinduism, advocating for its abolition through moral appeal, persuasion, and internal reform within Hinduism. Conversely, Ambedkar's perspectives became more radical over time. While he initially focused on political rights and electoral protections, he increasingly connected untouchability to the broader framework of Hindu society and its system of graded inequality.

Gandhi's socio-humanist approach aimed to bring about change by appealing to caste Hindus' conscience. He emphasized spiritual and moral reforms to eliminate untouchability but did not advocate dismantling the caste system entirely. In contrast, Ambedkar argued that untouchability was not an anomaly but a natural consequence of the caste system endorsed by religion. Consequently, he called for the total abolition of both untouchability and the varna system that upheld it.-

Early Political Engagement and the Question of Separate Electorates

Ambedkar's role in constitutional reform began with his consultation by the Southborough Committee in 1919, which aimed to revise the electoral franchise. While he initially did not favor a fixed formula, he considered options like separate electorates and reserved seats to ensure representation for the depressed classes. Over time, especially by 1928 during the Simon Commission, Ambedkar favored reserved seats over separate electorates. However, at the Round Table Conferences, he was influenced by supporters of separate electorates, believing they would better protect and grant autonomy to the untouchables.- representation. Gandhi, on the other hand, fiercely opposed the idea of separate electorates for the depressed classes, viewing it as a divisive strategy that would fragment Hindu society. This became the focal point of the conflict between the two leaders, culminating in the critical events surrounding the Communal Award of 1932.

4.2.3.1. The Poona Pact and Its Political Aftermath

In 1932, the British government announced the Communal Award, which acknowledged the idea of separate electorates for the depressed classes. Gandhi, perceiving this as a danger to Hindu unity, launched a fast unto death while imprisoned at Yerwada Jail. This act of protest provoked widespread sympathy across the country and increased pressure on Ambedkar to rethink his stance. Although initially opposed, Ambedkar eventually settled on a compromise, influenced partly by public pressure and Gandhi's offer to expand reserved seats if the demand for separate electorates was dropped. The Poona Pact, signed on September 26, 1932, became a pivotal moment. Gandhi concluded his fast, marking the beginning of a new phase in anti-untouchability efforts.

However, the Pact had lasting effects. For Ambedkar, it was a strategic setback. While it provided more reserved seats, it compromised his aim of establishing independent political agency for the depressed classes. Christophe Jaffrelot notes that the reserved seats within a joint electorate allowed upper and intermediate castes to influence the selection of candidates from the untouchable community. This weakened Ambedkar's objective of transforming the oppressed into a distinct and empowered political group.

Gandhi's Post-Pact Campaigns and Ambedkar's Dilemmas

Following the Poona Pact, Gandhi intensified his campaigns against untouchability. With financial backing from industrialist G.D. Birla, he established the All India Anti-Untouchability League, later called the Harijan Sewak Sangh. This organisation was well-funded to promote awareness and support the upliftment of the untouchables. Gandhi viewed untouchability as a moral and spiritual sin, and he responded by initiating programs such as Untouchability Abolition Week, founding the journal Harijan, and travelling across India to spread his message.

Despite his sincerity, Gandhi's interventions had mixed effects. While they raised visibility for the cause, they also overshadowed Ambedkar's political project. Gandhi's campaign generated sympathy among many, but it remained tied to the religious framework that Ambedkar fundamentally opposed. Gandhi did not call for the dismantling of the varna system; instead, he praised it as a functional social order based on division of labour, not hierarchy. He maintained that caste, when practised correctly, was not discriminatory.

Ambedkar found himself in a challenging situation. While Gandhi's active campaigning and the opposition it faced from orthodox Hindus showed his genuine concern, the increasing influence of Gandhian activism hindered Ambedkar's efforts to establish a separate political identity for the untouchables. Although he briefly participated in the Harijan Sewak Sangh and even met Gandhi in jail to request greater representation for the depressed classes within the organization, his request was denied, prompting his resignation. The Sangh remained mainly controlled by upper-caste leaders, which further distanced Ambedkar.

4.2.3.2.Core Ideological Differences on Caste and Varna

Ambedkar and Gandhi's differences extended beyond strategy to core ideology. Gandhi advocated for reform within the caste system and maintained his support for chaturvarṇa, the fourfold varna hierarchy, for much of his life. Although he later adopted a more flexible stance by endorsing inter-caste marriages and communal meals, he never fully rejected the caste's religious foundations. Conversely, Ambedkar saw

☐ Harijan Sewak Sangh

☐ Mixed effects

☐ Controlled by upper-caste leaders

☐ Reform within the caste system

caste and varna as deeply interconnected and as mechanisms that perpetuate social oppression.

In 'Annihilation of Caste,' often seen as Ambedkar's most influential work, he argued that true eradication of untouchability depends on dismantling the caste system. Ambedkar considered caste a framework that sustains inequality and privileges certain groups. He critically questioned Gandhi's concept of a varna system founded on merit, asking: How can individuals born into caste-based privilege be made to give up their status? And how can those born into disadvantage prove their worth when societal structures deny them acknowledgment?

❐ Dismantling the caste system

Arundhati Roy, in her critical reading of Gandhi, points out that he never explicitly renounced *chaturvarṇa*. She questions how Gandhi's image as a moral leader, a symbol of non-violence and justice, can be reconciled with his reluctance to dismantle the religious roots of caste inequality. She reminds us that while Gandhi inspired millions with his personal sacrifice and commitment, his stance on caste reform lacked the radical edge necessary to transform the structural foundations of social injustice.

❐ Lacked radical edge

The Gandhi–Ambedkar debate reveals two profoundly different visions of Indian society and the means of transforming it. Gandhi's spiritualised reformism and Ambedkar's structural critique of caste reflect not just different strategies but also different worldviews shaped by birth, experience, and philosophical commitment. While Gandhi sought change through conscience and internal reform, Ambedkar believed in assertive political action and a rupture with the religious foundations of inequality. Their disagreements—on separate electorates, varna, caste, and untouchability—highlight the contested nature of social reform in India. Understanding their debate in its full complexity allows for a deeper engagement with the challenges of caste and social justice today.

❐ Gandhi's spiritualised reformism

Summarised Overview

Mahatma Gandhi's concept of freedom was deeply rooted in ethical, spiritual, and social ideals. For him, *Swaraj* was not merely political independence but a form of self-rule that began with moral self-discipline and extended to collective social responsibility. Influenced by Indian philosophical traditions like the Gita, Jainism, and Buddhism, Gandhi believed true freedom meant overcoming one's ego, desires, and prejudices.

His framework emphasised *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satyagraha* (truth-force), and *aparigraha* (non-possession), seeing them not only as tools of resistance but as lifelong moral practices. Gandhi's idea of *Gram Swaraj* promoted decentralised, participatory governance and self-sufficient village economies. He also saw untouchability and caste discrimination as fundamental obstructions to Swaraj, advocating their removal through moral reform rather than violent revolution.

However, Gandhi's vision faced critiques. B.R. Ambedkar criticised his support for the varna system and his paternalistic approach to caste reform. Feminist scholars pointed out that Gandhi's gender views, though supportive in intent, were tied to traditional norms. His rejection of industrial modernity and scepticism towards the nation-state also raised questions about the practicality of his ideas in postcolonial India.

Despite these criticisms, Gandhi's ethical understanding of freedom remains influential for its insistence that liberty must be grounded in justice, self-control, and non-violence. His debate with Ambedkar highlights enduring tensions between moral reform and structural change in Indian democracy.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. What did Gandhi mean by 'freedom' beyond political independence?

2. How did Gandhi's concept of Swaraj differ from Western notions of freedom?

3. In what ways did Gandhi connect freedom with moral self-discipline?

4. What role did non-violence play in Gandhi's idea of political action?

5. Why did Gandhi reject modern Western civilisation?

6. What was Gandhi's view on village economy and decentralisation?

7. Why Gandhian concept of caste, was criticised by Ambedkar?

Assignment

1. Analyse Gandhi's concept of *Swaraj* and its ethical and spiritual foundations.

2. Discuss the role of non-violence (*ahimsa*) as a political method in Gandhi's conception of freedom.

3. Evaluate Gandhi's idea of decentralised self-rule through *Gram Swaraj* and its socio-political implications.

4. Examine the criticisms of Gandhi's views on caste and social hierarchy by B.R. Ambedkar.

5. Critically assess the Gandhi–Ambedkar debate on untouchability and separate electorates.

6. Explore Gandhi's ambivalence toward the modern nation-state and his critique of industrial civilisation.

7. Assess the contemporary relevance of Gandhi's ethical vision of freedom in the context of social justice and democratic governance.

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Learning Outcomes

After studying this unit, students will be able to:

- understand the ideological evolution of Jayaprakash Narayan from Marxism to Sarvodaya
- analyse his concept of participatory democracy and its implications for the Indian polity
- critically evaluate his idea of Total Revolution as a holistic transformation
- examine JP's version of democratic socialism and its ethical foundations

Background

Jayaprakash Narayan (1902–1979) was one of the most dynamic thinkers and activists in modern Indian political thought. His intellectual journey took him from Marxism to democratic socialism, and eventually to Gandhian ideals of Sarvodaya and non-violent transformation. Often called the "Loknayak," JP's life was dedicated to democratic reconstruction, ethical governance, and the empowerment of ordinary citizens. His ideas emerged from deep engagement with both Western radical thought and Indian civilisational values.

Keywords

Participatory Democracy, Sarvodaya, Total Revolution, Sampoorna Kranti, Decentralisation, Democratic Socialism

4.3.1. Political Philosophy of Jayaprakash Narayanan

JP's early engagement with Marxism reflected his commitment to social and economic justice. However, disillusioned with the authoritarian practices of the Soviet Union, he rejected dialectical materialism and the idea of a proletarian dictatorship. By the 1950s, JP turned to democratic socialism and later, Sarvodaya, seeking a framework rooted in both morality and grassroots participation. His concept of participatory democracy challenged the centralised and party-dominated nature of post-Independence Indian politics. In *"A Plea for Reconstruction of Indian Polity " (1959), he envisioned a five-tiered,* decentralised governance structure, with the Gram Sabha at its core. His political vision stressed "Swaraj from below", emphasising citizen agency, moral leadership, and communitarian values.

□ Decentralised governance structure,

JP's notion of democratic socialism combined the principles of liberty, equality, and social ownership. He insisted that the tiller must own the land and called for cooperative forms of production, challenging both capitalism and statist centralism. For him, socialism was not a historical inevitability but a moral commitment to justice. In 1975, during the Emergency, JP gave his final and most powerful ideological call: Total Revolution (Sampoorna Kranti). This was a call for holistic transformation across seven dimensions: political, economic, social, cultural, educational, ideological, and spiritual. He critiqued parliamentary democracy for its elitism and corruption and called for people's power and non-violent resistance. He opposed centralised authority, championed decentralisation, and stressed ethical regeneration.

□ Sampoorna Kranti

4.3.1.1. Jayaprakash Narayan's Ideological Transition and Criticism of Marxism

His deep involvement with Marxist ideas significantly influenced Jayaprakash Narayan's early political dedication. After returning from the United States in 1929, where he studied Marxism, he became actively engaged in India's independence movement, driven by a firm belief in socialist change. His commitment to Marxism was organizationally expressed through the foundation of the Congress Socialist Party in 1934. Additionally, he strengthened his ideological

□ Marxist ideas

stance with his pamphlet "Why Socialism" (1936), which he considered to champion the most scientific and revolutionary route to achieving socialism.

Over time, JP started doubting Marxist orthodoxy, particularly after seeing the harsh realities of the Soviet Union. The promises of a classless society and worker emancipation seemed increasingly betrayed by authoritarianism and violence. Stalinism's rise unsettled him, especially its use of state violence, suppression of dissent, and absence of moral accountability. As JP considered these developments, he became more inclined towards Gandhian principles, particularly satyagraha and non-violence. He saw these as providing a moral guide absent in Marxism. In A Plea for Reconstruction of Indian Polity (1959), he questioned whether achieving a just society could ever justify violent methods. For JP, social change based on coercion and terror threatened to perpetuate injustice in new forms.

❏ Inclined towards Gandhian principles

He also viewed Marxist materialism as problematic. JP argued that a solely materialist perspective on history and society overlooked the ethical and spiritual needs of humans. He believed a balanced society must support not only economic systems but also moral and cultural pillars. Dialectical materialism, which is core to Marxist theory, neglects this vital part of human experience. JP critically examined the idea of the "dictatorship of the proletariat," which is often seen as a necessary transitional phase in Marxist theory. He contended that in a democratic nation like India, such authoritarian measures are unjustified. Implementing a one-party system or limiting individual freedoms would, in his view, fundamentally undermine the essence of socialism.

❏ Authoritarian measures are unjustified

JP observed that revolutions driven by Marxism often started with promises of empowering the people but ultimately resulted in centralized, top-down governments. Over time, these regimes became controlled by small elites, leading to new forms of exploitation. For him the moral costs of those revolutions were too high. According to him the Soviet model served more as a warning than a source of hope.

❏ Warning than a source of hope

The oppressive environment in Stalinist Russia, characterized by pervasive surveillance, secrecy, and repression of dissent, reinforced JP's belief that the Marxist approach was inherently flawed. The lack of civil liberties and real democratic engagement conflicted with the ethical socialism he advocated. JP's final break from Marxism was also philosophical. He

came to see the coercive and deterministic aspects of Marxist theory as obstacles to human creativity and moral development. Instead, he adopted the Gandhian vision of Sarvodaya, which emphasizes non-violence, ethical living, and the welfare of all. In his view, socialism must be based on freedom and voluntary cooperation, rather than fear and coercion.

For JP, shifting from Marxism to Sarvodaya didn't mean abandoning socialism but rather redefining it within a moral and democratic context. His journey exemplified a broader pursuit in Indian political thought: striking a balance between justice and ethical principles. JP's criticism of Marxism was part of his larger effort to imagine a participatory, humane, and decentralised democracy rooted in India's civilizational values.

Participatory Democracy and Reconstruction of Indian Polity

Jayaprakash Narayan's views on Indian democracy emerged from his disillusionment with Marxist philosophy. He believed that, although influential in theory, Marxism did not adequately address India's distinct social and political realities. The enactment of the Indian Constitution in 1950 created high expectations among citizens. However, JP quickly realised that the democratic system in practice failed to deliver the changes envisioned during the freedom movement. He grew increasingly worried about the concentration of power in the Union government, which he felt betrayed the participatory ideals of the national struggle.

After travelling across Europe and studying various governance models, JP observed a recurring pattern: a growing gap between the state and its citizens. He believed that centralised systems undermine democracy by diminishing public authority. In his core work, A Plea for Reconstruction of Indian Polity, JP emphasised that democracy cannot be imposed from above. Instead, it should develop naturally from the grassroots, with active citizen participation in governance.

Drawing from India's Civilizational Experience

To suggest an alternative approach, JP looked to India's historical background. He drew inspiration from the decentralised nature of traditional village communities. Influenced by Sri Aurobindo's ideas, he thought India once had a form of self-governance based on moral and spiritual principles.

These village units operated independently, making decisions locally and embodying ethical duties and social harmony. In 'A Plea for Reconstruction of Indian Polity,' he contended that modern India's challenge was not to create a new system but to assist an ancient civilisation in rediscovering its inherent democratic strengths. He did not idealise the past blindly, but sought to identify certain valuable elements that could shape a new democratic structure focused on decentralisation and self-governance.

Criticism of Parliamentary Democracy and Planning from the Centre

JP heavily criticised the parliamentary system, viewing it as divisive and out of touch with the concerns of ordinary citizens. He believed electoral politics fostered unhealthy competition, groupism, and a focus on gaining power rather than serving the people. In his 1959 writings, he argued that centralised authority conflicted with the ideals of participatory democracy and hampered institutions based on popular consent. He also criticised India's centralised planning process. While recognising the impact of Soviet-style models, he believed that planning in India had become disconnected from local realities. He argued that development planning should be attuned to regional needs and contexts. He also dismissed capitalist models, stating they encouraged competition, exploitation, and inequality. JP supported a model where economic policies promote cooperation, local initiative, and social justice.

4.3.2. Vision of Communitarian Democracy

Instead of the current model, JP introduced the idea of communitarian democracy, emphasising harmony and ethical leadership over political competition. He believed democracy should be based on moral values and community spirit, demonstrated and practised daily, not just through institutional processes and elections. For JP, real democracy required a transformation in political culture. Selflessness, honesty, and public service had to replace ambition and party interest. He saw community-based governance as the path forward, where trust, mutual obligation, and participation would become the foundation of the political system.

Structure of a Decentralised Political System

To implement his ideas, JP outlined a five-tier model of decentralised governance:

Gram Sabha – The village assembly of all adult members, responsible for open deliberation and decision-making.

Gram Panchayat – A smaller, consensus-based executive group that would carry out the decisions of the Gram Sabha.

Panchayat Samiti – The block-level body, composed of representatives from the Gram Sabhas, to oversee planning and coordination.

Zila Parishad – The district-level organisation consisting of elected members from Panchayat Samitis, responsible for larger development plans.

Provincial and Central Governments – These higher levels of government would provide only technical and financial support. They would not interfere with the autonomy of the lower levels.

This framework was designed to strengthen the foundation of governance and enhance the role of the people in the decision-making process. As noted in *Jayaprakash Narayan: Select Works*, this model was a refinement of Ram Manohar Lohia's four-tier system, adding a layer between the village and the district for better coordination.

4.3.2.1. Swaraj from Below: The Gram Sabha as the Core

JP referred to this model as "Swaraj from below." He viewed the Gram Sabha not as a symbolic institution but as the true center of democratic power. In Swaraj for the People, he wrote that the authority to make decisions must reside in the people themselves. The Gram Sabha, as the basic unit of governance, had to be at the center of democratic life. He suggested that Panchs be chosen through consensus and be responsible for managing the village's daily affairs. This approach was designed to empower ordinary people with direct governance, fostering participation and a sense of ownership. JP aimed to revive the concept of local self-rule in a practical and meaningful manner.

Economic Transformation as Part of Political Change

JP believed that political decentralisation should be combined with economic rebuilding. He dismissed both capitalist and statist approaches, favouring an economy based on cooperative

❏ Enhance the role of the people

❏ Empower ordinary people

principles. He emphasised that economic planning ought to begin at the village level, with local communities leading in determining their needs and shaping development strategies. These village-level plans would subsequently be integrated at the block and district levels. The role of the state and central governments was to provide support through resources and technical assistance. This strategy aimed to make planning more accessible to the people and to foster a more democratic and responsive development process.

Reform of the Electoral Process

To reform Indian politics, JP proposed a series of electoral changes. He argued that political parties had warped the true meaning and purpose of democracy. As a solution, he recommended that each Gram Sabha select two delegates by consensus. These delegates would then constitute an electoral college that would nominate candidates for the legislative assemblies. This method, he argued, would reduce the negative influence of party politics. It would promote collective thinking and moral leadership. Through such reforms, JP aimed to rebuild trust in democratic institutions and foster a sense of public responsibility.

4.3.2.2.Criticism and Limitations of JP's Model

Although JP's ideas were rooted in moral clarity and a commitment to democracy, they received criticism. Some experts contend that his concept of village democracy ignored entrenched inequalities tied to caste, class, and gender. Others highlight that, despite the attractiveness of decentralised governance, executing it effectively is challenging in a large, intricate society. JP eventually acknowledged some of these challenges. Over time, he moved from emphasising structural reforms to embracing Gandhian ideals of Sarvodaya, or the welfare of all. Although his model of participatory democracy is still debated, it continues to motivate efforts to strengthen democratic principles and make governance more accessible to the people.

4.3.3. Democratic Socialism

Jayaprakash Narayan's political philosophy and activism primarily centre around two key concepts: democratic socialism and sarvodaya. His early political involvement in the 1930s is frequently characterised as Marxist, especially from a Leninist

☐ Economic rebuilding

☐ Collective thinking and moral leadership

☐ Gandhian ideals of Sarvodaya

perspective. However, a detailed analysis shows that his approach aligns more closely with Democratic Socialism. Jayaprakash Narayan's political journey and ideas are mainly based on two main concepts: democratic socialism and Sarvodaya. Although his early political activities in the 1930s showed strong Marxist influences, his later thoughts shifted towards a more human-centred and democratic outlook. While some regard his early phase as Marxist, a closer look reveals that his concept of democratic socialism differed significantly from traditional Marxism. His ideas became more clearly defined in 1940, during the Congress session in Ramgarh, where he presented a program that laid the groundwork for democratic socialism in India.

The features of this programme were:

According to Narayan, democratic socialism focused on the idea that liberty, equality, and solidarity are essential for individual development. To enable people to thrive, they must be treated with dignity and have equal access to basic needs such as food, shelter, education, healthcare, and childcare. His conception of socialism was inspired not only by Marxism but also by religious and ethical socialism, feminism, and all traditions opposing domination. He opposed the notion that socialism was a predetermined historical development, instead viewing it as a deliberate moral and political choice.

Narayan described democratic socialism as a political vision where political democracy is intertwined with the social ownership of productive resources. It demands democratic management of economic institutions and respects market systems while seeking to replace capitalism, which he believed was incompatible with the values of liberty and equality. He advocated state intervention not as control but as a tool for ensuring justice. For Narayan, building a just society through democratic socialism was not a theoretical exercise—it was a political responsibility.

Narayan believed that socialising the means of production was essential for eliminating inequality and exploitation. He argued that land should belong to the tiller, and the State should promote farming under its supervision. The capitalist system based on private ownership, he thought, should be replaced with a model where the means of production are publicly owned. However, for this to occur, the State must be controlled by socialists. Only then, he believed, would genuine socio-

☐ Democratic socialism and Sarvodaya

☐ Religious and ethical socialism

☐ Not a theoretical exercise

☐ Socialising the means of production

economic transformation become possible. Therefore, freedom from colonial rule was, in his view, a necessary first step.

Historically, socialism was absent from India's traditional systems. The social hierarchy was primarily based on caste, a system that even foreign rulers did not challenge. Figures like Kabir and Raidas subtly referenced socialist ideals, mainly through spiritual and literary means rather than through political programs. The formal entry of political socialism into India happened with the establishment of the Congress Socialist Party in 1934. Despite later challenges from neoliberal ideas, socialism continued to be a compelling aspiration for many. Among Indian leaders, Narayan was one of the most dedicated advocates, sincerely striving to realise this vision.

From the early twentieth century to recent decades, socialists have had a significant influence on Indian politics, despite facing challenging circumstances. As India's economy and global influence expanded, threats increased, especially from forces promoting authoritarianism and economic elitism. Narayan predicted the risks of money undermining democracy and cautioned against ceding power to the wealthy. His advocacy for Sampoorna Kranti (Total Revolution) was rooted in this concern. However, socialism in India lost its direction. It became fragmented, compromised by electoral politics, and weakened by internal conflicts. JP was aware of these challenges. He observed widespread inequality, illiteracy, and communal division when India was still under British rule. He saw how zamindars exploited people, often worse than colonial masters. While Congress was caught in ideological confusion, other political groups also failed to present a cohesive alternative. It was during this time that the socialist leaders—Narayan, Lohia, Aruna Asaf Ali, and others—responded to Gandhi's 1942 call for Quit India, risking their lives.

After independence, the Congress drifted away from its promises. Although there were socialist gains in the late 1960s—such as the nationalisation of banks, abolition of privy purses, and a focus on rural development—these reforms did not endure. The Emergency (1975–77) marked a significant decline in democratic values. Even after the 1990s, when the focus shifted to social justice and representation, economic liberalisation diluted the socialist agenda. Capital and religious majoritarianism formed an alliance, undermining inclusive nationalism. The rise of Hindutva and neoliberal policies has intensified inequality. JP anticipated these consequences,

❏ Compelling aspiration for many

❏ Congress caught in ideological confusion

❏ Intensified inequality

prompting him to advocate for societal restructuring via non-violent revolution. Sadly, contemporary socialist politics does not enjoy widespread support. For the new generation, the legacies of Gandhi, Lohia, Ambedkar, and Narayan feel distant.

The situation is particularly critical for Dalits. Caste-based exclusion, illiteracy, and gender inequality remain widespread. Despite their increasing visibility and voices, Dalits continue to suffer. Both Ambedkar and JP had emphasised the importance of eradicating caste for socialism to succeed. True empowerment demands a caste-free society. Economic advancement alone cannot dismantle the caste system. The socialist movement declined after JP's departure from active politics, but leaders like Lohia continued the mission. Lohia supported the representation of backwards castes and believed in affirmative action, marking a difference from JP, who favoured economic criteria for reservations. Additionally, the cultural aspects of socialism were largely overlooked, as many socialists retained conservative cultural values. .

❏ Caste-free society

Despite its failures, socialism remains India's best hope to build an equal and just society. However, socialists must rediscover their ideological clarity and align their actions with their words.

❏ Ideological clarity

4.3.4. Gandhian Concept of Sarvodaya

JP embraced Gandhi's concept of sarvodaya to articulate his vision of a decentralised, participatory, and egalitarian socio-economic and political system for India. Vinoba Bhave clarified that Sarvodaya is not about good governance or majority rule but about liberation from government and decentralisation of power. In this view, sarvodaya signifies a state where individuals live freely without reliance on external or controlling authorities.

❏ Liberation from government =decentralisation of power

JP saw Sarvodaya as a system where power is broadly distributed, ensuring that no individual is under the control of another. His concept of sarvodaya was based on a profound understanding of human nature. Although he recognised the existence of selfish or negative traits, he believed they could be mitigated through cultivating values like compassion, cooperation, creativity, and inner happiness. These values were crucial for establishing a social structure where people could coexist peacefully and with purpose. For JP, if people were educated to value these traits and if they saw such ideals practised in real life, they would be inspired to follow them.

❏ Inherent goodness of ordinary people

He firmly believed in the inherent goodness of ordinary people. This belief formed the core of his idea of sarvodaya—a just, democratic, and decentralised system based on moral strength.

4.3.4.1. Social Dimension of Sarvodaya

JP's Sarvodaya vision was rooted in the principles of inclusiveness and equality. He envisioned a society where every group, regardless of their background, coexisted with equal dignity and was free from discrimination. In such a society, caste and communal prejudices, along with practices that demean individuals based on social or historical divisions, would have no place. JP was clear about the roles different sections of society had to play in rebuilding the nation. He placed special emphasis on the youth, whom he encouraged to adopt a visionary approach and dedicate themselves selflessly to the nation's progress. Social relationships were to be based on voluntary action, not compulsion. People would be motivated to contribute to society willingly and responsibly.

❐ Special emphasis on the youth

4.3.4.2. Political Dimension of Sarvodaya

JP's political vision, rooted in Sarvodaya, focused on establishing a robust and inclusive decentralised democracy exemplified by the Panchayati Raj system. His distinctive approach prioritised loknīti (people's politics) and lokshakti (people's power) instead of rajnīti (party politics) and rajshakti (state power). Though these ideas seemed unconventional at the time, they were consistent with JP's commitment to decentralisation and participation. He was deeply disturbed by rising corruption and misuse of state power, especially in dealing with dissent. As a response, he called for relying on social institutions and non-state actors as the real source of political authority. Individuals with moral strength and courage would build JP's ideal political society. They would uphold the values of self-governance, cooperation, freedom, and fraternity, forming the ethical foundation of the Sarvodaya state.

❐ Real source of political authority

4.3.4.3. Economic Framework of Sarvodaya

JP's economic model under Sarvodaya aimed to establish a balanced and equitable system. Considering India's predominantly agricultural society, he focused on farming and rural livelihoods. He suggested developing collective farms owned and operated by entire villages. His belief in Gandhian economic principles motivated him to promote village-based and

❐ Village-based and cottage industries

cottage industries organised locally. However, JP also recognised the increasing importance of industrialisation. Consequently, he supported the inclusion of large-scale industries within the overall development framework.- His economic vision sought a balanced approach, giving space to all sectors. The wealth generated from these activities would be distributed fairly, ensuring that prosperity did not remain concentrated but reached all parts of society. The result would be a decentralised and participatory economy.

□ Decentralised and participatory economy.

Methods of Realising the Sarvodaya Order

After defining sarvodaya, JP considered how to build such a social system. His encounters with various political ideologies caused him to abandon conventional approaches to social transformation. For instance, he rejected Marxist notions of revolutionary violence, asserting that violence tends to favour those adept at using it, which can result in authoritarian regimes like Russia's. He believed this approach hampers the progress toward democracy, justice, and equality.

□ Rejected Marxist notions of revolutionary violence

He was equally disappointed with liberal democratic methods that relied solely on laws and institutions. He believed that laws and systems alone could not create good societies unless people were mentally and morally prepared to accept change. For JP, transformation required a broad-based process of education, education not limited to books but involving compassion, reasoning, and moral example. He believed that leaders and responsible citizens had to lead by example. Their conduct and commitment would inspire others to adopt the same values. Such moral examples, combined with widespread education, would help awaken individuals and encourage them to take responsibility for social change.

□ Compassion, reasoning, and moral example

JP observed voluntary sharing and commitment in movements like Bhoodan and Gramdan, led by Vinoba Bhave. He valued these efforts and proposed expanding them thr ough sampattidaan (sharing of property) and ultimately jeevandaan (offering one's life in serv ice of others). He believed that cultivating this spirit of voluntary sacrifice could foster a pea ceful, democratic, and non-violent sarvodaya society.

□ Jeevandaan

4.3.5. Total Revolution (Sampoorna Kranti)

Jayaprakash Narayan's concept of Total Revolution marked the culmination of his intellectual and political evolution. It

went beyond a simple slogan to serve as a broad appeal for fundamental transformation in social, economic, political, cultural, educational, and spiritual realms. Drawing inspiration from Gandhian Sarvodaya, this idea sought to create a society that was just, equitable, and participatory, rooted in moral and ethical principles.

Although Vinoba Bhave first coined the term "Total Revolution" in the 1960s to highlight the need for societal change, it was Jayaprakash Narayan who gave the concept significant political momentum in the 1970s. In response to the growing centralisation of power, widespread corruption, and the decline of democratic institutions under Indira Gandhi's regime, Narayan called for Sampoorna Kranti in 1975. His appeal gained widespread support, especially among students, workers, and common citizens in Bihar, serving as a unifying challenge to authoritarian rule during the Emergency. Narayan argued that minor, isolated reforms were insufficient to address India's deep-rooted issues. He envisioned a comprehensive change that would influence both the moral values and the institutional frameworks of Indian society. This change needed to be peaceful, non-violent, and driven by voluntary involvement. According to him, only a morally awakened and ethically aware citizenry could drive significant transformation, not measures imposed by the state.

4.3.5.1. His vision of Total Revolution was built upon the following dimensions:

- **Political Transformation:** Narayan was sharply critical of the existing parliamentary system, which he believed concentrated too much power in the hands of a few, especially the Prime Minister. He argued that this system fostered corruption and diminished democratic accountability. Instead, he promoted a participatory democracy without rigid party systems, where power would be decentralised and people could make decisions through self-governing institutions.

- **Economic Reorganisation:** Narayan advocated for a mixed economy that emphasises cooperation, fairness, and shared prosperity. He introduced sampattidan voluntary

wealth sharing to ensure that everyone, especially the marginalised, has access to essential needs like food, shelter, and clothing. His concept of economic democracy emphasised decentralised ownership, managed through cooperatives and voluntary groups.

- **Social Equality and Justice:** JP emphasised the need to eliminate caste-based discrimination and religious divisions. He believed that simply having Dalit leaders or achieving economic upliftment for a few was insufficient. According to him, true democracy can only be achieved by abolishing untouchability and caste hierarchies.

- **Cultural and Spiritual Renewal:** Narayan's core vision centred on moral and spiritual revival. He stressed that ethical principles should guide public institutions and governance. He was a firm opponent of violence and maintained that the movement for Total Revolution should be based on Gandhian non-violence and voluntary effort.

Jayaprakash Narayan's Total Revolution has sparked significant academic interest. Political scientist Rajni Kothari commended JP's steadfast moral dedication and his skill in connecting ethical principles with mass mobilisation. Likewise, Yogendra Yadav regarded the movement as a unique combination of Gandhian moral politics and socialist principles. However, some scholars have expressed concerns. Partha Chatterjee noted that JP's movement lacked a strong organisational foundation and a clear practical plan, which made it hard to maintain beyond symbolic protests. Paul Brass added that although Narayan inspired many with his charisma, he did not establish enduring institutions to perpetuate his ideas.

> **Total Revolution**
>
> - JP's idea of Total Revolution (Sampoorna Kranti) was a holistic transformation of politics, society, and individual consciousness.
>
> - He argued that true change must begin with moral regeneration, not just structural reform.

❏ Eliminate caste-based discrimination

❏ Moral and spiritual revival

❏ Lacked a strong organisational foundation

- Total Revolution involved simultaneous change in education, economy, politics, culture, and values.
- He believed that spiritual discipline and moral clarity were essential to rebuild India's democratic life.
- JP placed faith in people's movements, student energy, and grassroots initiatives.

Ashis Nandy viewed JP's call as an effort to awaken the nation's moral conscience rather than a pursuit of state power. However, he warned that such moral appeals might be ineffective against deep-rooted structural inequalities. André Béteille also expressed a similar concern although JP's anti-party stance was well-intentioned, it unintentionally created a political vacuum that groups subsequently occupied with very different agendas.

❐ Awaken the nation's moral conscience

4.3.5.2. Criticism and Contradictions

Although the socialist movement in India, with JP as a key figure, held lofty ideals, it encountered significant setbacks. Many leaders within the movement compromised their principles in pursuit of political power, which weakened the very values they championed. Additionally, the movement struggled to engage with existing cultural and social hierarchies effectively. While JP focused on economically based reservations, thinkers like Lohia and Ambedkar highlighted the importance of tackling deep-rooted social inequalities.

There were misunderstandings regarding JP's intentions. Although he explicitly said that he aimed to steer state institutions towards public service rather than dismantle them, some supporters saw his message as anti-state. A few supporters even engaged in extremist actions, which directly contradict JP's emphasis on non-violence and democratic processes.

4.3.5.3. Relevance in Contemporary India

Despite these obstacles, Total Revolution remains highly relevant today. Narayan warned against risks such as unchecked capitalism, concentrated power, environmental harm, and the weakening of democratic institutions—problems still prevalent in India. His advocacy for decentralisation, local self-governance, moral politics, and inclusive growth provides a vital counterbalance to the current dominant political and economic stories.

❐ And inclusive growth

In an era where neoliberal policies have intensified social inequalities and eroded public accountability, JP's ideas of Swaraj (self-rule), participatory democracy, and ethical leadership take on special significance. For today's youth, who seek honest leadership and inclusive politics, JP's concept of Total Revolution remains a guiding beacon. Jayaprakash Narayan's concept of Sampoorna Kranti was more than just a political movement; it was a moral quest for a just and humane India. Despite facing numerous obstacles and contradictions, its fundamental vision remains relevant. The challenge now is to revisit and actualise that vision amidst today's ongoing struggles for democracy, equality, and dignity.

❏ Total Revolution remains a guiding beacon

Summarised Overview

Jayaprakash Narayan's idea of freedom evolved from early Marxist ideals to a morally grounded framework rooted in Gandhian values of *Sarvodaya*, participatory democracy, and non-violence. Disenchanted by the authoritarianism of Soviet-style communism, JP redefined socialism as a moral, democratic, and decentralised vision that upheld liberty, equality, and justice. He rejected coercive methods, favouring ethical transformation through people's participation and self-governance.

His proposal for a five-tier decentralised political structure placed the *Gram Sabha* at the heart of democracy, advocating *Swaraj from below*. JP's concept of *Total Revolution* (Sampoorna Kranti) called for comprehensive change—political, social, economic, educational, and spiritual. His vision of communitarian democracy was based not on party politics but on people's power (*lokniti*) and ethical leadership.

He also emphasised democratic socialism that prioritised social ownership and economic justice through cooperative farming and planning from the grassroots. Though he faced criticisms for underestimating caste and gender-based inequalities, JP's vision remains a compelling alternative to centralised, elitist governance. His thought represents a synthesis of civilisational values, ethical politics, and radical democracy, offering a powerful model for reimagining freedom in contemporary India.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. How did JP's concept of Sampoorna Kranti go beyond economic or political change?

2. What was JP's critique of the existing party system in Indian democracy?

3. How did JP understand the role of education in political transformation?

4. What is the significance of non-party political formations in JP's democratic vision?

5. How did JP envision the reconstruction of the Indian polity through decentralisation?

6. What were the moral and ethical dimensions of JP's Total Revolution?

7. How did JP link social justice with participatory governance?

8. What lessons can contemporary movements draw from JP's vision of democracy?

Assignment

1. Critically evaluate Jayaprakash Narayan's concept of Total Revolution. How did it propose to transform Indian society?

2. Examine the ideological shift of Jayaprakash Narayan from Marxism to Sarvodaya. What factors influenced this transformation?

3. Analyse the philosophical foundations and political implications of Jayaprakash Narayan's idea of participatory democracy.

4. Assess the contribution of Jayaprakash Narayan to the socialist movement in India. What were the internal contradictions within the movement?

5. Discuss the views of major scholars on Jayaprakash Narayan's political thought. How do their interpretations differ in assessing his legacy?

6. Compare and contrast Jayaprakash Narayan's idea of socialism with that of B.R. Ambedkar and Ram Manohar Lohia.

7. In what ways does Jayaprakash Narayan's thought remain relevant to contemporary democratic and developmental challenges in India?

8. Explore the limitations of Jayaprakash Narayan's vision of party-less democracy. To what extent was it practical in the Indian context?

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MODEL QUESTION PAPER SETS

QP CODE: ………

Reg. No: ………....
Name: ……………

THIRD SEMESTER MA POLITICAL SCIENCE EXAMINATION
DISCIPLINE CORE COURSE
M23PS09DC – Indian Political Thought
SET-1

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

SECTION A

*Answer any **ten** questions in a word or a sentence. Each question carries **one** mark.*

(10 × 1 = 10 Marks)

1. Who founded the Brahmo Samaj?

2. What is the meaning of "Go Back to the Vedas"?

3. What was the purpose of the Satya Shodhak Samaj?

4. Name a book written by Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

5. What does the term "Hindutva" mean according to Savarkar?

6. What was Jinnah's stance in the Two Nation Theory?

7. Define Nehru's idea of scientific temper.

8. What was M. N. Roy's concept of Radical Humanism?

9. Which document of Ambedkar criticised the Hindu social order?

10. What is the central idea of Jayaprakash Narayan's Total Revolution?

11. What Vedantic idea shaped Vivekananda's political thought?

12. What is the literal meaning of "Swaraj" in Gandhian thought?

13. Name one journal started by Roy.

14. What was Phule's term for the lower castes?

15. Which social evil did Dayananda strongly oppose?

SECTION B

*Answer any **five** questions in two or three sentences.Each question carries **two** marks.*

(5 × 2 = 10 Marks)

16. How did Tilak use religion to promote nationalism and reform?

17. In what way did Dayananda Saraswathi connect political governance with Vedic teachings?

18. What was Phule's view on the caste system and Brahminical dominance?

19. How did Tilak justify political resistance through the Gita?

20. What was Savarkar's interpretation of Hindu identity?

21. Explain Jinnah's transformation from a constitutionalist to a communal separatist.

22. How did Nehru link secularism with democratic development?

23. What was Ambedkar's critique of Caste?

24. What is Ambedkar's idea of social democracy?

25. What is the Gandhian view on Trusteeship?

SECTION C

*Answer any **five** questions.Each question carries **four** marks.*

(5 × 4 = 20 Marks)

26. Examine the liberal values in Raja Ram Mohan Roy's religious and political philosophy.

27. Discuss Dayananda's idea of Vedic Swaraj and its relevance in political thought.

28. Analyse the role of Satya Shodhak Samaj in Phule's anti-caste movement.

29. Explain Tilak's concept of Swaraj as a natural right and his interpretation of nationalism.

30. Discuss Jinnah's 14 points and its features.

31. Describe the concept of Total revolution.

32. What were Ambedkar's arguments for the annihilation of caste?

33. Explain Vivekananda's approach to spiritual humanism and national regeneration.

SECTION D

*Answer any **three** questions.Each question carries **ten** marks.*

(3 × 10 = 30 Marks)

34. Analyse the religious and political reformist vision of Raja Ram Mohan Roy.

35. Compare the political ideas of Tilak and Savarkar on nationalism and Hindu identity.

36. Discuss the role of Ambedkar in shaping India's democratic and constitutional vision.

37. Critically evaluate Gandhi's contributions to Indian political and philosophical thought.

38. How do Gandhi and Jayaprakash Narayan differ in their vision of Swaraj and democratic reform?

39. Discuss how Phule and Dayananda laid the foundations of anti-caste and religious reform movements in modern India.

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

THIRD SEMESTER MA POLITICAL SCIENCE EXAMINATION
DISCIPLINE CORE COURSE
M23PS09DC – Indian Political Thought
SET-2

Time: 3 Hours   Max Marks: 70

SECTION A

*Answer any **ten** questions in a word or a sentence. Each question carries **one** mark.*

(10 × 1 = 10 Marks)

1. Who initiated the abolition of Sati in British India?

2. What is meant by Shuddhi in Dayananda's thought?

3. Name one of Phule's major works.

4. What was Tilak's role in the Swadeshi movement?

5. What slogan is Gandhi most associated with?

6. Name one reason why Jinnah opposed the Nehru Report.

7. What is Nehru's idea of planned development?

8. Name the book in which Ambedkar critiques Caste.

9. What role did Ambedkar play in the drafting of the Constitution?

10. Define the term "Sarvodaya."

11. Who popularised the idea of Universal Religion in modern Hinduism?

12. What was Gandhi's view on non-violence?

13. What does Phule mean by "Bahujan"?

14. What is meant by "Scientific Temper" in Nehru's philosophy?

15. Who founded the Arya Samaj?

*Answer any **five** questions in two or three sentences.Each question carries **two** marks.*

(5 × 2 = 10 Marks)

16. How did Roy advocate for civil liberties through his writings?

17. What was the political relevance of Dayananda's view on kingship?

18. How did Phule challenge the religious foundation of caste hierarchy?

19. What was Tilak's interpretation of karma and action in the Gita?

20. In what way did Savarkar define Hindu Rashtra?

21. Describe Jinnah's critique of the Congress-led nationalist movement.

22. What was Nehru's vision of socialism in a democratic framework?

23. Explain the Political Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda.

24. What were Ambedkar's main objections to Gandhian reformism?

25. How did Jayaprakash Narayan redefine politics through Total Revolution?

SECTION C

*Answer any **five** questions.Each question carries **four** marks.*

(5 × 4 = 20 Marks)

26. Analyse the socio-religious context of Roy's reformist interventions.

27. Evaluate Dayananda's critique of priestly orthodoxy and idolatry.

28. Discuss the radical elements in Phule's educational philosophy.

29. Examine the ideological contributions of Tilak to assertive nationalism.

30. Explain Savarkar's ideological impact on the formation of cultural nationalism.

31. Outline the Features of the Nehruvian concept of Secularism.

32. Explore Ambedkar's conception of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

33. How did Gandhi and Vivekananda use spiritual principles for social transformation?

SECTION D

*Answer any **three** questions.Each question carries **ten** marks.*

(3 × 10 = 30 Marks)

34. Compare the reform movements of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Dayananda Saraswathy.

35. Examine Jinnah's political ideology and its implications for Indian secularism and nation-

alism.

36. Critically analyse Ambedkar's concept of social justice in the context of caste and the constitution.

37. Assess Nehru's contributions to democratic governance, secularism, and planning in India.

38. Discuss the complementary and contrasting aspects of Gandhian Sarvodaya and Jayaprakash Narayan's Total Revolution.

39. Evaluate the political philosophies of Gandhi and B. R. Ambedkar in the making of modern India.

സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

വിദ്യയാൽ സ്വതന്ത്രരാകണം
വിശ്വപൗരരായി മാറണം
ഗ്രഹപ്രസാദമായ് വിളങ്ങണം
ഗുരുപ്രകാശമേ നയിക്കണേ

കൂരിരുട്ടിൽ നിന്നു ഞങ്ങളെ
സൂര്യവീഥിയിൽ തെളിക്കണം
സ്നേഹദീപ്തിയായ് വിളങ്ങണം
നീതിവൈജയന്തി പാറണം

ശാസ്ത്രവ്യാപ്തിയെന്നുമേകണം
ജാതിഭേദമാകെ മാറണം
ബോധരശ്മിയിൽ തിളങ്ങുവാൻ
ജ്ഞാനകേന്ദ്രമേ ജ്വലിക്കണേ

കുരീപ്പുഴ ശ്രീകുമാർ

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Indian Political Thought

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