



# Indian Political Thought

Themes and Thinkers

Edited by M.P. Singh | Himanshu Roy

ALWAYS LEARNING

PEARSON

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*Edited by*

Mahendra Prasad Singh

Himanshu Roy

**PEARSON**

Delhi • Chennai • Chandigarh

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## Preface

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Political thought as an allied branch of philosophy has a long, continual history in India unlike that of philosophy proper which, as Hegel argued, ceased to develop as an independent branch of knowledge after Buddha. Philosophy became ‘identical with its religion’ in the course of the formation and development of hereditary monarchies. The withering away of the free institutions, which existed due to the ‘connection between political freedom and freedom of thought’, created conditions for the philosophy proper—the absolute universal of self-consciousness—to lose its vitality. The Idea weakened and could not fructify into objective. The external and the objective couldn’t be comprehended as a full-blown form in accordance with the Idea.<sup>1</sup> But the epistemology about the concepts of an ideal polity, civil laws, justice, property, sovereignty and secularism as the six allied branches of philosophy proper blossomed over the centuries. This was because these concepts were necessitated by and required for the existence of state, and for its expansion in different forms in different regions according to the then prevalent social structure. The content and the contours of these themes, however, lacked substantive or sharp formulation when compared to the consistent evolution seen in Greco-Roman political philosophy; but an intensive reading of the available historical material in India leads us to interesting conclusions that are conceptually similar in content to the European formulations while simultaneously being distinct and with a discernible Indian imprint.

The similarities and differences in the political philosophy are, broadly, the results of the similarities and differences in the pre-capitalist social formations of India and of Europe, of their state structures, of Episcopal orders, and of variegated pattern of land holdings. In fact, one of the basic factors of distinction in India was the wide prevalence of land holdings and of property rights among the peasantry in customary forms whose vast numerical existence for centuries created conditions for the emergence of distinctive inputs into the conceptual paradigms of political thought.<sup>2</sup> It provided an ontological base over which many philosophical discourses emerged as different branches of knowledge and fructified into independent/autonomous/related disciplines.

Let us now discuss the six major concepts of political philosophy in India referred to earlier. One can begin with the notion of secularism actuating amidst the peasants or of application of policy and conduct of state towards religion and towards faiths of people. It may be noted here that historically the Indian states were largely non-theocratic. It had multifarious linkages with different religions and there was separation between the personal faiths and political practices of the rulers. The subjects enjoyed religious freedom. The application



of few apparently discriminatory policies by the local or central authorities, or their acts of imposing religious conversions on the subjects were minor trends. The absence of any Episcopal order provided conditions for the emergence of new religions, new gods and new sects. The absence was itself grounded in the existence of a large peasantry with diffused land holdings among different castes which acted as bulwark against theocracy and the emergence of a church type Episcopal order. The land holders required, in their routine existence, substantive degree of autonomy to formulate and actuate their decisions for cultivation and management of their properties, a freedom that was effectively transmitted into freedom of other kinds including their religious attitude. Curtailment of this freedom by imposition of fixed ideology by the state/ruling class on such a large number of land owners would have been a difficult proposition and a non-beneficial act. In fact, it would have created condition for a rebellion and a cause for revenue loss. The scattered and the autarkic village existence of the populace with expanding cultivable land acreage benefited the state in terms of increase in revenue generation and in providing insulation to it from economic crisis. In this mutually beneficial and balance of power relations between the state and the peasantry there was no requirement of a theocracy, neither was it desirable or possible to impose it nor to create an Episcopal order. In fact, there was no social condition for its emergence. The attitude of the state was to support every religion or to adopt policies which were beneficial to it. The economic appropriation of the peasants' produce and the avoidance of religious coercion was the best option for it. Thus, in a historically evolved social structure, in which there was a numerical preponderance of the peasantry with their local village and family deities, totems and rituals and an in-built requirement of functional autonomy necessary for cultivation and related functions, secular conduct of the state and the idea of limited liberty among the peasantry were imperatives.

In contrast to this, in Europe the states were theocratic in nature for centuries. In tandem with the Episcopal order, they imposed Christianity on their subjects as political ideology. It denied their civil freedom and created a fixed paradigm within which the aspirations for ideal polity or justice was to be sought, thereby intending to regulate the formation of new ideas in public sphere.

Simultaneously, the Episcopal order built up Christ and Christianity as the pre-eminent god and religion respectively and destroyed the plurality of other polymorphous religions. It went to the extent of suppressing the formation of sects within Christianity itself which created intense contention in the public sphere. The emergence of the Episcopal order and of theocratic states, and their power, were premised on and were in proportion to the increasing accumulation of wealth by the lords and churches, who appropriated the bulk of cultivable lands and other properties. This deprived the masses of its ownership and of its derivative necessities for existence. The more the surfe of society and the appropriation of the surplus produce by the lords and churches, the more was the necessity of religion for the masses. It helped in the preservation of the prevalent social structure. It necessitated the emergence and consolidation of a theocratic state and the development of an Episcopal order that was in contradistinction to the idea of equality of religions. Their emergence and consolidation, however,

created dual power centres and conflict for dominance over the temporal and mundane domains. The sovereignty of the state became divisible between the pope and the king, representing two factions of the ruling class. It became, therefore, imperative for Austin and Bodin<sup>3</sup> to negate the past and to reassert for the new ruling class represented by the state its indivisible, absolute, legal supremacy over the rest; the Episcopal order, declined after the consolidation of the bourgeois regime, was politically relegated into the background.

In India, this duality of power and the resulting conflict for dominance rarely occurred. In the absence of an Episcopal order, the sovereignty remained absolute and indivisible and was located in the monarchy. Any attempt or discourse of usurpation or division of power was immediately neutralized by a coercive and ideological state apparatus as it lacked popular support. The wide prevalence of property rights in customary forms, both individual and communal in nature (segmentary exclusion of the untouchables notwithstanding), in tandem with the deep-rooted idea of equality and plurality of religions, also preempted any pan-Indian usurpative or revolutionary challenge to the state.

The existence of mass property rights provided, even within the matrix of inscriptive pre-capitalist social formations, a restricted public sphere, a limited civil society and some basic functional civil laws<sup>4</sup> that were largely absent in medieval Europe except for its segmentary presence among burghers. These involved a large urban and rural populace of different castes/religion/gender (including the lowest decideratum) who had considerable operational and ideological autonomy as far as their customary rights were concerned. But it must be noted here that these groups were not a political community yet. In contrast, in Europe, the absence of mass property holdings and the presence of the Episcopal order resulted in the social erosion of such freedom. This either brutalized large sections of the populace or propelled them into radical/reformative social transformation with great intensity and increased frequency, leading to constant social change.

The search for justice and ideal polity, however, engaged the masses and the intelligentsia, both in the European and Indian societies. It was reflected both in religious discourses and in academic treatises. Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, Zia Barani's *Fatava-i-Jehandari*, Abul Fazl's *Akbarnama* were parts of it. Both in the popular and academic discourses, the notion of an ideal dharma/religere, the idea of powerful and benevolent kingship and of its different organs as integral part of the state were posited and were partly incorporated in the administrative and social machinery, which followed legal codification and customary inscriptive laws in the dispensation of justice and in governance. Here it may be noted that both the societies had political communities and citizenship in the ancient world. In Europe, however, the slaves were denied of it; in India, it was destroyed by the emerging hereditary monarchies. The idea of republicanism, nonetheless, persisted, at least in the vernacular literary works of poets. Kabir's quest for Begumpura,<sup>5</sup> for example, was part of this urge.

The presence of the past in the modern history of India was sharply contoured and enriched under the impact of colonial capitalism. In the process of fighting back for social and political emancipation, the past was resurrected in new forms<sup>6</sup> with enriched content for a comparative study with Europe. To demonstrate parity/superiority with Europe, new concepts of political philosophy

were added through creative interpretations of the past. Some of them, for example, were nationalism, socialism, democracy and feudalism. It was rarely emphasized that only modern capitalist Europe was better placed than colonial India, that Europe could be said to have had a bigoted past and it was far more intolerant and brutal than India. The pre-capitalist India was a more hospitable place to live in than the pre-capitalist Europe. Only in late history, in and around the 17th and 18th centuries, Europe had marched ahead of India in civilizational progress. A comparison of pre-capitalist India and of capitalist Europe was illogical and incompatible.

Fortunately, this kind of comparison no longer dominates the frontiers of research in post-colonial India. Currently, two aspects of political philosophy are being focused upon: the first is the exploration of new theories and their analysis, and the second is the 'discovery' of new thinkers and new interpretations of their views under different rubric.<sup>7</sup> In both the cases, a thematic comparison with Europe is used as a method for increasing our understanding. These efforts being made to understand the distinctiveness of philosophy of different societies without getting caught up in the notion of one being inferior or superior to the other is a sign of maturity.

Political philosophy as an academic discipline, different from the genre of political thinkers, is being gradually introduced as a new course in the universities of India. Its widening thematic base and enrichment through inter-disciplinary input is a right step toward holistic understanding of the past and of contemporary society.

In the editing of this book Praveen Dev, the senior commissioning editor, Pearson Education, provided important inputs for the enrichment of its contents. We thank him for it.

**Himanshu Roy**

## Notes and References

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1. See Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. I (New York, NY: Humanities Press, 1974), chaps. Introduction and Indian Philosophy; See also, B. K. Matilal, *Mind, Language and World*, edited by J. Ganeri (New Delhi: OUP, 2002), pp. 351–369.
2. See Himanshu Roy, *Secularism and Its Colonial Legacy in India* (Delhi: Manak, 2009), Preface and Introduction.
3. John Austin and Jean Bodin are considered as the theoretical classical representatives of legal and external sovereignties of early bourgeois state. See, for example, their books: John Austin, *Lectures on Jurisprudence* (London: John Murray, 1832) and Jean Bodin, *On Sovereignty*, edited by Julian H. Franklin (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1992)
4. See Farhat Hasan, 'Forms of Civility and Publicness in Pre-British India' in Rajeev Bhargava and Helmut Reifeld (eds) *Civil Society, Public Sphere and Citizenship* (New Delhi: Sage, 2005).
5. See Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura* (New Delhi: Navayana, 2008).
6. See K. M. Panikkar, 'Colonialism, Culture and Revivalism', *Social Scientist*, vol. 31, nos 1–2, Jan-Feb 2003.
7. See Yogendra Yadav, 'Was Lohia Parochial and Monolingual?', *Economic & Political Weekly*, 24 Oct 2009.

# Introduction

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*Mahendra Prasad Singh*

## Methodological Issues and an Overview

After a prolonged debate, Indian political thought has arrived as a field of study in its own right without succumbing to what appeared to be a compulsive instinct to compare it condescendingly with Western political thought. The hold of the orientalist mode of thought even on Indian scholars was such that some maintained that Western political *thought* was unquestioningly more systematically abstract and universal. It was subtly historically contextual as well. Indian political *thinking*, on the other hand, was supposedly banally contingent. Some writers tended to the view that Indian thought was religious and metaphysical without being concerned with the *political* (non-theological) and philosophical (epistemological) questions. Some even raised the false contrast that Indian thought was only monistic or non-dualistic whereas Western thought was dialectical. More recent researches and writings in Indian studies have shown these assertions to be patently orientalist and stereotypical. I mean to say that the Orient of the Western construction is not what the East is in reality; it is what the West says it is. Edward Said (1978), reminiscent of the post-colonial theory and post-structuralist method of deconstruction *a la* Jacques Derrida and Michael Foucault, asserts that the relationship between the West and the Orient is one of power, domination and varying degrees of control. The other side of the same coin is aggressive nationalism whose examples can be found both in the West and in the East. Taken to the extreme, it takes the form of fundamentalism and terrorism.

I propose in this Introduction to do basically two things. Firstly, I address some methodological problems in the study of Indian political thought. Secondly, I attempt to approach the field of Indian political thought basically as a field in its own right and do its mapping from this perspective of cultural relativism rather than seek to impose any universalist comparative straight-jacket. In doing so, I do not mean to disparage the latter approach. In fact, the two editors of this volume decided to introduce the field from both the aforementioned perspectives. My co-editor takes the comparative route, whereas I look at the field through a non-comparative lens, by and large.

I begin by drawing attention to three methodological problems in the study of Indian political thought. The first problem relates to the periodization of the long evolution of Indian culture and civilization through the ages. The commonly used division in terms of the Hindu, Muslim,

and British periods is stereotypical and misleading. An alternative perspective on periodization worked out by Ramdhari Singh Dinkar is empirically more valid and systematically more fruitful. In Dinkar's vision, Indian culture is a product of four important cultural-revolutionary transformations and transitions:

1. Aryan–Dravidian acculturation
2. Jain and Buddhist protest movements for reforms in the Vedic world view
3. Hindu–Muslim encounter and coexistence and
4. The Western, primarily British, colonial conquest, Indian response and resistance, and the modernization of the Indian tradition (Dinkar, 1962).

A second methodological problem relates to the identification and reading of primary texts and classical secondary commentaries of political purport and relevance. A comprehensive survey of Indian political and social thought must include texts such as Kautilya's *Arathashastra*, *Manusmriti*, Abul Fazl's *Akbarnama* that includes the *Ain-i-Akbari*, tracts and texts of administrative and policy relevance produced during the British Raj, political writings and speeches of the modern Indian political leaders, and political analysts. By the way, the classical Indian logic and theories of knowledge must also be laterally explored by the students of Indian political thought. In this regard the recent researches of the philosopher Bimal Krishna Matilal have amply demonstrated that the assertion that Indian philosophy is only religions, spiritual, and other-worldly is questionable (Matilal, 1990).

A third methodological problem we need to address is how to study the *texts* in their appropriate historical and cultural *contexts*. Traditionally, Indologists have primarily focused on internal reading of the texts, whereas historians have examined the political, social, and economic contexts. Students of political thought have primarily been interested in only the political aspects, while historians and Indologists have explored the traditions, past, and history more fully. Besides, historians have also grappled with contradictions evident in a text and its supposed historical context, though not quite satisfactorily. Treating these contradictions as aberrations, the texts are often devalued and denied any autonomy from their contexts. Interestingly, students of political thought per se are not dismayed by such contradictions between the texts and contexts; they are more readily inclined to grant autonomy to the texts and their authors. The classics of political thought enjoy a greater degree of autonomy from history which lends them a universal appeal and abiding relevance.

In his book *What Is History?* E. H. Carr maintains a sort of liberal view of history, according to which history delves into the past not only to know what it was like; more than that, it looks to the past with contemporary and futuristic concerns and questions. The history of political thought generally deals with three kinds of elements: ideas and concepts in general, thought of individual thinkers, and political ideologies and movements. These concerns are also reflected in the history of political thought in India in various stages of its history. Our exploration of political thought in India is suggestive of two prominent features that have gradually worked

themselves out from the ancient through the medieval to the modern times. Firstly, political ideas were initially not only inchoate but also undifferentiated from folklore, religious ideas, metaphysical and philosophical discourses, and the like. Secondly, the history of political thought in India is also a history of the evolution of political orientations of a less differentiated society and culture into a more diverse and complex multicultural political community.

This Introduction presents a synoptic overview of the development of the two features and trends mentioned above. This survey is broadly divisible into ancient, medieval, and modern periods of Indian history for analytical convenience. The ancient phase comprises the Vedic folklores, the vedantic idealistic vision, the Jaina and the Buddhist visions, and the gradual emergence of what A. T. Embree (1992) refers to as the formation of 'the Hindu way of life', reflecting the confluence of diverse streams of the Indian civilization until the first Muslim conquests of parts of India. The political ideas and state formation in India in this ancient phase may be illustrated by the different political ideas and structures prevalent in Vedic, post-Vedic, Mauryan, and post-Mauryan periods of Indian history. Ideas and institutions of kingship, government, and state during this period show a trajectory of evolution from society-centred political formations of multifunctional nature to political structures of more specialized functions centred on the king, government, and the state. This trend is not unilinear or unidirectional or politically centralizing all through the various sub-phases of this period. Rather, it is marked by rise and fall of the importance of social or political institutions respectively and reversal in the trends of political centralization or decentralization, political integration or fragmentation.

Political thought in medieval India predictably reflects rupture with the ancient Indian tradition as well as some elements of continuity. Muslim conquest of India brought an alien tradition of political ideas and institutions developed in West Asia and its transplantation from a dominant political centre that lacked a total social and cultural hegemony. This factor forced the adaptation of alien ideas and institutions to the Indian conditions. This necessarily entailed an evolution of a syncretic political orientation which may be called the Hindustani vision.

Political thought in modern India flowed into various and diverse streams. The last quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed two major political tendencies and trends, namely, renaissance and revivalism. The two tendencies differ in that the former seeks to adapt to the Western colonial modernity in a positive way whereas the latter seeks to revive the Indian tradition in a spirit of reaction and resistance. Both represent attempts to combine modernity and tradition in varying degrees. Renaissance subsequently developed into religious reforms and liberal nationalism while revivalism engendered religious foundationalism and extremist nationalism. The latter tended to stoke the fires of communalism and casteism, which were aggravated by the colonial strategy of 'divide-and-rule.' By the beginning of the twentieth century political terrorism or revolutionary nationalism also made their presence felt on the Indian political scene. During the First World War the imperialist stranglehold on India weakened a bit, which allowed some measure of growth of national bourgeoisie that reversed the trend of de-industrialization. By this time liberal nationalism as well as political terrorism were coming to a dead end on account of lack of British colonial concessions, on the one hand, and repression by the colonial state, on the

other. This double political failure provided the opening to ‘militant nonviolent nationalism’ of Mohandas K. Gandhi<sup>1</sup> under whose leadership the Indian National Congress was transformed into a widely popular mass movement (Robert R. McLane 1970).

By the beginning of the 1920s and the 1930s respectively, we also witnessed the emergence of Indian communism and socialism. Communists for the greater part remained outside the Indian National Congress, but occasionally (mid-1930s on) collaborated with it. Socialists, on the other hand, formed an organization within the larger framework of the Congress itself and sought to contain the right wing and strengthen the left wing of this centrist political formation. The Communists drifted away from the Congress during the Second World War. The socialists too parted company with the Congress soon after independence and on the eve of the first general election in 1951-52, the leftwing political elements that remained within the Congress or those who joined it under Jawaharlal Nehru became the mainstay of Nehruvian socialism.

The subsequent decades carry the legacy of the past, and elaborate and adapt them to the new conditions and compulsions.

## Political Thought in Ancient India

### *Metaphysical and Philosophical Foundations*

The themes of philosophical and/or cultural monism are recurrent not only in classical Brahminism (Vedism and Vedanta) Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism, but also in Indo-Islamic, Indo-British, and postcolonial secularizing versions. Indological and oriental interpretations, with their textual and ‘Orientalist’ (*a la* Edward Said 1978) biases, pioneered in bringing to light and offering early exploratory comments on Indian literary heritage and ontology. They are replete with cameos, ideas, and speculations about philosophical and/or cultural monism versus pluralism, *jnanayoga*, *karmayoga*, and *bhaktiyoga*. Besides these ideas, *rajadharma* or statecraft and *dharmashastra* flow into parallel streams, though the *dharmashastra* tradition is more prolific than the *arthashastra* tradition. It may also be added that in the classical Hindu tradition the abstract *purana* or mythic mode of writing generally prevailed over the positivist or factual *itihasa* mode of writing (for example, Kalhan’s *Rajatarangini*). Even Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* is more of an abstract treatise on statecraft than one specifically contextualized in time and place and dynasty. This style of writing political and historical texts changes in medieval India when philosophical, scientific, cultural, demographic, geographical, and agronomical, accounts are compiled in Indo-Islamic texts like the *Akbarnama/Ain-i-Akbari*, along with copious records of Mughal conquests in India.

Indo-British and post-colonial administrative accounts, gazetteers, census, and Royal/constitutional commissions take on a comparatively more historical, legal, and secular thrust. They heralded the advent of colonial and postcolonial modernity predicated on democracy and development, science and technology.

Marxist historians of ancient India on the basis of their scanning of Vedic and Buddhist texts sketch, increasingly combined with archeological evidence, the evolutionary transitions

from lineage- or tribe-based social and political formations of the early and later Vedic periods to post-Vedic *mahajanapadas* ('territorial states' *a la* Sharma 2005) and *ganasanghas* or oligarchic republics (*a la* Thapar 2002: 146–150). And, the subsequent historical evolution leads to the centralized monarchical-bureaucratic state of the Mauryas and Guptas in Magadha and Harsha in Thanesar and subsequently to feudal monarchies in early and late medieval periods (Sharma 2005, Thapar 2002, Kulke 1995) prior to the onset of the British colonial state. But history again, like Indology/Orientalism, is a branch of knowledge different from political thought. Though they can and do intersect and mutually benefit from each other.

### *The Vedic Folklores*

One sees the faint beginnings of political ideas in the Vedas, Upanishads, and epics, and then their crystallizations in the myths of the creation of the state in several Brahmanical and Buddhist texts. The most full-fledged outlining of the theory of state is found in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*. The Rig Veda is replete with the plurality of images of anthropomorphic personifications of natural forces in Indra, Agni, and Varuna. Agni is extolled as 'the household priest, the divine minister of the sacrifice, the chief priest, the bestower of blessings' (Rig Veda, 1.1, excerpted in Ainslie T. Embree, 1992, Vol. 1, p. 9). Indra, occasionally referred to as *ekadeva*, first emerges as a heroic warrior and victor and is subsequently elevated as the ruler of heaven, relatively above the norms that bind the humans. He is the god of thunderstorms and floors the demon of drought and darkness (Vritra) and sets the waters free. His victories produce light, dawn, and the sun. He settled the quaking mountains and plains. He stretches out heaven and earth like a hide; he holds asunder heaven and earth as two wheels, kept apart by an axle; he made the non-existent into the existent in a moment. Sometimes the separation and support of heaven and earth are described as a result of Indra's victory over a demon who holds them together' (Arthur A. MacDonell, 1993, pp. 43–44). Varuna emerges as the ruler of the cosmic law (*rita*, *dharmā*) that regulates the worldly activities. Varuna gets praised for powers and feats much like those of Indra. A verse in the Rig Veda says: 'Wise are the races [of gods and men] through the greatness of him [Varuna] who propped apart the two wide worlds. He pressed forth the high, lofty vault of heaven and, likewise, the stars. And he spread out the earth [beneath]. In my own person, I speak this together [with him]: 'When shall I be in [obedience to] Varuna? Might he take pleasure in my oblation, becoming free of anger? When shall I contentedly look upon his mercy? I ask about that trouble, Varuna, desiring to understand; approach those who know to ask [about it]. The knowing say the same thing to me: 'Varuna is now angry with you'. Was the offence so great, Varuna, that you want to crush your friend and praiser? O you who are impossible to deceive, wholly self-sustaining, you will explain this to me. I would swiftly humble myself before you with reverence to be free of guilt'. (Rig Veda, 5.86, trans. by Joel Brereton, Ainslie T. Embree, 1992, p. 11) We see here the earliest ideas of political obligation in the Indian tradition, in a precursive way.

The foregoing account is only a selective glimpse of the more prominent in the strikingly pluralistic Vedic pantheon. Two metaphors of similar nature are the 'thousand-headed,



thousand-eyed, thousand-footed' *Purusha* pervading 'the earth on all sides', still beyond it (Rig Veda, 10.90) and *hiranyagarbha* (golden embryo): 'who is the life-giver, the strength-giver, whose decree all [even] the gods honour, whose shadow is immortality and death—to what god should we do homage with our oblation?' (Rig Veda, 10.121, trans. Joel Brereton, Embree, 1992, pp. 19–20). In these visionary poetic and incipient philosophical explorations are seen the Vedic myths of creation and social formation. 'A golden embryo (*hiranyagarbha*) evolved in the beginning. Born was the Lord of what has come to be, he alone existed. He established the earth and heaven here. To what god should we do homage with oblation?' (Rig Veda, 10. 121) 'His [*Purusha*'] mouth became the Brahmin; his two arms were made into the Rajanya; his two thighs the Vaishyas; from his two feet the *Shudra* was born. The moon was born from the mind, from the eye the sun was born; from the mouth Indra and Agni, from the breath [*prāna*] the wind [*vāyu*] was born. From the navel was the atmosphere created, from the head the heaven issued forth; from the two feet was born the earth and the quarters (the cardinal directions) from the ear. Thus did they fashion the worlds' (Rig Veda, 10.90). 'Political' angle in these earliest texts are suggestively implied and inferred from cosmological hierarchy.

### *The Vedantic Idealist Vision*

The most significant texts in the culmination of the Vedic literature are the Upanishads that develop the earlier religious ideas, rituals and ideologies into spiritual and philosophical discourses. Much like the Vedas, the Upanishads are not a homogeneous and consistent system of thought. They also continue to lack in the self-consciously political or seek to rise above sociological and political realities of the time. What distinguishes them is 'their probing for new interpretations of the earlier Vedic concepts to obtain a more coherent view of the universe and man.' (Embree, 1992, p. 29). They exhibit a method of discovering the truth from the gross to the subtle, and an attempt of 'identifying partly or by degrees to seemingly dissimilar elements and arriving at a type of equation that, though at first sight irrational, will on further analysis or introspection reveal a unity' (Embree, 1992, p. 30). The multiplicities are reduced into a duality: the *brahman* or the pure idea or god and the *atman* or the self or soul. 'From this results the most significant equation of the Upanishads: *brahman = atman*' (Embree, 1992, p. 30).

*Ashvamedha* (horse sacrifice) was the most elaborately ancient Brahminical monarchical rite performed by a king desirous of extending his realm by setting free a horse to freely roam around, backed by a select armed band. It was brought back to the capital and sacrificed while symbolically copulating with the chief queen in an august ceremonial congregation. The *Brihadaranyaka* Upanishad sought to give a cosmological reinterpretation of the *ashvamedha* and offer its 'real meaning' in terms of

'a realization of the identity of the parts of this sacrifice [the horse] and the universe' equating the sun with his eye, wind with his breathing, fire with his open mouth, the year with the body (*ātman*), sky with his back, the atmosphere with his belly, the earth with his [under] belly, the directions with his flanks, the corners with his ribs, seasons with his limbs,

the months and fortnights with his joints, days and nights with his feet, clouds with his flesh, sand with the food in his stomach, rivers with his entrails, mountains with his liver and lungs, plants and trees with his hair, the rising sun with his forefront, the setting sun with his hindsight, the lightning with his yawns, thunders with his shaking, his watering with the rains, his neighing with the speech (*Brihadaranyaka* Upanishad, 1.1.1, excerpted in Embree, 1992, p. 30–31).

The metaphors symbolically underline the variety of elements and the importance of consensual nature of political conquest and hegemony.

### *The Jaina and Buddhist Visions*

The spirit of critical reinterpretation of the earlier Vedic texts that we find in the Vedanta texts was developed further, leading to a fuller critique and reforms in classical texts of Jainism and Buddhism. This great ferment, especially the Jaina and the Buddhist ones, occurred between the seventh and the fifth centuries BC and flourished most in the areas now forming Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh. Urbanization and economic changes had brought a new class of prosperous merchants besides the free peasantry in these areas where Aryan civilization was relatively new and less pervasive. The founders of these heterodox sets were Kshatriyas and the followers mostly Vaishyas. Both these sects did not entirely reject the Brahminical world view and political ideas. They appear, however, more down to earth and relatively less abstract and elitist.

Against Vedantic monistic idealism, Jain philosophy assumed plurality of souls and emphasized experience in the material universe. Hemachandra (born about c. 1089 in Gujarat and patronized by the Chalukya King Jayasimha, 1094–1143, a Hindu) in his poetic composition on the twenty-four *tirthankaras* and other eminent patriarchs and legendary rulers in Jain mythology portrayed the ideal king in terms of puritanical character, reformist legislation, and given to charity and welfare of the people. Such a ruler ‘will establish his own era upon earth’ (*Mahaviracharita*, 12. 59–770, excerpted in Embree 1992, pp. 84–85).

Somadeva, a Digambar Jain writer of the tenth century, portrays the characteristics of the ideal king in less puritanical and pompous garbs. In his *Nitivākyaṃrta* (17.180–84) he says a ‘true lord is he who is righteous, pure in lineage, conduct, and associates, brave and considerate in his behaviour’. For the prosperity of his subjects, the kingdom is the tree and the King the root. His order is ‘a wall that none can climb’. ‘The King is the maker of the times’, and in his kingdom ‘Indra rains in due season and all living things are at peace’.

These political ideas are hardly new when compared to Brahminism. However, in view of the pluralist and nonviolent temper of the Jain philosophy, their theory of kingship would appear to be less ‘idealist’ in terms of political thought and less inclined to what is called ‘realism’ in modern theories of international relations. However, it appears that early Jaina thought was more tolerant of societal autonomies than the two later Jain thinkers whose works are available with us and are briefly outlined above. It is quite possible that the early Jain thought was concerned more with what is now called the civil society than with the state.

Like Jainism, Buddhism too took a reformist stance towards the ritualistic and aristocratic features of early Vedism (though not of the later Vedanta or Upanishadic Vedism). Again, phenomenology, metaphysics, ethics, and epistemology of Buddhism, like those of Jainism, need not detain us here. A major Buddhist text, *Dīgha Nikāya*, addresses, among others, the question of the origin and evolutionary profile of the state. In statements attributed to the Buddha, it postulates that to get out of the evil and degenerate ways of society the people gathered together and reasoned and resolved: ‘Let us choose one man from among us, to dispense wrath, censure, and banishment when they are right and proper, and give him a share of our rice in return’ (*Dīgha Nikāya*, 3.80 ff. excerpted in Embree 1992: 127–1041). Thus was the *mahasammata* ‘approved by the whole people (*mahājana*)’ as ‘lord of the fields (*Khettanam*) and hence *Khattiya* (Skt. *Kshatriya*) ...’ (Ibid.). In the opinion of A. T. Embree (1992, p. 129), ‘this is probably one of the world’s oldest versions of the contractual theory of the state’.

*Dīgha Nikāya* (3.58 ff.) also goes on to offer a narrative of King Dalhanemi and his sons who anticipated the decline of the righteous state in due course when the *dharmachakra* (Divine Wheel) ‘sunk or slipped from its place’ and contrived a rescue operation by a would-be Universal Emperor. ‘He uncovered one shoulder, took a pitcher of water in his left hand, and sprinkled the Divine Wheel with his right, saying ‘Roll on, precious Wheel! Go forth and conquer, lordly and precious Wheel!’ (Ibid.). A perfect opening for the Mauryan Ashoka the Great with the archaeological heritage of rock and pillar edicts spread far and wide on the Indian subcontinent! Ashoka’s *dhamma* (Skt. *Dharma*) is among the earliest all-inclusive ideology of state and civil society.<sup>2</sup>

## The Hindu Vision

The *Amarakosh*, a Sanskrit dictionary composed sometime during the early Indian Middle Ages, though with contents that can be traced further back to the ancient period, does not contain the word ‘Hindu’ (though the term *Sindhu* is there). The connotation of the term Hindu is geographically communitarian, initially used not by Indians to denote themselves but by the Greeks and Persians to refer to the people living around the Indus (*Sindhu*). A. T. Embree (1992: 203–378) postulates that the centuries between the fourth and the onset of the thirteenth was the time of the formation of ‘the Hindu way of life’ comprising the sprawling branches of the tree of the Indian civilization. Philosophically and spiritually it included the ideas of *karma* (deeds), *dharma* (code), *avatar* (reincarnation), *sanatanata* (eternity sans beginning and end) of the *atma* (soul), and *bhakti* (devotion). Citing Raghavan and Dandekar approvingly, Embree finds an overarching philosophy of life in the classical Hindu concept of *Purushartha* (valour) that lends unity to the enormously varied streams of Hinduism. The ‘tetrad’ (*chaturvarga*) of *purushartha* is *dharma* (the code), *artha* (the matter), *kama* (love), and *moksha* (liberation). Sociologically, the caste ‘system’ is a uniform feature of the Hindu social structure, each unit of which is marked by ‘social customs that regulated marriage, food habits, occupations, and attitudes towards other groups’, and the society was integrated by ‘complex and interlocking social and economic

relationships between groups at all levels' (Embree, 1992: 205). It was during the early part of Indian Middle Ages that the role of the state shrunk to the maintenance of a stable social order so that various groups in the society could live out their lives in accordance with their *dharmā* (Embree, 1992: 207).

During this phase, India lacked an overarching subcontinental state, divided as it remained by four major regional states of the Guptas and Harshvardhana in the north and Pandyas and Pallavas in the south and numerous smaller kingdoms.

The contemporary and major regional languages of modern India also emerged during this period in their formative phases. The dialectics between 'dialect' and 'language', and the transformation of the former into the latter need not detain us here. However, it bears pointing out that the dialect of the Delhi-Meerut region (*Khari boli*) graduated to 'Hindavi' (*a la* Amir Khushro), Hyderabadī 'rekhta', Urdu, Hindustani (*a la* Mahatma Gandhi) and Hindi (in Devanagri script). The last-mentioned version is the official language of the Indian Union along with English under the Constitution of India.

## Political Thought in Later Medieval India

### *The Hindustani Vision*

In Islamic political thought, religious and political powers were initially undivided in Prophet Muhammad, who founded the faith around AD 610. On Muhammad's death, the succession issue caused a schism between those who supported Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet, and Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman, who were successively actually accepted by the community. The successful Sunni faction subscribed to the theory of elected Caliphate, which was supposed to be the agent, rather than the chief of the *ulama* (the authoritative interpreters of Islamic revelation). In the real unfolding of history, Umayyad (AD 661–750) and Abbasid Caliphs (AD 750–1258) turned to be hereditary and created basis of authority that partly diverged from the Sharia.

The most remarkable feature of the Indo-Islamic political thought is its adaptability to the Indian conditions. Muslim rulers in India, in the periods of the Sultanates as well as the Mughals, did not pay even a formal obeisance to the Caliphs in Bagdad. Embree (1992: 409) observes:

In the sixteenth century, members of Akbar's circle, under the influence of Shia doctrines and ideas mediated from Greek philosophy, were inclined to allow the 'just Imam' discretion to decide points of Sharia where there was disagreements among the doctors [of Islam]. Still, it is doubtful whether they were going beyond the ambit of the administrative discretion (*syāsa*) already allowed the ruler by some jurists and writers so that he might act in the best interests, though not according to the formal terms of the Sharia.

In practice, the readers of later medieval Indian history cannot miss a more generous political approach, by and large, among the rulers of the Mughal dynasty than among those of the

six dynasties of the Delhi Sultanate that preceded it, barring a few exceptions of eccentrics like Muhammad bin Tughluq among the Sultans and Aurangzeb among the Badshahs.

In Indo-Islamic political theory also a gulf is visible between Fakhr-i-Mudir, the author of *Shajara* at the court of Qutbuddin Aibak, who ruled between AD 1206 and 1210, and Abul Fazl, the author of the *Ain-i-Akbari* at the court of Akbar. The former postulated the ‘god-prophet-sultan’ triad, whereas the latter asserted: ‘It is communicated by God to Kings without the intermediate assistance of any one, and men, in the presence of it, bend the forehead of praise toward the ground of submission’ (*Ain-i-Akbari*, pp. ii-iv, excerpted in Embree 1992: 425–427 and 439–440).

The political theorists during the Delhi Sultanate were divided between those who believed that the Sultan had a duty to convert Hindus to Islam (*Ziauddin Baranī, Fatwa-i-Jahandari*, folios 12a, 119a-206 excerpted in Embree 1992) and those who advocated that Hindus were *Zimmis* or people who should be protected if they perform certain duties such as non-construction of new temples, non-rebellion, and respect and hospitality to Muslims, observance of dress and name codes, etc. (Sheikh Hamadani, *Zakhirat ul-Muluk*, folios 94a-95a, excerpted in Embree 1992). By the time of Akbar’s reign the Mughal state was acting upon policies like *Sulab-i-kul* and Abul Fazl’s advocacy of political pluralism towards the subjects, which amounted to an almost liberal toleration.

Moreover, we find something akin to the Hindu *varna* system in Abul Fazl, who divided the society into four orders comprising the warriors, artisans and merchants, the intelligentsia, and the workers. The corresponding elements of nature reflected in the four respective orders are stipulated to be fire, air, water, and earth. The departures from, and status reversals of, the *varna* system in the *Ain-i-Akbari* (pp. iv-v) are significant, though. The order corresponding to the Brahmins is relegated to the third place, that to the Kshatriyas goes to the top, and that to the Vaishyas goes to the second position. The socio-economic changes by the Mughal period may perhaps explain these status reversals and upgradations.

The greater political tolerance in India by the time of the Mughals should not surprise us. For the times had changed. The Mughal state had become more secure and struck deeper roots and established linkages of alliance, patronage, and powers with the Hindu rulers and subjects as compared to the Delhi Sultanate. Also, as later converts than the Turks and Afghans, the Mughals had retained their pre-Islamic tribal and princely cultural baggage and were more tolerant of the Hindus. The failure to conquer the whole subcontinent, particularly the south and the northeast and the fear of adverse effect of forced conversions also compelled them to be more compromising and pragmatic in Hindustan.

Yet, it is difficult not to feel a palpable difference in the Indo-Islamic political thought vis-à-vis inter-community relations as compared to the *Arthashastra*, Ashoka’s *dhamma*, and the *Manusmriti*. The latter are more deeply concerned about intra-Hindu community relations, whereas the Indo-Islamic texts are narrowly focused on the inter-community relations between the Muslims and the Hindus. This communal polarization was to become sharper and deeper in the first half of the twentieth century during the British colonial rule in India that ultimately caused the partition.

## Political Thought in Modern India

### *Modern Indian Vision*

The catalytic factors in the emergence of political thought in modern India were the British colonial rule, modernization of the Indian tradition, and the challenges of nation-formation, state-formation, and economic development. The patterns and trends of political thought in ancient and medieval India were too deeply entrenched to be totally unsettled and radically transformed either by the British colonial rulers or the emergent nationalist modernizers. Nevertheless, the colonial and nationalist projects could not get down to a serious engagement with Modernity without unleashing powerful forces of transformation, destruction, and reconstruction. Intended and unintended consequences of colonial modernity engendered new ideologies of liberalism, capitalism, nationalism, and democracy in various measures in the Indian context. The nationalist elites carried these ideologies to more fully fledged forms, adding on to them radical, socialist, and Marxist overtones. The medley of these new ideologies also produced counter-ideological and cultural forces of traditionalism, conservatism, revivalism, and communalism of caste, tribe, and religious variety. As India moved towards political independence, Indian political thought also increasingly addressed the problems of foreign policy and global and regional integration.

Kenneth W. Jones (1994: ix) observes, a student of modern India requires ‘a new vision of [the] change and a method of differentiating between what was new in the nineteenth century and what was a modification of long-standing cultural patterns.’ This theoretical and methodological puzzle continues to be the central concern of politics and social science research in India today. Religious fundamentalism and revolutionary radicalism have always met their Waterloo in India.

The mainsprings of changes in British India were globally economic, colonially political and phenomenally religious. The rise of British capitalism produced the political effect of the colonial rule in India. The immediately apparent product of the colonial rule was first felt in the socio-cultural realm: ‘Professional missionaries, polemical tracts and new rituals of conversion were only three of the components of religious innovation in South Asia during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’ (K. W. Jones, 1994: 1). None was, in fact, entirely an innovation in India, but the context and scale were certainly new. New forms of organization and technology were employed in religious pursuits. Politicization of religion exacerbated religious communalism out of proportion and competitive communalism vitiated the political process that culminated in the partition of India in 1947.

Political thought in British India—on the nationalist rather than the colonial side—emerged in an incremental and gradual way. For it had to come to terms with Western colonialism that eventuated into British imperialism, first of the East India Company, and, following the 1857 Rebellion or the ‘First War of Indian Independence’, of the British Crown. It also had to transcend the regional and ethnic divisions of the colony, often whetted and exacerbated by the ‘divide-and-rule’ policy of the colonial rulers and the Indian

princely states linked in subsidiary alliances under the paramountcy of the British Crown and *Pax Britannica*.

Between 1757 and 1849, the British were able to subdue their Indian as well as European rivals and establish their political dominance through direct or indirect rule throughout the Indian subcontinent. The educational, economic, and technological consequences of these seafaring conquerors were more decisive and consequential than the earlier foreign conquerors who had migrated into or invaded India through the north-western mountain passes. The Aryans and Central Asian Mongoloid tribes who came to India before the thirteenth century were absorbed into the Hindu *varna* system. This pattern of assimilation changed into one of integration after the Muslim conquests of Sindh in the eighth century, Punjab in the tenth century, and Delhi down to Deccan between the thirteenth and the first half of the seventeenth centuries. The post-Mughal Indian states of the Marathas, Sikhs, Jats, Afghans, Rajputs and Nawabs in the interregnum between the Mughals and the British amounted to political changes by and large, without the concomitant economic and social transformation from feudalism to modern bureaucratic and colonial capitalist states in a substantial way. The British in India made a beginning in this direction to not an inconsiderable extent. Smaller zamindars replaced the jagirdar grandees in eastern India; a freer class of peasantry emerged in the rest of the country, and then came a new English educated urban middle class as the standard bearers of, first, colonial and, subsequently, nationalist modernity. With the British being embroiled in the First and Second World Wars, small classes of Indian entrepreneurs and industrial workers also emerged in British India.

The foregoing, in brief, was the historical socio-economic context of the emergence of modern Indian political thought. However, social and religious reforms preceded any direct concern with political reforms. The socio-religious reform movements of this early phase have been classified into two major types by K. W. Jones (1994: Chapter 1). These are 'transitional' and 'acculturative'.<sup>23</sup>

Transitional movements linked the pre-colonial and colonial milieus in the initial period, when the colonial impact was less established and the number of anglicized individuals was limited in a particular movement. Traditional Brahmins and *ulama* largely led such movements. The examples of such movements are: the Namdharis and Nirankaris among the Sikhs; Sanatanis, Arya Samaj and Dev Samaj among the Hindus; the Khawarijites and Wahabis among the Muslims of the Punjab and North West. Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah founded by Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi in Rai Bareilly, Dar ul-Ulum Deoband in the United Provinces of Agra and Awadh, Christian Tamil Nadars and Chhattisgarhi Satnamis among the Hindu untouchables, Satya Mihima Dharma among lower castes and tribals of Orissa, etc.

The acculturative socio-religious movements, according to Jones (1994: 3 and 212), were the products of the established colonial milieu. While conscious of their indigenous cultural heritage, they 'sought an accommodation to the fact of British supremacy'. 'They could neither ignore the English nor could they join British society and find acceptance within it.' This category is illustrated by the Brahma Samaj, and the effect that Ramakrishna and Vivekanand had among

the Bengali Hindus, with spill-over effect in other parts of India. This category also included: Sayyid Ahmad Khan and his Aligarh movement with its base in the mid-Ganga Valley; the Radhasoami Satsang and Bharat Dharma Mahamandala among the Hindus of the same region and elsewhere; Singh Sabhas among the Sikhs of Punjab; the North-West Ahmadiyahs among the Muslims of that region; Manav Dharma Sabha, Paramahansa Mandali, Prarthana Samaj among the Hindus of central India and Maharashtra, Rahnumani Mazdayasnan Sabha among Parsis of the same region; Veda Samaj; and the Theosophical Society among the Dravidian Hindus; and Swami Narayana Guru among the untouchable Hindus of Kerala. Generally speaking, the pattern of regional distribution of the foregoing two categories of movements reveals that (a) acculturative movements followed on the heels of transitional movements, and (b) the more pervasive the impact of Western civilization in a region, the greater the likelihood of emergence of acculturative movements.

The advent of the printing press in British India, and with a more advanced technology than when it first arrived in Europe, brought about the phenomenon of what Jones (1994: 213–218) calls ‘Protestantization’, drawing an analogy with the Reformation in Christianity in the wake of the European Renaissance. The replacement of Sanskrit and Persian by the regional vernacular languages paralleled the European shift, when modern European languages replaced classical Latin and weakened the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and its clerics. The printing press made the religious texts more widely available for anyone willing and able to read. Similarly, the authority of Brahmins, Parsi priests, and *ulama* was undercut by the spread of education, urbanization, and the print media.

My own new analytical framework developed for a comprehensive analysis of modern Indian political thought and action delineates seven major patterns and phases of evolution. These are (a) reactive (for example, the 1857 rebellion); (b) responsive (examples of which were the Brahmo Samaj founded by Raja Rammohan Roy in 1828 in Calcutta, the Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College of Aligarh founded in 1875 by Delhi-born Sayyid Ahmad Khan and the Congress Moderates); (c) revivalist (of which examples were the Arya Samaj founded by Gujarat-born Swami Dayananda Saraswati in 1875, the Deoband School and the Congress Extremists); (d) revolutionary nationalists (best exemplified by Bhagat Singh and his Hindustan Revolutionary Army); (e) militarist (for example, Subhash Chandra Bose and his Indian National Army); (f) transformative (examples of which were Congress Nationalists like Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and others; B. R. Ambedkar, the Dalit liberal democrat; Congress Socialists and Socialists like Jayaprakash Narayan, Ram Manohar Lohia and others; and Marxists like M. N. Roy, Rajani Palme Dutt and others); and (g) free enterprisers like Chakravarti Rajagopalachari and the more recent neoliberal capitalists.

Since the literature on modern and contemporary Indian history, and now increasingly on political thought, is prolific, I do not consider it necessary beyond putting together the foregoing classificatory scheme, which is more or less self-explanatory. I should, however, like to make a few critical and constructive comments on (a) the ‘Indian Renaissance’ and (b) the major themes in modern Indian political thought.



It goes without saying that we must compare India with Europe with circumspection. For the fallacy of circumlocution here is even more serious than that of narcissist fixation. It is notable that the American historian of South Asia, K. W. Jones (1994), has warily used the term ‘Protestantization’ in the context of his study of socio-religious movements in British India, but has quietly avoided using the term ‘Indian Renaissance’. Is the reason for his cautious silence due to the fact that unlike Europe, India appears to have had not one renaissance and reformation but at least three? These are: (1) the critical spirit of the Vedantic Upanishads, Jainism and Buddhism, and the syncretic tolerant and egalitarian religiosity of the Bhakti and Sufi saints, including Guru Nanak; (2) the mature Mughal tolerance and fascination with philosophical and sociological heritage of India and (3) the renascent and reformatory movements in British India of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There may be something more to it.

Aurobindo was perhaps the first Indian who seriously pondered over the phenomenon called the ‘Indian Renaissance’ (reawakening). To his mind, if at all we can talk about Renaissance in India, it involved three major ‘steps’ (1) ‘the reception of the European contact, a reconsideration of many principles of the prominent elements and some revolutionary denial of the very principles of the old culture.’ (2) ‘a reaction of the Indian spirit upon the European influence, sometimes with a total denial of what it offered and a stressing both of the essential and the strict letter of the national past, which yet masked a movement of assimilation’ and (3) ‘process of new creation in which the spiritual power of the Indian mind remains supreme, recovers its truths, accepts whatever it finds sound or true, useful or inevitable of the modern idea and form, but so transmits and Indianizes it, so absorbs and so transforms it entirely into itself that its foreign character disappears and it becomes another harmonious element in the characteristic working of the ancient goddess, the Shakti of India, mastering and taking possession of the modern influence, no longer possessed or overcome by it’ (Aurobindo 1918, 1920).<sup>4</sup>

Synoptically, the major elements in European Renaissance (AD 1350–1650) were

1. the discovery of ancient Greek and Roman classical languages and lore
2. the replacement of these classical languages by the contemporary vernacular languages of European nations
3. the advent of the technology of printing press and mass circulation of religious texts and the new streams of secular knowledge
4. the weakening of the Roman Catholic Church and the rise of independent and powerful states in post-feudal Europe
5. the discovery of the New World in 1492 by Christopher Columbus, and
6. scientific discoveries in astronomy and the Scientific Revolution initiated by Nicolaus Copernicus and Galileo Galilei.

Renaissance made the Reformation possible and the latter spurred geographical and scientific explorations, the gateways to the European Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution.

*Prima facie*, there appears to be some parallels between Europe and India in the comparisons mentioned above. But are the superficial similarities in the realms of religion, language, politics and science sustained and deep enough to produce identical effects in India that may be attributed to the 'Indian Renaissance'? Aurobindo starts off with some similarities between the recent Celtic movement in Ireland and the 'Renaissance' in India. He goes on to say that

The word [Renaissance] carries the mind back to the turning point of European culture to which it was first applied; that was not so much a reawakening as an overturn and reversal, a seizure of Christianized, Teutonised, feudalized Europe by the old Graeco-Latin spirit and form with all the complex and momentous results which came from it. That is certainly not a type of renaissance that is at all possible in India (Heehs, 2005: 1–2).

The Indian Institute of Science looks upon the Indian scientists as the torchbearers of Indian Renaissance (see endnote 4). Ironically though one may well wonder whether there is an Indian science distinctly different from the Western science or is it only an invocation of Indian patriotism or nationalism? Such a demarcation may be a big question even in the realm of modern history and social science. It may perhaps have some relevance in the realm of culture, though globalization has put even this domain under universalizing pressures, postmodernist fragmentations and fundamentalist reactions notwithstanding.

A comprehensive and integral study of this area of studies would do well to address the following six major themes:

1. Transition from social reforms to political reforms and the concomitant puzzle of bridging the gap between communal fragmentation and national integration in the condition of colonial domination and dependency
2. Nation-formation in a country of unparalleled religious, linguistic, caste and tribal diversities in the world
3. State-formation in a society-centred ancient civilizational context where the task of modernization and political development demanded a strong state in the twentieth century
4. The challenge of economic development in a backward economy riddled with cumulative socio-economic and regional economic disparities
5. The predicament of evolving a national and supranational framework of federal governance in a historical society of radical decentralist tendencies and a contemporary socio-cultural mosaic within the nation and beyond national boundaries in South Asia face to face with simultaneous pressures of decentralization and regional and global integration; and
6. The forging of a concerted strategy of combating the terminal threats of environmental and ecological decay and climate change.

## Notes

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1. The term ‘militant nonviolence’ was first used by Erikson (1969).
2. Dharma, more or less comparable to the concept of ‘Justice’ in Plato’s *Republic*, is a key concept that runs through the ages in ancient Indian social and political thought. The ideal of Dharma has three loci, namely (a) in the *individual*, i.e., in the right ordering of the psychic tendencies of *satva* (truth), *rajas* (domination), and *tamas* (banality); and the balanced pursuit of *dharmā* (dutifulness), *artha* (materiality), *kāma* (desire, sex), and *moksha* (redemption); (b) in the society, i.e., in the performance of the duties of the four-fold *varna* system comprising the classes of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras; and (c) in the *state* [*rajadharma* or rightful statecraft]. The concept of *dharmā* with modifications recurs in the Vedas, epics, Gita, *Manusmṛiti*, Kautilya’s *Arthashastra*, Ashoka’s edicts, and Jain and Buddhist texts. For a recent addition to the sprawling literature on *Dharma*, see Adam Bowles (2007).
3. For a somewhat similar but more comprehensive typology of nationalist thought and action in India, see Mahendra Prasad Singh (1980). It comprises the following types of political inclinations, tendencies and orientations: (a) Retreatism and acculturation: The nationalism of liberal socio-religious reformers and Congress Moderates, (b) Hindu revivalism: The nationalism of Congress Extremists and terrorists, and (c) the Gandhian synthesis: the nationalism of militant nonviolence.
4. Several commentators on modern Indian political thought have used the concept of Indian Renaissance as the historical background of the emergence of political thought in contemporary India (e.g., V. P. Varma, 1993: Chapter 1; V. R. Mehta 1996, Chapter 8). However, Varma clubs the terms ‘Renaissance, Enlightenment and Nationalism in India’, whereas Mehta uses the term ‘Renaissance’ alone and associates it to the ‘Beginnings of Modern Thought in India’. The Indian Institute of Science in Bengaluru has put up Chapter II of its publication *Torch Bearers of Indian Renaissance*, with the caption ‘Pursuit and Promotion of Science’ with brief intellectual portraits of modern Indian scientists and statisticians. A sketch of Sir C. V. Raman, the Indian Nobel Laureate in physics (1930), adorns the front page ([www.iisc.ernet.in](http://www.iisc.ernet.in)). Obviously, Indian Renaissance is imprecisely multifaceted and apparently a wide-open conceptual hold-all.

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# Kautilya: Theory of State

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## Introduction

When there was renewed interest in and exploration of Indian philosophy and political thought during and after the Indian Renaissance in British India, the streams of the initial rediscoveries tended to flow into one of the following channels: (a) Orientalist-Indological (b) nationalist (c) idealist-philosophical and (d) the pluralist-philosophical concerns with varieties of schools of Indian philosophy and thought. Orientalism or its India-centered vision made pioneering discoveries of texts and later of forgotten and obscure Eastern/Indological/Indian traditions in the realm of letters and arts, and it projected them as distinctly different traditions from the Western ones.<sup>1</sup>

The nationalists were primarily concerned with bringing to light ancient Indian concerns with political ideas and institutions, systems of law and living, and transcendent nationalistic identities beyond tribe, caste, and other forms of ethnicity. The nationalist stream, in the present context, is represented by K. P. Jayaswal's *Hindu Polity*, which tried to demonstrate during the nationalist movement that ancient India had had democratic ideas and institutions.<sup>2</sup>

The best protagonist of the idealist-philosophical restatement of the *advait* or non-dualist metaphysics of Shankara was Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan. Shankara's metaphysical monism is the archetype of Indian idealist philosophy, which rejects the duality of *Brahman* and *atman* and considers the material world illusory. Philosophical pluralism is propounded by the *Sankhya* school. The concern with the pluralist-philosophical system of ancient Indian thought is best represented in Surendra Nath Dasgupta's five-volume *History of Indian Philosophy*.<sup>3</sup> A common thread running strongly through all these works, by and large, was the ubiquitous metaphysical assumption that Indian philosophy and thought were primarily religious and society-centered rather than being concerned with material life, political life, logic and epistemology.<sup>4</sup>

It took longer for Orientalists, Indologists, and students of political thought to establish a new trail that showed that ancient Indian thought was as much preoccupied with theories of reliable knowledge about this world and theories of state and government as with metaphysics. The ancient Indian epistemological thought is brought to the fore in the pioneering researches of Tsherbatsky and Bimal Krishna Matilal.<sup>5</sup> A similar new window opened when the political theories of origin of state in the Vedic and Buddhist texts and the treatises of Kautilya, Manu, Kamandaka and others were brought to light by textual scholars and historians, increasingly in combination with archeology and epigraphy.<sup>6</sup>

## The Kautilya Text

Legend has it that Kautilya was a teacher in the famous ancient Indian university at Takshshila. He helped one of his students Chandragupta in dislodging the Nandas, the ruling dynasty of Magadh, and establishing the Maurya dynasty. The text of the *Arthashastra* is attributed to this teacher, who is also known as Chanakya and Vishnugupta.

A new English translation of the *Arthashastra* has recently become available.<sup>7</sup> L. N. Rangarajan's translation follows in the trail of R. Shamasastri's and R. P. Kangle's.<sup>8</sup> Shamasastri had discovered the text from a pandit in Tanjore in 1904, translated it into English first and published it in 1915. Kangle later critically edited and numbered the *sutras*, translated them, added his commentary, and published the outcome in three volumes between 1960 and 1965. Rangarajan has attempted a new translation and reorganized the chapters in the original text into what he considers a more reader-friendly version. He goes on to say that 'presently available translations suffer from archaic expressions, voluminous footnotes, incomprehensible literalness, muddling of the text with tedious facts, difficulty in understanding a topic scattered in different places, divergence of opinion and personal prejudices or predilections'.<sup>9</sup>

The subjects dealt with prominently are: constituent elements of the state, major departments of the government, taxation system, armed forces and network of spies and the theory of *rajamandala* and foreign policy. A series of interpretative inferences can be made here. The first would be about the structure of the text itself. As the *Arthashastra* itself candidly admits, the text generally attributed to Kautilya is not the first in the tradition of the *arthashastra*, as distinguished from the tradition of *dharmashastra*. However, only the Kautilyan text has survived and was discovered early in the 20th century. Moreover, even in the case of the Kautilyan version, there are two different points of view as to whether it was 'created' or 'compiled' as a file by a series of scholars at different or the same point of time.<sup>10</sup>

The dating of the *Arthashastra* is the subject of a great deal of controversy. The range of possible dates places the text at times in the Mauryan and at others in the Gupta period. According to Romila Thapar, the text was originally written by Kautilya, the minister of Chandragupta Maurya (c. 322–298 BC) but it was commented and added on to by various later writers until about the third or fourth century AD.<sup>11</sup> T. R. Trautmann seeks to establish through the syntax and grammatical structures used in different chapters of the text that they must have been

authored by different people and/or in different periods.<sup>12</sup> Kangle, who does not reject this argument out of hand, concedes that ‘composition of a text has different connotations in ancient India, with the persistent tradition of oral transmission, from what it means in modern times’.<sup>13</sup>

### *The Social Structure*

We could make some inferences about the structure of the society, economy, and the state that are consistent with the factual details provided in the text. The structure of the society that emerges is one based on the *varnashrama* system. The *varna* system refers to the four orders into which society was ideally divided, and the *ashrama* system refers to the four phases of a life-cycle viz. *brahmacharya* (the celibate learner), *grihasthya* (the house-holder), *vanaspratha* (the anchorite), and *sanyasa* (the renouncer). The society was divided into four *varnas*: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishya, and Sudras. There were two kinds of Brahmins or the priestly class: *srotriya* and Brahmins in general. The special function of the Brahmins was the performance of ceremonial and sacred rituals. They, especially the *srotriyas*, enjoyed special privilege in social relations, property ownership, and laws. The *srotriyas* ranked next only to the temple establishment, hermits, and heretic ascetics. *Purohita*, the royal chaplain and adviser, enjoyed a position secondary to the royal family but exercised a good deal of influence on the king. In settling virgin territories, *srotriyas* were given tax-free land which could be transformed into hereditary property. Debt to a *srotriya* was treated second only to sovereign debt. Brahmins could bear arms as well but they were not supposed to be overtly martial in temperament and war. Kshatriyas were regarded as the ‘protectors of the land’. Nobility of birth and royal lineage were considered matters of overriding importance. Only a male heir could succeed a king, though the rule of primogeniture was not a settled convention. Kshatriyas were valued as the best recruits to the army as compared to other *varnas*.

Vaishyas as a *varna* are seldom mentioned in the text. But traders and merchants were an important and mobile segment of the society. Brahmins and Kshatriyas were apparently more equal than others, for Vaishyas are singled out in the text in the context of differential punishment. But they were also wealthy, for they feature in the section on laws of inheritance as well. They were apparently so ubiquitous that secret agents often disguised as traders. Sudras were agriculturalists, artisans, craftsmen, and actors and entertainers. A Sudra was also an Aryan and could never be taken as a slave. They, like the Vaishyas, formed a large section of society and usually lived in uninhabited areas. Both Vaishyas and Sudras were also recruited in large numbers in the army. However, Kshatriyas were highly regarded as the best soldiers.

Women were supposed to be always subject to patriarchal control by father, husband, or son. Non-Aryans were outside the pale of the four *varnas*. Their numerical strength is not clear though they were apparently not immune from slavery. The most frequently mentioned non-Aryans are called *chandals* who were probably ‘untouchable’ in their relation to an Aryan woman. Historians of ancient India are unanimous in their assessment that unlike the ancient Greek society, slavery was almost nonexistent in ancient India. This is borne out by the *Arthashastra*, which refers to *Vrishalas* and *Pashandas* who were non-Aryan ascetics belonging to the *Sramana* (non-brahmanical) sects.



The *Arthashastra* also refers to the ‘unsubdued jungle tribes [who] live in their own territory, [and who] are more numerous, brave, fight in day light and, with their ability to seize and destroy countries, behave like kings’ (8.1. 41-43). Rangarajan’s surmise is: ‘on the whole, tribal chieftains seem to have been independent of the kings so long as they did not harass the country and came to king’s help when called upon to do so’.<sup>14</sup> The jungle tribes were obviously outside the pale of the *varna* system at the time of the *Arthashastra*.

Occupations and professions listed in the *Arthashastra* are numerous and it mentions over 120 of these. They were mainly from agriculture, fisheries, animal husbandry, manufacturing based on arts and crafts, food products and vending, forestry, white-collar workers, defence services, textiles, jewelry, etc.

The Kautilyan text also refers to foreigners (*baharikas*, *agantub*, *agantukab*), although Rangarajan adds that some of ‘these terms may refer to strangers to the locality rather than true foreigners’. The text also has three references to ports and ferries (2.28) and sea-faring vessels. Foreign traders could visit these only if they were frequent visitors or vouchsafed by local merchants.

Movements within the country, especially into the countryside and new settlements were regulated by passports and immigration rules. The entry into the fortified city was rigorously controlled by regulator officers and secret agents.

## The Economy

The structure of the economy as revealed in the text appears to be considerably developed with regard to terms of ownership of property and division of labour. The institution of private property existed and so did state-ownership. This flies in the face of the Orientalist theories such as, for example, the Asiatic mode of production *a la* Karl Marx and oriental despotism *a la* Karl Wittfogel.<sup>15</sup> Both these theories are premised on the absence of the institution of private property and royal absolutism.

The state claimed ownership of common resources such as water and all residual, abandoned or disputed but unsettled private claims to property. Birds, fishes, vegetables on waterworks, irrespective of whether built by the state or private parties belonged to the state. The state also appropriated all treasure troves in the excess of 100,000 *panas* (the unit of money, from Sanskrit *parnas*) and 5/6th of smaller troves.

The king is advised to maintain a diversified economy efficiently and profitably. Silver coins of one, half quarter, and one-eighth *pana* and copper coins of one *mashaka*, half *a mashaka*, one *kakani* and half *a kakani* were in circulation. Land, livestock, mining and fishing were all both in state and private ownership. Virgin land tracts were state-owned but arable land was cultivated both by the state and the private parties. However, state monopolies existed in gold, silver and gems, liquors, gambling. The state and local and foreign merchants were involved in trade and commerce. Multiple sources of revenue are indicated in the text: from the *durgam* (fortified towns), from the *rasbtram* (the countryside), from *kbani* (mines), *setu* (irrigation work), from *ayamukham* (accounting), from warehouses, saving from expenditure, from *ayudhiyam* (supply of soldiers in lieu of tax barter, confiscation) and so on. The rates of tariff schedules is also given in the text.

One gets the impression from the text that the economy was predominantly agrarian. The crown lands (*sita*) were either cultivated directly under the administration of chief superintendent of crown land or let out to share-croppers at the rate of 1/4th or 1/5th of the harvest going to the tiller if they invested only on labour and one-half if they contributed all inputs. Private cultivators were under obligation not to keep their land fallow and pay land revenue at the rate of 1/6th of the produce. Animal husbandry was the second most important activity, and trade was ‘the third pillar of economic activity’.<sup>16</sup>

## The *Saptang* Theory of State

The pre-Kautilyan theory of state in ancient India closely resembled the early states in great many tribal or lineage-based societies where the role of the state was proposed to uphold the *varnashram* laws, i.e., laws of society given by customs and traditions. It is similar in some sense to the early *laissez faire* state in mercantile economies of Europe in the early stages of commercial and industrial revolution, where a minimalist state only facilitated commerce and contract rather than actively intervened in the economy. Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* made a significant break with this tradition by stipulating that the state could make its own laws and that in case of conflict between the laws of the *dharmashastras* and the *dharmanaya* of the state, the latter would prevail.<sup>17</sup>

True to the *arthashastra* tradition, the *Arthashastra* does not concern itself so much with the social customs and laws as with secular economic activity and the structure of the state and government. As the *saptang* (seven-organ) theory of state suggests, the state was a corporate entity comprising (1) *swami* (king), (2) *amatya* (ministers and other high officials); (3) *janpada/rashtra* (territory and the population inhabiting these), (4) *durga* (fortified town and cities), (5) *kosha* (treasury), (6) *danda* (forces), and (7) *mitra* (allies). This is in the order of the seven constituents of the state presented in the *Arthashastra*. They are supposed to be organically interdependent and interlinked according to Kautilya. The argument we find here is that earlier authorities cited by Kautilya opined that a calamity befalling a constituent higher in the order is more detrimental to the state than the lower one, but Kautilya shrewdly disagrees and ends up arguing that each element is equally important and indispensable. But, he admits reminiscent of ancient Greek teleologists and modern functionalists, ‘that partial calamity of one element is more likely to be functionally substituted by more healthy elements than a simultaneously debilitating calamity affecting more than one part of the state.’ But ‘[lastly,] a calamity which threatens to destroy all other elements shall be considered as [the most] serious, irrespective of what position the element affected occupies in the list of priorities’ (*Arthashastra*, 8.1.63/Rangarajan, 1992:127).<sup>18</sup>

### *Departments of Government*

Agriculture appears to be the most important economic activity of the time, and yet other economic activities were also considerably developed. In verse 2.12.37 the *Arthashastra* says:

‘The source of the financial strength of the state is the mining [and metallurgical] industry; the state exercises power because of its treasury. With [increased] wealth and a [powerful] army more territory can be acquired thereby further increasing the wealth of the state’.<sup>19</sup> The Kautilyan state demonstrated a considerably high degree of functional specialization and structural differentiation. It mentions 34 different departments of government, their respective *adhyakshas* (heads) and their qualifications and duties. They are as follows as per Rangarajan’s (1992) summary:

1. *Samahartri/Samnidhatri*—Chief Controller of Accounts
2. *Akshapatalamadhyaksha*/Nagavanadhyaksha—Chief Elephant Forester
3. *Koshadhyaksha*—Chief Superintendent of Treasury
4. *Akaradhyaksha*—Chief Controller of Mining and Metallurgy
5. *Lobadhyaksha*—Chief Superintendent of Metals
6. *Lakshanadhyaksha*—Chief Superintendent of Mint
7. *Khanadhyaksha*—Chief Superintendent of Mines
8. *Lavanadhyaksha*—Chief Salt Commissioner
9. *Suwarnadhyaksha*—Chief Superintendent of Precious Metals and Jewellery
10. *Kostagaradhyaksha*—Chief Superintendent of Warehouses
11. *Panyadhyaksha*—Chief Controller of State Trading
12. *Kupyadhyaksha*—Chief Superintendent of Forest Produce
13. *Ayudhgharadhyaksha*—Chief of Ordinance
14. *Pauthavadhyaksha*—Chief Controller of Weight and Measures
15. *Manadhyaksha*—Chief Surveyor and Time Keeper
16. *Sulkadhyaksha*—Chief Controller of Custom and Octroi
17. *Sutradhyaksha*—Chief Textile Commissioner
18. *Sitadhyaksha*—Chief Superintendent Crown Lands
19. *Suradhyaksha*—Chief Controller of Alcoholic Beverages
20. *Sunadhyaksha*—Chief Protector of Animals and Controller of Animal Slaughter
21. *Ganikadhyaksha*—Chief Controller of Entertainment
22. *Navadhyaksha*—Chief of Shipping
23. *Pattanadhyaksha*—Chief Controller of Ports and Harbours
24. *Go-adhyaksha*—Chief Superintendent of Crown Herds
25. *Ashwadhyaksha*—Chief Commander of Cavalry
26. *Hastiyadhyaksha*—Chief Commander of Elephant Corps
27. *Rathadhyaksha*—Chief Commander of Chariot Corps
28. *Pattadhyaksha*—Chief Commander of Infantry
29. *Mudradhyaksha*—Chief Passport Officer
30. *Viviti Adhyaksha*—Chief Controller of Pasture Lands
31. *Dhyutadhyaksha*—Chief Controller of Gambling Superintendent
32. *Samsthadhyaksha*—Chief Controller of Private Trade

33. *Bandanagradhyaksha*—Chief Superintendent of Jails
34. *Dentadhyaksha*—Chief Superintendent of Temples

These were the top echelons of the ministerial or administrative hierarchies of the central state. The distinction between the two categories, ministers and officials, is not very clear in the text, nor is the division between the central and provincial administration self-evident. The only vertical administrative hierarchies clearly mentioned appear to be those for the village and city/town level, including fortified cities. The administrative structure outlined above is by and large horizontal; the vertical chain of command and responsibilities is mostly left unarticulated. Only in few instances do the readers get a glimpse of explicit or implied hierarchical control, supervision, and coordination. However Rangarajan (1992: 308) makes bold to assert: '[T]here were at least two grades of ministers and head of the departments, apart from the councilors who need not have had direct administrative responsibilities. ... Kautilya says that one who fails all four tests (*dharma*, *artha*, *karma* and fear) shall be sent to difficult posts such as forests, mines or factories. Hence the salary of the head of the department could have been anywhere between 1000 to 12,000 panas per annum, with or without perquisites'. Romila Thapar reads into the Kautilyan text the reference to ministers as well as council of ministers (*'mantrino-mantriparishadamcha'*)<sup>20</sup>.

It goes without saying that the monarch himself occupied the apex of ministerial and/or bureaucratic hierarchy(ies). But it would have been an incredible task of supervision and coordination of policy making and coordination for one sitting at the hub of such a huge and sprawling state structure. It is the simultaneous presences of the institution of private property along with royal ownership, some implied autonomy of the *janapada/rashtra* from the state, and the differentiation between the state and the kingship within it that clearly demarcates the political system of the *Arthashastra*, on the one hand, from Marx's theory of the 'Asiatic mode of production' and Karl Wittfogel's 'oriental despotism', on the other.

Nevertheless, it must be conceded that, besides the huge bureaucratic apparatus, the Kautilyan blueprint of the state also outlines large armed forces and espionage. This is probably inevitable for a structure envisaged for the victor. As per their understanding of the evolution of state in ancient India, historians visualize the lines of development such as from *gopati* (owner of livestock) to *bhupati* (owner of land), from *janapada* to *mahajanapada*, *ganasanghas* ('republics') to the monarchies.<sup>21</sup> In the opinion of Burton Stein, 'these so called 'republics' are far better viewed as social 'communities as states''.<sup>22</sup> In some reckonings, they existed from about 800 CE to the time of Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, conventionally ascribed to the fourth century CE. As clan-based polities, 'republics' have been identified from Pali sources to early Buddhism and from Jaina texts. Other source such as the *Mahabharata*, the *Arthashastra*, and Panini's *Asthtadhyayi*, add to this evidence and also shift the ground of investigation from northwestern to northeastern India during the sixth to fourth centuries CE.<sup>23</sup> As already hinted above, the *Arthashastra* appears to be the most crucial text mirroring the above transition. Even though it could be used as a manual of statecraft by any king, it was primarily meant for the *vijigsu* (the one desirous of conquering the entire Indian

subcontinent). Such a king was described in later Buddhist texts as the *chakravarti*.<sup>24</sup> The early Indian lexicographical source *Amarakosha* (a text apparently post-dating the *Arthashastra* to perhaps sometime around the Gupta period) defines the *chakravarti* as follows:

*Raja tu pranatosheshasamantah syadadhiswarah.  
Chakravarti sarvabhaumo nriponyo mandaleshwarah (8.2).*

(The *Chakravarti* king owns all the lands and is the master of the *mandala*.)

### A Centralized State?

What is the extent of political centralization evident in the *Arthashastra*? Some may argue that centralization was greatly enhanced by giving considerable powers to the monarch and the officials. Centralization of state power is implied also in the very fact that the Kautilyan text departed from the society-focused *dharmashastra* tradition to join the state-focused *arthashastra* tradition emphasizing *raja dharma* (discussed in the following section). The same statist bias is reflected in the conquest-motivated and anti-‘republican’ temper of the *rajamandala*, the large extent of state-monopoly in some cultural and economic activities and regulatory role of state in the rest of the economy, the state-directed settlement of virgin tracts of land and immigration rules, and a huge network of spies. At the same time, however, lack of a tight centralization in the state may be argued on the basis of the limits of human ability on the part of the monarch to work such a bureaucratic apparatus, the fairly elementary and commonsensical nature of some of the exhortations, the rather pre-capitalist monetization and pre-modern technological development, and the lack of articulation of horizontal and vertical organizational control in the bureaucratic structure having multiple levels.

An analysis of Rangarajan’s English translation of the *Arthashastra*, commentaries on the political thought of Kautilya, and the historiography of the Mauryan state suggest that arguably three different interpretations have been made and are possible. These are textualist, nationalist, and Marxist. In the literature previously available, textual scholars or Indologists either downplay the centralist interpretation,<sup>25</sup> or vigorously refute it.<sup>26</sup> Kangle refers to H. Jacobis’s comparison of Kautilya with Bismarck, but refutes it citing A. Hillebrandt by arguing that ‘the comparison was unfair’ as one was a teacher and the other a statesman; besides, ‘the whole spiritual atmosphere in which the two moved was different’.<sup>27</sup>

One could still make a comparison at the level of ideas, history, and politics, but being Indologists and ideographs Kangle and his company obviously do not believe in such abstract comparative exercise. But, then, Kangle slips into a more detailed treatment of the comparison between Kautilya and Machiavelli. Citing approvingly W. Ruben’s comparison between the two, Kangle concurs that ‘the standpoint of both is that of ‘realpolitik’, yet both the political thinkers add that the ruler must be simultaneously ‘self-restrained and active’ (that is, not fatalistic).<sup>28</sup>

Heesterman makes the most unequivocal and sustained argument against the centralist/bureaucratic interpretation of the *Arthashastra*. He argues that the objective of the text may well

have been to break the mould of tribal political organizations and give them a bureaucratic form and purpose, but it has not really succeeded in this enterprise.<sup>29</sup> To quote Heesterman:

Thus a second book deals at considerable length with a long list of administrative departments but significantly leaves out the important point of how these departments tie in with each other and with the whole of the administrative machinery. Specifically, the text leaves its student in the dark about who is responsible to whom. Delegation, chains of command, and reporting are conspicuous by their absence. It is even possible to be in doubt as to whether the important official called *samabartr[ī]* is a provincial 'collector' or the chief administrative officer of the state as a whole in the manner of a [medieval Indian] *divan*.

The second major strand in Heesterman's argument is that the procedure and the occasion of the auditing of accounts presented by the *mahamatras* and its approval, by penalty-enforced unanimity, without the presence of the monarch smacks of a social and religious moment than a bureaucratically and rationally meaningful process subject to royal veto. The *mahamatras* are thus shown to be co sharers of authority with the king who is 'no more than a *primus inter pares*'.<sup>30</sup> [First among equals.]

Historian R. S. Sharma takes up cudgels with Heesterman but the latter's argument is not without chinks:

When Kautilya provides for several heads of a department, he is not really concerned with ensuring equality of peers, which is a feature more of the kin-based society, but with preventing them from being detrimental to the state. Kautilya faces a dilemma. On the one hand, he wants the work to be done, for which he provides that departmental heads should not quarrel. On the other, he wants that these heads should not act in concert, as they may grab the income from the undertaking.<sup>31</sup>

The nationalist interpretation of the *Arthashastra* appeared keen to show to the colonial masters that the ancient Indian/Hindu text was enough to disprove the contention that India lacked a tradition of political thought. They were also inclined to highlight any textual or historical evidence of popular democratic, republican, and federal political ideas, institution, and values in the antiquities.<sup>32</sup>

V. R. R. Dikshitar was at pains to argue, not always very convincingly, that the Mauryan state was 'federal', 'not unitary', 'roughly a composite of federal states', although he conceded that it was 'an intricate task to set forth the substantial relations which existed between the imperial government and each of the provinces or states now united in the empire as its member'.<sup>33</sup> He approvingly cited S. K. Aiyangars's view that

Empires in India under the Hindus attempted to be no more than kingdoms, of a small compass comparatively, which gathered together under the aegis of the leading state, which

went by the name of imperial state for the time being, other kingdoms constituting merely an expanding *mandala* in political dependence. The administration that had to be carried on by the imperial state was a comparatively simple one, as by a well-established principle of devolution, most of the actual administration was carried on by local bodies for comparatively small states ....<sup>34</sup>

We may clarify here that the devolutionary interpretation of Aiyangar (a parallel, for example, would be the Mughal *subas*) appears to be more persuasive than the federal one offered by Dikshitar, (something like the states in the USA).

The Marxist interpretation is, frankly speaking, more historiographical than textual and nationalist. Their interpretation is swayed by two additional factors: archeological, and the historiography of European feudalism. Being primarily historians, they are compelled by their craft to study a text in the context of, or in combination with, archeological effects: while this is methodologically more sophisticated, it tends to rob the text of its autonomy and its timelessness. Besides, the historiography of European feudalism prompts them to discover a parallel of the Roman Empire in India in the Mauryan state in Magadha. Just as the decline of the centralized competence of the later Roman Empire led to the subsequent rise of feudalism, similarly, the feudal historiography of Indian history needs a centralized Mauryan state whose decline caused feudal fragmentation and compartmentalization of state sovereignty from the emperor to the Brahmins and *samantas*.<sup>35</sup>

R. S. Sharma and Romila Thapar theorize that the Vedic political organizations were pre-state social formations, and proto-states or states in Indian history first materialized in the post-Vedic period when the primary egalitarian ethos of the tribal society in the mid-Ganga valley gave way to the class-stratified society in which monarchy and aristocratic oligarchy and coercion were needed for the perpetuation of inequalities of property. First the Nandas and subsequently the Mauryas in Magadh founded the first large-scale states. Sharma finds emphatic passages in the *Arthashastra* that prescribe 'the unquestioned loyalty of the officials to the head of the state', primacy of a 'royal decree based on the customs of the people (*dharmanyaya*)' over the '*shastra* (the brahmanical law book)' whenever the two come into conflict, appointment of candidates as *amatya* who are discovered by conducting secret tests (unknown to them) owing 'primary allegiance to the king, even in violation of prevalent religious practices laid down by the brahmanical religion, which [e.g.] does not permit the teaching of the Veda to one who is not entitled to the performance of the Vedic sacrifice (*yajya*)', and 'the state control of even brahmanical institutions'.<sup>36</sup>

Romila Thapar also interprets that the *Arthashastra* 'endorsed a highly centralized system where the king's control over the entire exercise remained taut'. However, she argues that it would not have been humanly possible to exercise control over such a vast and diverse territory, economy, and population as that of the Mauryan Empire. Accordingly, she speculates that there must have been 'three variants in the administrative pattern': (a) a centralized one in the 'metropolitan hub' (b) a devolutionary one in 'core areas' of 'strategic importance and of agrarian and commercial potential', and (c) a decentralized one in 'the peripheral areas'.<sup>37</sup> R. S. Sharma concedes that it

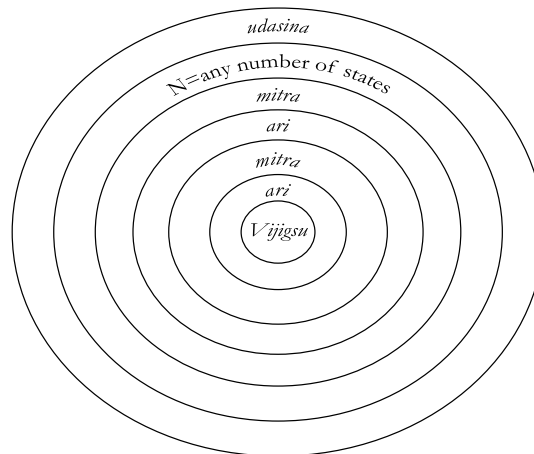
is not clear whether the over 30 superintendents of Book II of the *Arthashastra* worked in ‘the hinterland of the capital or in a wider area’, but does not find a wider administrative network improbable if the text is put in the context of nearly 500 excavated sites showing shreds of Northern Black Burnished Ware (NBPW) at Mauryan levels and nearly 30 sites showing NBPW as well as punch-marked coins carrying similar symbols giving ‘clear indications of supralocal provenance’. These archeological effects ‘presuppose constant contact between the various town settlements’ ‘in the middle Gangetic plains and its periphery’.<sup>38</sup>

## The Theory of *Rajamandala* (The Circle of States)

Kautilya formulated a detailed theory of foreign policy and inter-state relations based on the maxim that a friend’s friend is likely to be a friend and an enemy’s friend an enemy. He laid down six basic principles of foreign policy, viz,

1. pursuit of resources by the *vijigsu* (the one desirous of conquest) for campaigns of victory
2. elimination of enemies
3. cultivation of allies and providing help to them
4. prudence rather than foolhardy valour
5. preference of peace to war
6. justice in victory as well as in defeat

The theory of inter-state relations in the *Arthashastra* can be represented in a diagram as seen below.



**Fig. 1.1** A *Rajamandala*



The circle of states keeps expanding to include the ‘middle kingdoms’ of enemies until the distant states that may turn indifferent (*udasina*) to goings on in the circle relevant to the victor at the centre of the *rajamandala*.

We have already noted the novelty of the *Arthashastra* in treating statecraft as one that sought to recognize the state as the source of positive law, independent of social custom and tradition, and with a basis of authority and legitimacy that went beyond an ethnic or orthodox sectarian communalism. The theory of *rajamandala*, sketched out as a Weberian ideal type rather than as a historical case study of a particular state, draws attention to its other robust originality in the Indian tradition. It differs from the earlier brahmanical writings and texts dealing with social contract theories of origin of states.<sup>39</sup> It aims rather at laying down the function and structure of an inter-state subsystem of the cultural and civilizational zone of the ancient Indian subcontinent, now called the South Asia.<sup>40</sup> In the sound historical judgment of Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund:<sup>41</sup>

In ancient Indian history, the period which corresponds most closely to Kautilya’s description is that of the *mahajanapadas* before Magadha attained supremacy. Thus it seems more likely that Kautilya related in normative terms what he had come to know about this earlier period than that his account actually reflected the Mauryan empire during Chandragupta’s reign.

(Note that Kulke and Rothermund date Kautilya to the pre-Mauryan period, differing from most Indian historians.)

The word ‘foreign policy’ thus used by Rangarajan (1992: chapter x-2) in the context of the *rajamandala* theory is not exactly apt for a fluid inter-state subsystem within the larger inter-state system—going beyond the range of the Indian subcontinent. At the center of this political network was the political system ruled by the *vijigsu* (the victor or rather one desirous of victory). It was most probably positioned as the state with pretensions of political sovereignty. Relations with the kings who formed the concentric wider circles were based on the major premise that the immediate neighbour, more likely than not, may have reasons or pretensions of being the enemy (*ari*) of the victor while the neighbour of the neighbour could be a friendly king (*mitra*). Exceptions to this rule are admitted all along as a minor premise. Thus a middle king (*madhyama*) in any of these circles could turn out to be an ally or an enemy and intervene on the side of the victor by supporting him or decide to be neutral (*udasina*) or an enemy (*ari*). The policy of the victor should, of course, be to turn as many of the kings as possible into allies or take neutral positions.

Logically, I may add here, there could be a king/state in the non-internationalized or non-globalised world of that period, who/which could be totally disinterested or unaware of the kingpin of the *rajamandala* of the Indian subcontinent. The objective of the victor would or should be propelled by the motive of the prosperity (*artha*) of the ruler, and the king ruled within the teleology of the text. The closest concept to the Greek teleology in the *Arthashastra*, to my mind, could be said to be the *purusbartha* of the king as well as his subjects. The term *purusbartha* in the ancient Indian texts means the four-fold purpose of life, society and state comprising *dharma* (law), *artha*

(material well-being), *kama* (desire) and *moksha* (salvation). In the *Arthashastra*, however, the last element seems not to be emphasized.

The victor of the centre of the *rajamandala* could use the domestic resources of his state and its allies in pursuit of his conquest. Using the seven factors of power, 'the qualities of the king, then that of his ministers, his provinces, his city, his treasury, his army and last but not the least, his allies'.<sup>42</sup>

I am inclined to agree with the centrist interpretation of the text. V. R. Dikshitar<sup>43</sup> finds in the Sanskrit text of the *Arthashastra* that besides the primary *rajamandala* of the conqueror, in the circle of the adversary kings (i.e., 'the *madhyama* king's circle of states and *udasina* king's circle of states') besides the seven elements of sovereignty, every competitive state possessed two additional emergent factors out of the seven-fold combination: consummation (*sidhi*) and the transcendental power (*shakti*). Dikshitar goes on to state 'that monarch who is possessed of these elements and the means above mentioned becomes the overlord of not only his *mandala* but of the whole of the *mahamandala* through further exertion of his power (*shakti*)'.<sup>44</sup>

The strategy of the victor is contingent on four factors: (a) relative power equation among the victors, (b) objective or empirical deviations from the ideal policy prescribed, (c) classification of the motivations of the actors involved, and (d) the unanticipated and unpredictable or chance factors. The power in such a fluid structural and motivational context is not a constant quality. To quote from the text: 'One should neither submit spinelessly nor sacrifice oneself in a foolhardy valour. It is better to adopt such policies as would enable one to survive and live to fight another day'.<sup>45</sup>

There is a parallel between the theories of *saptang* state and *rajamandala* of Kautilya in the modern neo-realist or structural-realist theory of international relations formulated by Kenneth N. Waltz.<sup>46</sup> Waltz earlier postulated three levels of international politics, namely, the level where state behaviour is explained in terms of action and psychological motivations of individual functionaries of state, the level where international relations are shown to be a function of the domestic regime of state, and the level where international anarchy bereft of a sovereign power makes inter-state relations to be caused and conditioned by the structure of world politics, whether multipolar, bipolar, or unipolar.

The history of political ideas regarding states in ancient India also shows a similar line of evolution: the ideal kings Rama and Yudhishtir in the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata culminate into the theory of *saptang* state and *rajamandala* in *Arthashastra*.

The continuing relevance of Kautilyan models is underlined by my comparison between Kautilya and Waltz above. This is further underlined by texts like the *Kamandaka Nitisar*, separated almost by a millennium from the *Arthashastra* and discovered probably in East Asia.<sup>47</sup> It draws heavily on the previous text and in the opinion of Kulke and Rothermund<sup>48</sup> : 'The relevance of the *Arthashastra* for medieval Indian polity is that the coexistence of various smaller rivaling kingdoms was much more typical for most periods of Indian history than the rather exceptional phase when one great empire completely dominated the political scene'.<sup>49</sup> Read with Dikshitar (1932), the theory of *rajamandala* may have a universal applicability.

## Conclusion

A glance at the wider corpus of the textual tradition of ancient India from the evolutionary perspective would suggest an interesting line of development that seems to be along these lines: We see the philosophical and social visions of Vedic, Jain, and Buddhist thought ranging from monism to dualism to pluralism, on the one side, and concern with the theoretical and practical problems of the political community that gradually transited from tribal republican and confederal states to monarchical bureaucratic states of the Nandas and Mauryas of Magadha, on the other. Subsequently, after its decline there emerge the states of later and ancient and early medieval Indian history, first characterized by Marxist historians of India as feudal, a view more generally accepted later. To which phase of this evolutionary—I hesitate to use the word historical here—narrative could the Kautilyan *Arthashastra* have belonged? The most probable phase would appear to be the period of the replacement of the Magadhan state of the Nandas by the Magadhan state of the Mauryas. We lack clinching literary, historical and/or archaeological evidence for this inference. Yet as a student of political ideas and institutions, I find it more consistent with the legend, literature and historical interpretation now prevalent. It could not have belonged to an earlier period when Vedic and post-Vedic poetic and metaphysical speculations were profound but political ideas and institutions were singularly simpler, localized, and less clearly demarcated from social formations and organizations. Like the ‘frontier’ in American and Canadian history, there have also and always been frontiers of the Himalayas and the *aranyas* (forests) of mind and space in Indian life, letters, and imagination. The *Arthashastra* could not have belonged to a period later than that suggested by the great political transition from the Nandas to the Mauryas too. The *Arthashastra* sits uncomfortably with the temper and texts of the post-Mauryan phase, when the forms of states, with the possible exception of the Gupta state, were less bureaucratically centralized.<sup>50</sup> The weakened central state(s) then took frequent recourse to land grants to Brahmins (presumably for ideological domination) and *samantas* (feudal lords), a practice not unknown earlier, but very limited and infrequent. This resulted in fragmentation of sovereignty to feudal classes and communities, especially in peripheral areas. This continued through the early and later medieval Indian history<sup>51</sup> and in an attenuated and regionally limited way even during the British Raj.

A frontal attack on feudal institutions and mentality had to await the social reform movements of the elite and the subaltern classes and communities at the turn of the 19th century, and post-independence land reforms and the ‘silent revolution’ of the political rise of the lower classes, dalits and the tribal communities through electoral politics and public policies of the state in India.

As for the centralist versus decentralist debate over the *Arthashastra*, the protagonists of the former point of view can be said to be, speaking metaphorically, silently subscribing to the subsuming of Kautilya to the Kshatriya’s possessive motif, and the latter to the brahmanical renunciatory motif. I find it more persuasive to agree with those who argue that rather than being an incumbent prime minister, Kautilya may have been a kingmaker in the Gandhi–JP tradition of politics of renunciation in democratic India, and Sonia Gandhi emulating the same in federal India today. The freedom with which the *Arthashastra* offers advice to all kinds of kings, strong

and weak, lend it an authority or legitimization that is wider and detached from any *purohit* and the prime minister in office, the two functionaries that are stipulated by the Sanskrit text to be present by the sides of the monarch at the time of consultation with any minister. None of the Pali royal edicts of Ashokan rock and pillar inscriptions mention these super-ordinates, apparently next only to the king.<sup>52</sup> But do not pay too much heed to that. Authority and legitimization in the brahmanical tradition is more ideological than coercive any way.

Finally, while the general consensus among scholars has been that the theory of *rajamandala* is situated in the Indian subcontinent, yet a wider applicability of the model beyond this region may not be far-fetched. Dikshitar<sup>53</sup> in fact finds theoretical evidence for it right in the text. In the present age of democratization, federalization and globalization, the theory of *rajamandala* has the potential of being transplanted into what may be called '*vayaparamandala*', both regional and global.

## Notes and References

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1. The terms 'Orientalism' and 'Indology' are of Western origin and are used to refer first to Westerners, and subsequently to Indians as well, specializing in Eastern and Indian/South Asian cultures respectively. Orientalism, of late, has been roundly decried as a misrepresentation and a veiled attempt to colonize and dominate the Eastern societies and cultures. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).
2. See, for example, K. P. Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity: A Constitutional History of India in Hindu Times* (Calcutta: Butterworth, 1924); A. S. Altekar, *State and Government in India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1958, [1949]).
3. Surendra Nath Dasgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy*, five volumes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922).
4. Even S. Radhakrishnan sees Indian philosophy through metaphysical lenses. See his *Indian Philosophy*, 2 vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998; first published 1923, revised 1929.
5. See Bimal Krishna Matilal, *Language and Reality: Indian Philosophy and Contemporary Issues* (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1990, 2nd ed., first published 1985); *Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); *The Word and the World: India's Contribution to the Study of Language* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).
6. See, for example, the works of R. S. Sharma, Romila Thapar and others cited below. Other scholars in this regard are B. N. S. Yadav, D. N. Jha and Vivekanand Jha, among others.
7. L. N. Rangarajan, *Kautilya The Arthashastra* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1992).
8. R. P. Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra* (Bombay: Bombay University Press, 1965), three vols; *Kautilya Arthashastra* (Sanskrit Text, English translation, Introduction), Translated by R. Shamasastri, edited by V. Narayan (Delhi: Chaukhamba Sanskrit Pratisthan, 2005), 2 vols.
9. Rangarajan, *Kautilya The Arthashastra*, p. 27.
10. S. C. Mishra, *Evolution of Kautilya's Arthashastra: An Inscriptional Approach*, Foreword by R. S. Sharma (Delhi: Anamika, 1997). Mishra argues:

'The final emendation of the text seems to have been done around the 12th century AD. The inscriptions from the 9th to 12th centuries assume importance as they have incorporated some very significant terms of our text in large numbers. The epigraphs of this time-bracket not only give the continual echoes of the

designations and officers of the functionaries of the *Arthashastra* but also numerous references to *adhyaksapuracara*, the very title of Book II in our text. Book II of the *Arthashastra* appears to have come down to us as a result of some kind of overhauling, reshuffling and/or recasting during this time-bracket, and the aggregate of the chapters has derived the name of *adhyaksapuracara*' (p. 209–10).

Sharma in his Foreword finds 'many of the findings of the author acceptable' and hopes a scholarly debate may lead to some rethinking of some long-held inferences of other scholars.'

11. Romila Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, rev. ed.), pp. 218–225.
12. T. R. Trautmann, 'The Structure and Composition of the Kautilya Arthashastra', Ph.D. dissertation, University of Iowa, 1968, cited in Rangarajan, *Kautilya Arthashastra*, pp. 19–20. See also S. C. Mishra (1997), *Evolution of Kautilya's Arthashastra*.
13. Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra*, 1965, part III, p. 104.
14. Rangarajan, *Kautilya: The Arthashastra*, p. 53.
15. The idea/concept of 'oriental despotism' has a long lineage going back to Aristotle and Montesquieu. Karl Wittfogel developed it further, linking it to the concept of 'hydraulic' civilizations/societies as the structural basis of 'total power' by dint of control over water resources for population and irrigation managed by an agrarian bureaucracy. Marx and Engels also fell into this misconstrued Orientalist conceptual trap by postulating a specific mode of production in Europe, i.e., feudalism. In the Asian context, they thought, Asiatic mode of production (AMP) rather than feudal mode of production reigned supreme. In their imagination the Asiatic climatic and geographical conditions, coupled with the absence of private property and stagnant peasant production and craftsmanship, created atomistic village communities at the base and the despotic state at the top. See Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (1957). Even Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990) is not completely free of Orientalist biases. These Orientalist distortions stand refuted by D. D. Kosambi and other Indian historians. Kautilya's *Arthashastra* and Asoka's edicts are the self-evident textual and archeological refutation of both oriental despotism and Asiatic mode of production.
16. Rangarajan, *Kautilya: The Arthashastra*, p. 86.
17. Romila Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*.
18. Rangarajan, *Kautilya: The Arthashastra*, 8.1.63, p. 127.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 304.
20. Romila Thapar *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (1997), ch. IV, p. 98.
21. R. S. Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991, 3rd rev. ed.), chaps. XIV, XXII. See also his *India's Ancient Past* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), chaps. 12, 13, 15 and 16.
22. Burton Stein, *A History of India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 22.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Romila Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (1997), p. 8.
25. Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra*.
26. J. C. Heesterman: *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship, and Society* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985).
27. Kangle (1965), *The Kautilya Arthashastra*, p. 269.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 270.
29. Heesterman (1985), *The Inner Conflict of Tradition*, chapters 1 and 9.

30. Ibid., 133.
31. R. S. Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India* (1991), p. 393.
32. K. P. Jayaswal (1924); V. R. R. Dikshitar, *The Mauryan Polity* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1932, reprint 1993).
33. Dikshitar, *The Mauryan Polity* (1932), p. 78.
34. Quoted in Dikshitar, *The Mauryan Polity* (1932), p. 77.
35. For illuminating discovery of feudalism in Indian history and the pioneering contribution to this interpretation, see the nine papers published together under the caption 'D. D. Kosambi: The Man and His Work', guest-edited by Romila Thapar in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XLIII, No. 30, July 26–August 1, 2008: 34–108. For an excellent review of the feudal school of historiography and a few dissenting voices, see Hermann Kulke (ed.), *The State in India 1000–1700* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), especially the Introduction by Kulke and Harbans Mukhia 'Was There Feudalism in Indian History?'
36. Sharma (1991), *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, pp. 263–4.
37. Romila Thapar, *The Penguin History of Early India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2003), pp. 195–7.
38. Sharma, 1991, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, pp. 399–400.
39. Ibid: Chapter V.
40. See Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, 'Kosambi and the Discourse of Civilization', *The Hindu*, New Delhi, 31 July 2008, p. 9.
41. Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund, *A History of India* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 1991), p. 63.
42. Ibid., p. 63.
43. Dikshitar, 1992, *The Mauryan Polity*, pp. 74–77
44. Ibid.
45. Rangarajan, *Arthashastra* (1992), 7.15.13–20, 12.1.1–9, p. 543–544.
46. For works of a leading Neo-realist theorist, see Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959); and Scott Sagan and Kenneth Waltz (eds), *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003). Waltz thinks that more nuclear powers may be good for international peace due to deterrence, while Sagan is a non-proliferationist as new nuclear-weapons-states are more likely than not to lack organizational and political ability. Ironically, two modern works of geopolitical nature K.M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance* (Mumbai: Somaiya, Special Indian edition, 1999, first published 1953; and Sanjay B Chaturvedi 'Representing Post-Colonial India: Inclusive, Exclusive Geopolitical Imaginations', in Klaus Dodds and David Alkinson (eds), *Geographical Traditions: A Century of Geographical Thought* (London: Routledge, 2000) pass *Kautilya's Arthashastra* by without even a nod!
47. J. R. Mitra (ed.), *Kamaandakya Nitisara* (Calcutta, 1984).
48. Kulke and Rothermund (1991), *A History of India*, p. 63.
49. Ibid.
50. Kulke and Rothermund, *A History of India* (1991). In a passage quoted in the text above (note 34) discount this probability, but their argument is as speculative as ours here. So it is their word against ours, without any positive historical evidence.
51. Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, 'Political Processes and the structure of Polity in Early Medieval India', and M. Athar Ali, 'Towards an Interpretation of the Mughal Empire', both in Hermann Kulke (ed.), *The State in India* (1995).
52. Romila Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (1997), p. 96.
53. Dikshitar, *The Mauryan Polity* (1932), chap. II.

## Manu: Social Laws

*Nalini Sinha*

Manu, the author of *Manusmriti*, is the first teacher, according to legends, to reveal the essence of humanity to mankind and was the first legislator to prescribe norms of social life and practices, later incorporated in various *Dharmashastras* and *Sambitas*, premised on a moral view of history. *Manusmriti* is a pivotal text, which was presumably compiled, especially the passages on the caste system, only during the early centuries CE.<sup>1</sup> It encompasses pragmatic visualization as well as idealization of life or how life should be lived. It is primarily concerned with *dharma*, which includes but also transcends the Western concepts of religion, duty, law, right, justice, practice and principle. It gives us a bird's eye view of the prevalent religious and temporal practices of the time.

It is also worth mentioning here that the text in question is probably the work of not one person, rather of several authors. Yet, we attribute it to someone named Manu, and call it Manu's Laws, quite different from say Gautama's Laws or Yajnavalkya's Laws. Manu is often regarded as the mythological ancestor of the human race, the Indian version of Adam.

The interpretation of *Manusmriti* or its English equivalent the *Laws of Manu* is fraught with enormous difficulties because of the fitting *shlokas* in which the entire text is composed. Today, these writings together are attributed to Manu and consist of 2685 verses. It covers the entire gamut of human life, from social obligations and duties of the various *varnas* and individuals in different stages of life to Hindu philosophy. A cursory glance of the text reveals the richness and diversities of the social, political, economic, religious, ethical and aesthetic dimensions of life. It is a microcosm of the Hindu and Indic civilization of the time.

The title of the work poses a problem for the readers, because the text is known by two different names, *Manusmriti* and *Manavdharmashastra*. The title *Manusmriti* does not have the term

*dharmā*. Moreover, *smṛiti* is in contrast with *śruti*, which means ‘revelation’. The term *śāstra* connotes laws as well as teachings, treatises or text. In fact, the book may be regarded as a synthesis of philosophy, religion and law focusing on a very wide yet complex worldview.

Western scholars have examined the text from different perspectives. Manu’s was among the first of all Sanskrit works to be translated into various European languages. Sir William Jones was the first to translate the text into English, and this was subsequently translated into various European languages like German, French, Portuguese and Russian. J. Duncan M. Derrett calls the book ‘India’s greatest achievement in the field of jurisprudence’.<sup>2</sup> Nietzsche was full of praise for Manu’s writings and used it as a stick with which to beat Christianity, which he characterizes as ‘the victory of Chandala values ...’.<sup>3</sup>

*The Laws of Manu* were composed by members of a particular social class or *varna* known as Brahmins or priests. There is an impression that the text was created by priests for their exclusive use. It must be remembered that the term priest at that time was used in a wider connotative sense. A priest was held to be the ‘paradigmatic human being’,<sup>4</sup> a complete and perfect example of mankind, a kind of ideal. The text is a depiction of our complex cosmic system, embedded in a conceptual structure that encompasses the universe as a whole. In the process the text reflects the thoughts and ideas of ancient India.

Manu also dwelt at length on the nature of social life or the relations between the four social classes or *varnas*, viz., priests (Brahmins), rulers and warriors (Kshatriyas), commoners (Vaishyas) and servants (Shudras).

It should also be understood that many of the ideas expressed in the *Manusmṛiti* were not original and had already been articulated in the Vedic texts. Manu captured the existing social practices and prevalent ideas and codified them in the text. This depiction of the natural and social order was preserved in later Indian thought. In the Vedas, the culinary metaphor has been used to illustrate the natural and social world. Nature in the Vedas was regarded as a hierarchically ordered set of *mandalas* (circles), and the social world, no less than the natural one, is one of the rulers and the ruled, consumers and the consumed, exploiters and the exploited, the strong and the weak. The text declares that ‘those that do not move are the food of those that move’. Eating and killing were regarded as two sides of the same coin. The Hindu metaphor of the Law of Fishes, the *Matsyanyaya*, whereby the bigger fish eat the smaller ones in an anarchic universe, is a continuation of Vedic assumptions. Manu only reiterated Vedic presuppositions. Meat was regarded as the best kind of food. This had a deeper significance as it suggested that the stronger naturally dominates and engulfs the timid and has a higher place in the social chain. Vegetarianism and non-violence came only later, as revisionist ideas postulating a critique of the older vision of the natural order of things. Buddhism and Jainism challenged these fundamental assumptions of the Vedas.

The text of Manu is pivotal in the priestly response to the crisis confronting traditional Aryan culture. It is indeed a valuable historical document that successfully synthesized and created a cultural paradigm. The text can, in this context, be seen as a complement to the *Bhagavad Gīta* and to the great epics, the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, whose objectives were similar.



It attempted to extend its reach to all people as well as situations—the king as well as the ritual priest, the untouchable as well as the priest, the householder as well as the *sanyasi*, and women as well as men.

## Rajdharma

The seventh chapter of *Manusmriti* dwells at length on various aspects of *rajdharma* or statecraft. The concept of *rajdharma* has always been one of fundamental importance and has provoked much deliberation and discussion in the *Dharmashastras*. Who should be a king? How is he to be educated? What is the type of education to be imparted to a king? How can a king be elected? What are his duties in his personal life? What should be his duty in public life? How is the preservation and integration of the social order to be achieved? These were some of the core questions it sought to address. Besides these, a number of other things form part of the *rajdharma* of the ancient Indic polity. Though all aspects of statecraft had been debated upon earlier, Manu was the first to systematize the science of government and administration.

Manu was an ardent supporter of the ‘divine right theory’ of the origin of state, which considered the state to be a creation of God. K. P. Jayaswal holds the view that the theory of the divinity of the king was advanced by *Manusmriti* to support the Brahmin empire of Pusyamitra, and to counteract the Buddhist theory of the origin of the state by contract.<sup>5</sup> God, as the creator of the entire cosmic order, is responsible for the welfare of the people as well as the harmonious functioning of the whole order. With this idea in mind, he created the institution of kingship and the king was His representative on earth. This has been elaborated even in the Vedas and Upanishads. *Manusmriti* also subscribes to the idea that king is a creation of God.<sup>6</sup>

Since the king was the most important unit of the entire state administration, Manu emphasizes the intellectual and moral qualifications of the ruler or the king. He is asked to follow the advice of the Brahmins who are learned in Vedas, and are in a position to control their senses. The *Arthashastra* too extols the virtues of a king’s self-control so that he can control his subjects better.

Manu’s king was an ideal man, well educated, scholarly, efficient and a person of high morals and intellect. He was not a slave to his sexual desires and instincts and, at the same time, free from anger and greed. He treated all his subjects equally. Manu compares the personality of this ideal king to the ocean, deep and turbulent from within, hiding both pearl and filth, but calm on the surface.<sup>7</sup> Manu also prescribes certain virtues a king had to possess. The king had to be free from corruption but true to *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksba*, the four pillars of *satvik* life. Since he is the chief executive of the state, he should also possess qualities like *sama*, *dama*, *danda* and *bheda*. He also had to be modest, polite, courteous, and firm and determined.

The terms *Arthashastra* and *dandaniti* are applied to the science of government from two different perspectives. *Kamasutra* defines the *Arthashastra* as education, lands, gold, cattle, domestic utensils and the augmenting of what is acquired. Where it concerns the government of the people and punishment of offenders, it is called *dandaniti*. Almost all authorities conform to the

opinion that a state or *rajya* is constituted of seven elements (*prakriti*)<sup>8</sup>. It is therefore called the concept of *Saptanga Rajya*, or seven-element state. These seven *prakritis* are:

1. *Swami* (ruler or sovereign)
2. *Amatya* (minister)
3. *Janapada* or *rashtra* (the territory of the state and its people)
4. *Durga* (fort, fortified city or capital)
5. *Kosa* (accumulated wealth in the ruler's treasury),
6. *Danda* (army) and
7. *Mitra* (friends or allies of the *rajya*).

The word *prakriti* has wide-ranging connotations and could mean elements, attributes or constituents of a state. The *Sukranitisara* compares the *saptanga rajya* with the human body, i.e., it reflects the organic theory of the origin of state.<sup>9</sup> The king is the head, the ministers its eyes, its allies the ears, the mouth signifies the treasury, the army its mind and, lastly, the capital and *rastra* as its hands and feet. All the seven *prakritis* are complementary to others and if even one is defective, the state cannot function well. It is also indicative of the fact that Manu, like the author of the *Mahabharata*, believed in the existence of an organic unity among the various elements of the *rajya*, where all elements work harmoniously towards one ideal or goal. Manu has further tried to emphasize the unity of the seven elements although they are different in their individual character. *Rajya* is viewed as the kingdom not only in popular parlance but also in *smritis* and works on polity like Manu's.<sup>10</sup>

Manu's king is an ardent supporter of the divinity principle and he also believes in *Matyasanyaya* and the application of the *danda*, the *danda* being the coercive power or authority of the ruler or the power of punishment. The basis of punishment, according to Manu, is *dharmasutra*. He says:

*Dandasasti Praja Sarba*  
*Danda abavirakhyati,*  
*Danda Suptesu Jagarti*  
*Dandam Dharma Bidurbudha*<sup>11</sup>

Manu further elaborates that the punishment meted out should be in proportion to the severity of the crime committed.<sup>12</sup> Manu and Kautilya share similar views on the coercive authority or *danda* of the king. Manu develops this thought further on the lines of the old arthashastra thinkers. Manu further states that the Lord created *danda* for the sake of king and kingdom, and then made his own son the protector of all creatures and dharma or law. *Danda* not only rules over people but also protects them. The whole world is kept in order by the fear of *danda*. The king who is truthful, wise, virtuous, efficient and impartial is justified to use *danda*. On the other hand, the king who is corrupt and deceitful is destroyed

by the same *danda* which he inflicts. He is destroyed along with his relatives and kingdom. The whole world stands in awe of one who is ready to apply *danda* (Manu VII, 103). No individual, be he the father, the mother, friend, or domestic priest, is exempt from the king's *danda*, should they fail to carry out their duties (VIII, 334).

The function of the *danda* is to ensure individual security of person and property as well as stability of the social order. This concept of *danda* is in complete harmony with the doctrine of divine creation and endowment of the temporal ruler. *Danda* is at times also identified with *dharma* or law, indicating that one is the essential means for fulfilling the other. Manu also lays down the principle of the king's unlimited jurisdiction on all offenders and criminals irrespective of their social or political status. This is in conformity with the *Arthashastra* principle of *danda* and its application. He further states that God made punishment or *danda* to enable the king to discharge his duties effectively. He has also cautioned that power or force should be used judiciously after ensuring that the punishment is given only to those who are actually found guilty, with the intention of correcting them and at the same time serving as a warning to others.

Chapter Seven of *Manusmriti* also deals with the duties a king is supposed to perform. It lists eight types of duties for the king. These duties are concerned with income, expenditure, maintenance of the conduct of the personnel, building of roads and forts (*durga*), building ties with allies etc. The king must treat all subjects equally and be free from any kind of apathy towards any section of the people, except the guilty. The king should always take the counsel of learned individuals. One of his most important duties is to defend the *rajya*. It was also his duty to support and look after the helpless, aged, disabled, pregnant women, widows, orphans and those suffering from diseases and calamities.

Manu reiterates the *Arthashastra* doctrine of the four political expedients of conciliation, bribery, discussion and force. He considers all of them to be important, but is of the opinion that force should be used only as the last alternative. Manu also deals at length with the organization of the government. *Manusmriti* provides for the formation of a council of ministers in the organization of government to aid and advise the king in the proper functioning of the administration. The text absolutely forbids arbitrary and despotic rule of the king. He made provision for the appointment of high officials or ministers called *sachiva* to look after each department separately. The number of the ministers varied between eight and ten according to the importance of the portfolios held. These ministers had to be learned, efficient and well acquainted with the various problems they might encounter. They also had to be learned in the Vedas and be loyal to the *Rajan* or the king.<sup>15</sup> The ministers belonged to two categories. The first were those who held the post hereditarily and the second were those who were appointed for their intelligence and efficiency.

*Manusmriti* also laid down five principles for the appointment of the council of ministers. These were the principles of tradition, ability or qualification, examination, fulfilment of objectives and lastly the test of courage or bravery. It also stipulated a division of power and distribution of functions among the ministers on the basis of efficiency and merit. Manu also makes it clear that the king should always discharge his duties in consultation with the ministers, both collectively and individually. According to Manu, a wise king must always follow the opinion of

the *adbikarins* or ministers with portfolios, the precedents and his subjects. He must never follow his own opinion. When the sovereign becomes independent (of his council), he runs the risk of ruin. In time, he loses the state and his subjects.<sup>14</sup>

Manu's also looks into the matter of local government and the army, which is the means of controlling the subjects as well as the boundaries of the kingdom or state. His format for local administration consists of a number of officials at various levels in charge of single and larger units of villages with a minister of the king to regularly scrutinize their work. The primary unit of local administration is the village with a headman. The successively higher levels of local government were formed by groups of ten, twenty, hundred and a thousand villages. He also insisted on a superintendent of all affairs with an army of spies to assist him in 'exploring the behaviour of the people'. Local government as a whole should be placed under a minister at the headquarters. A company of soldiers must be stationed in the midst of two, three, five or hundreds of villages for the protection of the kingdom.

### *Principles of Government*

Manu also talks about the principles and policies of the government, which can be classified under two heads:

1. Public security
2. Interstate relations

*Public security:* Under the policy of public security, the king was required to detect two classes of thieves with the help of the spies. The first class of thieves called 'open thieves' were those who took bribes and lived by fraudulent sale of commodities. This class included gamblers, fortune tellers, cheats, rouges, and officials and physicians guilty of improper conduct. The second class of thieves was called the 'secret thieves'. They include burglars, robbers, dacoits and so forth. Manu also mentions methods and techniques to be employed by the king for the detection and punishment of both these classes of culprits. The king was to decide about the offence or crime committed by them, and mete out punishment accordingly. Different punishments were prescribed for different kinds of crimes that included dishonest behavior of tradesmen like goldsmiths, etc. Manu also was of the opinion that royal officers and vassals who do not discharge their duties honestly and remain indifferent at the time of the crime being committed should also be punished. Members of the public who do not resist when a village was plundered, or a dyke damaged or a highway robbery committed were also to be punished for their actions or inactions. Confiscation of the property of the rich indulging in crime or dishonesty, imposing a heavy fine on ministers and judges were also permissible and were to be used by the king to punish the erring.

Finance was important even in that era and Manu knew that no government could work without finance. He supported the idea of taxation to be imposed by the king. He listed seven different kinds of taxes, viz., (i) land revenue, (ii) fees, (iii) fines, (iv) taxes for the use of water in a river and

plying of boats, (v) taxes on animals, (vi) taxes on artisans and various other professions and, lastly, (vii) sales tax.

*Interstate relations:* Manu also showed that the delicate art of diplomacy required six elements or *gunas*. These were:

1. *Sandhi*: treaty or peace or alliance
2. *Vigraha*: war
3. *Asane*: neutrality
4. *Yana*: making preparation for attack without actually declaring war
5. *Samsraya*: seeking the protection of another
6. *Dvaidhibhava*: making peace with one, and waging war against another

Manu favoured a king agreeing to make peace when he was sure of superiority in future and of his loss at the present. He prescribed that the king shall wage war only when he knew that he was strong enough to defeat the enemy and that his own army was well disposed towards him. The king, said Manu, shall not engage in war when he is weak in chariots and troops. He shall divide his forces when his enemy is stronger and take refuge with a rich and powerful king when he is easily assailable by the enemy's forces. Finally, while determining his war policy, the king shall take into consideration the future as well as the immediate present, along with the positive and negative aspects of all past actions before coming to any final decision. Manu also advised his king that to follow Kshatriya *dharma* is to obtain victory in war and not to retreat from battle.<sup>15</sup> Manu has prescribed detailed rules for strategies for kings facing an attack. The king should march during the season favourable for the army and should provide necessary weapons to the troops for the occasion. Under exceptional circumstances the king may march if he is sure of his victory or if the enemy is in distress.

After the battle, came the next stage of signing treaties. Manu talks of three objectives of treaties. The first was the acquisition of an ally or *mitra*, second came money or *hiranya* and, lastly, acquiring land or *bhumi*. He observes that the king prospers not so much by the acquisition of money and land, as by acquiring a royal ally, who, though weak at the present, may turn into a powerful one in the future. The king is even advised by Manu to abandon without hesitation even rich and fertile lands if it is in conflict with his personal safety and security.

Manu and Kautilya have divergent views on the subject of diplomacy. Manu does not believe in expansionism or territorial annexation while the latter advocates it. He also interprets the six *gunas* or principles of diplomacy differently. Manu stresses more on the balance of power, because he believes the strength of a king cannot be demonstrated only by waging war. His approach to diplomacy is more ethical in nature than political.

## Manu and *Varnashrama* and Statecraft

In his social conceptualization, Manu has prescribed the rules each individual had to follow from birth to death. In this regard, he has laid down his concept of *varnashrama* in detail, where he

divides the whole society into four *varnas* viz., Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. The duties of all these *varnas* are different yet complementary to each other.<sup>16</sup> Manu has acknowledged the principles of integration of all social units for the purpose of universal welfare related to the cosmic cycle, where a man's rights were granted automatically if he performed the duties accordingly. Rights and duties are therefore made complementary in nature. Manu's also dwells on *karma*, and he believes that man's birth is decided according to his performances in his past life. Manu explains his concept of social order in terms of the laws of *dharm*a and *karma*. In his opinion, social order can be maintained only if all the four *varnas* perform their respective duties suitably and in a harmonious manner. According to him, one who performs his duties in the right manner attains heavenly state and all his desires are fulfilled in his lifetime.

Manu pigeonholes various occupational *varnas* under the umbrella called *shudras*. The caste system that emerged gradually in Indian society is the result of a long social evolution extending over centuries. Manu wanted to incorporate the sometimes conflicting rights of various groups of people within the framework of the *varnashrama*. He tried to create a pluralistic society by offering special hereditary occupations and cultural freedom to the detribalized castes. Manu also mentions various tribes like the *Nishadas*, *Ambasthas*, etc. and prescribes the occupations they could take up. He included even the foreign tribes and those living in the border regions like Kambojas, Yavanas, Sakas, Pallavas, Kiratas, into the category of *shudras* and they were regarded as twice-born.

Manu gives a great deal of importance to customs, which he considered essential for the maintenance of social life. These customs were based on the religious principles or *dharmasutra* and were binding on all individuals. Social organization formed the basis of polity and Manu gives it due attention.

*Manusmriti* also deals at length with various aspects of statecraft including the rules and principles relating to various branches of royal revenue, its administration and expenditure. The *dharmasutras* justify the taxes levied by the king because he is charged with the duty of protecting his subjects. According to U. N. Ghosal, the concept of protection is deep-rooted and as Manu says, 'A king who affords no protection yet receives the sixth part of the produce as taxes [brings] upon himself all the foulness of his whole people'.<sup>17</sup> Chapter Seven of the text deals with the methods and principles of taxation comprehensively. The king could not levy taxes nor change the rates at his pleasure as the rates of taxes were fixed. In fact, Kautilya in the *Arthashastra* has covered in more detail the sources of land revenue, inequality and injustice. But the admirers of Manu, on the other hand, argue that those are mostly interpolations and must have been made by misogynists. The same argument is cited in the case of his hatred against *shudras*. According to these critics, Manu had a broader vision of life, where men all over the world naturally fall into one or the other of these four *varnas*, according to their inner and outer characteristics.

In fact, Manu tried to create a social order out of diverse and conflicting elements which was needed for the society of his time. *Manusmriti* should be examined from this larger perspective.<sup>18</sup>

Due importance is given to women's problems in *Manusmriti*. Manu examines the inheritance and property rights of women. He uses the term *stridhan* which in fact refers to special kinds

of property given to a woman on certain occasions in different stages of her life. But the term *stridhan* underwent significant change in subsequent periods. Besides these, there is also a discussion on the economic position of widows. A widow had the right to retain her ornaments. Manu also prescribes a lot of dos and don'ts for widows. He also refers to the *Niyoga* system. When Manu is compared with Kautilya, the latter has more liberal views on widows. There are many passages in *Manusmriti* in which it is stated that women should be honoured and their rights shall be maintained.<sup>18</sup> But again these are verses that reflect a despairing attitude towards the Shudra women and persons belonging to the lower ranks of social hierarchy. Perhaps this is the reason why many historians who examined the book not in its proper perspective branded Manu as a reactionary law-giver who advocated a social system that was based on oppression.

## Legal Tenets of Manu

*Manusmriti* in due course became a source of modern legal literature and procedure for European and Indian legal practitioners who were required to know the fundamental contents of *Dharmashastras* in general and *Manusmriti* in particular. Several notable works on Hindu law have drawn heavily from *Manusmriti* beginning with Thomas Strage's *Hindu law* published in the 1830s. Other books include Gibelin's *Study on the Civil Laws of the Hindus* in 1846, Wilson's *Glossary* in 1855, which till date is indispensable for students of the Indian legal system and in many of the works of scholars like E. B. Cowell (1870–72), G. C. Sarkar (1891), and Priyanath Sen (1918) the code of Manu has been used.

One criticism often levelled against Manu is his mixing of law with religion. Manu claimed that his laws have divine origin but this can be seen as more of a sign of the era he lived in and there is nothing fundamentally wrong about it. In fact, most ancient people regarded their laws as having divine origin. In ancient Egypt, law was attributed to the Gods.<sup>19</sup> Both laws of *Manusmriti* and the *Code of Hammurabi* claimed to be based on divine inspiration. Yahweh is said to have dictated the Old Testament's Ten Commandments to Moses. Further, all the laws found in the Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers were said to be a direct revelation of God to Moses.

The code of Manu also talks about established practices that encompassed observance of caste, domestic rituals, funeral rites, oblation to men and to God, and religious and philosophical discussions on the subject of secular laws. Manu always emphasized a way of life in accordance with the philosophy and spirit of the Vedas, and he interpreted it in his own fashion. His emphasis on the religious and philosophical aspects of life and his discourses are all part of the cultural tradition of the subcontinent. A comprehensive study of the ancient laws anywhere in the world will make it clear that no distinction was made by society between faith, beliefs, rituals, customs, morality or ethics, on the one hand, and the different clauses and provisions of the so-called positive laws, on the other. For Manu the whole of the Vedas were a source of dharma or law. Even Blackstone (18th century) considered law to be divine revelation, but it came down to earth through the human agency.

Manu was the first who classified law under eighteen heads and called it *Vyavaharapada*. The sections were as follows:<sup>20</sup>

1. Non-payment of debts (*rndana*)
2. Deposit and pledge (*niksepa*)
3. Sale without ownership (*sambhuya-sannuthana*)
4. Concerns among partners (*sambhuya-sannuthana*)
5. Resumption of gifts (*dattasyanapakarma*)
6. Non-payment of wages (*vetanadana*)
7. Non-execution of agreements (*samvidhyati-karma*)
8. Recession of sale and purchase (*kerayavikeraya-nusaye*)
9. Dispute between owner and his servants (*swamipalavivida*)
10. Dispute regarding boundaries (*simavivada*)
11. Assault (*vakparusya*)
12. Defamation (*dandaparusya*)
13. Theft (*steya*)
14. Robbery and violence (*sahasa*)
15. Adultery (*strisangrabana*)
16. Duties of man and wife (*stripumdharma*)
17. Separation of man and wife (*stripumdharma*)
18. Gambling and betting (*dyertasamahvaya*)

Manu adds that this classification is for convenience and does not encompass all types of disputes but only those which are most important.<sup>21</sup> He puts greater emphasis on the concept of justice and equity and held that he who violates justice is always despicable. The king is the dispenser of justice and the original court as well as the appellate tribunal is combined in him. The king presides over the courts and in this he is assisted by Brahmins and experienced councilors. Cases are to be decided in accordance with the principles of local usages and the institution of the sacred law.

In case the king is unable to dispense justice himself due to whatsoever reason, he should appoint a learned Brahmin with three *sabhyas* (assessors) to decide the cases. Once the defendant denies the charges, the complainant should call for witnesses or other evidence, and in case of conflict in witnesses' statements, the king shall accept as true, evidence of the majority. If there are no witnesses, the judge should follow the policy of investigation. Manu's ideas of evidence is further systematized by Yajnavalkya, who lists three kinds of proofs: documents, witnesses and possessions.<sup>22</sup>

Manu's idea of justice also encompasses the concept of social justice of today. He called it the social purpose of justice, where the king must protect the rights of those who were unable to do so themselves. He adds that it was the king's duty to safeguard the inheritance and other forms of property of a minor until the latter returns from his teacher's house or attains adulthood.



He also had to take care of barren women, people who have no sons, orphans, wives and widows and women suffering from various diseases.<sup>23</sup>

Manu's ideas on *varnashrama* are reflected in his criminal laws particularly those relating to morality and personal hygiene. He prescribes different punishments for identical offences based on the caste of the criminal and the victim, and as a general rule Brahmins are exempted from capital punishment. Manu has elaborated on the various aspects of law. He is also of the opinion that only under special circumstances, like self-defence and similar situations, can law be taken in one's own hand. Besides capital punishment, he also prescribed other forms of punishment, but all punishments are to be awarded and executed after careful consideration. The king is the final authority to settle all disputes.<sup>24</sup> Thus *Manusmriti* is the first treatise to give a regular elucidation of the legal system that was followed in the *Dharmasastras* and it provides a basis for legal interpretation, with the assistance of learned Brahmins and experienced councilors. It also provided a basis for modern legal interpretation both in India and abroad, mainly in Europe. Kautilya also deals with many common aspects of statecraft and law in his *Arthashastra* but he differs from Manu in several key aspects. They are at odds over handing out capital punishment to Brahmins who have committed treason. Kautilya also shows more compassion towards *shudras* and women compared to Manu. But it also needs to be stressed that Manu's Brahmin is the embodiment of idealisation of Man, the symbol of the best and highest virtues which man could acquire. Kautilya's Brahmin on the other hand, though a superior, knowledgeable human being, fails to reach that exalted height of perfection as visualised by Manu. The two thinkers differ with regard to the role and status of a Brahmin.<sup>25</sup>

It becomes clearly evident from this discussion that the primary concern of the author of *Manusmriti* was to spell out the infrastructure of an all-embracing society, which in course of time became synonymous with Hinduism and the Hindu way of life. In Manu's age, this vast subcontinent consisted of numerous ethnic and linguistic communities with varying degrees of perceptions and values of life. Manu could foresee that this cultural and social diversity needed to be kept as one organic entity. *Manusmriti* deals with practically all the aspects of life—political, economic, legal, social, etc. It is a monumental work of epic proportions, an omnibus which continues to be relevant till date. Manu endeavours to use law and politics as agents of continuity, for transforming human life to achieve normatively defined goals. It is the moral embodiment of the vision of that great thinker of ancient India who preached pragmatism as well as idealism. This is perhaps the most remarkable feature of the text which has provided a touch of universality, tempered by particularities that transcend the frontiers of time.

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## Zia Barani: Good Sultan and Ideal Polity

*Himanshu Roy and Muzaffar Alam*

Zia Barani<sup>1</sup> (1283–1359) was the most important political thinker of the Delhi Sultanate, particularly during the reigns of Alauddin Khalji, Muhammad bin Tughlaq and Firoz Tughlaq. He represented the idea of political expediency in the Islamic history. His *Fatawa-i-Jabandari* (AD 1357), written as *nasihat* (advices) for the Muslim kings, is a classic work on statecraft which can be compared with Kautilya's *Arthashastra* and Machiavelli's *Prince*. For his emphasis on following the Shariat (laws of the Quran and the Prophet's tradition) (Advice II) and his views on the Hindus (Advice XI.2), however, he has been called a conservative, a fundamentalist and a bigot as compared to relatively liberal thinkers like Abul Fazl. Ironically, in the earlier days he was mocked upon by the mullahs and others for not following the Quranic principles and for calling himself an Indian rather than a Turk. Later in life, when he adopted a politically hard line for governance, he was dismissed from the court at the age of 68 (1351 AD)<sup>2</sup> and lived in penury on the outskirts of Delhi. But taking into account the totality of the circumstances, both personal and political, his views on religion at the ripe old age of 74 (1357 AD) was more in the nature of a political tool for consolidating and expanding the state, which he identified with the Muslim ruling elite.

He advised the kings, nobility and other grades of administrators to follow the Shariat in personal and political domain, which he felt as desirable, but he equally emphasized the formulation of *Zawabit* (state laws) (Advice XIV) in the political domain and conceded flexibility in not following the Shariat (Advice II) in their private spheres. For him, the most important aspect was achieving the objective, the end; and the end was strengthening the state whatever the means. Laxity in not following the Shariat both in personal and political domains was tolerable till it began to affect the stability of the state. Suppressing the rebellious elite, both Hindus and Muslims, banning education to the under-privileged and nondescript people including Muslims (Advice XI),

‘welfare’ of the subjects, etc. were all intended for consolidating the powers of the Muslim rulers. He knew that, philosophically, monarchy is anti-Shariat (Advice IX.2), yet he accepted it on the grounds of reality. This reveals his intentions of treating the Shariat as a means for political ends.

Politically, the monarchy along with the nobility had yet to stabilize themselves, as they were in a flux in terms of class composition<sup>3</sup> and in their wider acceptance by the Islamic and non-Islamic sections of the nobility and by other segments of the dominant class.<sup>4</sup> Since the Islamic following was still restricted to a very narrow section of the population, Barani felt it necessary to widen the Islamic base for political obligation towards the monarchy. In the absence of civil society, religion was an important means for the said objective; perpetuation of tyrannical behaviour towards the rebels was another. The peasant revolt of 1330 AD in the *doab* comprising mainly of Hindus and led by their local elite must have haunted him like a recurring nightmare from the viewpoint of the security of the state. Yet he was not anti-Hindu per se. His antipathy was largely directed against the traders, shopkeepers, money lenders, and other dominant sections—*rais*, *ranas*, *ramats* (Advice XI.3)—who used to pass on their tax burden to the *reza riaya*,<sup>5</sup> or defraud the people creating conditions for a rebellion against the state. From them, he felt there was a threat to the Sultanate. He, therefore, advised the king to either ban such sinful professions or deal with them ruthlessly. People who plied such trade and were to be treated ruthlessly included Muslims too who were engaged in these profession. Essentially a conservative aristocrat in his world outlook who treated even *banya-buqals* as low-born, Barani looked upon the Shariat, Hindu, etc. only as generic terms, as the term Hindu was to Marx for Indians.

## Theory of Kingship

### *Ideal Sultan*

Barani made a distinction between the personal life of the Sultan and his political role (Advice II). In both aspects, however, he envisaged in him an ideal person—noble born, preferably belonging to the family of the monarch, having an innate sense of justice, wise enough to understand the deception and conspiracies of the wicked (Advice XXIV), understanding the importance of his time and dividing it judiciously between his personal needs and political requirement (Advice X) and following the path of the Shariat, which laid down that he was an agent of god on earth to do the ‘welfare’ of the people. The Sultan was expected to reflect supplication, helplessness, poverty and humility (Advice XXIV) to compensate for the existence of monarchy which was contradictory to the principles of Islam. As far as following the Shariat was concerned, Barani conceded that in the personal realm the Sultan may choose to be lax but he opposed the idea of laxity in the political sphere as it might lead to disease in the administration, for the ideal polity and the political avatar of the Sultan were intertwined. However, what seems initially as Barani’s emphasis on following the Shariat in the political domain acquires flexibility as we proceed further in the *Fatawa*. In the section under the *Zawabit*, he advised the formulation of new laws where, in the changed circumstances, the Shariat was unable to serve the purpose

of the state. Though he cautioned the formulators to be guided by the Shariat's intention, it was more verbiage than anything else. It was just like his arguments that monarchy, in the given circumstances, was to achieve the principles of Islam when he knew that Islam was opposed to the system of monarchy. In fact, he argued further; he advised the Sultan to achieve the objectives of Islam and possess the attributes of terror, prestige, pride, high status, domination and superiority. Anyone's ascendancy over him meant the loss of his superiority (Advice XX). Courage to react to any idea or anyone's wishes at the appropriate time was to be the essential ingredient of his political existence. Nonetheless, he must desist from five mean qualities such as falsehood, changeability, deception, wrathfulness and injustice (Advice XXIII). Similarly, differentiation between the determination in the enterprises of the government and tyranny/despotism (Advice IV) was necessary to command faith, fear and prestige among his friends and foes. High resolve, lofty ideals, fair administration, distinctiveness from other monarchs, obligation over people, etc (Advice XV) were the other required characteristics to influence people to lend their ears or be warned.

As people were influenced by the character and actions of the monarch, it was necessary for him to maintain all the regalities associated with kingship. Counsellors, and army and intelligence officers were indispensable parts of these royal functions. Their selection, gradation, etc. were obviously the duty of the Sultan and required careful attention. It was on the basis of their advice and reporting, either on policy matters or about conspiracies, corruption, the condition of people, etc. that the administration could function harmoniously. It was the king's responsibility to protect the old political families, to check their possible usurpation of power and to ensure they are not left to live in material deprivation (Advice XXII). Penury and removal from power a potent combination, created a condition for rebellion. Barani's intimate knowledge about such affairs, and the fact that he was himself a victim of such circumstances, might have compelled him to pen down such advice.

The supremacy of the Sultan and the safety of his Sultanate, however, couldn't have been secured without delivering justice to the subjects. 'The real justification for the supremacy of the kings and of their power and dignity', Barani had remarked, 'is the need for enforcing justice' (Advice V). Accordingly, the first act had to be the appointment and gradation of judges, with the king himself being at the apex, and the functions delineated for them were 'protection of money, property, women and children of the weak, the obedient, the helpless, the young, the submissive and the friendless' (Advice V). Further, it was to 'prevent the strong from having recourse to oppression in their dealings with people' (Advice V) without which 'there would be a complete community of women and property' (Advice V), leading to anarchy in the ruling class.

While delivering justice, 'however, the king should know ... the appropriate occasions for both forgiveness and punishment ...' (Advice XII). Punishment to the rebellious, cruel, mischievous, etc. had to be combined with mercy and forgiveness for those who accepted their sins and were repentant (Advice XIII). Similarly, things like recognizing the rights of the people, refraining from minute enquiries and fault-finding, and not inflicting upon subjects impositions beyond their power of endurance were to be essential aspects of justice. However, in all

these deliberations on justice, one aspect was conspicuous by its absence, i.e., the deliverance of justice was to be according to the religious practices of the subjects, though Barani nowhere mentioned separate kinds of justice for Hindus and Muslims. Yet, it may be argued that when justice based on the Shariat was favoured by Barani, then justice based on religion was already implicit in it. Moreover, his proclamation for all-out war against *zimmis* made his intention clear. But, as observed earlier, the growing redundancy of the Shariat in the changed circumstances and the corresponding importance of *Zawabit*, emphasized by Barani himself (Advice XIV), explicitly nullified the existence of any Islamic religious justice as state policy of the Sultanate. Moreover, Barani's recognition that Sultans in India behaved moderately towards the *zimmis* (Advice XI.3) recognizes the existence of customary justice during the Sultanate period. The word *zimmi* refers to followers of polymorphous religions, like Hinduism.

The important point to be noticed here, however, is that Barani's conception of justice was strongly tilted in favour of the rich and powerful. His hatred against the *ganwaran* and underprivileged and bias in favour of the noble-born speaks volumes about the basis of his justice. In fact, the very paradigm of the *Fatawa* was based on the consolidation and expansion of the elite in the Sultanate<sup>6</sup>; and like any other element of feudal society to be used as an instrument for the perpetuation of monarchy, justice was meant to be a facade for maintaining the serenity of the Sultanate. At panchayat and community levels, nevertheless, caste and religion did influence the judgements but the state did not generally adopt the policy of religious discrimination.

The *Fatawa*, however, was not bereft of any positive idea to the theory of statecraft. The notable features were, firstly, the distinction made between the personal and political domains of the king, and between nobility and others of the ruling elite; secondly, the espousal of the concept of political obligation, individual and collective, towards the monarch and his administration in the form of loyalty; thirdly, the recognition of rights of the people which essentially meant the right to life and property; and, finally, the emphasis on *Zawabit* which ultimately led to the formulation of incipient secular state policies reflected either in the context of justice or revenue collection or trade and commerce, etc. All these aspects were not new to the Indian political society as we find them in the *Arthashastra* tradition of political theory also, but Barani's emphasis on such elements at a time when rulers of a different religion had acquired political power is really important. In the pre-civil society his emphasis, for example, on public policy rather than on personal life is worthy of a thinker.

### *Nobility*

The nobility was the second component of the monarchy. The nobles were the chosen individuals whom the Sultan assigned 'the right to levy the revenue in particular territories'<sup>7</sup> which was known as *iqta*. It was the basic unit of landed property whose holders formed the main class of landed proprietors. The *iqtas* were frequently transferred from one person to another, which made them non-hereditary. The revenue resources created from the appropriation of the surplus produced by the peasant were distributed among the ruling classes of which the *iqtadars* were

the principal component.<sup>8</sup> They were also part of the royal consultative council which advised the king on policy matters. Since the basic function of the Sultanate was revenue collection, for which the entire paraphernalia of administration existed, and which could not have been performed by the king alone, a set of people existed to collect the revenue and advice or formulate administrative policies for it. The selection of such people by the Sultan, therefore, was of crucial nature for which Barani set certain guidelines, and advised the king to be careful. The criteria were two fold; first, the people to be selected should be noble-born with loyalty, both personal and political, towards the Sultan; and second, they must possess the quality of sound political judgement and render advice to the monarch while taking into account the prospects and contradictions of the impact of the policies to be undertaken (Advice XIX). While the first was explicit, he prescribed nine conditions (Advice III) for the second to test the political quality of the counselors. From fear of god, knowledge of history, lack of greed to practical knowledge of state affairs, all must be present in the advisers. Further, he prescribed eleven criteria (Advice III) to judge a policy, which the monarchy planned to undertake, in order to formulate the right one. Barani suggested an additional seven conditions to be provided to the advisers once they were selected. Some of these conditions were the security of their lives and tenure, environment for free expression of opinion, etc. Finally, he suggested the grading of nobility as per their birth and merit.

These advices, however, must be seen in the social context of the time in order to understand their import. In AD 1351 just six years before Barani penned down his advices, there was a severe political crisis created by the rebellion of a large section of the ruling class, and the sweeping changes in their composition. There was 'large-scale recruitment of foreigners, still greater recruitment from the lower strata of the Indian population and from the Hindus, and an attempted wholesale destruction of the older, chiefly military elements (represented by the cavalry officer-crops, the *admiran-i-sada*).'<sup>9</sup> With the accession of Firuz Tughlaq in the same year major concessions were granted by the Sultan to his officers. *Iqta*, which was transferable and non-hereditary, as mentioned earlier, became more or less, non-transferable and semi-administrative offices had to be passed on to the sons of previous incumbents. The nobility, mainly urban in character with no social base due to the nature of the *iqta*, was wholly dependent on the Sultan. Thus it was in such a social milieu that Barani expressed himself in favour of noble birth and personal loyalty, about the security of life and tenure of nobility, of their gradation, etc., to keep the 'upstarts' at the lower echelons of bureaucracy, to check them from the intricacies of the administration,<sup>10</sup> etc. Besides, the anti-Hindu stance and the Shariat were the other potent cementing forces between the royal slaves of the nomad Turkish origin, Indianized Turks, Indian slaves and foreign immigrants who were, because of their internal contradictions, destroying each other. The fear of takeover by the Hindus, who were recruited in considerably large numbers by Muhammad Tughlaq, might have been the other but equally important factor that led him to express his opinions strongly against the Hindus. As the nobility occupied one of the crucial positions in the state structure, Barani prescribed tough conditions for their selection.

## Ideal Polity

### Laws

As said earlier, Barani categorized laws into two kinds, the Shariat and the *Zawabit*. While the Shariat meant the teachings and practices of the Prophet and of the pious Caliphs, the *Zawabit* were the state laws formulated by the monarch in consultation with the nobility in the changed circumstances to cater to the new requirements which the Shariat was unable to fulfill. It was ideal for the king, nobility and the personnel of administration to follow the Shariat, both in personal domain and in public policies. The state laws, however, were also to be formulated in case of the inability to follow/apply the Shariat. But, he cautioned simultaneously that the law-makers must take into account the practices of the past and contemporary socio-political conditions while formulating the laws. The *Zawabit*, he said, must be in the spirit of the Shariat and enumerated four conditions (Advice XIV) for its formulation as guidelines. First, the *Zawabit* should not negate the Shariat; secondly, it must increase the loyalty and hope among the nobles and common people towards the Sultan; thirdly, its source and inspiration should be the Shariat and the pious Caliphs; and finally, if at all it had to negate the Shariat out of exigencies, it must follow charities and compensation in lieu of that negation. Thus what he envisaged in the *Zawabit* was an ideal law which could cater to the needs of the state without offending any section of the nobility in particular and the masses in general.

Since the conquest of northern India by the Ghorians and their establishment of the Sultanate, the application of the Shariat as state-policy engaged the minds of the administrators and theoreticians as the new rulers were of a different faith (Islam) from that of their predecessors.<sup>11</sup> As a personal belief of the people, no doubt, Islam had existed in India since the beginning of the eighth century when Muslim traders and others began to settle down in the coastal regions, but then it had no political importance. The revenue settlement of the new rulers with the defeated aristocracies for the collection of the *kharaj* (tribute) in the initial years, the subsequent evolution of the new *iqta* system and its assignment to different individuals for collection, the centralization of power in the hands of the Sultan, growth of trade and commerce, production of cash-crops, collection of revenue in cash, etc, created a piquant situation in which the application of the Shariat became difficult. Consequently, the formulation of a new policy which was called the *Zawabit* became imperative for the new ruling class. The changing composition of the ruling class, the rebellion of their different sections for power or status quo, etc., were the other factors that led to the requirement of new policies. It was in this context of political flux that Barani argues for charities, compensation and protection for those who were deprived of their power, prosperity and political clout. Since the *iqta* was transferable till Firuz Tughlaq's time, there were frequent changes in the fortunes of political families. In such flux the Shariat was the only potent force to keep them united vis-a-vis the *rais*, *ranas*, *rawats*, etc., who professed a different faith. Although defeated, they had the potential to pose problems for the Sultanate if a situation providing them with such opportunity arose. The peasant revolt of 1330 AD in



the *doab* led by such *rais* must have been at the back of Barani's mind. Thus the search for laws which served the interests of the state and the ruling nobility without offending the masses or any section of the defeated nobles was his prime concern.

## Army

After the Mauryas, the Sultanate was the largest (in terms of territorial extent) and most powerful state (in terms of centralization of power) in India. Obviously, the administration played varied roles, from revenue collection to maintaining law and order, and from public works to dispensing 'justice'. Out of the three main pillars of the administration, the army was the preeminent one which was organized on the decimal system and based on the Turkish-Mongol model.<sup>12</sup> It was divided into four parts,<sup>13</sup> viz., infantry (foot soldiers or *payaks*), cavalry (horsemen), war-elephants and auxiliary, viz., boats, engineers, transporters, scouts, spies, etc. The cavalry was further divided into three wings, viz., *mumattab*, *savar*, and *do-aspah*, which respectively meant a soldier without horse, a soldier with a single horse, and a soldier with two horses.<sup>14</sup> The rank and file such as *khan*, *malik*, *amir*, *sipahsalar*,<sup>15</sup> etc. (Advice VII) which were composed of Turks, Tartars, Rajputs and others were paid either in cash or were assigned the revenues of different villages<sup>16</sup> as per their grades. As the Sultanate ultimately rested on the power of the army, whose basic functions were the security and expansion of the state, Barani advised the king to take greater care in its efficiency, checking corruption and conspiracies within it and so on. The monarch also maintained personal troops called *qalb* for his safety and ultimate reliability in case of rebellion occurring from within the nobility. The army, apart from performing its above mentioned roles, acquired importance for another reason as well. It acted as facilitator in the expansion of Islam since the ruling class of the Sultanate came as invaders and immigrants and it needed a large support base. Already defeated in their homeland they were forced to flee. So, on the one hand, they were conquerors while on the other they were political losers. Psychologically placed in a bind, they compromised with the local aristocracy but the feeling of being a conqueror made them contemptuous towards the local inhabitants. This feeling existed at least among a section of the intelligentsia and nobility. At the same time, insecurity haunted them like a nightmare.<sup>17</sup> The question of their existence, if they lost political power in India as well, was therefore uppermost in their thinking. So the only alternative left, in their perception, was to consolidate and expand, which was possible either through converting the local aristocracy into Islamic faith or annihilating them. Barani, representing such perception, found in the army, the ultimate bastion of physical power and performer of such tasks. However, being a realist, he could perceive the other views prevalent among the majority of the nobility and intelligentsia. These people who were compromised and co-opted the local aristocracy into the structure of the Sultanate, including the army and bureaucracy and against them Barani expressed himself both explicitly and implicitly. But whatever may be the different perceptions, the army, nonetheless, commanded respect from every quarter as it was the ultimate bastion of state power and in its absence the very foundation of the Sultanate would have become shaky.

## Bureaucracy

The bureaucracy was another necessary component of the Sultanate whose basic function was to measure the land and fix and collect the taxes for its disbursement among its beneficiaries; and in its absence the very existence of the ruling class would have become redundant and neither would have the army sustained itself. It operated at three levels, viz., centre, province and village. The *Diwan-i Wazarat* headed by a *wazir* (the head of revenue and finance, also known as the prime minister) and assisted by a *naib*, *Musharif-i-Mamalik*, *Mustanf-i-Mamalik* and *dabirs*, was at the apex of the revenue department.<sup>18</sup> Corresponding to it at the provincial level, the administration was headed by *muqtis* or *walis*.<sup>19</sup> Below him was the *Diwan* (ministry of revenue) provincial *wazir*, counterpart of the central *wazir*, but more or less with independent charge, who was accountable to the central *wazir*. In the initial and latter parts of the Sultanate, the *walis* became considerably independent in collection, expenditure, audit and accounts of their revenue. But in the middle phase (Khaljis and early Tughlaqs), however, they had to route the balance sheet to the king's treasury<sup>20</sup> through the Diwan/provincial *wazir*. At the local (*sarkar*, *pargana*, village) level were the *Muqaddam* (the headman of the village), *Chaudhari*, etc., who were in charge of the collection and fixation of revenue with the *patwari* as the village accountant and keeper of records.<sup>21</sup> The revenue was collected on the basis of the estimate prepared for each locality, based on their revenue-paying capacity; and the salary of the staff was paid from this revenue as per their status. Almost throughout the Sultanate, the revenue amount collected was half of the produce of the peasants which was levied separately on their land holdings. The tax was fixed and collected on each unit of the area irrespective of the produce of the current year's harvest. It was paid both in cash and in kind. Alauddin Khalji preferred to collect it in kind and it was later on commuted into cash at market prices thereby placing the cultivators at a disadvantage. Besides the land revenue, other burdens were also imposed upon the peasants; in particular, the tax on cattle or grazing tax.<sup>22</sup> Thus, overall the tax burden was heavy, particularly, for the lower strata (*balabar*, the village menial) upon whom the upper strata (*kebot*, the large village landholder) passed on their own burden as well. Barani's passage in this context on forsaking severe exactions (Advice XVI), checking corruption, recognising the rights of people (Advice XIII), etc., acquires clear meaning when he discussed dispensing of justice to subjects or advised kings to protect weak against strong. How far was he heeded to may well be guessed from the fact that the three-tier structure of the revenue bureaucracy, which was highly centralized in spite of its vast spread in terms of territorial extent, played the same stellar role, along with the army, throughout the Sultanate period without much changes either in the percentage of revenue collection per cultivator or in checking the tax burden being passed on to the weaker elements by their superiors. The advice could not have been heeded to because of the structural limitation of the ruling nobility in the pre-capitalist society. The only possibility, at best, was to provide temporary relief to the *raiyyats* either under pressure of social discontentment or natural calamities. To Barani all these were means of dispensing justice towards which we now turn our attention.

## Justice

Justice was the third essential element of the administration, which to Barani was all encompassing, from remission of land tax to supply of commodities to buyers at production cost and from dispensing civil and criminal cases to granting monetary help to the needy from the state treasury. For instance, he advised the king to ‘settle before his own throne the prices of all things according to the principle of production cost’ (Advice IX) and suggested that the *Diman-i-Riyasat*, the controller general of the market, the *Shahana-i-Mandi*, the superintendent of the grain market, and other officials should control irregularities in the market such as checking the weight and measures, deliberate hike in prices, hoarding etc.<sup>23</sup> The reasons behind this suggestion were two fold; first, a hike in the prices of commodities would affect the army, particularly the subaltern rank, directly, and, second, it might have led to discontentment among the general populace. As the prices of the commodities concerned everyone, a hike without a corresponding increase in the income of the people, particularly of the lower strata of society, and of army personnel who were paid salary in cash might have created discontentment leading to problems for the state. As revenue exactions were already severe, there was no further possibility of its enhancement. Consequently, an increase in the salary of the army personnel was ruled out. Further, at the existing rate of revenue payment to the treasury there was no scope for savings on the part of the peasantry who could not cope with increased prices. As a result, an increase in prices would affect a vast section of the population both civilian and military which could have posed a threat to the security of the Sultanate from within and without either in the form of popular revolt or in military mutiny, desertion, etc. Thus an increase in the prices had the possibility of cascading and far-reaching implications for the Sultanate. Therefore, in order to avert it, the need for such justice was imperative.

Another aspect related with justice and consequently with the security of the state was remission of taxes. At least during calamities, Barani suggested, the king should remit or reduce taxes and extend monetary help from the treasury till the time it was possible and necessary. Failure of crops, with consequent increase in prices coupled with the continuation of revenue collection in the same proportion as during normal harvest seasons might have created discontentment among the populace. Aware of the heavy surplus appropriation from the peasantry, frequent changes in the *iqta*-holders and the double burden of tax payment on the lower strata made him suggest forsaking severe revenue exaction, protecting the rights of people both plebian and *iqta*-losers, checking corruption, etc, which he considered as a part of dispensing justice. But all these suggested measures did not emanate from any philanthropic reasoning—rather these were the articles of advice of a realist concerned with the security of the state.

To dispense justice the courts were divided into civil and criminal categories and they operated at central and provincial levels. The judges were to be appointed by the king, with himself at the apex of the judicial structure, and the fountain-head of justice and highest court of appeal. Below him were *Quazi-ul-Quzat* (Chief Judge), *Sadr-us-Sadur* or *Sadr-ul-Mulk* (Provincial Judge) *Amir-i-Dad-Bek-i-Hazrat* (Central Judicial Officers), *Qazi*, *Amir-i-Dad* (Judicial officers at provincial level) *Mubtasibs* (municipal officers and moral censors) and so on<sup>24</sup> in the respective

order. The king in dealing with the religious cases was assisted by the *mufti* and the *Sadr-us-Sadur* while in secular cases he was assisted by *Qazi-ul-Quzat*.<sup>25</sup> As the Sultanate was mainly urban in character, the organization of justice was obviously limited to the main administrative centres. The panchayats continued with their customary modes of dispensing justice based on status, caste, property, etc. They were free from formal organizational encumbrances of the Sultanate, and the laws related with it.<sup>26</sup> Justice, thus, had two operational levels: one, operating in rural areas, another, operating in the urban-administrative centres. But in both cases there was one common factor—there was no discriminatory justice rather it was differential justice based on the merits of the cases and on the religion of the individuals.<sup>27</sup> Although Barani emphasized following the Shariat wherever possible, the very possibility of its operation was marginalized by the changing composition of the rulers and military-bureaucratic, quasi-judicial personnel of the administration and greater incorporation of Hindus and Indianized Turks into it. The economic basis of the Sultanate necessitating revenue collection and leading to compromises with the local aristocracy was the second factor that annulled the operation of the Shariat. The third factor was the vast population of Hindus inhabiting the rural areas surrounding the miniscule population of the Muslims living within the restricted urban-administrative centres who could not have been antagonized at the cost of jeopardizing the security of the state. We, therefore, find the adoption of a liberal attitude on the part of the Sultanate ruling class towards the Hindus for which Barani complained but also simultaneously emphasized the formulation of the *Zawabit*. Barani's theory of justice thus essentially emanated from the perspective of the security of the state. Firstly, using religion he attempted to consolidate the Muslim population and various factions of the ruling class and tried to link the two; secondly, through the *Zawabit* he tried to solve the grievances of the *Zimmis*, and other social problems which remained unsolved by the Shariat; and finally, he used 'justice' as an instrument to expand the basis of political obligation of the subjects towards the state. But the contradictory aspect of his theory was his hatred and contempt towards the nondescripts which nullified his political use of religion for the purpose of linking the underprivileged with the rulers. Here, however, one must be careful in analysing the conditions of poor Muslims. Economically, they might have been poor and weak *vis-à-vis* the rulers, but psychologically they might have professed the thought of being superior to the Hindus of the corresponding stature by virtue of professing the same faith as the Islamic rulers and sharing their common ancestral homeland. For this reason, a feeling of being the conqueror and ruler might have existed in them<sup>28</sup> with the tendency of looking down upon the Hindus with contempt in the same way as an economically poor Brahmin looks down upon individuals of the lower castes of corresponding economic stature regarding himself superior to them. Barani might have tried to use these feelings among the poor Muslims for the benefit of the ruling class and the state. Being a realist and an opportunist, he tried every means to achieve the political objective of the Sultanate and the expansion of its social base. Ironically, he never represented the dominant ideology of his class in context of religion (co-opting and compromising with the Hindus) and neither did he identify himself with the changing composition of the rulers (plebianisation of nobility), yet his *Fatama* acquired prominence in history. There lies his enigma.

## Conclusion

Barani's eminence lies in his theory of history and its constant application in different aspects of society of his time resulting in his theory of statecraft which made him unique and enigmatic. In fact it won't be wrong to say that he marshaled all his knowledge and experiences from the past and the events of his time to serve the interests of the Sultanate. The prominent elements of his theory were his belief in the hereditary status of the nobility, espousal of political expediency on the part of monarchy and nobility, and contempt for the downtrodden. While the last element was the corollary of the first, the second element was intended to serve the purpose of consolidation and expansion of the Sultanate and consequently of the ruling class. To this end all means, such as religion, despotism, benevolence, annihilation of the Hindus etc. were to be employed. He was not against the Hindus *per se* as it has been alleged but against the Hindu elite from whom he feared potential threat to the Sultanate. Conversion or annihilation of the *Zimmis* essentially meant the conversion/annihilation of the elite among them. He knew that the conversion or annihilation at mass level might lead to uncontrolled conflagration. *Zawabit* rather than the Shariat therefore finds more prominence in his theory. Moreover, Shariat was only the tool to be used for the benefit of the Sultanate; and for the same purpose he suggested judicious mixing of benevolence and despotism in order to enhance the power prestige and wealth of the Sultanate. Justice likewise was intended to serve the pecuniary interests of the state rather than to fulfill the politico-economic needs of the masses. It was meant to expand the social base of political obligation towards the monarchy.

He consistently upheld the interests and values of the traditional Muslim (Turk) aristocracy who he thought were intrinsically superior to any other section of society. It acquired such prominence that purity of birth became the parameter of judgement for every appointment of personnel in the organs of government. They were to be judged on the basis of an appointee's hereditary status. Further, his status was to be hierarchical and graded. His contempt for low-born was so strong that even those who moved into the realm of nobility were looked down upon. He went as far as to suggest the banning of education among the lower classes in order to check their individual mobility; for education acted as catalyst in providing opportunity to individuals in their vocations. The changing composition of the ruling nobility which consisted mostly of former plebians incensed him. Even the changes that he suggested, for example, for formulating the *Zawabit*, which emanated from new necessities, was essentially geared to serve the overall interests of the Sultanate.

Thus the entire theory of Barani had a definite interest. On the surface, his *Fatava* or *Tarikh* may look like a bundle of contradictions, but beneath it lies the consistency of his interest—the protection, consolidation and expansion of the Sultanate, the methods applied to achieve these aims notwithstanding. Essentially a conservative aristocrat in his outlook, he craved for stability<sup>29</sup> but was surpassed by the changing circumstances of his time, and sidelined by the class whom he desired to represent.

## Notes and References

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1. In the *Tarikh-i Firuzshahi* (henceforth *Tarikh*) and *Fatawa-i-Jahandari* (henceforth *Fatawa*) he refers to himself as Zia Barani rather than, Ziauddin Barani. For details, see Irfan Habib, 'Barani's Theory of The History of The Delhi Sultanate' in the *Indian Historical Review*, Vol. VII, No. i-2, July 1980–January 1981, p. 1.
2. Mohammad Habib and Afsar Umar Salim Khan, *The Political Theory of the Delhi Sultanate* (Allahabad: Kitab Mahal, 1957), p. IV.
3. See Irfan Habib, *Essays in Indian History* (henceforth *Essays*) (New Delhi: Tulika, 1995), p. 86.
4. See A. B. M. Habibullah, *The Foundation of Muslim Rule in India* (Allahabad: Central Book Depot, 1976), Chaps. V, VI, VII and VIII.
5. Irfan Habib, *Essays*, p. 151.
6. A. B. M. Habibullah, Chap. VIII.
7. Irfan Habib, *Essays*, p. 82.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 82–86.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
10. Barani regrets the end of Turks' domination over the polity. See A. B. M. Habibullah, p. 165.
11. The civil functions proper began only from the end of the 13th century. Earlier, the state resembled more a military organization. See A. B. M. Habibullah, Chap. X.
12. *Tarikh* (ed. and trans.), Elliot and Dowson in *The History of India as told by its own Historians*, Vol. III. (Allahabad: Kitab Mahal, 1971), pp. 491–495, 499.
13. *Fatawa* (ed. and trans.) Mohammad Habib and Afsar Umar Salim Khan, pp.221–222, 219.
14. I. H. Qureshi, *The Administration of the Sultanate of Delhi*, (Patna: Oriental Book, 1979), pp.141–141.
15. A. B. M. Habibullah, op. cit., pp. 222, 246.
16. Irfan Habib, *Essays*, op. cit., p. 83.
17. A.B.M. Habibullah, op. cit., Chap. XV.
18. I. H. Qureshi, op. cit. p.84; A. B. M. Habibullah, op. cit., pp.195–196.
19. Irfan Habib. *Essays*, p. 83; A. B. M. Habibullah, op. cit., p. 211.
20. *Ibid.*
21. A. B. M. Habibullah, op. cit., p. 213.
22. See Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (eds). *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 62; Irfan Habib, *Essays*, pp. 81–82.
23. K. S. Lal, *History of the Khaljis* (Delhi: Munsiri Ram Manohar Lal, 1980), pp. 206–213.
24. Mohammad Habib and Afsar Umar Salim Khan, pp. 46–47; I. H. Qureshi, pp.157–161; A. B. M. Habibullah, p. 198.
25. A. B. M. Habibullah, *Ibid.*, p. 226.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, p. 225.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 224.
29. Irfan Habib, 'Barani's Theory of The History of The Delhi Sultanate', op. cit., pp. 113–115.

## Abul Fazl: Governance and Administration

*Kamla*

### Introduction

Medieval India had many eminent historians and among them Sheikh Abul Fazl (1551–1602) occupies a place of distinction. This is mainly because of the predominance of intellectual elements in his writings, his unflinching appeal to reason against religious and cultural traditions, broader view of history and a new methodology which he sought to apply to his task. His interpretation of history was integrally linked to the political, social, economic and religious realities of that period.<sup>1</sup>

At the beginning of the Mughal period, India was divided into many smaller kingdoms, and this frequently led to a great deal of political instability. This ended with the victory of the Mongol ruler Babar over Ibrahim Lodi, the last ruler of the Delhi Sultanate. The Mughals eventually conquered much of India resulting in an integrated and vast Mughal Empire<sup>2</sup> which had many new characteristics. It had a hierarchical administrative structure, strong monetary policies, centralized governing system and new methods of military organization, and there was an emergence of fresh ideas in the cultural and religious fields. These new structures gave rise to a novel integrated culture that had elements from both Hindu and Muslim thoughts, an idea that found a clear expression in the tradition of Bhakti and Sufi movements. The primary message was that no religion is inferior to any other, God can be found without blind belief in superstitions, that all humans are equal and that there is a basic unity and equality in all religions.<sup>3</sup>

Political ideas in Islam have various sources. A part of it can be traced to pre-Islamic sources and a substantial part was based on the teachings of Prophet Muhammad. The concept of one God and the universality of the laws of the Quran fostered the doctrine of equality, which forms the basis of Islamic brotherhood. Politically, however, the Islamic belief was that ‘some

are born to rule and others to obey', an idea that was closer to the Greek belief of superior and inferior.<sup>4</sup> The three basic principles, however, which governed all subsequent political thinking were: (a) the divine law, the Shariat based on the Quran and the Prophet's tradition (b) the historical traditions of the early years of Islam, and (c) the consensus and solidarity of the Islamic community.<sup>5</sup>

Abul Fazl, a contemporary of Abdul Qadir Badauni, was a courtier, historian and also a friend to Akbar, the greatest of all Mughal rulers. He finished his massive and definitive work, the *Akbar Nama* and *Ain-i-Akbari*, in the waning years of the sixteenth century. It marks a decisive and schematic departure from the predominant historiographic format of the time, as it does in several other aspects of the construction of an alternative world view. The *Akbar Nama* opens with the praise of Allah, for sure, and then moves to Adam and traces Akbar's lineage back to fifty-three generations of his ancestors. It dislocates the historiographic axis from the groove of Islam and seeks to construct an alternative teleology of universal history in which Akbar is the heir not of Muhammad and the caliphs, but of Adam himself, the first human being, and thus the ruler of all humanity.<sup>6</sup> The text therefore promotes the idea of a powerful sovereign and a centralized state structure.

*Akbar Nama* and the *Ain-i-Akbari* together constitute a single book. The first part of the *Akbar Nama* contains an account of Akbar's ancestors, including that of his father Humayun. The second part gives the most complete account of Akbar's reign up to the 46th year, in a chronological order. The work was undertaken in 1595 and, after five revisions, completed in 1602. The *Ain-i-Akbari* is the third part of the book. It is a unique compilation of the system of administration and control over the various departments of government in a great empire. It faithfully and minutely records, to the minutest detail, a wide array of facts illustrating its extent, resources, condition, population, industry and wealth as the abundant material supplied from official sources could furnish.<sup>7</sup> It also contains an account of the religious and philosophical systems of the Hindus, as described in their ancient books, and of their social customs and practices. Thus, Abul Fazl widened the range and scope of history as no medieval historian before him had done and his work is considered the most comprehensive account of Mughal administration and state structure.

## Methodology

Abul Fazl had a rational and secular approach to history. He also applied a new methodology to collect facts and marshal them on the basis of critical investigation. These are the hallmarks of his writings. He widened the scope of history by recording a mass of facts pertaining to political, social, economic and cultural life, and by incorporating chapters on administrative regulations, procedures and topographical accounts of various provinces. He laboured hard for the collection of material, selected important facts after careful enquiry and investigation, and then presented them in a clear and systematic manner. He questioned the validity of a source and accepted it only when it satisfied the principles of historical investigation formulated by him.



In other words, he created a new idiom for understanding and interpreting history, widened its range and scope and laid down the principles of historical investigation. It may, therefore, be suggested that in Abul Fazl's writings we can discover a philosophy of history, i.e., a definite concept about the nature and purpose of history, principles for its interpretation, and the critical apparatus for the collection and selection of facts of history.<sup>8</sup>

Abul Fazl realized and recognized the importance of original sources and gave his utmost attention and care to its study. He did not depend on a single source or account in order to ascertain a fact, but obtained as many versions as he could. They were put to a critical examination before they were accepted. He states that he has formulated a set of questions which were put to the reporter of an event or fact. This procedure, he points out, is of great help to the historian in ascertaining the truth.<sup>9</sup> His source material consisted of accounts of events written by eye-witnesses. Reports, memoranda, minutes prepared by the offices, imperial *Farman's*, and other records were carefully consulted.<sup>10</sup>

## Governance and Sovereignty

In the political field, Abul Fazl can be compared with Barani of Delhi Sultanate. While both of them were concerned with social stability, Abul Fazl's method of handling this concept was different. *Ain-i-Akbari* creates a theory of sovereignty promised on social contract. He drew a picture of society that existed before and then explained how sovereignty emerged.<sup>11</sup>

### *Divine Theory of Padshahat (Badshahat) and the Concept of Royalty*

According to Abul Fazl, the term *Padshahat (Badshahat)* meant 'an established owner' where *Pad* stands for stability and *shah* stands for owner. *Padshah* therefore, means powerful, established owner who cannot be eliminated by anyone.<sup>12</sup> The *Badshah* had a superior place in the Mughal Empire. He was the ultimate authority on all social, economic, political and judicial powers. This theory of *Badshahat* was a combination of Mongol, Turkish, Iranian, Islamic and Indian political traditions. According to Abul Fazl, '*Badshahat* is the light derived from God which has been sent by God himself. God throws his kindness on *Badshah*; who works as the agent of god'.<sup>13</sup> A *Badshah* considered himself as the father and his subjects were his children. So it was his duty to make every effort for the welfare of his people and take care of every aspect of their life, be it economic, social, political, religious and so on. He should always treat his people equally to maintain peace and harmony in his empire.<sup>14</sup>

It is evident in the writings of Abul Fazl that Akbar was interested in establishing the authority of the *Badshah* over all other elements of the state. In 1579, through a decree named *mazhar*, Akbar gained a great deal of authority to interpret law. But he was not satisfied with this limited power. This remained controversial as he was compared with the great Muslim jurists like Imam Abu Hanifa, Hambal and others. Akbar, after some time, lost interest in the position of king

of Islam. He wanted a wider concept of religion. He sought for a new justification of religious thoughts and Abul Fazl provided this to him. Abul Fazl told him the new meaning of sovereignty as a divine light. Later on Akbar portrayed himself as an agent of god who worked on his behalf.<sup>15</sup> According to Abul Fazl, sovereignty was in nature, a divine light (*farr-i-izadi*) and with this statement he seems to dismiss as inadequate the traditional reference to the king as the shadow of God (*zill-I Ilah*).<sup>16</sup>

### *Sovereignty in Badshahat*

The king established his sovereignty by considering himself an agent of god and used his absolute powers according to the rule of controller, guide and state.<sup>17</sup> Abul Fazl considered *Badshah* as the father of his people so it was the duty of people to respect him and obey his orders. But if the *Badshah* discriminated on the basis of caste, religion and class then he could not be considered a good king. According to him, the king had been given miraculous powers, it was impossible to challenge him and nobody could share his power. During the Delhi Sultanate, the king was the final authority in governance, administration, agriculture, education and in other fields but he had no say if they were related to religious matters<sup>18</sup> but when Akbar acquired kingship he made himself the final authority even in religious disputes vis-à-vis the Imam-e-Adil<sup>19</sup> because he followed the order of God and He could not be wrong. Therefore people must follow his order. It is clear that Akbar was the ideal king for Abul Fazl and that's why he looked at Akbar as a 'complete man who could never be wrong'.

### *Toleration and Sulh-I-Kul- Doctrines of Peace*

The agent of God could not practice discrimination among the various faiths present in the society. A doctrine for justifying the tolerant religious policy was now the need of the hour. Sovereignty was not restricted to any particular faith. It became overarching. They believed all religions were, in essence, the same but only the paths varied. Abul Fazl carried this logical thought to Islam and Shariat. He could not find any justification for their sovereignty over others while Barani did so.<sup>20</sup> He believed that in a poly-religious country like India the theory of monarchical sovereignty was more relevant. Here sovereignty was not to be related with any particular religion as the monarch was above all the religions. He promoted the good values of different religions and thus assembled different faiths for maintaining peace everywhere. He had to sustain those qualities by adopting an appropriate religious status. He provided relief to himself and his people by giving them freedom from bound thoughts. After evaluating Abul Fazl we can conclude that a sovereign must have the quality of tolerance for the existing beliefs and he should not reject the traditional ways of his people which were necessary and complementary. Abul Fazl justified the views of Akbar by promoting him as having a rationalist approach to social reforms. Fazl argued that he did so, as he wanted to construct a 'Hindustan' that could stand out in the world with greater confidence.<sup>21</sup>

### *Division of Society*

Abul Fazl gave the concept of sovereignty and state in the context of the needs of society. On that basis he classified human beings into four categories<sup>22</sup> as the warriors, artificers and merchants, the learned (religious class viz., Brahmans, Ulamaa), the husband men and labourers. He put the learned class in the third place. He downgraded this class on the basis of existing social reality of his time. He also classified human beings into three classes on the basis of Greek tradition, based on their qualities as noble, base, and intermediate.<sup>23</sup> Nobles were those who had pure intellect, sagacity, capacity of administration or composition of eloquence and personal courage for military duty. The base and intermediate sections included various professions. These were the qualities of those who were self centered and did their activities more for themselves than for any other.<sup>24</sup>

According to Satish Chandra, 'Abul Fazl's view about human being, particularly the lower classes called the base or the ignorable reflected in large measure the prejudices of the contemporary upper classes. It was implied that the lower orders should not aspire for a share in state power, and that the task of administering the state should be the preserve of those belonging to noble families, and to the upper castes. Prevalence of evil sections in society was a justification for royal despotism, for only a king who possessed the necessary qualities could control these sections. Secondly, it was necessary for a king endowed with *Farr-i-Izidi* to establish social stability by not permitting the dust of sectarian strife to arise. It was also obligatory for him to put each of these (sections) in its proper place, and by uniting (their) personal ability with due respect for others, to cause the world to flourish. Thus stability even dignity implied the maintenance of one's due station in life. Akbar is quoted as saying that the *Daroghas* should be watchful to see that no one from covetousness abandons his own profession. Elsewhere we are told that Akbar quoted with approval Shah Tahmasp's statement that 'When a menial takes to learning he does so as at expense of his duties'.<sup>25</sup>

The divinity of sovereignty clearly defied any restraints on the power and authority of the sovereign. Of his several classifications of human beings in different contexts, Abul Fazl divides one of them into three groups: The noblest souls are those, whose loyalty to the king, Akbar, is absolute, unquestioning and undemanding, a virtue in itself. Placed below them are ones whose display of loyalty is on par with tangible gain, those who have made traffic of their service. The worst never show any sign of loyalty. Rebellion, rebelliousness and their synonyms are the most damning language of abuse in medieval court literature; defeating rebels becomes a cleansing operation. For Abul Fazl the rebellious were not merely the ones who defied imperial authority; even those like Rana Sangram Singh and Mahmud in Bihar, who refused to surrender to Mughal conquering power, were rebels; they defied the divine destiny manifest in history's teleology.<sup>26</sup>

### *Akbar as an Ideal King*

Abul Fazl mentioned in *Akbar Nama* that Akbar always worked wisely for the welfare of his people. He had tolerance, broad mindedness and a strong sense of justice. He provided stability

to the state and gave good governance to ensure economic prosperity, peace and safety of his people. He provided religious freedom to all. His political views were clear and were intended for the expansion of the state boundaries. Therefore, Abul Fazl justified his policy of imperialism on moral grounds.<sup>27</sup>

According to Harbans Mukhia, Abul Fazl envisions the sovereign essentially as paterfamilias, and bestows absolute power to them. Everything that the ruler does, all gifts Mansabs or rewards bestowed by him upon his nobles, princes or subjects are favours; nothing is gained by anyone as a matter of right. On the other hand, Abul Fazl binds the ruler with bestowing paternal care to his subjects. Subjects are entrusted to the king by God, seems to be Abul Fazl's favourite phrase for the king, as also the metaphors of shepherd, gardener and physician. The king as father motif is of course almost universal and has been prevalent across regions and civilizations since ancient times. It is seen in almost all cultures and streams of thought from Buddhist to Greco-Roman, ancient Egyptian, Assyrian and biblical. Enumeration of the requisite qualities of a ruler has understandably been of central concern to medieval political thought. For Zia Barani, a strong determination to conquer and govern nearly exhausted these qualities. For Babur, good governance implied that the town walls be solid, subjects be thriving, provisions be in store and the treasury be full. But the running thread in Abul Fazl's several discussions of kingship is the composition of a paternal love towards his subjects, the priceless jewel of justice and fair play, and observance of absolute peace, *Sulh-i-Kul*, without discrimination; other conditions vary with the context, at times out of step with one another. There is a grander vision to Abul Fazl's conception of sovereignty than enumerating a king's qualities: The true King must understand the 'spirit of the age'.<sup>28</sup>

### Justice

It was also the duty of the king to provide justice to his people and always punish the wrongdoers and ensure that justice helped the innocent people.<sup>29</sup> According to him, a king should be kind and harmonious while dispensing justice and treat his people as his children and himself as their father. He should keep it in his mind that he was sent by God on earth to ensure peace and justice for all. He is a medium for their welfare. He should always remain indifferent and take care that nobody was hurt by him. His decisions should be transparent and he should always try to make his reign a civilized society. He should take care of the basic needs of people. The king should try to place himself in the criminal's shoes at the time of judgment. He should consider every aspect of those circumstances in which crime had occurred and give his decision only after that. If the king wanted to increase goodness of his state he should always give rewards to good people and punish the wrongdoers to inspire them to do good work.<sup>30</sup>

Abul Fazl's basic premise was that the ruler should not depend on any religious person. His moral level should be high and should know the moral and spiritual qualities. He tried to show this concept of state and sovereignty in terms of Iranian traditions. According to him in a poly religious state the concept of justice for all should be free from any bias irrespective of birth. He

favoured abolition of *Juzjyah*. He convinced us that Akbar's conquests were not based on spiritual or religious differences but they were necessary for justice as Indian politics was based on justice and tolerance and he called it *Dar-ul-Sulh*.<sup>31</sup>

## Abul Fazl's Views on Administration

Humayun did not have the time to revise the old administration. It was Akbar who revised it and gave it a structure of government and administration based on his knowledge of the Delhi Sultanate. He did not make any changes in administration at the district and sub-district levels. His land revenue system was almost the same.<sup>32</sup> An important question arises here as to what was different or new that made the Mughal Empire stronger than the Delhi Sultanate? What were those new policies by which Akbar could govern such a large, stable, long-lasting political and administrative structure?<sup>33</sup> As we know a strong and well planned administrative structure is a sound link of great governance. It is also necessary for welfare and peace of the state that people should not fear an enemy's attack. All this could not have been possible in Akbar's empire if intelligent, and loyal officers and army were not present, as the state could defeat the enemy with their help only. In reality Mughal polity was not a complete continuation of the Delhi Sultanate. He changed the designation of the officials. His important contribution was the development of a provincial administration, patterned on the central system of government. Detailed rules and regulations were made for better control.<sup>34</sup> In his administrative views Abul Fazl gave supreme place to advocates among all the officers. According to him advocates should have those qualities which could solve both private and social problems of the king.<sup>35</sup>

As we see in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, the state was divided into many levels and each level had many officers of various kinds. All of them were responsible for the administration of the state and answerable to the ruler directly and hence they always worked for the betterment of the public. We can find the same concept in the *Ain-i-Akbari*. Akbar divided his empire into *Subas*, *Sarkars* and *Mahalls*. He appointed a chain of officers at various levels who were controlled by ministers at the centre. In this system, the religion of the officers could not interfere in their administrative work, so this system was also followed by his successors. Akbar wanted a sovereign rule so he gave importance to it. He systematized and centralized his administration. There were small landlords under the king who were known as *Zamindars* or *Jagirdars*. The king often used their forces to curb other chieftains (landlords). There was also a class called *Bhumia* which got some land from the *Jagirdars*. The *Bhumia* were the owners of the land and did not have to pay duty for it. But his land was always inferior to that of the *Jagirdari* land. There also existed a *Khalsa* land which was under the direct control of the king. This land would be mostly in the vicinity of the capital. This system had flourished even during the Sultanate and the Mughals did not disturb it as the landlords (chieftains) kept the lands with those who were allied with the king of Delhi.<sup>36</sup>

The Mughal state had a vast centralized patrimonial system. In this system they bestowed various kinds of ranks and hierarchies borrowed from the *Mansabdari* system of Persia (In Persian

*Mansab* means rank). These ranks had two parts comprising *zat* and *sawar*. Each *Mansabdar* had some rights (*zat*) and a force of horses to command (*Sawar*). The ruler provided him the grant of his strength. The *Ain-i-Akbari* mentions sixty- six ranks. At that time, the system granted gifts to the deserving. All the *Mansabdars* reported directly to the ruler. They also collected revenue on the behalf of the king and received salaries in cash.<sup>37</sup>

Abul Fazl gave three classifications for the *Mansabdars*: first, those who had 500 and above *Mansabs*, second, those who had 400 to 200 *Mansabs* and third, those who had 150 to 10 *Mansabs*.<sup>38</sup> This system gave rise to a community with various grades between the people and the ruler and a hierarchical system came into existence. Summing up, in medieval times, Indian society had a complicated system of rank and status on the basis of military power. The military power became a status symbol and the whole framework was designed around it. The Mughals also followed this pattern for peace in their kingdom and they did not try to change it.<sup>39</sup>

Abul Fazl had a strong belief in hierarchy but he was more concerned about the need of talent for the kingdom. He did not bother about the social background of a talented person. It is for this reason that he stated that Akbar was moved by the spirit of the age, for he knew the values of talent, honoured people of various classes with appointments in the rank of army and raised them from the position of a common soldier to the dignity of a grandee.<sup>40</sup> Mughals did not interfere in the Indian caste system and also did not try to change the basic frame work of Indian society. They also did not interfere in the distribution of justice and the economy management of the *Jagirdari* system.<sup>41</sup>

Abul Fazl wanted the Hindus and Muslims co-exist peacefully. But according to him the Hindus wrapped themselves up in their own cocoon. He wrote this on the basis that very few matters of the Hindus came up in courts. The matters were settled by panchayats or by caste courts.<sup>42</sup> The Mughals did not interfere in the existing framework of society. The panchayat and caste courts existed and therefore the *Zamindars* were loved like parental figures. The land belonged to the family and was transferred from father to son. So the theory that the land belongs to king was only rational. All land belonged to the peasant families, the *Zamindar* and the king. This communal ownership prepared a ground for the development of canals, common grazing grounds and so on. It also helped in developing trade and commerce in village and society.<sup>43</sup>

## Land Revenue and Army Structure

Akbar's administration was a continuation of the Delhi Sultanate, and so was his land revenue system. Akbar's provinces were divided into *Sarkars* and *Parganas*. Each *Sarkar* was divided into a number of *Parganas*. For general administration there was a *Shiqdar* and an *Amil* for assessment and collection of land revenue. There were many other posts as well like a treasurer, a *Qanungo* and so on. There was a large army of people who were appointed to look after the matters of production i.e. the produce at the time of harvest and demanding the state's share of it. The land revenue system was the basis of the financial system of the state. *Dahsala* or a ten year system was the basis of Akbar's revenue policy. It was the logical evolution of the

system of measurement adopted by Sher Shah which continued to operate in Hindustan i.e. the region between modern day Lahore and Allahabad. On the basis of this system, state demand was expressed as a cash rate based on local produce and local prices. The *Dahsala* did not mean a ten years settlement but was an average of the production and prices of the last ten years. The productivity and local prices during the past ten years were worked out afresh on the basis of information, and then averaged in cash. On the basis of this evaluation it is clear that the land revenue demand was undoubtedly the heaviest demand. It put a lot of pressure on the peasants. This was the heaviest demand which the peasants had to meet under threat of severe action, including ejection and loss of life, if he failed to meet it.<sup>44</sup>

The *Dahsala* system which was based on measurement or *Zabt* was introduced in many places like Lahore, Allahabad, Gujarat, Malwa, Bihar and Multan. The second method was crop sharing. There were many other methods in different areas for collection of revenue. All these methods needed a large number of intelligent inspectors to check them.<sup>45</sup>

Abul Fazl narrates that Akbar during his reign started a system of collecting tax on individual basis. This system allowed the farmer to pay his tax based on his individual harvest. He only had to pay the tax on whatever produce he got. This system was different from the previous one found in the Mughal Empire, where a whole village had to pay the tax collectively. In this system, every farmer had to pay the tax whether he had a good produce or not because everyone had to share the tax equally. So, when Akbar became ruler, he changed this system, taking a step to reform the condition of farmers. But this system, in which a farmer could pay his tax according to what he produced or according to his financial condition did not prove to be beneficial for the farmers, as the authority of collecting the tax was in the hands of the zamindars or landlords and the *ameer*. They exploited the farmers and compelled them to pay the tax in conditions of droughts, floods or other natural calamities. Although Akbar had directed them not to collect tax during natural calamities the zamindars and landlords did not heed his advice. Akbar took some preventive measures to stop this exploitation of farmers. He kept a watch on the zamindars to know who exploited and who did not, as a result of which he succeeded, to some extent, in returning the money to the farmers who had paid the tax under force<sup>46</sup> but despite all this, he was not able to keep a watch over his whole kingdom, and this exploitation of the peasantry became common among the landlords. This practice continued in many parts of India in Akbar's reign.

Akbar had a large and strong army for the smooth working of governance and administration. The Mughal army consisted of cavalry, infantry, artillery, elephants and camels. There was no easy way to assess the strength of Akbar's army. Troops were maintained by the Mansabdars according to their obligations denoted by their *samar* rank. According to Montserrat writing in 1581, "There were forty-five thousand cavalry, five thousand elephants and many thousands infantry, paid directly from the royal treasury."<sup>47</sup>

## Religious Views

Abul Fazl was not a blind supporter of Islam. This was the reason that he respected the Hindu religion and supported the participation of Hindus in governance and administration. It can

also be said that Abul Fazl was influenced by composite culture of his time. He argued that Hindus also believed in the theory of monotheism (one god) like Muslims but most Muslims get them wrong because they do not read their religious scriptures and so their criticism springs from ignorance.<sup>48</sup> In fact Fazl did not think that Islam was superior to all religions while Barani and other thinkers regarded it as supreme. This was the reason that many people called Abul Fazl a rebel, a Kafir, Hindu or Agnipujak etc.<sup>49</sup> His religious thoughts were based on secularism which considered all religions equal and believed in religious fraternity and *Sulh-i-Kul* (peace everywhere).<sup>50</sup> He was considered an intellectual, a thinker who believed in the goodness of all religions. He liked rationality and innovations in every field. He did not like orthodox, traditional and customary values. He said if traditions were sufficient for all the times then why the Prophet brought new thoughts. He argued that change in law and religion must be initiated with the passage of time.<sup>51</sup> His modernity and religious rationality were reflected in the thoughts of Akbar who also declined to be a traditionalist himself and started innovative policies and customs in his reign. We can find its glimpse in *Sulh-i-kul* and *Deen-i-Ilahi*.

People from different religions and sects lived in India in the medieval age. It was not that easy to unite all of them under one umbrella. The Sultans of Delhi did not try to unite them during their reign, and this was the reason that Delhi Sultanate was not as tolerant and liberal, for the most part, as Mughal period was. Akbar conducted many new experiments to please people of different religious groups. Though he was not completely successful he did manage to unite them during his reign. Policies like *Sulh-kul* and *Din-i-Ilahi* gave strength to his governance and administration but these new experiments were not as successful as Akbar hoped.

## Conclusion

Abul Fazl was Akbar's trusted courtier however; he had a genuine adulation and reverence for Akbar. His firm belief in religious tolerance owed its origin to his formative years, when he and his family experienced the worst type of persecution at the hands of the orthodox Ulama. This proved to be the basis of a lasting friendship with Akbar. Moreover, few could doubt that Akbar possessed the highest and noblest qualities of head and heart. No wonder that Abul Fazl found in Akbar the qualities of a king, philosopher and hero. Abul Fazl's official position, as well as his personal views on religion and politics, required that he should defend, justify and extol Akbar and his activities.<sup>52</sup>

Kings like Akbar and Ashoka had to fight a series of battles at the start of their rule to consolidate their position and expand their empires. But when they achieved stability they proposed the ideas of peace, religion and friendship; be it the *Dhamma* of Ashoka or *Sulh-kul* or *Dini-i-Ilahi* of Akbar. Here some questions arise: Why did Akbar need *Sulh-kul* in his kingship? Wasn't he able to run his administration efficiently? Did he really need to introduce *Deen-i-Ilahi*? Wasn't he successful in maintaining peace and order in his large empire? It was perhaps, to make his subjects happy and to instill confidence in the other groups like Rajputs and Marathas; he created the concept of *Sulh-kul* and *Deen-i-Ilahi*.



Abul Fazl rarely discusses the failures of Akbar or the shortcoming of his policies yet he was undoubtedly one of the greatest thinkers and scholars that India has produced. One may pick holes in his theory of social contract and more in his theory of divine origin of sovereignty since the two theories are not logically compatible with each other. Indeed, he may be said to have tried to ride two horses, and combined (in anticipation) the views of Hobbes and James I (and he went much beyond James I in his claim for the sovereign). Yet the essential bedrock of rationality in Abul Fazl's thought commands respect, even admiration. Certainly no one after him in India debated the issues of sovereignty at the same high level of reason and abstraction.<sup>53</sup>

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30. A. Appodoroy, *Political Thoughts in India*, (Delhi: Khama Publication, 2002), p. 180.
31. Satish Chandra, op. cit., pp. 132–134.
32. M. Athar Ali, p. 62.
33. Satish Chandra, op. cit., pp. 134–135.
34. Ibid.
35. Harbans Mukhia, op. cit., p. 50.
36. V. R. Mehta, op. cit., p. 149.
37. Abul Fazl, *Akbar Nama*, vol. I, p. 283, vol. II, p. 41–42.
38. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, p. 250.
39. V. R. Mehta, op. cit., pp. 150–151.
40. Satish Chandra, op. cit., p. 133.
41. V. R. Mehta, op. cit., p. 152.
42. Ibid. p. 148.
43. Ibid. p. 152–153.
44. Satish Chandra, op. cit., pp. 147–152.
45. Ibid. pp. 152–153.
46. Ibid. pp. 147–157.
47. Ibid. pp. 162–165.
48. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, pp. 2–4; Abul Fazl, *Akbar Nama*, vol. III, pp. 654–660.
49. Mohibbul Hassan, op. cit.
50. M. Athar Ali, op. cit., pp. 162–164.
51. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, p. 179.
52. Mohibbul Hassan, op. cit., pp. 141–42.
53. M. Athar Ali, op. cit., pp. 125–126.

## Rammohan Roy: Civil Rights

*Amiya P. Sen*

He would be free or not be at all ... love of freedom was perhaps the strongest passion of his soul; freedom not of action merely but of thought.

*William Adam*

The character of a nation is always in a great degree dependant on the character of individuals ... the single name of Rammohan Roy is cherished by the more enlightened of his countrymen with gratitude and admiration because they feel how much they owe him when foreigners speak with insulting contempt—as they often do—of the native intellect, the example of Rammohan Roy is appealed to as an answer.

*Bengal Herald, 17 January 1841*

On 5 April 1823, an anonymous correspondent of the *Calcutta Journal*, a popular newspaper of the time, produced what appear to be fairly insightful analyses of social citizenry in the colonial city of Calcutta. The residents of that city, the correspondent claimed, could be broadly classified under three categories. First, there were those who allegedly preferred to remain plunged in darkness, desiring neither 'benefit of knowledge nor blessings of true religion'. Their more 'enlightened' compatriots, by comparison, were quite contented with the status quo and asked no more than the continued enjoyment of civil and religious rights available under the Company's administration. Finally, there were people who consciously opposed British rule, chiefly for its

tendency to pull down ‘the stronghold of ancient superstition and absurdities of established custom’.<sup>1</sup> Prima facie it is tempting to attribute these observations to Raja Rammohan Roy (1772–1833) himself for the rhetoric and the distinct turn of phrase are very reminiscent of him. The singular difficulty with this claim though is that the Raja would have been hard pressed to identify himself with any of the three categories. Of these, the first and the third would have been entirely unacceptable to him and even the second generally incompatible with his social and political vision. Rammohan’s primary quest as I see it, was epistemological—an attempt to locate the right and socially useful sources of knowledge. The Raja not only accepted British rule in India as a *fait accompli* but providential in design and something that had to be constantly worked upon through the active mediation of interested citizens. This ruled out preferring pre-British rule to the British or to even remain contented with the limited or selective changes introduced by the Company. In modern India Rammohan was perhaps the first to argue, albeit somewhat indirectly and in a subdued voice, that colonialism *ipso facto* prevented Britain from replicating in India those social and political institutions on which her own modernization had rested. Thus British liberal ideology or constitutional practice followed perceptibly different practices in Britain and India. In Rammohan’s view, the daunting task before responsible public opinion in both these countries was to close down this gap between precept and practice. This called for a pro-active, not reactive response to change.

Rammohan’s historical location naturally makes him a controversial figure. The Raja lived and worked at a time when patriotic impulses or cultural pride were not wholly incompatible with a genuine admiration for the new cultural and political order. Even fifty years after him, a fellow-Bengali, the novelist Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838–84) could say that in itself, British rule was not unwelcome so long as it produced positive changes in the daily lives of the people.<sup>2</sup> However, such sentiments must be understood in relation to special circumstances of Bengal where the political transition was the quickest, quite dramatic and fraught with important changes within society and economy. The nature and the pace at which such changes were carried out would explain why the Bengali intelligentsia, paradoxically enough, were the warmest supporters of British rule as also its most articulate critics. Rammohan too, as we shall presently see, was an ardent supporter of colonization without entrusting India to the perpetual care of the British.

Though much eulogized in some quarters, Rammohan also suffered much malice and misapprehension.<sup>3</sup> In most cases, this came from people whose visions were clouded by personal differences or sheer conservatism. However, even closer to our time, his standing within the so-called ‘Bengal Renaissance’ has been viewed or interpreted very differently, depending upon the historical or ideological perspective employed. His work has sometimes been interpreted as an early and effective antidote to Christian proselytization. This conveniently overlooks the deep understanding and appreciation that the Raja had of the moral and religious precepts of Christianity. More recently, Marxist critics while justly associating him with only an ambivalent and limited modernization,<sup>4</sup> do not sufficiently allow for the fact that in their day, Rammohan and his supporters had no real understanding of the mechanism of exploitation that colonialism employed or how exploitation was inherent to it. No doubt the Raja displayed caution and conservatism in certain matters; on the other hand it might be reasonably argued that no Indian

thinker of the 19th and early 20th centuries entirely escaped this. Arguably, the mentality of colonized intellectuals deserves as much to be an autonomous field of study as colonialism itself as a distinct stage in human history.

Rammohan Roy was born into a family of high-ranking (*kulin*) Brahmin family of Radhanagar, District Burdwan, W. Bengal that had the distinction of serving the imperial Mughals for three generations. His great grandfather, Krishna Chandra Bandopadhyay was in the service of Murshid Quli Khan, *Subedar* [governor] of Mughal Bengal. Rammohan's grandfather, Brojomadhab, served Ali Verdi Khan, Murshid Quli's successor in office. Rammohan himself went as the emissary of Emperor Akabar II before the Court of Directors of East India Company in London. The family acquired rentier interests when Brojomadhab's son, Ramakanta invested in landed estates following the Permanent Settlement in Bengal (1793). Rammohan followed closely on his father's footsteps, combining lucrative money-lending activity with purchase of prime estates. Between 1809 and 1814, the six *talukas* or estates he had acquired fetched him an annual income of Rs.11,000. The family's long-standing secular service under the Mughals explains the Raja's close familiarity with Indo-Persian culture and what has come to be seen as his 'great regard for the externals of Moslem civilisation'.<sup>5</sup> There is nevertheless a certain ambivalence that we may detect here. Especially after he embraced the idea of interminable progress under British rule, praise for the Mughals was hard to come by. Rammohan accepted the title 'Raja' conferred on him by Akbar II but remained consistently critical of Mughal polity and statecraft.<sup>6</sup>

Rammohan first entered the service of Europeans in the year 1803 as *munshi* (private secretary) to the Collector of Murshidabad, Thomas Woodforde. Subsequently, he served the civilian John Digby, later to be his close personal friend. Lending money to low paid Britishers or officials enabled Rammohan to considerably widen his circle of friends and acquaintances. However, it was during this time that he was also seriously drawn into a study of the English language but perhaps more importantly, developments in contemporary Europe. Digby himself refers to his constant habit of reading English newspapers and his gathering interest in continental politics. Several years later, when in England, he expressed his feelings in the following words:

I felt impressed with the idea that in Europe, literature was zealously encouraged and knowledge widely diffused; that mechanics was almost in a state of perfection and politics in daily progress, that moral duties were, on the whole, observed with exemplary propriety .... I was, in consequence, continually making efforts for a series of efforts for a series of years to visit the western world with a view to satisfy myself on these subjects by personal experiences.<sup>7</sup>

By 1814, apparently, Rammohan Roy had enough personal resources not to work for a living. It was thus that in the manner of the prosperous gentry, he chose to settle down in Calcutta, the political and cultural nucleus of British India. Hereafter, he befriended many more European

gentlemen of distinction belonging to the world of business and speculation such as John W. Ricketts, owner of the Agency House in which he invested a good part of his money, James Silk Buckingham, the radical journalist who was deported from India, the Orientalist scholar, H. Wilson, David Hare, a pioneer in English education in Bengal, and the Unitarian, William Adam, who supported his agenda of religious reform.

For the next fifteen years, that is until he sailed for England in November 1830, Rammohan was embroiled in furious debates with Hindu pundits and publicists over the 'true basis' of Hinduism; questioned the basis of Trinitarian Christianity; repeatedly petitioned the State for redressal of civic grievances; shocked orthodox Hindu opinion by supporting anti-Sati legislation and showed a growing interest in a free trade economy. This intensely polemical phase in his life was intellectually also the most productive. Apart from the fact that he contributed substantially to the growth of modern Bengali prose, it is important to remember that between 1814-33, he authored more than 60 tracts and pamphlets in the English, Bengali and Sanskrit languages. This may well be contrasted with the fact that in the pre-1814 phase, Rammohan is said to have composed just three works, two of which are still untraceable. As a young boy he is known to have written a tract condemning Hindu idolatry that had led to serious differences with his father. However, the radicalism of this tract is difficult to vouch for since it has still not been recovered. Similar is the case with the *Manzaratul Adiyar*, a Persian tract he may have composed sometime around 1803-4, simultaneously with the well-known *Tuhfat-ul-Munabidin* (A Gift to the Monotheists) the main text of which is in Persian and the introduction in Arabic. The post-1814 writings, by comparison, cover a very wide range of subjects, covering metaphysics, Bengali grammars, temperance, gender justice, history, Hindu laws of inheritance and observations on the state of society and economy in contemporary Bengal. From Calcutta he also successfully ran three journals/newspapers—the Bengali *Samvad Kaumudi*, the bilingual *Brahmanical Magazine* and the Persian *Mirat ul Akbbar*.

Though officially sent to England in 1830 to plead for an enhanced pension for the Mughal Emperor, Rammohan personally carried multiple agendas. In part he was there to counter the propaganda carried out by the Hindu orthodoxy against the Sati Regulations. More importantly, however, he remained acutely conscious of the fact that his visit coincided with the passage of the Reform Bill in the British Parliament. While in England, he called upon a wide variety of people. At the industrial town of Manchester, he shook hands with the working population and exhorted them to support the King and his ministers in effecting reform. He was delighted with the midnight meeting he could manage with the philosopher Bentham but admonished the Socialist Charles Owen for his atheism. In the summer of 1832 he traveled to France, the political developments of which always excited him.<sup>8</sup> Around this time he also appeared before Select Committees of the House of Commons to be interrogated at length on the material and moral conditions in India under the Company's administration. The testimony he has left behind now serves as valuable source material for the study of early Indian responses to colonialism.

Raja Rammohan Roy died after a brief illness on 27 December 1833.

## Colonial Encounter and Rammohan

One of Rammohan's letters (of 1832) to a friend, George James Gordon, carries an autobiographical fragment that reveals the political views he held in his early life. First, there is the claim that even at the age of twenty, he was 'tolerably acquainted with [British] laws and forms of government'. The same letter also reveals how and why he came to radically change his views on British rule. Though initially unhappy with this, the Raja admits that he gradually overcame such 'prejudices' from the settled conviction that though foreign in origin, this rule would lead to the amelioration in the condition of native inhabitants. Such conclusions must be understood in the light of certain characteristic qualities that he also began to associate with peoples and communities. Europeans, he found on the whole to be 'more intelligent and steady' and the Hindus 'superstitious and miserable both in the performance of their religious rites and in their domestic concern'.<sup>9</sup> Again, the Bengalis were a people of 'submissive disposition'; they did not stir and showed loyalty to the Mughals even as their property was plundered and their blood wantonly shed. In a statement that foreshadows the events of 1857, the Raja warned that this would not be necessarily true of the people from the upper provinces. The grievances of such people, if left unheeded, might weaken if not actually undermine British power in India.<sup>10</sup> Prudence persuaded Rammohan to add that the possibilities of a strong anti-British sentiment developing in Bengal itself were indeed slim for, under the British, the people here had come to enjoy 'that freedom and security which is considered by rational and social beings as the grand object of all civil and religious institutions.'<sup>11</sup> By the 1820s, the 'providential nature' of British rule and sharp criticism of Mughal polity became recurring motifs in Rammohan's writings. An Appeal mad to the King in Council against strictures passed on the Indian press has the following:

... Divine Providence at last, in its abundant mercy, stirred up the English nation to break the yoke of those tyrants [Mughals] and to secure the oppressed natives of Bengal under its protection .... The English distinguished this city [Calcutta] by such peculiar marks of favour as free people would be expected to bestow, in establishing a English court of judicature and granting to al within its jurisdiction, the same civil rights as every Briton enjoys in his native country; thus putting the native in India in possession of such privileges as their forefathers never expected to obtain even under Hindu rulers. Considering these things ... your dutiful subjects consequently have not viewed the English as a body of conquerors but rather as deliverers, and look up to your Majesty not only as a ruler but also a father and protector.<sup>12</sup>

Even allowing for the strongly loyalist tone which was only expected to embellish an appeal, it is clear that Rammohan had come to accept the dominant thesis within early British writings on India. In concrete terms this meant pitting the 'regressive' character of pre-British rule with the 'enlightened' and 'liberating' character of the British. Oriental governments he now labeled as undemocratic and irresponsible. 'Asia affords few instances of Princes who have submitted their actions to the judgments of their people'<sup>13</sup> and further, that Asiatic princes profited from

deliberately keeping people in ignorance, he was to observe.<sup>14</sup> That the British ruling class itself took Rammohan to embody the ‘civilising’ mission that Britain had extended to India emerges from a passage that appeared in *The Times* on 13 January 1831:

We hail his arrival [in England] as a harbinger of those fruits which must result from the dissemination of European knowledge and literature of those sound principles of rule and government which it is the solemn obligation of Great Britain to extend to her vast and interesting Empire in the east.<sup>15</sup>

This brings us to the question of Rammohan Roy and Indian modernization. In a well-known essay, the historian Rajat K. Ray has identified the Raja with a three fold process of modernization: (a) the consolidation of the position of the traditional high caste landed gentry; (b) transformation of a medieval literati into a modern intelligentsia; (c) the transformation from monopolistic trade to free trade imperialism. In this section we deal with the first and the third of these processes.

Rammohan and like-minded individuals now appear quite naïve in their belief that even under colonialism, the free movement of European skills and capital would contribute to the economic modernization of India. In a meeting at the Calcutta Town Hall on the 17<sup>th</sup> December, 1829, Rammohan, along with Dwarkanath Tagore and Prasanna Kumar Tagore openly supported the ‘free trade’ lobby which was building up at the time in both Britain and India. It is noteworthy that men like Dwarkanath, who took this position, had wide ranging economic or commercial interests ranging from investment in land to financial speculation and comprador trade.<sup>16</sup> That the social character of the impending ‘transformation’ was to be extremely limited can be gauged from the repeated reference to the interests of ‘natives of wealth and respectability as well as the landholders of consequence’.<sup>17</sup>

A fairly explicit resume of the deep interests that a comprador class had begun taking in British rule occurs in the June 13<sup>th</sup>, 1829 issue of the *Bengal Herald*, a paper in which Rammohan himself had some proprietary interests. The piece in question connects the consolidation of British rule with appreciable increases in land prices and the price of food grains. More significantly though, connections are drawn between the redistribution of wealth, the birth of ‘middling’ society and greater moral freedom. Rammohan, himself a beneficiary of the Permanent Settlement in Bengal, believed in the ‘self-correcting authority of the natural landlord over his subjects’ which included both the will and the capacity to improve the condition of the subordinate peasantry.<sup>18</sup> Not surprisingly, his view on the Bengal economy, particularly on the land question drew sharp criticism from quite contrary quarters. *The Bengal Harakaru*, though generally of a liberal disposition, alleged that while testifying before the house of commons’ select committee, the Raja spoke merely as a *zamindar*, overlooking the plight of the cultivating peasant.<sup>19</sup> The conservative paper *Samachar Chandrika*, on the other hand, accused him of neglecting the interests of the traditional *zamindars* by which it meant that class that had failed to combine rentier interests with speculative trade. The *Harakaru*’s criticism, it has to be said, was somewhat harsh considering Rammohan’s recommendations to lower the rent and his general sensitivity



to the worsening condition of the Bengal peasantry. Apparently, he was even willing to tax his own class for he suggested a tax on luxuries to compensate for the loss of revenue that might follow from the lowering of rents. In Rammohan's defence it also needs to be said that his opponents often misinterpreted his support for European colonization. Thus the *Samachar Darpan* (of 15 October 1831) was unjust in its remark that unlike the Raja, the great body of Hindus did not wish that the English should come and cultivate the ground and become landlords. Surely Rammohan advocated the import of European skill and capital, not labour. His error, if any, lay in assuming that profits accruing from the investment of foreign skill and capital would be ploughed back into India's rural economy. Ironically enough, the free trade policy he supported allowed for the greater integration of Indian markets and labour with the dictates of a buoyant British capitalism. In effect, this seriously hampered India's own economic growth.

## The Rationalist Foundations of Reform

In the understanding of Rammohan Roy, the modernisation of India rested not on material development alone but also the intellectual. It is this aspect of his thought that Rajat Ray has identified as the transformation of a medieval literati to a modern intelligentsia. Despite not being formally associated with the founding of the Hindu College (1817) that eventually produced a fine crop of western educated intellectuals, Rammohan was a pioneer in the field of such education. More significantly, though, he contributed towards changing the contemporary Indian outlook upon the home and the world.

Rammohan's plans for modern education hinged on the greater use of English as the medium of instruction; here, the language itself was not as important as its function in disseminating useful contemporary knowledge. Arguably, this knowledge could also have been disseminated through indigenous languages as was indeed the case with certain modernizing countries.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, in Rammohan's time this looks an impracticable option especially given his preference for mathematics, natural Philosophy, chemistry, anatomy and other related sciences.<sup>21</sup> A competent technical vocabulary for these disciplines was found wanting a generation after him. Even in 1845, Kissory Chand Mitra, one of his early biographers could observe how the Bengali language remained 'destitute of a scientific nomenclature which must be either created or borrowed to enable us to transfuse European science into it'.<sup>22</sup> Rammohan although on the side of the Anglicists in pushing an English-medium education had intentions that were palpably different from that of Macaulay which brought about a largely literary education. And once again, as it would appear, the Raja failed to foresee why a colonial government would be keen to promote an education that carried a distinct ideological slant rather than a relatively value-free, scientific education.

Reason and reasonableness seem to be the two main platforms on which the reformism of Rammohan rested. It was on this ground that he demanded a more equitable share of property for Hindu women, the creation of certain enduring institutions that guaranteed civic and religious freedom, and end to the barbaric treatment of Hindu widows, idolatry and priestly

excesses. Importantly enough, the criterion of reason that he employs here is not necessarily internal to some belief or practice but an analytical category that could be applied even from the outside. This made it possible for him to sometimes judge seemingly contrary things using the same yardstick. Thus religion too could be judged from a secular viewpoint and not merely from that of the practitioner. In Rammohan, this intermeshing of the religious and the secular is best exemplified by a remark he once made in a letter [of 18<sup>th</sup> January, 1828] to his friend, John Digby. Quite remarkably, this letter connects advancement in religious life to that in the social and the political. For the Hindus, reforming their religion was necessary for the sake of obtaining ‘political advancement and social comfort’.<sup>23</sup> Utility, it would seem, was also to be a measure of religion and not surprisingly, Rammohan has sometimes been labeled as a ‘religious Benthamite’.<sup>24</sup> This is indeed an extraordinary position to take for a man who situated himself within the philosophical non-dualism of Acharya Sankara which takes a strongly non-utilitarian approach to religion.

Apparently, Rammohan entertained a dynamic view of reform and change, situating it within the larger framework of world-historical struggles. ‘Struggles are not merely between the reformers and anti-reformers’, he wrote to an English friend in April 1832, ‘but between liberty and tyranny throughout the world between justice and injustice and between right and wrong’.<sup>25</sup> This also underscores his universalism,—the belief that men everywhere had comparable problems which could be resolved by using similar methods. The struggle to bring about an enlightened and responsible government, was in his opinion, the common political destiny of civilized man. It was thus that he hosted parties and publicly rejoiced at the news of people attempting to overthrow despotic governments in France, Portugal or Naples. Conversely he could be sad and melancholic on hearing such movements capitulating before reactionary forces. ‘All mankind are one great family of which numerous nations and tribes existing are only branches’, he wrote to the French Foreign Minister, Talleyrand. But sustaining this required a free flow of peoples and ideas across countries and continents. Rammohan was pained upon hearing that his personal voyage to France would require the formal approval of bureaucrats.<sup>26</sup> His communication to Talleyrand also throws up the idea of resolving international disputes through amicable bilateral meetings. The term he chooses to use here is ‘Congress’ and one wonders if Rammohan’s thoughts were not in some way influenced by post-Napoleonic peace settlements, viz. the Congress of Vienna (1815) and the subsequent Concert of Europe (1815–22).

However, the Raja also believed that internationalism and the universal destiny of man was best protected by developed nations showing genuine concern for the underdeveloped; of the strong feeling morally obliged to help the weak. The universalism of Rammohan Roy is perhaps best manifest in his religious thinking and the extraordinary range of scholarship that he employed. Monier Monier-Williams took Rammohan to be the first earnest minded investigator of the science of comparative religion.<sup>27</sup> In his early life, as we know, the Raja was influenced by the radical theology of an eighth century sect, the Mutazalis. Such influences went into the writing of the *Tuhfat*. What is less known is his command over Islamic law and jurisprudence that earned him the title ‘zabardast mauilavi’ among his Calcutta friends. Thereafter he mastered Hebrew, Syriac and the Greek languages to study in the original, the Old and the New Testaments. There

are stories to the effect that he once crossed over to Tibet to learn Buddhism from the llamas and at least one biographer has alluded to his picking up rudimentary knowledge about Jainism from Marwari merchants.<sup>28</sup> As a Brahmin, he naturally made a special effort to study Hindu scriptures and it was here that he was also the most productive. Rammohan translated from the original Sanskrit, five of the major Upanishads— *Isha*, *Kena*, *Katha*, *Mundaka* and *Mandukya*— produced a modern commentary on the *Brahma Sutras* and also on the *Bhagavad Gita* though the latter is now untraceable. Significantly, the Raja translated these major texts into both English and Bengali which allowed him to simultaneously address two different kinds of readers, the English educated (Europeans and Indian) and the traditional scholarly class. Reforming Hinduism was obviously his first priority and for this purpose he founded in Calcutta two religious organizations, the Atmiya Sabha and the Brahmo Sabha in 1815 and 1828 respectively.

Looking back at his religious and philosophical works it is possible to arrive at two significant conclusions. First, unlike some of his spiritual successors such as the Brahmo leader, Keshab Chandra Sen, Rammohan was not selective in his universalism. He did not take religions to be true in part but as self-contained bodies of Truth. This prevented him from syncretically fusing elements from one with those of another. To an extent therefore he anticipates the late 19th century Bengali mystic Ramakrishna Paramahansa who believed that all religions had to be understood or experienced in the light of its own body of beliefs, rituals or practices. It was thus that the Raja was a 'Brahman among Brahmins ... a Mahomedan with Mahomedan and a Christian with a Christian'.<sup>29</sup> In Rammohan's view, Universalism did not submerge religious personalities. Rather, it allowed all religions to themselves grow in fruitful contact with others. This view he strongly articulated in the 'Trust Deed of the Brahmo Samaj (1830) which advocated the 'promotion of charity, morality, piety, benevolence, virtue and the strengthening of the bonds of union between men of all religious persuasions and creeds'.<sup>30</sup>

In his closing years Rammohan Roy was indeed cautious and somewhat conservative but in part, this was a measure of the dogged opposition he had to put up with. It is also probable that in later life he outgrew the tendency to negate existing thought and practice towards building a more positive social and religious consensus. Finally, contrary to what has sometimes been suggested, Rammohan did not merely take an instrumentalist view of religion or placed a disproportionate emphasis on 'reason'. In fact, commenting on the *Kena Upanishad* [1.2.9] the Raja ruled out '*tarka*' as a valid source to the knowledge of God. Rammohan Roy could be moved by the ecstatic poetry of Sufi poets, the mystical appeal of Brahman and the writings of European Deists some of whom found no opposition between reason and faith.<sup>31</sup>

## Constitutionalism: Rights and Justice

The philosophical foundation of Rammohan's legal and political thought has often been put to debate. There is difference of opinion on whether or not in these matters, the Raja largely went by what he had gathered from the contemporary west. The historian Barun De is inclined to believe that Rammohan's constitutionalism had clear precedents in traditional Hindu thought

and practice. Orthodox Hindu scholars, De reminds us, were already a part of a process whereby juridical right, if not the right of legal interpretation, was already vested in the sovereign. It was thus a number of such scholars assisted the early colonial state in codifying Hindu law and in its implementation.<sup>32</sup> Here, De's position offers some contrast to that of Biman Behari Majumdar who would have us believe that Rammohan's legal and constitutional thought was almost entirely determined by English jurists and utilitarian thinkers like Blackstone and Bentham.<sup>33</sup> Majumdar's views have also been criticized by scholars who had reason to believe that Utilitarian influences upon Rammohan have been grossly exaggerated. At least in the 1820s Bentham may not have been a very popular philosopher even in England and in some aspects, it has been argued, Rammohan's position is not far removed from Greek hedonism.<sup>34</sup> And although he often speaks of 'happiness' being the measure of successful reform, this is not really separable from the concept of the 'good' that he may have easily derived from Hindu and Buddhist philosophy. Incidentally the term he specifically uses is '*lokasreya*' (that which rests on the people)<sup>35</sup> which, to me strongly resonates of '*lokasamgraha*' of the Gita.

Rammohan's practical knowledge of law and legal institutions goes back to his days at Rangpur where as private Secretary to the Collector, he enjoyed certain quasi-judicial powers delegated by the Commissioners of Revenue. Presumably, his knowledge of Western legal theories and jurisprudence grew more intimate after he settled down in Calcutta, where the relevant texts or literature would have been available far more freely. Without taking the argument too far, it should be possible to say that Bentham did cast a major influence on Rammohan. Like Bentham, the Raja makes a clear distinction between law and morality and to press for the codification of law. Like the Utilitarian thinker again, he appears to reject the view that a positive social contract constituted society or that men had certain natural rights. If Rammohan did speak of rights, these were largely civic and religious in nature, not political. Thus religious toleration was something that every government was obliged to secure and promote but not necessarily, a democratic sharing of power. However, according to Majumdar himself, Rammohan also differed from his mentor in as much as he did not support the idea of a Universal Legal Code but one that took cognizance of the way manners or customs peculiar to a society evolved. In his *Essay on Rights of Hindus over Ancestral Property* (1830) he straddles both a historical position and the purely analytical by suggesting that property rules must have come to be founded on the basis of popular acceptance. Interestingly enough, this historicism did not take Rammohan to the position that laws also evolved in keeping with changes in social contexts, a position later taken by scholar-administrators like Sir Henry Maine. Perhaps it was this qualified acceptance of the historical that explains his strong defence of certain customary practices. In his day, Rammohan appears to be among the few who championed, even in the face of some opposition, the Dayabhaga law of inheritance, peculiar to Bengal.

The practical experiences that he had gained while serving in various official capacities enabled Rammohan to submit some original recommendations regarding the judicial system. On the whole, he expressed some unhappiness at the manner in which trials were conducted. In particular, he worried over the linguistic competence of European judges and the manipulation by scheming subordinates—all leading to the miscarriage of justice. The Raja seems to have

had little faith in village justice too as handed out through the panchayat system. Here again, he found the system equally corruptible and always under pressure from vested interests. One important implication that followed from this was that the Raja was more openly on the side of centralization or standardization than the devolution of power and self-government. Interestingly enough, Rammohan was opposed to the reduction of the pay of European judges for he was apt to believe that that would negatively affect their performance and integrity. In keeping with his recommendations elsewhere, Rammohan was always keen to press the point that the greater induction of Indians into the judicial offices and functions would improve its general efficiency. Finally, even though he very much believed in the rule of law, the Raja did not think that every citizen could be subjected to the same legal/judicial processes irrespective of his social standing. High-ranking men, he argued, ought to be judged by special commissions.<sup>36</sup>

In his constitutionalism, Rammohan was wholly in favour of a practical separation of powers. In Majumdar's opinion again, this drew heavily upon the writings of Montesquieu and Blackstone. Apparently, the Raja was especially concerned with imposing suitable checks on the powers of the executive and ensuring the autonomy of certain civic institutions. Of the various forms of government Rammohan found both the democratic and the autocratic to be equally unacceptable; the first because it could easily grow to be unwieldy and the irresponsible and the second because it stifled human dignity and freedom. The best government was that which was 'pledged not to infringe the laws of the nation'. Practically speaking, this amounted to a sharper separation of executive functions from that of lawmaking. In the 1830s, when the future structure of the Company's administration in India was being debated, Rammohan took the side of those who felt that legislative authority should vest with the King and the Parliament as the highest sovereign bodies. Entrusting this to the Government of India, he felt, would make the executive unduly powerful. This, in the long run, would prevent the process of lawmaking to remain dispassionate or objective.<sup>37</sup>

Rammohan was far too pragmatic a person not to realize the operative difficulties of legislating from Britain, particularly at a time when communication links between the colony and the metropolis were not very developed and the British ruling class as yet without a first hand acquaintance with Indian conditions. Such difficulties, he argued, could be effectively overcome by meeting three requirements. First, there had to be a free press in India; second the setting up of Enquiry Commissions from time to time and third, the positive co-option of more Indian of proven ability in the day to day administration. This, as Majumdar puts it aptly, the initiative for reform was left with the Indian government, the power to enact laws to the British Parliament and the function of positive criticism to 'enlightened' Indians.<sup>38</sup>

In Rammohan's view, the stability of British power in India depended primarily on the institution of a free press and the willing devolution of greater power and responsibility upon Indians. Here, evidently, he was thinking exclusively of a class of people who could combine the advantages of traditional rank and the benefits of a modern education. It was this class that could most effectively articulate the public's perceptions about the state policy as well as socially disseminate modern values and changes in the nature of society and government. This led the Raja to protest repeatedly at the strictures passed against the Indian press in 1822. A petition was first submitted

to Sir Francis Magnaghten, the Judge serving the Supreme Court at Calcutta and thereafter, the King in Council. The latter is usually taken to be the first attempt of its kind made by an Indian legal interpreter directly to the King.

However, what is more important here is not so much the uniqueness of the petition as its rationalization in terms of the Whig philosophy of the Reform Bill era.<sup>39</sup> It irked Rammohan that the colonial state unilaterally passed regulations without taking into confidence, the 'responsible' and 'respectable' classes in Hindu society. This pushed him into the paradoxical position of criticizing Mughal administrative policies yet acknowledging that under the Mughals, the Hindus could aspire to reach the highest offices of the state just as much as the upper class Muslim. On occasions one can detect his holding out veiled threats. Thus protesting against the Jury Bill of 1828 that empowered Christians to sit in judgment in the case of Hindu and Muslim offenders but not Christian offenders by either Hindu or Muslim, the Raja wrote the following to a friend:

...supposing that some hundred years hence, the Native character became elevated from constant intercourse with the European and the acquirements of general and political knowledge as well as of modern arts and sciences, is it possible that they will not have the spirit as well as the inclination to resist effectively, any unjust and oppressive measure serving to degrade them in the scale of society?<sup>40</sup>

India could not be held down as easily as Ireland, the Raja warned, and eventually, the treatment of Indian subjects would very much determine whether the country would remain 'useful and profitable as a willing province, an ally of the British Empire or troublesome and annoying as a determine enemy'.<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, when his petition to the King opposing the Press Regulations failed to meet with a favourable response, Rammohan reacted rather dramatically by closing down the *Mirat ul Akhbar*.

## Conclusion

With the advantage of historical hindsight it should be possible to say that in his overarching vision, Rammohan was indeed a modern man. His modernity lay not merely in his historical location but in the precise meanings that he derived from this. His vision was modern also because it was never overburdened by tradition or inhibited in the acceptance of change. Rammohan Roy respected tradition and often chose to express himself through it. However, tradition to him was never frozen in time but always capable of being reinterpreted and revalidated in the light of new experiences. This is precisely how he meant to bring something as traditional as Vedanta to the necessities of contemporary life. In this, he anticipates the life and work of the Hindu missionary, Swami Vivekanand.

The idea of reform was intrinsic to Rammohan's thought since for good or worse he had come to accept the idea emanating in post-Enlightenment Europe of interminable human progress. At the same time, he was realistic enough to realize that change or reform in human

society had to operate within a set of values determined by particular societies. It occurs to me that Rammohan was perhaps the first modern Hindu thinker to suggest that so far as the Hindus were concerned, the key to all reform, whether social, moral or political lay in religious reform. This perception was to dominate Hindu thinking for a long time.

In his personal culture, Rammohan appears quite anomalous but perhaps therein also lies his strength. In the matter of dressing, he was a Mughal, in manners and personal conduct a European and in religious and ritual conformity, a Hindu. Whether at home or outside, the Raja displayed European civility in his dealings with women. His granddaughter, Chandrajyoti Devi, recalled how he would take his seat only after the ladies in his presence were seated.<sup>42</sup> And yet, we are reliably informed that on the voyage to England the Raja would have his food cooked only by Brahmans out of deference to caste prejudices.<sup>43</sup> By the time he left for England, Rammohan had come to be attacked both from the conservative society in Calcutta and the youthful Radicals. The conservatives were outraged at his iconoclasm, his role in the anti-Sati campaign and his mixing with non-Hindus. The radical Derozians, on the other hand, found him too ambivalent and backtracking on social questions.<sup>44</sup>

There is reason to believe that Rammohan did not advocate an end to British rule, at least not in the foreseeable future. It was not the natural wish of the colonized, he wrote at one place, to separate from the mother country and if the Americans had indeed done so, this was only the result of persistent mis-government.<sup>45</sup> By this, presumably, Rammohan tried to convey that it was not a foreign government per se that was objectionable but its failure to take cognizance of the legitimate ambitions of its subjects. On the other hand, he was only too sensitive to the question of basic human rights and dignity, which, in his opinion, cut across all social and political rank. Sometime in 1809, when unduly insulted by a European officer, Rammohan Roy promptly sent off a strong letter of protest to Governor-General, Lord Minto, demanding unconditional apology from the offender.<sup>46</sup> It is tribute to contemporary notions of justice that he obtained what he had legitimately demanded.

Interestingly enough, although Rammohan saw continued British rule to be advantageous to India in most ways, he also seems prepared to accept the idea of the two countries severing their connections with one another:

if events should occur to effect a separation [of the two countries] ... still a friendly and highly advantageous commercial intercourse may be kept up between the two free and Christian countries, united as they are by the resemblance of language, religion and manners.<sup>47</sup>

From this B.B. Majumdar has concluded that in his last years, Rammohan Roy had accepted the 'submergence' of India's linguistic and cultural identity 'in the stream of European civilisation'.<sup>48</sup> On closer examination, such claims appear far-fetched. While the dissemination of the English language did anglicize and alienate Indian life styles, it also served as a major medium of cultural and political contestation for the Indians themselves. And by the term 'Christian' Rammohan did not mean a particular religious persuasion but a certain moral outlook upon the world. The moral obligation that one man may feel for another was extremely important for the Raja, with or without

its cultural or theological framework. One of Rammohan's favourite maxims was that 'true way of serving God was to do good to man'.<sup>49</sup> This seemingly Christina precept was borrowed from the Sufi mystic poet, Sheikh Sadi.

In India, there were mixed reactions upon hearing Rammohan's untimely death. His close friends and supporters mourned the event but others were not as forthcoming in their praise. Governor General Bentinck, greatly enamoured of his life and labours, personally contributed a sum of Rs 500 to the commemoration funds and promised to contribute more only if Rammohan's countrymen could institute a chair in his honour. Sadly, no one responded to this generous offer.

## Notes and References

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2. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, 'Jatibair' [Racial Animosity] in *Bankim Rachanavali*, Vol. 2 [Collected Works of Bankim Chandra] (ed.) J. C. Bagal (Calcutta: Sahitya Samsad, 1974), pp. 884–85.
3. Some of his opponents accused him of immorally cohabiting with a Muslim mistress and of partaking all kinds of 'un-Hindu' food. Debendranath Tagore, Rabindranath's father, recalled Rammohan once complaining to him in the following words: 'Biradar, here I am eating pure bread and honey but people say I eat beef'. 'Debendranath Tagore: Reminiscences of Rammohan Roy' in *The Father of Modern India: Commemoration Volume of the Rammohan Roy Centenary Celebrations*. 1933. Compiled and Edited by Satish Chandra Chakravarti, Part II. 1935, p. 172.
4. See especially Sumit Sarkar, 'Rammohan Roy and the Break with the Past' in V. C. Joshi (ed.) *Rammohan Roy and the Process of Modernization in India* (: New Delhi: Vikas, 1975).
5. Debendranath Tagore, p. 174.
6. Bruce Carlisle Robertson, *Raja Rammohan Roy: The Father of Modern India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 12.
7. Rammohan Roy: 'Brief Preliminary Sketch of the Ancient and Modern Boundaries and History of India' [1832]. Reproduced in Bruce Carlisle Robertson, *The Essential Writings of Raja Rammohan Roy* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 179.
8. Writing to Hyde Villiers, Secretary to the Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India (22 December 1831) Rammohan noted how his heart was 'with the French people in their endeavours to support the cause of liberal principles'. Reproduced in *Rammohan Rachanavali*. [Collected Works of Rammohan Roy] Ajit Kumar Ghosh et al. (eds) (Calcutta: Haraf Prakashan, 1973), p. 484.
9. Rammohan Roy's letter to George James Gordon reproduced in *ibid*, p. 449.
10. Rammohan Roy, 'Appeal to the King in Council', reproduced in *ibid*, p. 508f.
11. See the Prospectus of the *Mirat ul Akbbar* reproduced in Majumdar, *op. cit.*, pp. 298–99.
12. 'Appeal to King in Council', pp. 508–09.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 518.
14. Memorial to Rt. Hon'ble Sir Francis Magnaghten, Judge. Supreme Court, Calcutta, from Chunder Coomar Tagore, Dwarka Nauth Tagore, Rammohan Roy, Hurchunder Ghose, Gowree Churn Bonnergee and Prosonno Coomar Tagore. Reproduced in *Rammohan Rachanavali*, pp. 502–07.



15. Cited in Robertson, op. cit., p. 47.
16. The description of the Town Hall Meeting occurs in Majumdar; op.cit., pp. 438–39. Also see Rammohan Roy: ‘Views on Settlement in India by Europeans’ Reproduced in *Rammohan Rachanavali*, op. cit., pp. 529–35.
17. Memorial to Francis Magnaghten, op. cit., p. 503; Prospectus of the *Mirat ul Akhbar*, op. cit.
18. Barun De, ‘A Biographical Perspective on the Political and Economic Ideas of Rammohan Roy’ in V. C. Joshi (ed.), op. cit., p. 145;
19. *Bengal Harakaru* of 20 June 1832, cited in Majumdar, op. cit., p. 484f.
20. An argument especially made in Sumit Sarkar, op. cit.
21. See Rammohan Roy’s letter to Rt. Honble William Pitt, Lord Amherst, dated 11 December 1823. Reproduced in *Rammohan Rachanavali*, op. cit., pp. 433–36.
22. Kissory Chand Mitra, ‘Rammohan Roy’ in *Calcutta Review*. Vol. IV, December 1845, pp. 357.
23. Reproduced in *Rammohan Rachanavali*, op. cit: 462.
24. Kissory Chand Mitra, op. cit: 388–89.
25. Rammohan to Mrs Woodford Brighton, dated 27 April 1832. Reproduced in *Rammohan Rachanavali*, op. cit., p. 457.
26. Rammohan’s letter to T. Hyde Villiers, op. cit.; Also see his communication to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of France [n.d] Reproduced in *Rammohan Rachanavali*, op. cit., p. 486f.
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28. Iqbal Singh, *Rammohan Roy: A Biographical Enquiry into the Making of Modern India*. Vol. 2, 1983 reprint, Bombay, 104.
29. B. N. Seal, *Rammohan: The Universal Man* (Calcutta: Sadharan Brahma Samaj, n.d.), p. 37.
30. Trust deed of the Brahma Samaj. Reproduced in *Rammohan Rachanavali*, op. cit., p. 539.
31. A typical case is that of John Locke. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* he writes thus: ‘... faith is nothing but a firm assent of the mind, which, if it can be regulated, as is our duty, cannot be afforded to anything but upon good reason and so cannot be opposed to it’. Cited in Dilip Kumar Biswas, op. cit., p. 60.
32. Barun De, op. cit., p. 145.
33. B. B. Majumdar, *History of Indian Social and Political Ideas from Rammohan to Dayanand* (Calcutta: Bookland, 1967) p. 26, Majumdar in particular cites Bentham’s *Fragments on Government* (1776) and *Introduction to Morals and Legislation* (1789).
34. Naresh Chandra Sengupta, ‘Rammohan and Law’ in *The Father of Modern India*, p. 320.
35. Ibid.
36. B. B. Majumdar, op. cit., pp. 29–37.
37. Ibid., p. 32.
38. Ibid., p. 34.
39. Barun De, op. cit., p. 145. De himself believes that Roy’s petition had precedents in appeals made by Emperor Shah Alam and the Maratha chief Raghoba.
40. Rammohan’s letter to J. Crawford, dated 18 August 1828, Reprinted in *Rammohan Rachanavali*, pp. 468–69.
41. Ibid.
42. See reminiscences of his great granddaughter, Hemlata Devi. Cited in *The Father of Modern India*, p. 283.

43. See reminiscences of James. C. Sutherland who travelled on the same ship to England. Cited in Robertson, op. cit., pp. 6–7.
44. For Derozio's observations on Rammohan, see *The East Indian* of October 1831, cited in A. F. Salahuddin Ahmad, 'Ram Mohun Roy and His Contemporaries' in V. C. Joshi (ed.), op. cit., p. 100.
45. Letter to J. Crawford.
46. The incident occurred at Bhagalpur and involved a European civilian by the name of Sir Frederick Hamilton. The petition to Lord Minto is reproduced in *Rammohan Rachanavali*, op. cit., pp. 431–33.
47. Cited in B. B. Majumdar, op. cit., p. 46. Similar observations were made by the Anglo-Indian paper, *India Gazette* of 20 July 1820: 'The separation of India from Great Britain cannot in the nature of things be prevented. It must come sooner or later and after appropriating to the mother-country, all the advantages which colonial possessions can confer during the period of our rule, the true system of governing them should aim to provide that the separation shall be safe, gradual and friendly ...' Cited in B. B. Majumdar, op. cit., p. 45 (FN).
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## Jotirao Phule: Social Justice

*Niraj Kumar Jha*

Traditionally ignored in the mainstream academic circles, the articulations of social justice have now found their rightful place in intellectual circles along with the intensified political mobilizations of lower castes across India. The vision and praxis of Mahatma Jotirao Phule has come to be recognized as the pioneering contribution in this field. Dr B. R. Ambedkar, one of the definitive voices on the issue of social equity, acknowledged Phule as one of his gurus.<sup>1</sup> Phule and his colleagues held caste as slavery and at the root of their enslavement they found the Brahmin religious values and machinations. The ideas and arguments which they put forth in the course of their concerted attack on Brahminical hegemony form an ideology which has a vital role in the evolution of Indian perception towards self. No wonder that today social inclusion is the buzz word in policy making of the Indian establishment. In the nineteenth-century Maharashtra, Jotirao Phule pioneered the lower-caste movement as its leader and most influential theoretician. Remarkably, in his attack on Brahminism, Phule broke new grounds, which throw unconventional theoretical insights on contemporary social realities and facilitate the understanding of the society and politics. He deserves a place of pride in the galaxy of modern Indian thinkers.

### Life and Times

Jotirao Govindrao Phule was born in a low-caste family of Pune most probably in 1827.<sup>2</sup> The family earned their living by growing flowers, fruits and vegetables, which was anyway their caste profession as *malis* (gardeners). A year before the completion of his secondary school education, he read Thomas Paine's 'Rights of Men', which made a lasting impact on

his mind. In 1848, the very year he finished his education, he founded a school for the *shudra* and the *atishudra* girls. He could afford his living without doing a job as by that time his father Govindrao had become a successful contract builder. But his father, fearing a high-caste backlash against his son for running a school for *shudra* and *atishudra* girls, made him leave home with his wife Savitri Bai whom he had married in 1840. Undeterred, he founded yet another school for girls of all castes this time, and later in 1855 an evening school for working-class people. Phule's taking of the gender issue at that time was by all means revolutionary. An attempt on his life was made in 1856 which shows the intensity of the reaction his works had engendered. In 1868, he threw open the drinking water tank in his house to the untouchables. He furthered his espousal of the gender cause by launching a campaign for widow remarriage. He founded the Satyashodhak Samaj (Society of the Seekers of Truth) on 24 September 1873 to realize his reformist vision. He was also a pioneer working for prohibition. He was a nominated member of the Pune Municipal Council from 1876 to 1882. He died on 28 November 1890.<sup>3</sup>

Phule's lasting contribution, however, is in the field of ideas. His reformative activism soon found articulation in his writings. Beginning with *Shivaji Powada*, a ballad, in 1869, he wrote a number of plays, poems and polemical works. The best known of his works *Gulamgiri* (Slavery) was published on 1 June 1873. This work, in a way, was the manifesto of the Satyashodhak Samaj. *Shetkarya Asud* (Cultivator's Whipcord) was another major work. His last work was *Sarvanjanik Satya Dharma Pustak* (The Book of the True Faith), which was published after his death in 1891.<sup>4</sup> *Ghulamgiri* focused on the origins of the Brahminical order and its ideological foundations. *Shetkarya Asud* exposed the exploitive character of the order and the last one offered a theology of egalitarianism. All three together presented an ideology which questioned and rejected the Brahminical hegemony both in religious and secular domains and countered its degrading effects on the lower castes and women of all castes.

The ideology Phule propagated can be appreciated only after one gets a feel of the times he lived through. He was born a little after the British conquest of western India. The establishment of the British rule had attracted a mixed response. Initially, the progressive sections of the Indian society had welcomed the British as the harbingers of modernity and a new age. They viewed the British rule as an antithesis to the oppressive feudal order and obscurantism. While hailing the British, the pioneers of the emergent middle class vigorously worked for reforms based on the twin fundamentals of modernity, viz., rationality and humanism. Humanism places men at the core of the human existence and also rejects inequality sanctioned by heaven. This was an eye-opener even to those who were at the lower rungs of the Indian society. They also viewed the British as liberators. The establishment of the British rule made them aware of the predicament and ordeal they endured in the traditional social set-up and also led them to the realization that their conditions were not divinely ordained and were completely alterable.

In this context in western India, the scenario was different from the other parts of the country. The region was ruled by the Peshwas, the de facto Brahmin rulers of the region; the nominal suzerain being the descendents of Shivaji Bhosale, the founder who carved out a Maratha empire out of the Mughals. Here the traditional Brahminical, almost closed, order flourished with the state support. The order held the Brahmin *varna* or caste at the top of the caste hierarchy as the priestly

class and helmsmen in government and administration as men of learning. They were followed by the Kshatriya *varna*, the warriors; the Vaishyas or traders; and the *shudras*, in succession. The last category of castes being at the lowest was consigned to serve the rest. Beyond the pale of these four *varnas*, there were caste communities who are in the current terminology known collectively as dalits. Considered impure and regarded as untouchables, they led the most dehumanized existence. The end of the Peshwa rule in 1818 heralded a new era of hope as well as of despair for the lower castes. First, this led to a severance of the political support to the Brahminical religious values, which at a more practical level ended the denial of education to the *shudras*. The growing number of educational institutions mostly in the hands of protestant missionaries not only provided equal access to all but encouraged the lower-caste pupils in whom they saw a constituency for conversions. With this in view, they criticized Hinduism for depriving them of rights in matters of education and religion. For a person like Phule, educated in one such school, the British rule certainly promised a great opportunity for uplift.<sup>5</sup>

The change in the land tenure regime was also a blow to the traditional order. In the Decan, the British introduced the *ryotwari* system in which the cultivators paid taxes directly to the state. The ownership of land moved from the community to individual farmers who viewed the traditional *balutedari* system, under which service providers had claims over land produce, as burdensome. On the other hand, the imperial administration carried out considerable public works like constructions of roads, buildings and dams generating a great deal of employment and creation of wealth for non-Brahmins too who worked as sub-contractors and suppliers of building materials.<sup>6</sup> This social mobility among the lower castes heightened their aspirations and they strove to consolidate their gains. However the rising aspirations of the lower castes were stymied by the overwhelming presence of the Brahmins in every field where literary skills mattered. The opportunities the new regime offered them were soon overshadowed by the challenges it threw to them. The expanding administration of the British had offered openings to a larger number of Indians. Naturally, the skills required for such jobs were to the advantage of the high caste Hindus with their traditional association with literacy and education. In addition, for the same reason, they made their mark in professions like law and journalism. In particular it was the Brahmins who benefited the most from the expanding British administration. On the other hand, the unified imperial system brought into existence an all-India leadership constituted of well-educated and high-caste Indians. They pressed for participation in the governance and in response to their demands the British government initiated a process of gradually opening and expanding the access of Indians to the political bodies and higher services. Again in both imperial government and in the dissenting nationalist movement the Indians were mostly high caste Hindus and among them mostly the Brahmins. It was apparent that the British rule, rather inadvertently, reinforced the religious authority of Brahmins by vesting in them an array of political and administrative powers. Phule and his colleagues viewed the Brahmins in their apparently unrelated roles in religious and secular spheres colluding in order to protect their privileges and strengthening their powers over the lower castes. In their game plan, Phule and his fellows realized, the Brahmins would find the greatest ally in the conservative attitude of the lower castes. Phule and his associates thus reached the conclusion that without breaking the Brahmin's

religious authority and the hierarchical values on which it was based, any real change was not possible. Therefore, they favoured a long period of benevolent rule of the British to continue so that the lower castes could develop the skills and social resources hitherto denied to them.<sup>7</sup>

## Anatomy of Slavery

The Brahmin domination and the plight of the lower castes or the *shudras* and the *atishudras* were the core concerns of Phule's theory and praxis. 'Caste was to him *slavery*, as vicious and brutal as the enslavement of the Africans in the United States, but based in India not only on open conquest and subordination but also on deception and religious illusion'.<sup>8</sup> In his introduction to *Gulamgiri* he opens with the crux of his thesis:

It has been conjectured that the Brahmins have ruled this country for more than three thousand years. They had come originally from distant lands, outside India, invaded it, attacked the original inhabitants of this land, conquered and forcibly turned them into slaves and oppressed them in several different ways. ... The Brahmins ... composed several treatises which they claimed to have obtained directly from God. ... It was the decree of God, they wrote, that the *shudras* should diligently serve them and try to please them throughout their lives. Only then, they wrote, would their lives be fulfilled and their birth itself would be justified.<sup>9</sup>

Phule traces the origin of the predicament of the *shudras* and the *atishudras* to the distant and forgotten past. Deriving his thesis from contemporary studies suggesting that Aryans were not the original inhabitants of India but settlers, he saw the present iniquitous order in which the Brahmins lorded and the rest suffered rooted in the conquest of the land by the invading hordes from Western and Central Asia. He wrote in the preface to *Gulamgiri*:

Recent researches have demonstrated beyond a shadow of doubt that the Brahmins were not the aborigines of India. .... they were an off-shoot of the Great Indo-European race, from whom the Persians, Medes, and other Iranian nations in Asia and the principal nations in Europe like-wise descended. The affinity existing between the Zend, the Persian and Sanskrit languages, as also between all the European languages, unmistakably points to a common source of origin.<sup>10</sup>

Phule deconstructed the Brahminical texts to recast the narratives of warfare and wanton destruction the invading Brahmins perpetrated on the indigenous people in order to establish their unquestionable domination.

The wars of Devas and Daityas, or the Rakshasas, about which so many fictions are found scattered over the sacred books of the Brahmins, have certainly a reference to this primeval

struggle. The original inhabitants with whom these earthborn Gods, the Brahmins, fought, were not inappropriately termed Rakshas, that is the protectors of the land. ... They eventually succeeded in establishing their supremacy and subjugating the aborigines to their entire control. Accounts of these conquests, enveloped with a mass of incredible fiction, are found in the books of the Brahmins.<sup>11</sup>

Even a thorough military conquest cannot perpetuate a system of domination for long. In order to sustain itself an order needs not only an ideology but an elaborate administration of the relations of inequity. The Aryans for a better hold on the people devised, in Phule's words, 'that weird system of mythology, the ordination of caste, and the code of cruel and inhuman laws, to which we can find no parallel amongst other nations'.<sup>12</sup>

The institution of caste, which has been the main object of their laws, had no existence among them originally. That it was an after-creation of their deep cunning is evident from their own writings. The highest rights, the highest privileges and gifts, and everything that would make the life of a Brahmin easy, smooth going and happy—everything that would conserve or flatter their self-pride—were specially inculcated and enjoined, whereas the *shudras* and *atishudras* were regarded with supreme hatred and contempt, and the commonest rights of humanity were denied them. Their touch, nay, even their shadow, is deemed a pollution.<sup>13</sup>

Over this vast spread of land, the Brahmins were far lesser in numbers than the numerous *shudras* and *atishudras* and despite that they were able to hold their abhorrent hegemony for so long. Phule unveiled another craft of enslavement.

They realized that they could sustain themselves and their domination only if they divided the *shudras* and *atishudras* and antagonized them against each other. ... To achieve this devious goal, they created the fraudulent rigmarole of the caste system and wrote several books to legitimize the caste system. ... At that time, a section of these downtrodden people revolted against the Brahmins. In order to take revenge on them, the Brahmins separated them from the others and dictated that neither they nor their children should ever be touched by other people, called *mali* or *kunbi* today. After this, all their trade and commerce ended and they were reduced to a life of abject poverty and had to resort to the practice of eating the flesh of dead animals in order to survive. ... This is how the Brahmins have divided the *shudras* into various castes, punished or rewarded them according to their loyalty, and established their control over them.<sup>14</sup>

Phule elaborated the abject degradation of the *shudras* and the *atishudras* under Brahmin rule in detail. Moving depictions of inhuman practices prevalent in India like the one given below in his writing justified his claims.

The *shudras*, who had to travel a lot in connection with their trade or some other business, had to face several problems on the road. It would be very difficult to walk especially in the

early morning. This is the time when shadows are cast long. If the *shudra* walking on the road saw a Brahmin approaching, he had to stop walking and sit at the side of the road to avoid casting his shadow on the Brahmin. He would be so afraid of the Brahmin's wrath that he would even inconvenience himself. He would resume walking only once he had made sure that the Brahmin had gone off. In case his shadow fell on the Brahmin, the Brahmin would beat him to pulp and then immediately march off to the river to bathe and wash off the polluting effect of the *shudra's* shadow.<sup>15</sup>

The Brahmins, despite losing their pre-eminence of the Peshwa days, Phule asserted, remained at the helms of affairs. Besides, in their traditional capacity of priests, they exploited the lower castes in various other ways. With their superior education and cunning, they monopolized all higher ranks of emolument under the British administration. From the village level to the Collector's and Revenue Commissioner's Courts and other departments of the public services like engineering, education and others remained in the hands of the upper castes. While they favoured their relatives and fellow caste men, they heaped scorn on the *ryots* and left no opportunity to fleece them. Even the higher European officers generally viewed men and things through Brahmin spectacles and hardly had the correct picture. Phule noted:

Though the Brahmin of the old Peshwa school is not quite the same as the Brahmin of the present day, though the march of Western ideas and civilization is undoubtedly telling on his superstition and bigotry, he has not as yet abandoned his time-cherished notions of superiority or the dishonesty of his ways.<sup>16</sup>

On the other side of the divide, the *shudras* were not only reconciled to their horrendous living conditions but often resisted the people who worked for their liberation. Phule lamented:

The arguments of the Brahmins have been imprinted so firmly on the minds of the *shudras* that they, like the Negro slaves in America, oppose the very people who are willing to fight for them, and free them from the chains of slavery. It is very surprising that the oppressed people choose to remain resigned to their despicable state of existence; they proclaim that they have no complaints about their circumstances and resist the very people who are willing to help them and fight for their rights. Not only do they reject the offer of help, they are willing to fight those very people who want to help them. Now their friends do not stand to gain anything by fighting for the downtrodden.<sup>17</sup>

Phule's depiction of slavery has strong contents of universality. His writings delineate the process of enslavement, which explain almost every system of domination and subjugation. To begin with, people can be subjugated and for periods spanning millennia by the use of force and violence. This is a fact which he puts across very powerfully and can be substantiated by looking at the history of societies across the globe. In modern history, the established superiority of the white race is based on the brutal uses and display of military power.



Slavery, however, needs to be severed from the possibility of slipping into rebellion and to be harmonized into a cohesive social order wherein the iniquitous relations of privileges and deprivations can be maintained without being questioned. For this, the collective memory is tinkered with. The accounts of resistance, cultural resources and intellectual traditions of the targeted people are deliberately erased from the collective memory and the saga of the victories, martial traditions, and mystical powers of the dominant people are put forth wherever possible.

Willing compliance of the subjugated people, however, needs greater efforts. These efforts include two interrelated methods. First is the policy of keeping the deprived people ignorant. They are denied education and kept away from the world of knowledge. Ignorance or lack of proper knowledge is the very basis of slavery. Secondly, willing compliance is secured through the propagation of an ideology. Traditionally ideologies evolved around perceptions of divine ordination. The subject people were made to believe their existence to be perfectly normal and the imposed drudgeries and deprivations as their divine duty and state respectively. Through all these means, the dominant people of the society constantly impress their superiority over the rest. Other crafts of maintaining slavery include the policy of divide and rule and the regime of reward and punishment. People are not only kept ignorant but also divided. Loyal ones are rewarded and the rebels are punished. With the passage of time, subjected people take their status not only as legitimate but resist and oppose those who work for their liberation. This is the most difficult aspect of a long prevailing hegemony to be challenged; a task which Phule undertook very skilfully.

## The State of Enslavement

Phule saw the evil impact of enslavement continue unabated during the colonial rule. The rampant fleecing of the *shudra* farmers in the name of religion by the Brahmins and untold harassment and extortion of the farmers by the Brahmin-dominated British administration led to their abject dehumanization. Phule in his *Cultivator's Whip-Cord* narrated the real-life experiences of exploitation and deprivations of the lower castes under the British rule. Phule described elaborately farmers' exploitation in the name of religion. On the one hand, all rituals, festivities, auspicious occasions, pilgrimages and life-cycle ceremonies beginning from conception (*garbhdhaan*) to the last rites (*shraadhha*) were pretexts for the Brahmins to extract some offerings from the farmers. They resorted to instilling divine fear, bullying, thuggery and even beggary to achieve their objectives. On the other hand, as the Brahmins dominated all the departments of the government, they harassed and exploited the *shudras* by using their caste connection.

Phule asserted that the *shudras* remained ignorant and exploited till date because the Brahmins had barred education to them from the time they established their rule in ancient times and subsequently very resolutely worked against the forces which could liberate them. The Buddha was one such influence who challenged and shook the foundations of Brahminism. However, later, Adi Shankaracharya revived and reinstated Brahmin supremacy, not only by bringing in some reforms in Hinduism but also with the help of the sword. Similarly, when the follow-

ers of Prophet Mohammad invaded India and started to liberate the *shudras*, Brahmins, like Mukundaraja and Dnyanoba, wrote tactical books and ‘crazed the ignorant farmer to such an extent that the farmers started to think of the Mohammedans as low, along with the Quran, and started hating them instead’.<sup>18</sup> In Maharashtra, a Vedanti called Ramdas Swami conspired with Gangabhat to distance Shivaji from the farmer saint Tukaram and later Shivaji’s principal servants, the Brahmin Peshwas, confined his heirs to Satara and became the de facto rulers. At the time when many *shudras* and *atishudras* were redeeming their humanity by converting to Christianity, the Brahmins tried generating all sorts of opinions against Islam and Christianity corrupting the minds of farmers. The farmers so exploited in the name of religion and by the Brahmin-dominated administration were left with hardly any means to send their children to schools. Even if someone had the means, ill advised by the same Brahmins, he did not have the wish or the courage to do so.

The cultivator’s situation only worsened during the British rule. Prior to the establishment of the British rule, large number of men from farming families served the native kings and their chiefs and supplemented the income of their families, and were also able to pay their taxes. The British rule eliminated all these grand employers and the peace ensured by the British also led to the rapid growth in population, which combined to put pressure on the land. Earlier, the families which found their farm produce insufficient would supplement their livelihoods by securing produce from nearby forests. The colonial regime monopolized all forests, hills, vacant lands and even pastures and brought these under a mammoth forest department, depriving farmers of their means of subsistence. Meanwhile, the machine-made cheap goods from Britain flooding Indian markets further destroyed the avenues for local employment. The poor labourers, artisans and, in particular, weavers were the worst sufferers and most of them faced acute starvation.

The lower-caste poor, who had lost their ancestral livelihood, could not even take up seafaring for a living as it was tabooed by Brahmins. This deprived them of a major source of income, leaving them to accept their predicament as a natural phenomenon. The landless labourers could hardly find work with peasants with lands as repeated farming on the same land had reduced their fertility. Lower production meant that they could hardly support their kith and kin and were in no position to hire extra hands. The farmers had to bear losses even of their livestock. With the establishment of the British rule, cows and oxen were butchered for eating with impunity. The seizure of pastures by the forest departments had already depleted the supply of feeds for cattle and occurrences of droughts worsened the fodder supply leading to large-scale deaths among them. Epidemics and diseases took their own toll on the animals. With not enough animal power available for cultivation the produce declined further. Even if there was timely rainfall and a good harvest crop stood in the fields, the farmers were unable to protect the crops from wild boars and pigs because they had been disallowed to keep guns by the cowardly government. Despite agriculture being so burdened and production depleted, the government while reassessing the ignorant farmers’ lands every thirty years never failed to raise taxes. The farmers often fell into the hands of ruthless moneylenders and in the process they were often totally ruined.

Impoverished farmers were left with hardly any means to send their children to schools. The government raised huge amounts of local funds but opened only a few schools which were manned by the same Brahmins obsessed with rituals of pollution and purity. The futility of education imparted in these schools was manifest by the fact that pupils graduating out of these schools hardly found a government job. Illiterate and ignorant farmers often indulged in feuds among themselves over petty issues and fell prey to local administration. The personnel of revenue, police and justice departments all joined to loot the hapless peasants. The clerks, lawyers and judges all behaved haughtily and showed no respect for the age and social status of the farmers. Despite peasants paying heavy taxes, there was absolutely no one to pay attention to their grievances.

Therefore there is not any manner in which the farmer can convey his condition to the white officer, who are inured in their customary luxury, status, attendants, or to black officers who are engrossed in their wealth, their higher caste and colour, and their rituals of purity ...<sup>19</sup>

## Trajectory of Liberation

Phule's treatise on slavery also charted a course for liberation. He held that mythology and other texts of Hindu philosophy and law like Vedas and *Manusmriti* were the deceitful constructs of the Brahmins. He said that the Brahmins propagated their crafty works as divine ordination in order to sanctify their privileges and to condemn the defeated lot to lasting subjection. In order to remove the spell of holy narratives on the believers he adopted a two-pronged strategy with regard to these scriptures. He first trashed the Hindu gods, the incarnations of Vishnu and the associated myths and attempted to shred the rationale, holiness and the grip of the holy texts on the minds of the masses. His depiction of Brahma, the creator of the universe according to the Hindu mythology, is an instance.

... since Brahma had genital organs at four places—mouth, arms, groins and legs (the four *varnas* were born out of those four organs according to the *Manusmriti*)—each of them must have menstruated at least for days each, and he must have sat aside in seclusion, as an untouchable person, for sixteen days in all, each month. If that was so, then who looked after his house during those sixteen days?<sup>20</sup>

... if Brahma really had four faces, he must have had eight breasts, four belly buttons, four genitals and four anuses.<sup>21</sup>

So a clever clerk called Brahma took the reins of administration in his hands. He was a very cunning person, a turncoat, who could always adapt himself to any situation and achieve his own selfish ends. He was extremely untrustworthy; that is probably why he was called Brahma of the four mouths.<sup>22</sup>

Secondly, he turned the holy narratives upside down by giving his own versions in which he demonized the Hindu deities, held them as deceitful Brahmin aggressors and commemorated the devilish villains portrayed therein as the heroic defenders of the land. Hindu mythology describes nine incarnations of Lord Vishnu, the upholder of the existence. He is said to have incarnated on earth in order to reinstate the reign of justice. Phule held the different avatars (incarnations) viz., *Matsya*, *Kachchhap*, *Varaha*, *Narsimba* and *Vaman* as successive real warriors chiefs of Brahmins who cunningly defeated the righteous kings of this land viz., Shankhasur, Hiranyaksha, Hiranyakashapu and Bali.

The legend of Bali, the benevolent king of Deccan, who was banished by Vamana, an avatar of Lord Vishnu, to the netherworld has evocatively been portrayed by Phule. Bali was a non-Brahmin king in whose reign equity and prosperity prevailed. Vishnu appeared before Bali as a dwarf Brahmin (Vamana) and sought a piece of land equal to that covered in three steps as a gift. Granted his wish, the short Brahmin turned so big that he covered the whole earth in one step, the whole of heaven with the next and then demanded more land for placing his third step. Bali offered his body. Vamana laid his foot on his chest thus making him his slave and commanded him to the netherworld. People in the western part of the Indian peninsula still celebrate his visit to the earth once a year, as told in the legend, from the netherworld and pray for the reinstatement of his rule. On Vijayadashami, the Brahmin and non-Brahmin divide appears stark with regard to their respective rituals for Bali. On this day, the Brahmin man, with the twig of the Apta tree, pricks the stomach of the image of Bali made of rice flour kept at the threshold of his house and enters the house by putting his foot over the image, whereas in Kshatriya families, women-folk circulate lighted earthen lamps around the face of their husbands and wish for the kingdom of Bali to descend again.

Phule's vilification of Parashurama, another avatar of Vishnu, was absolute. According to mythology, he had annihilated many generations of the Kshatriyas. Phule said that the Kshatriyas were the warriors among the *shudras* who fought against the Brahmins in general and Parashurama in particular. The *Mahars* of Maharashtra was a distorted form of the word *Maha-ari* literally meaning the great enemy, Phule reasoned. This was how they were described by their Brahmin opponents. Phule depicted Parashurama as a ruthless butcher in the name of a warrior who did not spare even new-born babies and pregnant women of the Kshatriyas and pursued them wherever they fled in order to annihilate them. He wrote:

Parashuram was a bully; he was an audacious, vicious and barbarous villain. He did not hesitate to behead his own mother Renuka.<sup>23</sup>

Phule did not refer to Ramchandra as an avatar of Vishnu but as the son of a Kshatriya chieftain. In Phule's version, Parashuram was defeated by Ramchandra in a battle and the former took refuge in the Tal Konkan and ultimately committed suicide for not being able to bear the disgrace. Similarly, he showed Vamana defeated by Banasura, the successor of Baliraja and

perishing under the siege laid by Banasura. But, he concluded, the Brahmins ultimately succeeded by using things like black magic and Vedic incantations having mysterious powers. The vanquished could see the light of liberation by what he called the return of Baliraja. He did not mention an incarnation of Bali but what he may have meant was the emergence of rational and egalitarian ideas. He wrote:

... Baliraja came into this world. He realized that the great Almighty God, our great Father and Creator, had given us the true and holy knowledge and had granted everyone an equal right to it. He fathomed the Divine Will, that this knowledge be shared by all alike.<sup>24</sup>

He said that millions of Europeans had become the followers of Baliraja and he had brought a tremendous upheaval there. He listed the ancestors of Thomas Paine as the followers of Baliraja. In fact, he said, several Balis appeared to have given a jolt to Brahmin supremacy. Shakya Muni or the Buddha was one of such rational sages. The Buddha, he said, prevailed over the Brahmins but a few escaped to the South and from among them was born Shankaracharya who reorganized Brahminism and with the help of the sword annihilated the followers of Shakya Muni and reinstated Brahmin supremacy which was challenged only with the coming of the British. The British ended Brahmin rule and brought along with them the American and Scottish missionaries, whom Phule regarded as the followers of the Baliraja of the West, that is, Jesus Christ. These missionaries relieved the *shudras* from the bondages of the Brahmins by imparting the true teachings of a God who did not sanctify inequality among human beings. With the British rule and the missionaries' activities, Phule said, the Brahmins were no longer in a position to dominate the *shudras* so they intended to drive away the British. He blamed the Brahmins for deceiving the *shudras* again by inciting them against the British. On the other hand, they continued to occupy various posts under the British administration and from the bottom to the top there was hardly any office without Brahmins. He blamed Brahmin incitements for the various rebellions against the British and in particular for leading the 1857 rebellion. He specifically mentions 'the deshastha bramman from the north like Bhatpande, the konkanstha brahman, Nana, 'Tatya Topya' were responsible for the rebellion, and the *shudra* princes like Shinde and Holkar for extending all support to the British throughout the rebellion. Phule ridiculed the British for preferring the Brahmins to man the administration despite their treacherous rebellion against them. He called these Brahmin employees of the British as pen-wielding butchers who left no occasion to extort bribes from the *shudras*, favour their own kinsmen, and misguide the busy high European officers so that the miseries of the *shudras* went unnoticed. He very passionately narrated the travails of the poor *ryots* who had to run from pillar to post seeking justice which always eluded them because of the Brahmin grip over the British administration.

Despite the shortcomings of the British administration, he wished the British Raj to continue and demanded greater intervention from the administration. He recommended that the government place at least one English or Scottish preacher in each village with a grant of some land

for his upkeep and assigning him the task of preaching and submitting a report at least once in a year on every occurrence in the village. This would stop the Brahmins organizing revolts against the government and impart true knowledge to the *shudras*, who would not be beguiled by the Brahmins any further. He also recommended that the government not employ individuals of only one caste as *patil* or *kulkarni* but like in the military appoint candidates on the basis of their ability for the job through examinations. He also suggested that the government stop all grants to the education department and divert the funds to the collectorates. He added that the education for pupils of all castes selected on the basis of merit should be free under the close supervision of the European collectors. He appealed to the government to employ people in proportion to their population and if there weren't enough people from all castes then only Europeans should fill those posts. He also suggested that retired Marathi speaking European collectors be made to stay in the villages with pension for life. Their duty would be to keep a close watch on the Brahmins and the *kulkarnis* so that they could prevent mischief and frauds. He wrote:

This will expose all the shameless frauds of the *bhats* in the Education Department and check the anarchy there. This will also enlighten the oppressed *shudras* and true knowledge will enable them to renounce the irrational domination of the *bhats* over them. I am quite convinced that they will never forget the obligations of the Queen, who alone can remove the bond of slavery tied around their necks by the wily Brahmins.<sup>25</sup>

Phule said that it was foolish to oppose the British who were their saviour. Instead, they had to make the best use of this opportunity for freeing themselves from the slavery of the Brahmins while the British rule lasted. Not only did he hold the uprising of 1857 a Brahmin led rebellion but he also called the nationalist movement a high caste elitist project. He often attacked those Brahmins who were moderate, liberal reformers grouped in organizations like the Prarthana Samaj, Brahma Samaj, Sarvjanik Sabha and the Congress. All these were to him projects for deceiving the masses and establishing upper caste hegemony.<sup>26</sup> He openly questioned the *shudras* making a common cause with the Brahmins. He raised questions like:

... Brahmins think of cow-piss as sacred ... and they drink cow-piss and purify themselves. And the same *bhats* and Brahmins ... think of the *shudra* farmer as low. Thus how will the farmers and Brahmins unite?<sup>27</sup>

Most *bhat* Brahmins enact all manner of impure things with the dancing girls or harlots in town, but the same Arya *bhats* think it sinful to inter-marry with the simple and innocent farmers' daughters. So how will the farmers and Brahmins unite?<sup>28</sup>

Most of the *bhats* and Brahmins do not allow the *shudra* farmer to touch the stone or metal idols in their temples, and do not eat with them, even at a distance, but put leftovers in his plate, and are done with it, so how will the farmers and Brahmins unite?<sup>29</sup>

By mocking the holy mythical figures and portraying them as cunning and brutal invaders, Phule sought to demolish the divine import of the Brahminical scriptures and instil a sense of outrage in the lower castes so that they could rise up to claim their rights. He also sought to boost the morale of the downtrodden by depicting the Brahmins being repeatedly defeated in his restatement of mythology. This was only the starting point of his critique of Brahmin hegemony. He very painstakingly charted the exploitation and oppression of non-Brahmins by the Brahmins in both their religious and secular roles. He gave a vivid account of the Brahmins in their various religious roles as priests, mendicants, fortune tellers, matchmakers, story tellers, custodians of holy places and their fleecing of the lower castes on any conceivable occasion employing all sorts of means like cajoling, frightening, cheating or bullying and he went on to describe their domination and networking in the British administration and professions like law and journalism, in representative bodies like the municipality, and in the nationalist movement. Phule very successfully exposed how the Brahmins reinforced their hegemony from their standing in different walks of life and ensured their domination and privileges at the cost of the toiling peasants and other working peoples.

For overcoming Brahmin hegemony, mere exposure of their latent powers was not enough, nor the subverting of their sacred texts. It required greater efforts. One of the primary focuses of the Satyashodhak Samaj was the removal of Brahmins from ritualistic roles. The campaign won many adherents and the Samaj made available trained non-Brahmin priests for performing marriage and other rituals wherever it could provide. At a broader level, he and his associates championed a Maratha identity drawing resources from the non-Brahmin warrior and cultivator traditions and clever manipulations of Hindu scriptures. The term *Maratha* earlier denoting Marathi speakers was gradually evolved into an identity marker for the labouring and cultivating castes united in opposition to the Brahminical hegemony. And 'it was Phule who, almost single-handedly, provided the reinterpretations of the past, the potent symbolism and the vivid imagery which was to form the ideological substance of this identity'.<sup>30</sup> Along with exhorting the lower caste people to make the best use of the opportunities offered by the British rule he fervently appealed to the British administration to limit the role of Brahmins in administration and keep a check on them so that they could not think of rebelling against the British. In employment and in education he advocated proportionate access for all castes.

## Critiquing Colonialism

Generally, commentaries depict Phule's main concern being 'Brahminical Colonialism' instead of British colonialism. Anti-Brahminism is indeed the core of Phule's articulations and activities and he viewed British rule as a godsend opportunity to get rid of the Brahminical yoke. Primarily, it was a sense of gratitude for Phule and his associates '... British colonialism inadvertently made available certain normative and cognitive tools with which to fight Brahminical colonialism'.<sup>31</sup> Besides, his projections of the colonial rule were coloured by his expectations from the regime. He intended to counter-pose the alien rule against the deeply

entrenched high caste hegemony. He often started with scathing criticism of the colonial rule but ended up blaming the lackadaisical officers or the scheming Brahmin employees. In fact his quest of fundamental freedom forbade him to be forthright in his criticism of the colonial regime. In *Sbetkaryya Asud*, he clearly stated that the peasants' plight has worsened during the colonial rule. In particular, he was very critical of the lazy and luxurious way of life of the European officials who were always inured in pleasure seeking and depended on their scheming subordinates for administration.

It is again very surprising to see Phule writing that the Empire would not last forever when it was at the height of its glory. He wrote in *Gulamgiri*, 'Let me tell you, the English are here today, but who knows whether they will be here tomorrow? They won't be there till eternity. Therefore, all the *shudra* should make haste to free themselves from the ancestral slavery of these bhats'.<sup>32</sup> This observation reflected his awareness of the unsustainable character of colonialism. At times, his condemnation of the British rule is too sharp to be overlooked. 'O, cannot the farmer be invited to the governor's court, the farmer, on whose labours the government depends for its army, its ammunition, and the inordinate salaries of its black employees, and the lassitudinous luxury of the white ones, and their pensions? O, should such be the condition of one who is the foundation of all nations? He does not get enough food to feed his belly, not enough cloth to cover himself, and the sword of the taxes to be paid is constantly hanging on his head, and the hunting dogs of the lords do not even sniff at him?'<sup>33</sup> He also said when the peasants would redeem their rights the British would have to flee the country. He wrote, '... the moment the farmer educates himself and acquires knowledge, he will carry his whip on his shoulder, and he will bring the goddess of wealth back to his own house, and make her stay there happily. If this ever happens, the English will have to scream and yell, and travel to America, and somehow to manage to fill their bellies by working hard day and night'.<sup>34</sup> The fact being as Gail Omvedt writes, 'Unlike some of the later non-Brahmin leaders who maintained an unqualified loyalty to the Raj, he seems to have viewed it as largely destructive in economic terms; it was only on cultural grounds that he saw it as providing a foundation for the liberation of the masses'.<sup>35</sup>

## Education for Liberation

Whatever may be the trajectory of subjection of the lower castes their liberation rests primarily on education. Providing education to the masses was the crux of the remedies Phule offered for change. This is the pioneering and lasting contribution of Phule. His prescriptions in this regard have been conceptualized and are practiced as inclusive education in contemporary parlance. He emphatically laid down the lack of education as the root cause of the degradation of lower castes:

Without knowledge, intelligence was lost, without intelligence morality was lost and without morality was lost all dynamism! Without dynamism money was lost and without money the *shudras* sank. All his misery was caused by the lack of knowledge.<sup>36</sup>



He very skilfully located a formidable source of Brahminic power in their monopoly over knowledge and the knowledge systems ensuring their control over the rest of society and which was being extended, in Phule's analysis, through appropriation of educational facilities in colonial times.<sup>37</sup> What the evil of ignorance could cost to the lower castes could not be better elaborated than by Phule himself:

In sum, since there is no book amongst the *mali*, *kumbis* and *dbangars* which could be said to have come from god, like the Bible, brave and great kings among them, like the Shindes and Holkars, and the lords of the farmer's children, and cows, cannot even read even basic books of Sanskrit conjugations because of the obstacle of the Arya *bhats*, they do not know that they are human, and what their real rights are. If we say this is not so, then why would the farmers have maintained the tradition of washing the Brahmin's feet, and drinking that water? Why would they have worshipped stone and metal idols, cows, and snakes, and plants, and treated them as gods? Because the Arya Brahmins have kept them ignorant for their own selfish purposes, the farmers do not have the power of balanced thought, and believe in all manner of ghosts and creatures and practise all manner of mumbo-jumbo and magic and waste their own money. They lose their lives too, because they do not believe in medicine but in shamans and magicians.<sup>38</sup>

The primary cause of degradation of the lower castes was the denial of education to them by the Brahmins. He further pointed out that the lower castes were so badly fleeced that they were not in a position to afford education for their children, and even if they had the resources they had the least inclination for sending their children to schools. Often they were ill advised by the very same Brahmins for not sending their children to schools. On the other hand, in colonial India, the schools were so few that they could hardly cater to even a small portion of population. Even those schools were manned by Brahmins, who were reluctant to teach the children of *shudras* and *atishudras*. He also resented the government splurging huge sums on higher education, '... the greater portion of the revenues of the Indian Empire are derived from the *ryot's* labour ... That Government should expend profusely a large portion of revenue thus raised on the education of the higher classes for it is these only who take advantage of it, is anything but just or equitable'.<sup>39</sup> Phule advocated massive expansion of primary education and employment of trained teachers from lower castes.

## Gender Justice

Phule's liberation project also engaged the gender issue prominently. It was also a major aspect of his theology discussed below. Besides opening a school exclusively for girls, he also ran a home for pregnant Brahmin widows to deliver their babies, who often killed or abandoned their 'illegitimate' babies. He adopted a baby delivered by a Brahmin widow in this home as

his son. He advocated remarriage for Brahmin widows and was against the inhuman Brahmin practice of shaving off the head of their widows. He had defended Tarabai Shinde and Pandita Ramabai when they faced public acrimony for their radical views on gender issues. Phule suggested that gender inequality had to be contingent on general iniquitous caste relations. He equated the status of women with that of the *shudras* and *atishudras* and presented them ‘as victims of Brahminic culture and power in common with other lower caste and untouchable people’.<sup>40</sup> He did not favour categorization of women on caste lines. To him, women formed a single category of oppressed like the *shudras* and the *atishudras*. He negated *varna* differentiation among women and treated gender as a separate factor for oppression.

In Phule’s opinion, women like the *shudras* and *atishudras*, were denied education in order to keep them ignorant. He held Brahminism and *Manusmriti* responsible for evils like abortion and infanticide. Thus he indirectly suggested that it was only Brahmin widows who were victims of the ban on widow marriage and the ideas of purity and chastity. For women too, he suggested knowledge and education as means of liberation.<sup>41</sup> Phule held the family as being at the centre of a social organization and also the centre of oppression in society. He was the first one to point out that young brides were used as bonded labour by the family they married into. Phule was convinced that the family and the marriage system must be reformed.<sup>42</sup> He never treated men and women as a single category. He talked of equal human rights for both men and women.

## Theology of Equality

Unlike Periyar, who led the anti-Brahmin movement in the Madras Presidency, Phule was a believer and had a theology to offer, which sought a ‘monotheistic, humane and benevolent’<sup>43</sup> makeover of Hinduism. In this endeavour, he rejected the mediatory role played by the Brahmins between God and the believers. His book *Sarvajanik Satya Dharma Pustak* (The Book of True Faith) published posthumously in 1891, which, G. P. Deshpande writes, is ‘almost like Phule’s final testament’ and summarizes his theology.<sup>44</sup>

Phule’s articulation of equality of all human beings, in fact, emanated from his belief in the Creator.

... the Creator of this universe is also the Creator of human beings. It would not be surprising if He, because He is merciful, would want all human beings to enjoy all human privileges and rights.<sup>45</sup>

If the Creator is one, why is there mutual hatred among human beings? Phule raised these questions.

Why is it then that the human beings living in different states and nations hate each other? How and why are the foolish passions of religions and national hatreds generated?<sup>46</sup>

And he answered:

All the religions and revelatory books that man has produced on our planet, one and all, do not contain a consistent universal truth. This is so because in every such book are to be seen passages interpolated into those texts by certain groups of individuals as the situation in their views warranted and as their dogmatism and mulishness dictated. Consequently those religion or faiths did not in the final analysis work towards the good of all. This in turn resulted in sects and sectarianism. Small wonder that these sects hated and turned against each other.<sup>47</sup>

Phule rejected the ideas of heaven and hell on the simple ground that nobody had seen them and such ideas persisted because they had not been subjected to logical thought.

Phule's theology was a doctrine of social justice, and gender justice was its core component. He said that human beings were superior to all other beings and among humans, the women were superior to men because they bore children and nursed them, were faithful and dependable and sacrificed for the sake of relations. The men, on the other hand, were exploitative and lustful. They kept their women uneducated so that they could not question their authority and immoral way of life. While women were forbidden to remarry even when widowed, men could marry many times and keep many wives. The problem was more acute among Brahmins. Among them old men could marry young girls and when young women became widowed they became victims of the lust of their own family members. This led to other complications like unwanted pregnancies which they were forced to abort and if unsuccessful in aborting they resorted to infanticide.

Phule asserted that the Creator had indeed given men the faculty of discretion to safeguard against lust, but they did not use that discretion. The problem was that they do not apply the same standard of morality for themselves and women. A man could marry many women and justify his action by referring to some religious text, but the same man would be aghast if a woman married more than one man to satisfy her lust. Phule wrote:

If you do not like such behaviour on the part of women (marrying more than one man), is it surprising that women would dislike similar filthy behaviour on the part of men? Both men and women are equally qualified to enjoy all human rights in equal measure. How can anyone then have one standard for women and quite another for lustful, adventurous men?<sup>48</sup>

Phule also vehemently rejected caste-based differentiation which at that time was accepted as a natural phenomenon. He said that there are no castes in species like animals and birds, how could this exist among human animals? If Brahma created castes, he would have ordained the same for other creatures. And the Brahmins could not claim superior status on the basis of the caste practices, because they hardly bothered with the same practices when dining and dining with the Europeans. Professions did not make castes, as castes did not decide professions. A

peasant's sons could become a horticulturist, shepherd or cultivator, but that did not change their caste. Even if the job done by someone of a particular caste was dirty, the caste could not be set aside as an inferior caste; in the same way, a mother could be held as a person of an inferior caste because she cleans the excreta of her baby. And castes did not have some inherent qualities. Good and bad qualities were not hereditary. Well-educated individuals from any caste could compete with individuals from other castes. Thus Phule questioned the legitimacy of caste.

It can be safely said that Phule believed in divine intervention and in his belief all religions were integrated under the divine order and mission. He clearly suggested that the caste system did not have the divine sanction and God had indeed intervened for the destruction of the caste-system. He asserted that the monotheistic Mussalmans, who did not believe in the caste-system, were sent to India by God in order to rescue people from caste-based slavery. But, according to him, the Mussalmans soon immersed themselves in luxuries and thus betrayed the Creator. The merciful God then deprived them of their power and glory and instead civilized the English primitives, granted them qualities like extraordinary valour and sent them to rescue the *shudras* and the *atishudras* from the Aryan Brahmins. Some Englishmen among them following the teaching of a sage of their religion (Jesus Christ or Yashwant as Phule calls him) were in all sincerity making every effort to rescue the *shudras* and the *atishudras* from their unnatural slavery.<sup>49</sup> To Phule, thus, the colonization of India was divinely mandated and He so willed the annihilation of the caste-system in India.

## Contribution: An Assessment

What Phule presented as 'history' was basically an instrument of his political goal. His writings do point to some broad trends which could have happened but what he says cannot be held 'history' as such. In his accounts the ease with he moves from mythological to historical figures is anything but astounding. He mixes myths with history and correlates them with existing social relations and traditions to make them look authentic. His history can best be called an indicative history. Moreover he does a fantastic makeover of the Hindu mythology and presents that as history. This is again something which cannot pass as acceptable discourse. He may be credited for turning mythology from an ideology of oppression to a tool of liberation but it can only be accepted as a schema of activism rather than theorization.

In fact, Phule's accounts are tactical, and that is more deliberate by intention and forthright in form than the writings of those whom he accuses of such writings in the name of philosophy or religion. Very skilfully he formulated the Hindu social structure to be what G. P. Deshpande calls *dvaitvarnik* (two-*varna*), in which society was shown to be polarized into the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins and rejected the prevailing four-*varna* social structure. His formulation resonates of the class struggle thesis of Karl Marx wherein he wipes off all social divisions to show the society to be divided into only two classes. Gail Omvedt attributes Phule's theory containing 'a kind of incipient historical materialism in which economic exploitation and cultural dominance are interwoven. In contrast to a class theory, communities become the basis for contradiction

(the *shudra-atishudra* peasantry versus the Brahmin bureaucracy and religious order); in contrast to changing property relations, conquest, force, state power and ideology are seen as driving factors'.<sup>50</sup> While propounding the bipartisan *dvainarnik* division of Hindu society, Phule brushed aside the multilayered oppression of the caste structure. In the caste system, oppressors are not only Brahmins; they are invariably the dominant caste of any region, and for a caste to be dominant, ritual superiority which the Brahmins command is only one of the several factors. 'Ritually higher status is only one of the four criteria of dominance as defined by Srinivas; the other three are education, economic strength and numerical majority'.<sup>51</sup> Post-colonial history testifies to the oppressiveness of caste system persisting despite the changes in the character of regimes in independent India. Most of the governments of the Indian Union are now overwhelmingly manned by the erstwhile lower castes of India or Other Backward Castes (OBC) as they are officially referred to, but caste and gender based oppressions continue unabated.

In this context, it is pertinent to note that the divide between the backward castes and Scheduled Castes persists. Atrocities on dalits are rampant even in Tamil Nadu where the Dravidians hold complete sway and Brahmins are thoroughly marginalized. Omvedt cites Eleanor Zelliot, 'Just as the Justice Party in Madras failed to include significant numbers of Untouchables, the non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra could not make common cause with Untouchables'. She cites Zelliot to deny the divide and clarifies that even Ambedkar was critical of the hypocrisy of non-Brahmin leaders but he and others never had any doubt that Brahmins were the 'dominant caste' in the system as a whole. Omvedt thus denies the divide and writes, 'In a real sense he (Ambedkar) was the heir of Phule's call for a movement of *shudras* and *atishudras*'.<sup>52</sup> However, the political developments in Uttar Pradesh deny the proposition that these two caste groupings are natural allies. The Bahujan Samaj Party led by Mayawati has turned the Phule-Ambedkarian discourse upside down. The party led by a dalit lady Mayawati having a solid chunk of vote bank in the dalits themselves completely retracted from their anti-Brahmin rhetoric and went to the extent of forming an alliance with Brahmins to defeat a party which has its core support base in the backward castes led by a person from the leading backward caste of the state.

In this context, a general fallacy with most of the articulations and movements of social justice in India can be noticed. In effect, they seek to transfer power from one caste or category of castes to another category of castes and in turn when they succeed they produce counter hegemonies and the emerging hegemonies are often no better than earlier ones. The proponents of social justice seek their cause from the viewpoint of primordial identity groupings instead of seeking justice by creating free and empowered individuals. Mostly they are guided by the psychology of retributive justice amongst groups. This perception of justice betrays medievalism.

Besides, the theory of Aryans being outsider invaders is contested. More than being contentious, the issue as to whether the Aryans were invading settlers from faraway lands or the original inhabitants of this land is irrelevant. It is not possible to establish that there exists a racially separable Aryan stock in India. Even if this divide is accepted for argument's sake, the historical facts are clear that invasions and settlements from outside never ceased in India. Intermingling of invading armies, hordes, immigrating traders, missionaries and the refugees with local populace has been an unceasing process from time immemorial in this subcontinent and drawing a clear

divide between an indigenous stock and an original conquering race subjugating the indigenous inhabitants and holding their sway till date is hardly tenable. Moreover, to sift a pure heredity of an Aryan Brahmin from that of a Dravidian Shudra is impossible because it does not exist. Unstoppable sexual encounters among men and women of different castes through ages do not allow such divisions to continue even if such divisions can be speculated to exist in the almost unknown distant past.<sup>53</sup>

The fact to be appreciated is that Phule attacked a degenerate caste system and its abominable practices by appropriating the same resources on which the system was based. Phule turned the Aryan race theory, current during his times and used by people like Tilak to justify Brahmin superiority, on its head by formulating that Brahmins had indeed descended from the conquering Indo-Europeans, who far from being superior were deceitful and cruel.<sup>54</sup> The other ingenious aspect of his polemics was that he presented the different areas of Brahmin activity, in religion, rural economy, and administration which looked unrelated as 'an essentially unitary force' and 'presenting this as a fact so obvious that it needed no particular argument or demonstration to prove it'.<sup>55</sup> On the other side, as he and his associates found the deep religious conservatism of the much oppressed groups being the main hindrance to their reformist agenda, they embarked upon a process of a collective identity formation for all non-Brahmin castes by appropriating the warrior and cultivator traditions of Maharashtra.

His critique of British administration has a ring of contemporariness. His portrayal of the conditions of the peasantry can be an eye opener for today's scholars and activists who fail to account for numerous instances of farmers committing suicide. His critique of the forest department, the need for improving agricultural techniques and practices, the method of land use and farmers' indebtedness shows a passionate concern which is missing today in the academic and civil society presentations of the state of peasantry. In the field of education, Phule asked for greater state funding of primary education and advocated that the higher education might be better left to the efforts of private individuals. Neo-liberals of today would hardly differ from this line of argument. His advocacy of inclusive development policy, free and compulsory education and state intervention for fulfilling basic necessities are concerns of the same intensity today. Even the modern companies can take a lesson or two from Phule in the corporate social responsibility. Phule had opened a night school for labourers under his employment working at a certain construction site. This school was attended by 2000 labourers and when the project was finished he gave a feast for all of them. His addressing of the gender question was also much ahead of his times. His autonomous treatment of the gender issue and treating women as a single category were anything but revolutionary.

Phule had a rather comprehensive approach to social realities. In the age of ascending Marxism, while the issues of economics dominated the academic world, with the crucial and undoubtedly the more lasting impacts of wars, mythologies and above all, the knowledge systems, access or denial of access to which is the most crucial determinant of social interrelations, on the course of human history were ignored. Phule though encountered mythological symbolism with a matter-of-fact approach and by an imaginative reconstruction of an unsubstantiated 'history', which was hardly logical, but he very convincingly put forth the rather

lasting impact these factors made in the Indian case. For instance, the status of Brahmins hardly altered after the onset of the British Empire and their prominence in society continued over ages despite innumerable changes of regimes and even in the so called modes of production. It is after all, politics alone which worked decisively in favour of the socially oppressed in India before and after independence. Very emphatically he showed how religion, politics and economics intertwined to perpetuate a system of a very formidable form of hegemony and domination. Crucial for liberation are education and required intervention from the government. Phule indeed anticipated the role of the government in bringing social change and ensuring social justice. Though his project of social revolution was soon abandoned, and by the 1930s, the non-Brahmin movement was merged with the national movement but its imprints on the national psyche remains indelible. The Indian Constitution was so drafted to become a powerful medium for social engineering, and governmental commitment to inclusive policies is deepening with passage of time. In the first decade of twenty-first century we have seen enactments of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and the Right to Education Act. Both Acts are testimonies of the fulfilment of some of the demands made so passionately in the nineteenth century.

Reading of Phule's writings should not engage too much with the logical incoherencies and factual inconsistencies therein. Methodological or political correctness was not Phule's concern at all. His genius lay in uniting and organizing the suppressed masses for redeeming their humanity. He questioned the status quo and relentlessly worked for the cause of social liberation. Indeed he was not comfortable with the emergent nationalist project, which was surely half-baked as it was more an assertion of elitist privileges than a call for real emancipation of toiling masses. Though the nationalist project for the time being was denied the support of a significant number of people as a result of non-Brahmin mobilizations, and yet the movement prepared ground for greater democratization of society. The moot point is that one can disagree with Phule on all the points he made but cannot deny any of them.

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# Vivekanand: Cultural Nationalism

*Amiya P. Sen*

... he was no politician, he was the greatest of nationalists.

*Sister Nivedita*

I am grateful to the lands of the West for the many warm hearts that received me with all the love that pure and disinterested souls alone can give, but my life's allegiance is to this, my motherland and if I had a thousand lives, every moment of the whole series would be consecrated to your service my countrymen.

*Swami Vivekanand*

## The Man and His Work

In the annals of modern Indian thought, there have been but few individuals whose life and thought have been open to such diverse interpretations and who themselves were inclined to continuously redefining or reformulating their lives and their objectives. Swami Vivekanand (1863–1902) rejected political praxis and yet the Sedition Committee Report of 1918 listed him among the individuals who instigated young men and women to wage war against the British Empire. Indeed, young revolutionaries, when apprehended by the police, were found to carry on their person, a pocket edition of the Gita and public addresses delivered by the Swami. Especially after his first visit to the West (1893), his followers were often undecided on

whether to call him a speculative monk or a social crusader. Some found in him a fiery patriot, interpreting his zeal for Vedanta as only a philosophical gloss that somehow hid from public view the political project of an advancing Indian nationhood. On the other hand, Vivekanand himself, and several of his admirers, have emphasized his decision to stay away from organized politics. One of his closest followers, Sister Nivedita (1867–1911), found the Swami to be intensely patriotic without also being political, which sets us wondering if it was not so much the ends as the methods adopted by contemporary Indian politics that Vivekanand disagreed with. Paradoxically, again, the Swami has been seen in many quarters as one of the key founders of modern Hinduism though in his day he remained defiant and quite scathing in his attack on traditional Hinduism. Possibly such polarized and polemical perspectives on the Swami have followed from only selective aspects of his life and work being highlighted at specific points of time. In the early 1890s, when he toured the West to procure material support for India's social uplift, his mission was often interpreted as one that aimed at countering the excesses of materialism. During that tour, the Hindu orthodoxy of Bengal questioned his credentials (as a Kayastha) to represent Hinduism; only a few years later, during the Swadeshi agitation, this Kayastha sanyasi was to become the iconic representation of political militancy and resurgent Hinduism.

Such polarized assessments of the Swami, however, should not obscure the fact that he was himself known to shift ground several times. Vivekanand himself contributed no less to the specious theory about a grossly 'materialist' West in serious need for 'spiritual' messages from the East. Also from an engaging activism, he is known to have disputed the very rationale for work and human intervention. It is paradoxical that an individual who publicized the universalistic or pluralistic face of Hinduism should have also contributed substantially to essentialise that term. Arguably, modern Hinduism was more easily defined after Vivekanand than before him. Whereas Rammohan Roy was perhaps the first modern Indian to consciously employ the word 'Hinduism',<sup>1</sup> its ideological constituents attained some fullness only with Vivekanand.

As a philosopher, Vivekanand was not very original. He was, however, an eager learner, never ashamed to admit that he had either changed or outgrown his earlier views. Perhaps some of his inconsistency arose from the fact that he was, on the whole, an indefatigable but impatient crusader who was wary of public criticism and rapidly lost interest or hope in the face of tardy progress. All the same the quality that never deserted him even amidst adversity of ill-will was his deep attachment to his country and countrymen—a pressing concern for their social and spiritual welfare. In a sense, the 'idea' of India took cohesive shape only with Swami Vivekanand—an idea often movingly expressed through tears and toil, a genuine empathy for the poor and the humble and, above all, by drawing attention to the underlying unity of human life and the common human predicament.

While there would be, at first sight, many Vivekanandas, an empathetic understanding of his life and work will only reveal the inter-penetration of seemingly opposite categories. For the Swami, spiritual awakening was never entirely removed from the social; the edification of the soul and self were but two dimensions of the same human revolution. It was thus that he came to view older problems from new perspectives. Although belonging to a traditional order

of monks, Swami Vivekanand was no ordinary ascetic. Even before he journeyed to America, the Swami was an enigma to several fellow Indians. Several friends and admirers who met him during this time have expressed wonder at the sight of a Hindu monk who unabashedly puffed at his cigars, took great interest in French music and continental cuisine and could reproduce verbatim, passages from the *Pickwick Papers*. And while he came down heavily on certain aspects of modern civilization, Vivekanand was indeed a very modern figure. For one, he believed that movement and change were signs of life and stillness, of decadence and death. Hence he believed that a tradition, rather than be fossilized in time, would have to be interpreted afresh in keeping with new social and historical requirements. Secondly, he was deeply enamoured of the idea that change first occurred in the minds of men before they could take the shape of earth-shaking events. Man-making was therefore, his overarching mission in life, his mantra.

## Life and Times

Though Swami Vivekanand lived and worked for less than forty years, his life ought to be judged not by its length but its richness and intensity. It was also a difficult life, a good part of which was spent in hardship and self-denial, and it was committed to a cause that consumed it prematurely.<sup>2</sup>

Vivekanand (pre-monastic name, Narendranath Dutta) was born into an upper-class, Kayastha family of north Calcutta. His father, Biswanath Dutta, a successful lawyer by profession, was a man of eclectic tastes and progressive views on social matters. He respected social conventions and took under his care many poor relatives, much against the wishes of his own family. At the same time, he was courageous enough to ensure that his wife was taught elementary English by members of the European Zenana Mission. Biswanath's wife, Bhuvaneshwari Devi, was a deeply pious woman who taught her young son the virtues of austerity and self-control. In personal character, the child Narendra was strong and fearless, opting to face danger his friends and companions avoided. More important though, was that the heroic cast of Narendranath's personality hungered for greater love, support and recognition. In some measure, he found this hunger assuaged by his mother but it was more his guru, the Bengali mystic, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836–86) who managed to address this. It was in reality Ramakrishna, more than anyone else, who made Narendra aware of his potential greatness and the historic mission that he was to play in life.

At first glance the educational background of Narendranath looks far from extraordinary. He was an average student but with a deep interest in contemporary Western philosophy, particularly the Utilitarians, Comte, Mill and Spencer. Apparently, he also developed some interest in debate and discussion for he is known to have joined the Freemasons Lodge and for a time, the Sadharan Brahma Samaj. Though initially influenced by the agnosticism of J. S. Mill and the Scottish Common Sense philosophers, Narendra hesitated to throw overboard his conceptions of God and religion. Instead, he wondered if these too were not matters that had to be better understood and made an integral part of ones experiences in the world. There is a popular

story to the effect that when he was still a college student, Narendranath called on prominent residents of Calcutta, eager to know if they had come face to face with God. As it turned out, all but one said that they had not. The sole exception, incidentally, was none other than Sri Ramakrishna.

The bonding between these two ecstatic souls grew rapidly through the years 1881 to 1884, only to be ruptured by the untimely death of Biswanath Dutta. This event was to be a turning point in the Dutta family fortunes. Biswanath's wanton generosity left behind huge debts and unscrupulous relatives found this an opportune time to press claims for share in the family property. Sadly, Narendra himself could not secure a suitable job; it was a time when out of consideration for the family, he had to pretend to having eaten at a friend's place when, in truth, he had not eaten all day. The news of Narendra's misfortunes soon reached the temple complex of Dakshineswar where Sri Ramakrishna served as a priest. Ever anxious about the well being of his young charge, the saint fervently prayed to the Divine Mother, the goddess Kali. Perhaps it is this great love and tenderness that the Master showed, together with the traumatic experiences of bereavement and family-feuds that deepened the spiritual quest in Narendra. In this, however, Sri Ramakrishna played no small part. It was he who constantly worried about the young man's moral and spiritual state, seizing every opportunity to remind him that a great life such as his should not be wasted in marriage and domestic chores. Of all his young devotees, Sri Ramakrishna chose Narendra alone for initiation into the mysteries of Advaita Vedanta, a part philosophical, part mystical viewpoint that took all differentiation in this world to be only relatively real. Man, in this view, was no different from Reality or God; it was just that his delusions did not allow him to gauge this supreme truth. It was this philosophical monism that Swami Vivekanand later attempted to translate as a gospel of universality and social egalitarianism.

The Vivekanand we are more familiar with emerged around 1890. Following the death of Sri Ramakrishna in 1886, the eleven men that he had initiated into *sanyas* tried to organize themselves into a monastic order and for a time lived in a dilapidated old house in north Calcutta that served as a monastery. Thereafter, most went their own ways; some set out on pilgrimages, others to work for socially useful projects. Narendranath himself left the monastery sometime in 1890, little realizing at the time that it would be seven long years before he would be reunited with his brother-disciples. The Swami's wanderings at the time have often been given the name of *parivrajya*, the unsettled itinerary of a Hindu ascetic who was allowed to camp at one place for only brief periods. In truth, Vivekanand's own tours during this time were different in as much as it was not always personal salvation that he was seeking but familiarity with a country and its people with whom he had not been closely acquainted. In some ways like Gandhi who came after him, Vivekanand tried to feel the pulse of India, to reflect more critically on what elements fashioned the lives of his people or what sentiments moved them. On these tours, predictably, he found grinding poverty, disability and disease. What worried him more though was the weight of ignorance and superstition that had gripped the popular mind and only further aggravated their mental and physical afflictions. In the Swami's view, what his countrymen needed most was the gift of knowledge, in both its secular and its spiritual forms. While secular knowledge enhanced knowledge of the phenomenal world,

a spiritual awakening was no less important, for it restored self-belief in man and made him aware of his potential greatness. On these tours, Vivekanand reflected deeply on how best he might serve his country and it occurred to him that rather than blame religion for the several ills plaguing the country, as unkind critics were apt to do, religion itself must be made practically useful and a source of strength. Thus, rather than be preoccupied with the journey of the human soul, religious figures themselves could take elementary education to the masses. There was a time when the Swami seriously considered forming a band of young sanyasis who could instruct villagers in useful knowledge and basic science.

However, it also occurred to Vivekanand that ambitious projects such as his could not rest entirely on indigenous will or support. He undertook the journey to America because, at the end of his extended tours, he was convinced that Indians could not be persuaded to provide the necessary manpower or resources for their own upliftment. By this he was only underscoring the fact that it was far easier to move his own countrymen once the ruling races themselves had been won over. Also, similar to Rammohun's beliefs, the Swami was staunchly converted to the idea that India's problems could be overcome only by embracing other peoples, their methods and their ideals in a constructive spirit. Much before he left for the West, Vivekanand thus alerted his countrymen of the serious need to examine how the 'engine of society' worked in other countries, to keep free and open communication with what was going on in the minds of other nations if they themselves wanted to be a nation.<sup>3</sup>

It is now commonplace that his opening speech at the Parliament of Religions (Chicago, 11 September 1893) made Swami Vivekanand an instant celebrity. His handsome face and exotic dress attracted crowds, his profound knowledge of Indian and Western philosophy impressed fellow delegates and scholars and the American press gave him consistently good coverage. On arrival back home in early 1897, the Swami received a hero's welcome with enthusiasts even forcing the train carrying the Swami to unscheduled halts. However, success also brought with it much bitterness and opposition. The Hindu orthodox were scandalized by the Swami's open defiance of taboos regarding food and drink and even some of his brother-disciples resented the 'outlandish' procedures he introduced such as waking up residents of a *math* by the ringing of the morning alarm. In the West, some erstwhile followers accused him of living off donor's money. Despite recurring health problems and mounting opposition, Vivekanand pushed on with his long-standing ideals. In 1897, he started the Ramakrishna Math and Mission at Belur, appropriately facing Dakshineswar across the river Hooghly. Two years later, he set up the Advaita Ashram in the Himalayas. By the close of 1899, he set sail for his second journey to Europe and America, a journey that lasted a little more than a year.

In effect the year 1900 marks the end of Vivekanand's active life and career. Sometime that very year he had the premonition that he would not survive the next three years. Around this time too, patriotism and the zeal for social work increasingly gave way to monastic solitude and the quest for salvation. 'Amen', he wrote to an American friend in June 1900, 'I have given up all thoughts about India or any land. I am now selfish, want to save myself.'<sup>4</sup> The more disturbing thing though was his going back on the very need for human mediation, a retreat from a world determined by human effort and enterprise to one that could be understood only as some

inscrutable divine play: ‘... work always brings evil with it. I have paid with bad health ... and work? What is work, who shall I work for? I am free, I am Mother’s child. She works, she plays, why should I plan?’<sup>5</sup>

By the early months of 1902, he was mostly bedridden. Austerity and meditation now took up more and more of his time; he also found new delight in walking the lawns of Belur Math in the company of his pets and personally feeding poor construction workers at the site. He died on the 4th of July the same year.

## Vivekanand and Problems in Contemporary India

Very little of what Swami Vivekanand wrote or spoke about was unrelated to his concern for India and fellow Indians. Much of this concern, as we have earlier noted, developed during his extensive tours of India, travelling through barren country roads and crowded market places and from being hosted in both princely chambers and poor quarters. These wanderings, one has to say, left a paradoxical effect on Vivekanand. Through these he came to appreciate the immense diversity of Indian life on the one hand while on the other they also revealed to him the underlying oneness of human problems. Human contentment, he realised, was not always a matter of class and the unlettered were often, in their own ways, happier than the mighty and the affluent. Conversely, spiritual talk could not be palatable to empty stomachs. The solution therefore lay not merely in self-knowledge but in an empathetic understanding of the other who may be besieged by a different set of problems. Over time, he also came to realize how grossly inadequate bookish learning was to the practical necessities of life, not least of all in the sphere of religion. ‘Haribhai’, he once confessed before a brother-disciple, Swami Turiyananda, ‘I am still to understand anything of your so called religion ... but my heart has expanded very much and I have learnt to feel’.<sup>6</sup>

Personal experiences gained at the time left a deep impact on Swami Vivekanand and forced him to change his received wisdom, often radically. For one, they taught him to mistrust the rich more than the poor. At Khetri, after being refused food by wealthy residents, a hungry Vivekanand gratefully accepted coarse *chapatis* offered by a humble cobbler. ‘Thousands of such large hearted men live in lowly huts’ he was to later remark, ‘and we despise them as low caste and untouchables!’

Experiences gained elsewhere made the Swami more receptive to cultures other than his own. Though initially shocked by the polyandrous habits among the Tibetans of the lower Himalayas, Vivekanand subsequently came to appreciate the need for empathy and caution in dealing with different social arrangements.<sup>7</sup> More importantly perhaps, he saw the impropriety of judging the habits or customs of other peoples by standards not their own.

Within the larger question of contemporary India and her problems, Swami Vivekanand focused on two critical and interrelated issues. First, there was the morbidly exploitative nature of British colonial rule and second, the several social ills endemic to indigenous society.

Vivekanand, as it is only too well known, distanced himself from organised politics and repeatedly cautioned his followers from giving any political tilt to his message.<sup>8</sup> In part this may be attributed to anxieties about the newly started Ramakrishna Math and Mission that did later come under some police surveillance. However, his basic objection seems to have been directed against the mendicancy of the early Congress but even more so, the general un-preparedness of his countrymen for a meaningful political revolution. ‘The Congress should boldly declare India to be free’, he reportedly told his brother Mohendranath Dutta, ‘of what use is it to wail like women?’<sup>9</sup> Of course, it was good to have a body like the Congress than have none at all. All the same, no radical change in the political status quo would occur so long as the masses themselves had not been awakened first.<sup>10</sup> A few thousand graduates, as the Swami aptly remarked, did not make the nation.<sup>11</sup> A successful anti-colonial upsurge then required deeper changes in the way people thought or rather, the manner in which they had been taught to think. Colonial rule, observed Vivekanand, had hypnotised the Indian mind and taken away from it all vestiges of dignity and self-belief. The mind, therefore, had to be de-colonised first before it could be made more responsive to freedom.<sup>12</sup>

Though averse to attaching any political significance to his messages, Swami Vivekanand did deem it fit to publicly expose the injustice and indignities perpetrated by the British rule. Unlike some Congress leaders of his day, he had not the opportunity and perhaps even the talent to develop powerful economic critiques of colonialism. On the other hand, he was perceptive enough to use his knowledge and understanding of contemporary events to detect what foreign rule could do to a country and its people. It was here, he felt, that Japan and India offered contrasting examples. In one case, the government was national, pro-people and able to enforce the important distinction between Westernization and choosing to modernise along western lines.<sup>13</sup> In the other, such a distinction could not be as sharply enforced as the ruling class itself was alien and had not interests of the country at heart. In the case of Japan, it had been possible to graft the material and scientific aspects of modernity best exemplified by the West upon the richness and continuities of the indigenous tradition. In the case of India, the very nature of colonial rule sometimes made it difficult to separate constructive borrowing of Western ideals from a reactive xenophobia. All conquests of one people by another were an evil, asserted Vivekanand<sup>14</sup> and British colonialism more so because of its parasitic nature and functioning. ‘No good can be done when the main idea is blood sucking’ the Swami wrote to an American friend.<sup>15</sup> Regrettably, the British never made India their home or identified themselves with Indians. This, incidentally, was never the case with the imperial Mughals. Shah Jehan would turn in his grave on being called a foreigner.<sup>16</sup>

The recurring perpetration of evil and wrongdoing, the suspension of basic civic liberties in colonial India pained the Swami:

For writing a few words of innocent criticism, men are being hurried to transportation for life; others imprisoned without trial and nobody knows when his head will be off. There has been a reign of terror in India for some years; English soldiers are killing our men and



outraging our women—only to be sent home with passage and pension at our expense. We are in a terrible gloom—where is the Lord? <sup>17</sup>

Here, it would be important to remember that the Swami attributed the problems of contemporary India as much to her own shortcomings as the inhuman exploitation by her rulers. Over a long period of time, Indians had suffered at the hands of her conquerors because they had naively overlooked the fact that material growth and development was no less critical to the health of a civilization as the ecstasy of spirit. For centuries Indians had preferred to keep themselves in isolation, unconcerned and oblivious of the phenomenal developments taking place in the world outside. The Hindus, in particular, had been doomed, observed Vivekanand, the day they had invented the word '*mleccha*'.<sup>18</sup> Seen from this perspective, British rule could not have been an unmitigated evil. It had broken down old barriers of the mind and of social cohabitation and forced India to re-establish her contacts with the wider world. The pundits who insulated themselves and fellow Indians from external influences and raised objections to foreign travel were now made to sit up and realize that India was but a very small part of the world.<sup>19</sup> Happily, India had once again become the meeting ground of various ideas, some no doubt petty and merely profit oriented but some truly noble and emancipating. In some respects, the Swami granted, Indians were no match for the European or American. The latter were aesthetically more sophisticated, physically stronger and energetic, greatly advanced in industrial production, and more adept in the art of governance. They were indeed like the *asuras* of Hindu mythology, whose virility and self-belief often put even the gods to shame. However, having argued thus, Swami Vivekanand also claimed that a nation's true worth could not always be measured in terms of her military might or material development. Each nation or civilization had its defining feature, its characteristic quality and it was there that her genius had to be located. 'Political greatness or military power will never be the mission of my race,'<sup>20</sup> argued Vivekanand though fully aware that in his day no nation or peoples were secure without these. Here perhaps lies his critique of Western aggrandizement, of putting power to wrong uses. Also implicit in this argument is the Swami's rather tendentious stereotyping of people and cultures. Vivekanand assumed, quite wrongly, one would have to say, that the West could be understood only through the language of politics and India, through speculative philosophy. In truth, these were really born out of his patriotic attempt at defending his country against uncharitable criticism, to accept her as she was, with all her follies and failings. In Vivekanand's scheme of things, the emergence of India as the spiritual teacher of humanity was only one way of restoring her rightful place in the collectivity of nations. It was important, therefore, that India be seen to give back to the world treasures worth more than what she had herself received. 'We will not be students always but teachers also', he wrote, 'There cannot be any friendship without equality and there cannot be any equality when one party is always the teacher.'<sup>21</sup> This is precisely why he may have found the humble petitioning of the Congress rather demeaning for the collective nation:

The highly educated and prominent men among you form themselves into societies and clamour at the top of their voices 'O English rulers, admit our countrymen to the higher

offices of the state, relieve us of famines and so on. This rendering of the air day and night with the eternal cry of 'Give' and 'Give'. The burden of all this speech is to give to us, give more to us ...<sup>22</sup>

The solution to India's pressing problems, Vivekanand felt, lay in broadening the social base of nationalism by creating a greater bond of empathy between classes. This bonding together as a nation, he suggested, would more effectively come about through a sensitive handling of everyday social problems. The Congress, preoccupied as it was with the nascent nationhood, had somehow come to acquire the facile belief that political goals could somehow gloss over glaring socio-economic evils. This is the critical question he posed in a letter of December 1899:

... in the days of famine and flood and disease and pestilence, tell me where your Congressmen are? Will it do to say 'Hand over the government to us?' ... if there be two thousand people working in several districts, wont it be the turn of the English to consult you?<sup>23</sup>

In the raging debates of the day, Vivekanand apparently took the side of those who had come to believe that political freedom was strongly contingent on the removal of social inequities. No amount of politics would bear fruit until the masses had been educated, fed and adequately cared for:

The whole difference between the West and the East is this: They are a nation and we are not, i.e. civilization, education here is general, it penetrates into the masses. The higher classes in India and America are the same but the distance is infinite between the lower classes between the two countries ... When one great man dies, we must sit for centuries to have another; they can produce them as fast as they die ... why so? Because they have such a bigger field of recruiting their great ones, we have so small ... Educate and raise the masses and thus alone a nation is possible ... The whole defect is here: The real nation who live in cottages have forgotten their manhood, their individuality. Trampled under the fool of the Hindus, Mussalman and Christian, they have come to think that they are born to be trodden under foot by everybody who has money enough in his pocket. They are to be given back their lost individuality. They are to be educated.<sup>24</sup>

For the upper classes, the Swami also advocated the greater spread of technical education and programmes of economic self-reliance and self-help. These were precisely what the educational institutions under the colonial regime discouraged as their principal aim was to produce an army of lowly paid clerks.<sup>25</sup>

In his time, Swami Vivekanand was indeed to produce a sharp criticism of contemporary Indian society. His speeches and writings, strongly anti-Brahmin at times, held saints and *sadhus* to be no less responsible for the inhuman persecution of the masses. He refers, for instance, to the 'diabolical barbarism' of the traditional priestly class which allegedly had molten lead poured into the ears of the *shudra* found listening to the sacred word (*sbruti*).<sup>26</sup> The Swami came down heavily

on a society that permitted parasitic Brahmins to suck the life-blood of the people and turned a blind eye to the spectacle of millions subsisting only on the flowers of the *mahua* tree. He was apparently unhappy too with social reformism of the day being essentially an upper caste/class affair that took up for consideration, issues that affected that stratum of society alone. The issue of widow marriages, for instance, that whipped up great fury and passion in the Hindus in India did not really affect the lives of over seventy per cent of Indian women.<sup>27</sup> Sadly too, the methods adopted by these reformers were wantonly destructive. They were keen to destroy rather than constructively build practical and useful alternatives for their perspectives on existing ideas and institutions were heavily tainted by the West which itself had little understanding of these.

Vivekanand also doubted the efficacy of social legislation in a situation where the authority to make laws was not in the hands of the people. 'First create the power, the sanction from which the law will spring', he advised, 'The Kings are gone; where is the new sanction, the new power of the people?'<sup>28</sup> Ill conceived and thoughtless reform campaigns, the Swami feared, damaged the social fabric of India, setting classes and communities against one another. In this matter, one has to say, Vivekanand's caution bordered on conservatism. It set agendas but not a time-table for meaningful social change which in a sense went against his own belief that social issues, to a considerable extent, had to be prioritised against the political. Perhaps the Swami was seized with fear, whether real or imagined, of a violent class war being unleashed in the name of social change. The secret of success, in his opinion, lay in working along the line of least resistance. Thus, the solution to the caste problem in India was not to bring down the higher castes or classes to the lower level but to raise the lower up to the higher.<sup>29</sup> Vivekanand believed that this could be accomplished through mass education (including a greater emphasis on the Sanskrit language)<sup>30</sup> and the language of class harmony. Appropriation of upper class culture by the masses was a safer way of levelling caste differences.<sup>31</sup> His advice to friends and fellow-workers, therefore, was to socially raise the depressed *jatis* by investing them with the sacred thread.<sup>32</sup> To Swami Akhandananda, a fellow disciple working among the labouring poor in Rajasthan, he repeatedly cautioned against instigating the poor or in any way abusing the moneyed classes.<sup>33</sup>

## Vivekanand and the Revitalization of Indian Life

Both in his time and in ours, Swami Vivekanand has been seen to provide new impulse to older messages, to bring back dormant elements in the Indian tradition to fullness and life. Thus, the strongly humanistic message in his writings and speeches is not unprecedented in the Indian tradition and Vivekanand himself admitted to modelling his ethical activism on the lines of the Buddha. Likewise, the Vedantic message he tried disseminating in India and the West has deep philosophical roots in Sankara and other pre-modern thinkers. And yet, few thinkers of his time could as passionately and innovatively restate the old and fewer still were able to back their convictions by experiences drawn from actual life. Unlike his own guru, Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekanand did not feel that moral activities in this world were only a preparatory step to higher spiritual ends. Rather, in his treatise *Karma Yoga* (1896) and the London lectures collectively called 'Practical

Vedanta', the Swami seems to drive a wedge between moral responsibility as born out of some religious feeling as that which was autonomous and self-procreating. In modern India, Swami Vivekanand is perhaps the first figure to suggest that a moral life may be successfully detached from any conceptions of god and religion. At another level, he appears to have used religion and moral sensibility quite interchangeably. Vivekanand once told Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar, a man of radical leanings 'Sir, as long as a dog of my country remains without food, to feed and take care is my religion, anything else is either non-religion or false religion'.<sup>34</sup> He understood and admired philosophical brilliance; on the other hand he does not hesitate to tell us that purely by itself, this could not bring about a human revolution. Acharya Sankara was brilliant but had not the compassion, the heart of the Buddha. With Vivekanand therefore, Advaita Vedanta was not simply hoary metaphysics but a gospel that could be given tangible social meanings. An attempt to project Vedanta as quintessential Indian philosophy had indeed begun with Rammohun Roy. However, where the Raja's efforts had largely been textual and exegetical, Vivekanand in his passionate and provocative speeches seems to have more effectively pressed home the point that the task of the Vedanta was to break down privileges. 'The idea that one man is born superior to another has no meaning in Vedanta; that between nations, one is superior and the other is inferior has no meaning ... put them in the same circumstances and see whether the same intelligence comes out or not', he quipped.<sup>35</sup> Here what the Swami seems to be suggesting is that inequalities were not endemic to individuals or institutions; they were, more often than not, a reflection of the circumstances they had been placed in. Also, a claim such as this when made by an individual who called himself a *Vedantin* is indeed astonishing for historically, the construct of spiritual democracy had not necessarily given way to the social. Though he was a theorist of philosophical non-dualism, Acharya Sankara, in his everyday life, was an orthodox Brahmin.

In Vivekanand's reading of Vedanta, one also detects the reassertion of India's pluralistic culture. Vedanta, in this view, allowed people to reach the same goals through different paths.<sup>36</sup> He was not quite comfortable with the word 'tolerance'. 'Why should I tolerate? Toleration means that I think you are wrong and I am just allowing you to live ....'<sup>37</sup>

Implicit in this plea is his proud defence of India and Indians against unkind and impatient critics. That plan alone was practical, the Swami felt, which did not destroy the individuality of cultures or institutions and yet revealed a point of union with others. Just like the doting mother, aware of her child's failings but unhappy at the neighbour's complaints, Vivekanand was unsparing in his criticism of India but much too proud to take this from Western critics:

... if foreign friends, you come with genuine sympathy to help and not to destroy, God speed to you. But if by abuses incessantly hurled against the head of a prostrate race ... you mean only the triumphant assertion of the moral superiority of your nation, let me tell you ... the Hindu will be head and shoulders above all other nations in the world as a moral race.<sup>38</sup>

Present day scholarship is apt to regard Vivekanand as the forerunner of Hindutva. This is not perhaps an accurate description considering his great respect for all religions and great

reluctance to be drawn into organized politics. It is nonetheless true that several elements from his life and message are open to appropriation by Hindu right wing activists. In hindsight, it appears as though his plans for the social emancipation of the lower castes were in response to threats posed by Christian and Muslim proselytisation. Vivekanand rejected the commonplace theory that Hindus had been converted to Islam at the point of the sword and yet showered praise on the Sikh gurus for readmitting converts into Sikhism.<sup>39</sup> Above all, he worried over the reported decline in the numerical strength of the Hindus. For him, every man going out of the Hindu pale was not only a man less but an enemy the more.<sup>40</sup> Further, his preoccupation with the question of Indian 'unity' led him towards some tendentious assumptions. For one, he believed that the Indian identity could somehow be aggregated or essentialised. Here, he anticipates some later day Hindutva theorists in deliberately conflating the terms 'Hindu' and 'India'. The word Hindu, he argued, could be said to cover not only Hindus but also Mahommedans, Christians, Jains and other people.<sup>41</sup> 'Educated Mahommedans are Sunnis, scarcely to be distinguished from Hindus', he once told a correspondent of *The Times*.<sup>42</sup> Again, when thinking of a common scripture for India, Vivekanand preferred the Vedas<sup>43</sup>, oblivious of the fact that he himself had once identified these as an authority recognized by the Hindus alone.<sup>44</sup>

Another idea that present day Hindutvas would find attractive in Vivekanand is his rejection of the theory of an Aryan invasion into India. He was, on the whole, quite unconvinced about a possible racial separation between 'Aryans' and 'Dravidians'. The division in so far as he could see, existed in the matter of language, not race.<sup>45</sup> When touring south India, he was indeed offended at the claims made by one Dr. Sundaram Pillai that the Dravidians were indeed outside the framework of Hindu polity.<sup>46</sup>

Rather than label the Swami as an ascetic or activist, reformer or conservative, patriot or prophet, it is more reasonable to accept that perhaps he was all of these. Vivekanand's life and work belie the commonplace assumption that politics and religion were two entirely different worlds, completely unbridgeable. No doubt he too became a victim of the Hindu rhetoric of the day that maintained that in India, politics had to be expressed in the language of religion.<sup>47</sup> However, beneath this rhetoric there remained the belief that no human scheme of spiritual emancipation could be fruitful without liberal and public-spirited activity. Vedanta, as Swami Vivekanand himself was once to observe, could be meaningful only in a free country.<sup>48</sup> For him, patriotism virtually began at the grass roots, with the resolution of everyday problems, not contrived and clamorous agitation. Freedom, in his view, essentially rested on the perceptions of the self and the world; the central reality for the individual in every case was the internal one. It is because he would not see political subjection to be a limitation of man's spirit and innate freedom that Vivekanand also did not perceive any contradiction between patriotism and religious prophecy.

For the future reconstruction of the country, Vivekanand consistently stressed the value of committed work and entrusted this largely to the youth. For him, young men and women represented not just unbounded energy and enthusiasm but also greater integrity and innocence. It did not really matter if this youth was also somewhat irreverent; they could still impart to the burgeoning national project, strength of the body and of the mind. Vivekanand who spoke at

length on the Gita,<sup>49</sup> also felt that young men could be nearer heaven through a collective game of football than sermonizing on that text.<sup>50</sup> By this, one imagines, he was not so much devaluing a widely revered work as restating its gospel in a new light.

All work was self-justifying and instructive in its own way, argued Vivekanand. Also, one form of work was just as good as any other. No work was menial, he argued, there were only menial attitudes. Committed and energetic engagement was the idyll for Swami Vivekanand. Rebelliousness was for him the sign of life and unthinking acceptance that of slovenliness and decadence. It was better to wear out than to rust out, as he would often say.<sup>51</sup>

## Notes and References

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1. D. H. Killingley and Dermot Killingley, *Rammohun Roy in Hindu and Christian Traditions: The Teape Lectures 1990*. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Grevatt & Grevatt, 1993). This is the view of Dermot Killingley.
2. The short life sketch that follows is based upon the official biography *The Life of Swami Vivekanand: By His Eastern and Western Admirers*. 8th Ed (Calcutta: Advaita Ashram, 1974). Hereafter referred to as *Life*.
3. *Letters of Swami Vivekanand*, 4th new edition (Calcutta: Advaita Ashram, 1976), p. 28. Hereafter referred to as *Letters*.
4. *Letters*, p. 428.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 421.
6. *Life*, p. 280.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 260–63.
8. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekanand*, Mayavati Memorial Edition, 9 vols. Various reprints the details of which are given thus. Vol. 1: 14r, 1972; Vol. 2: 12r, 1971; Vol. 3: 11r, 1973; Vol. 4: 10r, 1972; Vol. 5: 10r, 1973; Vol. 6: 9r, 1972; Vol. 7: 8r, 1972; Vol. 8: 5r, 1971; Vol. 9: 3r, 2002. Hereafter referred to as *CWV* followed by the relevant volume number. In this instance *CWV*: 5: 46.
9. Mohendranath Dutta, *Londone Swami Vivekanand* (in Bengali, Swami Vivekanand in London) Vol. 1 (Calcutta: Mohendra Publishing Committee, 1956), p. 190.
10. Asit Kumar Bandopadhyay et al., eds. *Biswabibek* [A collection of Essays]. (Calcutta: Bak Sahitya, 1963), p. 144.
11. *Letters*, p. 95.
12. Mohendranath Dutta, op. cit., p. 181.
13. Vivekanand apparently had plans to send some young graduates for technical training to Japan. See *CWV*: 5, p. 372.
14. *CWV*: 3, p. 271.
15. *Letters*, p. 394.
16. Sister Nivedita: 'The Master As I Saw Him'. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*. Nivedita Birth Centenary Publication Vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, 1972), p. 165.
17. *Letters*, p. 395.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 171.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
20. *CWV*: 3, p. 108.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 318.

22. *CWV*: 5, p. 354.
23. *CWV*: 6, p. 426.
24. *Letters*, p. 113; *CWV*: 5, p. 222.
25. *CWV*: 8, p. 264.
26. *CWV*: 3., p. 295.
27. 'Our reformers do not know where the wound is, they want to save the nation by marrying the widows. Do you think a nation is saved by the number of husbands its widows get?' *Letters*, p. 114.
28. *CWV*: 3, p. 216.
29. *CWV*: 3, pp. 294–95. Also consider the following: 'To the non-Brahmin castes I say, wait, be not in a hurry, Do not seize every opportunity of fighting the Brahmin' *CWV*: 3, p. 298.
30. Sanskrit and prestige go together in India, observed Vivekanand. *CWV*: 3, p. 299.
31. *CWV*: 3, pp. 292, 299.
32. This was his advice to the revolutionary leader from East Bengal, Aswini Kumar Dutta. *Life*, p. 576.
33. *CWV* 6, p. 428. A disciple, Haripada Mitra, recalls the Swami once advising him about the virtues of charity. When denied this, a beggar might resort to theft. 'If instead of that he [the beggar] buys hemp, smokes a little and sits quietly, is it not to your own advantage?', the Swami asked. See *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekanand: By His Eastern and Western Admirers*. 2nd ed. Calcutta, 1964, p. 36.
34. *Life*, p. 644. Also see the following: 'I do not believe in a god or religion which cannot wipe the widow's tears of bring a price of bread to the orphan's mouth' *CWV*: 5, p. 50.
35. *CWV*: 1, p. 423.
36. *CWV*: 1, p. 108.
37. *CWV*: 2, pp. 373–74.
38. *CWV*: 4, p. 346.
39. *Letters*, p. 95; Sarat Chandra Chakravarti: *Swami Shisya Samvad* [Conversations between Master and Pupil] Parts 1 & 2. 11th edition. 195: 272.
40. *Valuable Conversations with Swami Vivekanand in England: America and India* (Calcutta. 1902), p. 113.
41. *CWV*: 3, p. 118.
42. *Valuable Conversations* etc., p. 8.
43. 'So far as the Bible and other scriptures of other nations agree with the Vedas, they are perfectly good but when they do not agree, they are not to be accepted'. *CWV*: 3, p. 333.
44. *CWV*: 3, p. 228.
45. *CWV*: 3, pp. 292–300; *CWV*: 4, pp. 296–302.
46. *Reminiscences*, p. 64.
47. *CWV*: 8, p.77.
48. Mohendranath Dutta, p. 149.
49. For select excerpts from his *Thoughts on the Gita*, see Amiya P. Sen Ed. *The Indispensable Vivekanand: An Anthology for our Times*. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2006), pp. 151–63.
50. *CWV*: 3, p. 242.
51. Sarat Chandra Chakravarti, pp. 9, 168.

# Aurobindo: Nationalism and Democracy

*Sangit Kumar Ragi*

## Introduction

Aurobindo, a creative genius and a multifaceted personality, was a towering figure of the national movement. Nationalists worship him as an apostle and prophet of Indian nationalism.<sup>1</sup> He was not a mass leader of the national movement like Gandhi<sup>2</sup> but he was no less forceful than him. Aurobindo, whose original name was Aravinda Akroyd Ghose, was born on 15 August 1872 in Kolkata. His father, a district surgeon in Rangapur in Bengal, had studied medicine in Britain and wanted his children to be educated there, free from any kind of Indian influence. After a few years of schooling in Loreto Convent, Darjeeling, Aurobindo and his two elder brothers were packed off to Manchester, England, in 1879, where they were put in the care of an Anglican clergyman's family. Later, in order to fulfil his father's wishes to have his sons in the Indian Civil Services (ICS), he joined King's College, Cambridge University, on a scholarship and attempted the difficult ICS examination. He was successful and achieved a pretty high rank. However, by the end of the two-year probation period, he had decided against joining the ICS and serving the British. Instead, after an arranged meeting with the Maharaja of Baroda, Sayajirao Gaekwad III, in England, he joined the Baroda State Service. He left England soon after and arrived in India in February 1893.

In Baroda, he moved from one department to the other and finally settled as the vice-principal of Baroda College. It was only while at Baroda that he taught himself, Bengali, which was his mother tongue, Hindi and Sanskrit. His father's insistence on keeping him away from Indian influences had completely cut him off from his roots, and he did not know even his mother tongue. While still in the service of the Baroda State, he quietly started taking interest in the political movements against the British rule. Soon enough, he was engaging in the clandestine promotion



of resistance activities. He also started writing a series of articles in a weekly in which he attacked the aim and methods of the moderates in the Congress.

By 1905, the year Bengal was partitioned, he was in the thick of nationalist politics. He attended the Benares session of the Congress in 1905. He moved to Kolkata in 1906 and became very active in organizing and promoting revolutionary activities. He was charged with sedition for his fiery articles in *Bande Matram* but was later acquitted. This, however, strengthened his position among the revolutionaries and he began to be considered, by both the revolutionaries and the British, as the leading member of the group. The simmering discontent between the Congress's moderate and revolutionary factions, which had largely to do with the crucial question of the aim of the party and the methods to be adopted to achieve them, came to a head in the Surat session of 1907. Aurobindo, along with Bal Gangadhar Tilak, led the extremist or the revolutionary faction in the showdown at the session, which resulted in the split in Congress. In the meantime, his activities gathered pace and he travelled to various places giving speeches and holding meetings. Arrested in the May of 1908 in connection with the Alipore Bomb Case, he was incarcerated and kept in isolation in the Alipore Central Jail for a year while the trial was underway. Though he was acquitted, his experiences while in prison had shifted his focus from the political to the spiritual. But this transformation did not completely dampen his revolutionary spirit. As soon as he was out of the jail, he gave the famous Uttarpara speech in which he articulated forcefully his spiritual convictions, equating nationalism with dharma, elevating the nationalist struggle and cause to the spiritual level. The British, however, were very worried by his growing influence and his brand of politics. Lord Minto thought him to be the 'most dangerous person we have to reckon with' and the police were on the lookout for a chance to arrest him again. So, within a year of his release, he finally left British territory and moved to the French colony of Puducherry (earlier known as Pondicherry) where he concentrated on his spiritual activities and philosophical pursuits. He died on 5 December 1950.

## Political Activities of Aurobindo

Aurobindo's initial activities were largely focussed on the burning political and nationalist questions of the time. In the beginning, Aurobindo had great expectations from the Congress Party. He believed that the party would play a leading role in the national movement, and it would help in channelizing the aspirations of the masses. However, the feeling did not last very long. Disappointed at its debating club mentality, he became a vehement critique of the party and its leadership. He questioned the Congress Party almost on every count: from the question of leadership to its methods of working, from its claims to be representative to its very commitment to the cause of Indian independence and its capability of galvanizing the Indian masses towards national goals. According to him, the Congress lacked both 'direction and insights'.

A revolutionary, Aurobindo opposed both the motive and methods of the early Congress, led by the moderates. He was of the view that the constitutionalist and 'faithful symbolic protests' of the moderates would not yield the desired result for the nation. He described the moderates

as 'loyalists' (due to their allegiance to and faith in the British government and colonial rule) and severely condemned the moderates' 'reformatory goals' directed at gradual upgradation of the quality of life of Indians within the British rule itself, and peaceful constitutional campaigns aimed at extracting political concessions for Indians. Aurobindo, on the other hand, argued for complete independence of Indian. He ridiculed the logic of self-development and common well being under foreign rule as extended by moderates. He considered foreign rule as 'unnatural and foreign to a nation' as it does not give 'space to the indigenous capacity and energies' to flourish rather than crush them down to meet the colonial interests. The subject nation, he argued, 'becomes dependent, disorganized and loses its power by atrophy'. The national independence, therefore, is 'absolutely necessary'.<sup>3</sup>

He held that just as no two men are alike, so no two nations can be alike. Each one has a separate character and capacity. The way every individual has his own distinct individuality despite several aspects of physiological similarity so is the case with nations. They all have their own individuality. And the way this distinctiveness in human beings remains 'due to freedom' similarly the distinctiveness of nations can continue to sustain only when they are free and able to develop in consonance with their innate nature. Thus he drew on the idea of organic development to prove his point. He argued that the way individual liberty is essential for individual development, national liberty, similarly, is required for development of a nation. For Aurobindo, liberty was 'a necessity of national life and therefore worth striving for its own sake'.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, it was also must for the intellectual, moral, industrial and political development of the nation. Colonization does not stop with political enslavement but leads to economic, moral and cultural imprisonment too. Colonialism, he held, drains out the natural vitality and genius of a nation and reduces the colonized people into a race of imitators. He, therefore, argued for exercise of 'actions and efforts determined by our own nature'.<sup>5</sup> Even a benevolent foreign rule, which was what the moderate approach was aiming for initially, was therefore not worth it because it is unnatural, as 'the foreign rule is bound to impose foreign values and systems, some time knowingly, some time unknowingly'. But without exception, it proves to be a burden and is harmful to the colonized population as the foreign elements are not best suited to the genius of the native population. Imitations, he said, can provide temporary success, not the lasting one. They decay and die out at the end. He argued that under colonial rule certain sections of people may be beneficiary but the nation stands to lose.

Political emancipation of the nation therefore was the first principle. He called upon the nationalists always to remember this point and adhere to it. For him, neither the colonial self-rule nor the colonial self-government, as aspired for by the early moderates, was sufficient. Aurobindo criticized the moderates for their limited goals like increasing representation in the legislative institutions. His apprehension was that such moves would benefit the British government as they would help the latter to legitimize its rule by 'using the broader representation as the reflection of 'general will' or real will of the people of the country'. This finally would defeat the larger goal of nation. Moreover, they (British) would also like to fill up the seats with their puppets. Therefore, instead of representation in government he advocated for representative government.<sup>6</sup>

Aurobindo also rejected the 'disunity and fitness theory' propagated by the British and blindly accepted by the moderates. It is relevant to note that one section of the early moderates believed in 'civilizing theory' that the British rule was beneficial to the nation. The 'civilizing theory' smacked of racial arrogance and contained the elements of religious exclusivism, and both the Christian missionary and the colonial state were hand in glove on this count. Several reformists of the 19th century as well as the moderates within the Congress had fallen victim to it and had interiorized this theory. Aurobindo rejected this line of argument and condemned the moderates for misleading the nation.

For him advancing faith in the British sense of justice was 'grave and injurious'<sup>7</sup> to the nation as it would weaken the national resolve to throw out the colonial power and hence opposed it tooth and nail. He held that British had not come to India to promote moral and noble cause in the country but to exploit it for their own colonial ends. Hence, expecting any thing big and great from them would be self-deceiving and grossly erroneous as they were here not to work towards political, economic and cultural emancipation of the country. They would work, if at all, only towards 'nominal redressal through petty and tinkering legislation'.<sup>8</sup> Hence, any appeal to the British sense of justice was misplaced, misdirected and fatal to the country.

He ridiculed the Congress for behaving like a 'permanent opposition' of the British rule in India in the same way there was a permanent opposition to the Crown in England.<sup>9</sup> He questioned the convictions and wisdom of the Congress. He argued that 'bar counsel' behavior of the Congress leaders working for 'remedial legislation'<sup>10</sup> could be appropriate for the judicial matters but inappropriate strategy for 'political emancipation of the people'.<sup>11</sup> He wrote:

Its aims are mistaken. It is proceeding for accomplishment of goals not with sincerity and wholeheartedness and its methods are not the right methods and the leaders whom it trusts are not the right sort of men to be leaders in brief.<sup>12</sup>

Aurobindo made it very clear that the Congress should work for no less than complete independence. He held that 'any aggregate mass of humanity must inevitably strive to emerge and affirm its own essence by law of its own nature, aspire towards life and its expansion'. This is possible only in the atmosphere of political freedom. And the political freedom does not come from requests and appeal to the colonizer but is fought and won. It is true for every nation including India. Therefore, application of the methods by the Congress for achieving it by 'relying on the liberty-loving instincts of English Parliament'<sup>13</sup> and 'hankering after the Anglo-Indian or British sense of justice'<sup>14</sup> was not correct. What was needed was to arouse and display a sense of manhood and genuine patriotism among the Indians. It required a sense of confidence within the national population and its commitment to the national cause forgetting the individual gains and interests. For him, actual enemy of the country was not 'any exterior force' but Indians own inferiority complex, their selfishness, hypocrisy and 'purblind sentimentalism'. He therefore called upon the youths to shed off their mental inertia and dedicate themselves to the cause of the nation.

## Idea of Passive Resistance

Aurobindo was very clear that the emancipation of the nation was not so easy. The path to Swaraj, he wrote, everywhere in the world has been 'full of sharp rocks and thick brambles'. Those who wish for it must have faith and conviction in cause and methods apart from capacity to bear sufferings. They should possess the 'quality of endurance and sacrifice'. For emancipation of the Indian nation from the British colonialism, he advocated for starting first the 'organized national passive resistance', rather than 'organized active resistance', which could involve assassinations, riots, strikes, agrarian risings, etc. Nor did he advocate the course of 'armed revolt bringing the administration to collapse'.<sup>15</sup> This may seem surprising given his revolutionary bent of mind. But it was well considered. Aurobindo knew it very well that it was almost impossible to oust the British militarily given their relative military might. Moreover the colonial government could find it easier to suppress such revolts and therefore chances of their success were less. The story of the 1857 uprising was before him. Therefore as a first step towards freedom he advocated the course of 'passive resistance', a technique of resisting the government by gradually making it irrelevant for the people.

By passive resistance he thus meant 'organized defensive resistance to the alien rule' by 'reducing the dependency of nation on the foreign bureaucracy'<sup>16</sup> It involved two things: first constructive activities like creating institutions of need, parallel to government, such as the opening of schools, local community courts etc and secondly opposition of foreign schools and foreign courts. Both had to go simultaneously. Thus passive resistance did not mean only institution of *swadeshi* but resistance of *Videshi* at the same time without which the entire purpose behind creating *swadeshi* would get defeated. Passive resistance was not an end or deviation or escape from struggle but a new kind of struggle which in his view required rather more courage, endurance, and capacity to sufferings compared to active organized resistance involving riots and assassinations or armed revolts. Resistance was the core of its strategy. After all Congress was also engaged in the constructive programmes like opening of schools and colleges to impart education but it lacked the second part i.e. boycott of schools and colleges run by the alien ruler. It introduced the second part only after arrival of Gandhi on the national scene. It is therefore he termed the moderate within the Congress as 'inoffensive philanthropic patriots'.<sup>17</sup> Resistance therefore was intrinsic and must, just as the *swadeshi* without boycott had no meaning. Aurobindo held that these two constituents must encompass all the 'critical aspects' of the nation life from the court to industries. Thus mere expanding indigenous trade and industry or setting up of indigenous court of arbitration was not enough. Boycott of the government run entities were equally important. Thus self-help and boycott, two complementing strategies, constituted operating methods of passive resistance. While boycott aimed at 'non-cooperation with and non-acquiescence' to the colonial set-up, self-help was directed towards providing alternative to the existing ones. Thus boycott of the industry or foreign goods in itself was not enough. It had to be 'supplanted' by *swadeshi* industry i.e., 'expansion of indigenous industries.

Aurobindo identified four major priority areas in this respect. They included economy, education, judicial system and executive administration. The selection of these four core areas was important, as these four constitute the backbone of any colonial administration. If *swadeshi* was essential to stop the draining out of the native capital, indigenous schools were important to end production of ‘non-patriotic individuals getting tutored by schools controlled by the government’. Quite naturally, he suggested for developing alternatives in these areas. He said:

If we decline to enter alien court of justice, we must have arbitration courts of our own to settle our disputes and differences. If we do not send our boys to school owned or controlled by the government we must have schools of our own in which they must receive a thorough and national education. If we do not go for protection to the executive, we must have a system of self-protection and mutual protection of our own.<sup>18</sup>

The idea of passive resistance also included ‘the refusal of payment of taxes to the government’ but considered it the strongest and final form of passive resistance. He therefore did not recommend this for India in the first stage of struggle. Nevertheless, legality was neither the core of passive resistance nor an essential condition. He strongly advocated the breaking of laws if they were unjust and oppressive, as was the case with sedition laws and laws related to racial enmity. In fact, opposition of such laws, for him, constituted the duty of the practitioner of passive resistance and the latter should be ready to bear the brunt of the government because the latter would like to suppress it at every cost. Aurobindo derived this inference from the happenings in Bengal where even the singing of *Vande Mataram* invited wrath from the state.

For Aurobindo, there was a narrow line between active resistance and passive resistance. The passive resistance was acceptable to him only to the extent the bureaucracy too resorted to legal procedures. Otherwise the practitioner of passive resistance was duty-bound to apply violent techniques. That means if bureaucracy was engaged in brutal suppression of the movements through illegal means, then non-retaliation on part of the passive resisters would be cowardice. Here he made an essential departure from Gandhi who advocated that one should maintain non-violence in all forms and in all conditions. Contrary to Gandhi, he argued that submission to ‘illegal and violent methods of coercion’ is an act of cowardice, as it not only undermines the divinity within oneself but also of the motherland, which must be protected.<sup>19</sup> He said:

If the instrument of executive chose to dispense our meetings by breaking the heads of those present, the right of self-defense entitles us not merely to protect our heads but to retaliate on those of the head breakers.<sup>20</sup>

He ridiculed the moderates and Gandhian techniques as ‘overstressing passivity’ at the expense of resistance. He attacked Gandhian preaching of healing ‘heat by love, injustice by justice, sin by righteousness’. He said that it was possible for only few saintly people, one out of thousand and unfortunately ‘politics is not about rare individuals but masses’. Aurobindo wrote: ‘to ask masses of mankind to act as saint is desirable but not a tenable proposition’.<sup>21</sup> Thus Gandhian meth-

od was not practicable even if it was desirable. For him, active resistance to illegal and brutal coercion was also a passive resistance as it was defensive in nature. It becomes non-passive only when retaliation is *over proportionate*. He termed his passive resistance as *masculine* in character as it was always ready to turn active against the brutality and coercion.

He argued that passive resistance should continue not till the colonial administration initiated reforms in these areas but till 'the control of all these functions is vested in a free, constitutional, and popular government'.<sup>22</sup> Passive resistance thus was not the sacrifice of the goal of self-rule in India but a 'midway' to the same in the sense that it aimed at paralyzing the colonial government by restricting its penetration in to the life of the nation, peacefully and without violating rules. It was a prior to final assault or battle for salvation.<sup>23</sup> He made it very clear that the purpose of organized resistance was not limited to mere seeking few concessions from the ruling power or to get few grievances settled but to accomplish the task of complete eradication of the foreign government and 'creating of a free popular government vindicating Indian nationality'.<sup>24</sup> Its objective was not restricted to few reforms but to 'end the state of servitude' India was passing through.

Aurobindo did not condemn violence and assassinations. The application of means and methods for him was not static in struggle and hence none of the methods were condemnable. They were to depend on the exigencies and were directly linked to the suitability of the circumstances. In fact nature of resistance is conversely linked to the nature of suppression. Thus, where the life is suppressed or threatened by all violent means, 'any or every means of self-preservation becomes justified'.<sup>25</sup> Where the liberty of a nation is suppressed by violent means violent response becomes duty. Passivity in such conditions amounted cowardice. Thus passive resistance is valid only till and where oppression is 'legal and subtle in form' as there is breathing space for life and liberty. He found the passive resistance also useful in 'making the struggle wider and shared' as it involves masses. It gives the movement a wider reach and popularity. This is not possible in case of violent methods because few motivated ones execute them. Moreover passive resistance provides a kind of training and opportunities for inculcating certain values among the citizens which are essential for self-government. According to him, Indian situation was fit for the practice of passive resistance, at least till 1907, as the bureaucracy had not gone so wild and brutal in case of India as had been the cases in Russia or Ireland.

In fact, Aurobindo gave four reasons in favour of political freedom, i.e., why it should be accorded priority. First, that liberty is necessary for the national life and therefore worth striving for in itself. Secondly, it is indispensable for the overall development of the nation. That means intellectual, moral, industrial or political development of a nation is not possible in the absence of political freedom. For him, political democracy was a prerequisite for realizing social and economic democracy.<sup>26</sup> Thirdly, freedom was essential to accomplish and retrieve the Vedantic wisdom of India and its applications in all segments of national life including politics in the modern conditions. He held that in order to place Hindu *dharma* at the centre of our national life what was first needed was the political freedom. Fourthly, and finally, Indian independence was essential for the spiritual emancipation of the humanity at large. He repeatedly made this point that Indian nationalism was not for India alone but for the sake of humanity.<sup>27</sup>

## Cultural Nationalism

He made it a point that the world needed Indian freedom as much as India needed it for itself. For him, the civilizational growth of the West was not the guarantee of the human misery because of their materialistic orientation. Therefore, he applauded the material growth of the West but found it ‘spiritually deprived’ and felt that it badly needed spiritual guidance. Materially, they ‘were everything but spiritually they were nothing’. Like Vivekanand and Gandhi, Aurobindo too was a vehement critique of the western civilization which he found deficient in spirituality and too engaged with material pursuit. He found it unsuited to India. In his opinion, the material progress of the West had limited their vision to the ‘visible and material’<sup>28</sup> and hence their entire energy was directed towards ‘mechanical invention’.<sup>29</sup> He held that India would ‘sterile itself if it went on importing and imitating’ from the West. India could not have a future in the western civilization, which was based on material gains and whose political and other institutions were just to achieve these goals. They, he considered, were for ‘immediate and practical gains’.<sup>30</sup> They would not lead to great ideals or goals. They provide just material enrichment and that too without ‘building a healthy industrial life’.<sup>31</sup> When applied to India, instead of wielding the country together they, he held, would only give rise to ‘competitive selfishness’.<sup>32</sup>

The function of India, he held, was not simply creating material wealth but spreading a perennial source of light of spirituality and Vedantic wisdom to the world which it couldn’t do by implanting western or foreign institutions or being part of foreign civilization but by returning to her eternal self which was rooted in spiritualism. It was essential to preserve its ‘individuality and splendour, greatness and wisdom’.<sup>33</sup> Imitation would spoil the native genius, which naturally turned to spiritualism. He said that India did not need only ‘political revolution but spiritual revolution as well’.<sup>34</sup> And for this what was needed was to retrieve its spiritual majesty by ‘recovering the patrimony of forefathers, Aryan thought, Aryan discipline, Aryan character and Aryan life; and by recovering the Gita, Vedanta and the Yoga. They needed to be retrieved not only in sentiments and intellect but practically in life. He wished to orient the entire national life—from society to polity, science to literature to individual character along the tenets of *sanatan dharma*.

### *Sanatan Dharma as the World Religion*

Aurobindo was a great advocate of *sanatan dharma* and considered this alone to be worthy of being world religion. He went on to say:

Sanatan Dharma or Hinduism is not a dogma, it is a law of life discovered and absorbed in to life after continuous testing and experimenting. It alone can be the basis of world religion because it accepts all forms of religion—from theism to Christianity, from Buddhism to Mohammedanism, yet it is none of these. It alone combines science and faith.<sup>35</sup>

For him it was the religion 'in which India first awoke' and it is the religion which should shape the future of India in the time to come.

Aurobindo was not the one to subscribe to a defensive and ascetic Hinduism. He dwelt on the historical experience to drive this point. He held that whenever Hinduism went on the defensive, 'it shrunk or contracted to narrower limits and finally moving on the course of decay'.<sup>36</sup> He therefore dismissed all the ascetic movements as damaging to the nation.

Aurobindo not only wanted a free India but a regenerated India, without which there was nothing but bondage.<sup>37</sup> He wanted freedom but freedom was meaningless if it was not followed by religious and cultural regeneration of the nation. Regeneration does not come through imitation but returning to the roots. He talked the language of revivalism, and accused the British of creating policies that encouraged cultural amnesia in the people of the nation in order to produce 'a body of grave, loyal and conservative citizens'<sup>38</sup> educated with the aim of working for the British Empire rather than revolting against it. They, he held, were intended to produce 'submissive and attached population'.<sup>39</sup>

When Aurobindo talked about cultural and religious emancipation of the nation, he chose to focus on Hindu religion and Hindu India because for him Hinduism, despite several distortions coming into it in course of time, constituted the soul of India. Like Vivekanand, when he talked of Indian culture he talked the language of Hinduism as all that he referred to depict the Indian culture were the Hindu components be it the Shastras, texts or spiritual domain. Unfortunately, Christian and Muslim components did not constitute the parts of his articulation of Indian culture. To quote him:

... When it is therefore said that India shall rise, it is Sanatan Dharma that shall rise. When it is said that India shall be great, it is the Sanatan Dharma that shall be great. When it said that India shall expand and extend itself, it is the Sanatan Dharma that shall expand and extend itself all over the world.<sup>40</sup>

However, his nationalism was not exclusive. It was inclusive and it had space for all classes and creeds. Nationalism, he said, could not afford to ignore or neglect any segment of the society. And therefore he welcomed the break of Muslim inertia and rise of political consciousness at the community level among them. For instance, he did not consider Pan-Islamism, in the beginning, as a threat to the nation because he believed that one day it will get submerged in the tide of nationalism.<sup>41</sup> Possibly, the growing violent conflicts between Hindus and Muslims led him to take this stance.

### *Depiction of the Nation as a Divine Entity*

India for him was not a name for a geographical territory. It was not merely a piece of land but a living divine entity, hence, *sanatan*, or imperishable. It was the one which neither originated 'in operation' nor would die 'in suppression'. Aurobindo brushed aside the idea of political origin



of the nation as subscribed by the modernists and the moderates in India. It, for him, was rather an incarnation, an *avatar*, an eternal force, and a divinely appointed *shakti*, who had to perform a god-given work and would immerse into the universal energy after performance of its divinely ordained tasks.<sup>42</sup> Aurobindo was not alone in holding such a view. Similar arguments were given by well-known French and Indian nationalists such as Mazzini and Bipin Chandra Pal who too considered the nation as the manifestation of god and nationalism, anywhere in the world, as a god-ordained phenomena. Thus, Aurobindo's characterization of nationalism was on a very different plain. It was more metaphysical than political. Nationalism, for Aurobindo, was not a 'mere' political movement for political ends but a religious act in itself, because it amounted to working for the will of god. For him, enslavement was denial of the creation of Almighty and therefore working for liberation from the clutches of colonial rule was not less than serving the god itself. He therefore argued that for a nationalist it is a must to have faith in god and he should always remember the fact that he is discharging merely a godly appointed mission. And since it is a divine work a true nationalist for him should be fearless from persecution of any kind and should always be ready to sacrifice every thing for the sake of the nation. Such fearlessness and a sense of sacrifice can be possible only in those who hold great ideals in mind and have a faith in divine virtue.<sup>43</sup>

Nationalism thus was not a 'political program or intellectual fashion'<sup>44</sup> but a passionate aspiration for the realization of divine unity in nation where all components of individuals despite variations and inequality get dissolved and every one feels the spirit of oneness.<sup>45</sup> Nationalism thus does not discount inequality and variations but has the capacity to dissolve the differences arising out of them. Aurobindo thus gave an argument very different from some of the modernists like E. J. Hobsbawm who used the inequality, contrasting and conflicting interests and unfamiliarity among the members of the society to argue the concept of 'imagined community' and refuse the idea of nationalism as a real category. Aurobindo thought differently. For him it was not the social and economic equality that gives rise to nationalism but vice versa. He was sure that the force of nationalism would automatically take care of it and such divide would not come in the way of nationalism. He had seen it in Bengal where people reacted sharply against the communal partition of the state. The social and economic divide did not come in the way of spontaneous spurt of protests against the partition. This did not require public pronouncements. People on their own came out on the streets. He thus cautioned the Congress not to think that Indian nationalism happened because of its efforts. It was rather bound to take the shape irrespective of the party because it was destined by the divine force. He said that Indian nationalism neither grew in the pandal of Congress nor in Bombay Presidency Association nor in the councils of wise economists and land reformers or in the brains of Ghokhales or Mehtas or de-nationalized English speaking moderates.

It was destined by god and it took shape in the minds of common men. Though Aurobindo defined nationalism as a manifestation of divine on the earth, the way Bipinchandra described it as manifestation of Viratpurusha,<sup>46</sup> he unlike Hegel did not consider it as the highest synthesis. He ranked the love for humanity, love and compassion for all creatures far greater and

considered god as the highest synthesis. Nationalism for him was just ‘an immediate faith’ and it was essential because other higher synthesis could not be realized without it. He wrote:

God in nation becomes realization of the first moment to us because the nation is the chosen means or condition through which we rise to the higher synthesis, god in humanity, god in all creatures, god in him self and our self.<sup>47</sup>

Thus the argument that one should work and live for the higher cause of humanity is impossible unless we realize the order of free nationalism. He said that nations couldn’t work for the greater cause of humanity if they are deprived of political freedom. It is true in the same sense as a man must be free and powerful enough to work for the others.

Aurobindo’s arguments are echoed in writings of Mahatma Gandhi and Pundit Deendayal Upadhyay’s integral humanism. Both these writers did not discount the importance of humanism but they, at the same time, didn’t consider nationalism as antithetical to it but complementary one. Gandhi’s nationalism too was not averse to internationalism. He rather argued that those who cannot be nationalists couldn’t be internationalists as well. He condemned those who condemned nationalism as madness. He considered nationalism not a product of intellectual arguments but a matter of faith. Nationalism for Aurobindo also was not a mental construct, hence not guided by the brain or the force of reason but driven by heart and the force of passion. But how was this cultural regeneration to be achieved?

## Views on Caste System

Though Aurobindo clearly seems to prioritize Hinduism in the national life, he did not approve of it in totality. He condemned the practice of social evils such as the oppressive caste system. He considered the caste system inverse to the gospel of Vedanta and rejected it. It did not fit in with the spiritual catholicity of the religion. Aurobindo’s view on caste was almost similar to that of Mahatma Gandhi. He too considered caste as a socio-functional category that had nothing to do with birth and heredity at all.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, it was not wrong and oppressive from the beginning. It became detrimental to the society only after it got distorted in the course of time and started ‘purporting the principles of inequality’. While he accepted the degeneration in the institution, he did not approve of the idea of conversion or separate representation for the lower castes in the political institutions as a solution. If he did not subscribe to the idea of separate representation system it was only because of realization that, it would further lead to a permanent divide in the Hindu society which ultimately would weaken the national movement. Gandhi thus preferred to fight against this menace throughout his life but only within Hinduism. Like Gandhi and R. N. Tagore, Aurobindo too had a faith in the catholicity of Hindu religion and its internal centripetal impulse to solve the caste and other social problems. Though, like Gandhi, Aurobindo did not launch a mass-scale social and national crusade against the caste

system, he found it opposed to the gospel of Vedantic equality and unity and therefore unfit for future democratic set up in India. He called for removal of these unreasonable distinctions and inequalities.<sup>49</sup> He hoped that the wave of nationalism would be able to dissolve the caste differences and finally give rise to a new India bereft of inequality and oppression.

## Views on Education

The most important aspect of the national reconstruction programme was the introduction and development of native education system in India. Aurobindo wrote extensively on education. He was very critical of blindly imitating the system of education prevalent in the western countries. He said that European education system 'surely marked an advance in the terms of methods and techniques' but it had been based on 'insufficient knowledge of human psychology'.<sup>50</sup> Though he wrote several articles on education but the articles titled 'A Preface on National Education' which was published in two parts in two issues of *Arya*, a journal which was later discontinued, first in Nov-Dec 1920 and then in January 1921, expounded his thoughts on education.

His scheme of national education did not envisage the mere changing of the ownership of academic institutions from foreigners to native hands because that was not a guarantee of providing better education; leave aside the task of imparting national education. Aurobindo was of opinion that the indigenous or native people trained in the western system won't be providing true education even if they became the owner of the institutions. At most, they would be 'making minor additions and subtractions here and there', or making the 'syllabus more Indian oriented'. Thus taking over of the foreign educational institutions and giving them a national name was not the national education what Aurobindo aspired for. Nor was he for 'retrogressive sentimentalism' manifesting through recurring cry for hanging back to glorious past. The national education for him did not mean resurrection of the 'past principles, method and system whatever great it was and in consonance with our past civilization'. He considered it false patriotism. He held that we couldn't reject the western science just because they have come from the west. He held that knowledge is trans-territorial and therefore there was nothing wrong in taking something from the west if they were good. What was wrong was the blind copying of the west and orienting our national education accordingly with minor modification and then terming it indigenous. He held that our education must be update 'in form and substance and modern in life and spirit'<sup>51</sup>. Thus, when he talked of *swadeshi* education he did not mean going back to the forms of education imparted in *Nalanda* and *Taxila* or returning to the mathematics and astronomy of *Bhaskara* but to make it connected to Indian mind and nature. Similarly, it also did not mean rejection of the western discoveries and their methods of knowledge but to 'assimilate them to our own knowledge and culture, native temperament and spirit mind and social genius'<sup>52</sup> to formulate a civilization of future.

The Indian mind, as he saw it, was of peculiar cast because of its culture-centric and spiritual orientation. It has always seen, within the individual soul, the manifestation of mighty power.

The object of national education should be to develop the soul of India and its eternal spirit. Its objective should essentially be the awakening and development of 'individual spiritual being'.<sup>53</sup> This will not only be good for the individual but also for the 'preservation, strengthening and enrichment of the nation-soul and its dharma'. For him, the question of education, thus, was not a selection between modernity and antiquity but between imported civilization and greater possibilities of the Indian mind and nature. Moreover, it was also not merely a tool for gathering information but building of the human mind and spirit. Acquiring scientific mind and producing new scientific discoveries were important but they need to be related to other areas of knowledge, especially spiritual one, which are 'no less light giver'.<sup>54</sup>

One also finds him emphasizing on education to be imparted in Indian languages, and Sanskrit finds a special place in his scheme of education. He did not hate the foreign languages but strongly advocated for adoption and promotion of Sanskrit and other Indian languages 'so as to get to the heart and intimate sense of our own culture and establish a vivid continuity between still living power of our past and the yet uncreated power of our future'.<sup>55</sup>

## Economic Reconstruction and the Idea of Boycott

Aurobindo was an ardent advocate of *swadeshi* economy and therefore he strongly supported the idea of 'boycott'. The idea of boycott was introduced in the national movement first by B. G. Tilak. Though Tilak and other nationalists aimed to exclude only British-made goods initially, they later allowed those people who wanted, at least in Bengal and Maharashtra, to make it a comprehensive movement that meant the boycott of all foreign-made goods or goods made with a foreign collaboration. Boycott, for Aurobindo, was a powerful instrument in the fight against colonialism. It served at least three purposes. First, it stopped the drainage of the native capital to the colonizing state. Secondly, it protected the indigenous enterprises against already powerful foreign enterprises which in the open competition could have killed them a premature death. Thirdly, it marked an expression of movement towards self-sufficiency and independence.

Though Aurobindo favoured the protection of indigenous industry he was very categorical that the indigenous businessmen should not treat it a granted license to continue with supply with inferior quality of goods. If it happened it was abuse of the national or patriotic sentiments which can't continue for a longtime and the entire premise of boycott and swadeshi would meet an unwanted death. He said that businessmen should not forget that in boycott nation is persuaded to buy even an inferior quality of product in the place of superior foreign good in the hope that the businessmen would improve the methods, processes and quality of the product and would be able to compete with the foreign enterprises. He held it to be the duty of the native businessmen without which he loses the right of protection in the name of patriotism.<sup>56</sup> He was also critical of infighting among the native businessmen for monopoly supply of goods to the people. This tendency according to him was against the spirit of *swadeshi*. He suggested that the native entrepreneurs rather should join hands together to increase the supply by increasing the productivity.

According to Aurobindo, successful boycott thus needed broadly two things: first, organization of the national industry with a view to improve the quality of existing product and secondly opening up new lines of enterprises. He held that though this task belonged to the producers, even leaders of the movements could contribute to it by organizing vital information both for the businessmen and the consumers such as suggesting which business was needed in the interests of the nation, what were the chances of earning profit (for businessmen) and the quality of the goods their prices, source of supply etc. (for consumers) The second condition for the success of boycott was the unbroken, genuine and sufficient supply of the *swadeshi* goods. The unbroken and sufficient supply of goods was essential to strengthen the confidence of the people in *swadeshi*. Moreover, there must be a supply agency which brings the goods to a near market and as close to the door of the people as possible as 'it is not possible for every one to hunt *swadeshi* articles to their source and purchase them'.<sup>57</sup>

## Conclusion

Nineteenth-century Bengal, in its penultimate decade, came across two sets of movements; the first was under the influence of Raja Rammohan Roy, and the second was represented by people like Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Swami Vivekanand and Aurobindo. These two sets of thoughts, though not completely disjointed, represented two different interpretations of India. While the former attempted to reinterpret India in terms of western modernity, the latter sought to define India essentially in the framework of its native tradition and spiritual individuality. They saw India's future essentially linked to the resurgence of native religion and native culture, alongside the struggle for political liberation from colonialism. After Vivekanand, Aurobindo was the most powerful spokesperson of this thought system. Needless to say, Aurobindo eulogized an India which was destined to thread the path of modernity without sacrificing its spiritual distinctiveness. His uniqueness lies in the fact that he is the referral point for both the revolutionaries and the spiritualists.

## Notes and References

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# Ramabai: Gender and Caste

*Madhu Jha*

Pandita Ramabai (1858–1922) has not only been acknowledged as an eminent social reformer and a scholar but also perhaps as one of the first feminists in the modern Indian history who struggled for the emancipation of Indian women. Her life and thought is instructive to all those who yearn for the dignity and equality of women in Indian society. Her critique of patriarchy and demand for civil rights and gender justice reflects her political thought.

## Life and Times

Ramabai was born to Ananta Shastri, a liberal Brahmin Pandit, in 1858. As a child, Ramabai lived the life of a Brahmin pilgrim and travelled the Indian subcontinent with her parents and two older siblings. Her father had withdrawn to a forest area to run a residential school for Brahmin boys and to teach Sanskrit to his young wife. This was especially remarkable considering the fact that in those times women were denied even the basic right to get literate. Her unconventional upbringing facilitated the rejection of a rigid gender-specific role unlike other girls who were forced into wifehood and motherhood at an early age, denied education and made to restrict their lives within the private domain of a joint family. After the death of her parents and sister in the mid 1870s, Ramabai along with her brother travelled throughout India until they reached Calcutta (now Kolkata). A formal invitation was given to her to lecture in that city before a few learned Pandits. Ramabai's remarkable scholarship and especially her in-depth knowledge of the Sanskrit scriptures created a great impact on the audience. They called a public assembly in the Town Hall of Calcutta and conferred upon her the highest title possible in India for a woman, that of 'Saraswati', meaning 'Goddess of Wisdom'. In Calcutta, Keshab Chandra Sen, the



supporter of Brahma Samaj, suggested to Ramabai that she read the Vedas and Upanishads. This was the beginning of a new phase in her life, a period in which she grappled with several contradictions in her life that later fructified into liberal feminism.

In her personal life, Ramabai ignored caste restrictions and married a man of *shudra varna* (lower caste), Bepin Bihari Medhavi, an active member of the Brahma Samaj. However, after 19 months of a happily married life, her husband died leaving her with a little daughter, Manorama. Ramabai decided to return to her native land Poona to embark upon the journey of learning from the social reformers of that time. She was readily welcomed by the leaders there.

## Feminist Discourse

Ramabai founded the Arya Mahila Sabha in 1881. This may be termed as the first feminist organization of India. However, Ramabai, entered the feminist discourse of those times through her first Marathi book, *Stri Dharma-Niti*<sup>1</sup> (Morals for Women), which was published in 1882. With no support coming towards a widows' institution that she wanted to establish and as a reaction against the Pune's conservative society, Ramabai decided to go to England to seek British support for her widows' home. After reaching England, Ramabai sought a meeting with Sir Bartle Frere, the former Governor of the Bombay Presidency, and followed it up with an appeal for help, written originally in Marathi, titled *The Cry of Indian Women*.<sup>2</sup> This book contained details of Indian women's oppression through early marriage, marital harassment, desertion by the husband and widowhood; she also made an appeal on behalf of the Arya Mahila Sabha for a 'widow home' in India.

At the same time, the disillusionment with elite liberalism and Brahminic tradition began to lead her away from Hinduism. In England, she drew closer to Christianity.<sup>3</sup> On 25 September 1883, Ramabai converted to Christianity and began signing her name as Mary Rama, a symbol of dual identity, affirming the old along with new. Her daughter Manorama also was converted into Christianity. Finding not much of support from the imperialist England, Ramabai went to the United States in 1886 on an invitation by Dr Rachel Bodley, dean of the women's medical college of Pennsylvania, to attend the graduation ceremony of Anandibai Joshi, a cousin of Ramabai and the first Indian woman to travel to the United States to become a doctor.

Ramabai got acquainted with the feminist and other reformist circles in Philadelphia and Boston. She soon contacted various church groups and women's welfare groups in a fund raising campaign for her long-lived dream of a women's home in India. America clearly inspired her with notions of freedom and liberty. In 1887, she published *The High Caste Hindu Women*, India's first feminist manifesto with an agenda for women's emancipation and empowerment. Published in 1887<sup>4</sup> with the help of Women's Christian Temperance Union, the book turned out to be the most popular of all Ramabai's educationist ventures. The content of this book offers a feminist critique of the Indian women's condition, where she analysed how women were treated as an unwanted and inferior being, through childhood, married life and widowhood, with the sanction

of the Hindu scriptures. During these years, Ramabai also worked on a Marathi book, *United Stateschi Lokeshthiti ani Pravashritta* (The People of United States) which was published in Bombay in December 1889,<sup>5</sup> a few months after her return to India. Through this book, Ramabai tried to highlight the importance of social movements and civil society in changing the society for better. Citing United States as a model of modern and advanced nation, Ramabai made an appeal to the Indian audience about the importance of following the pattern of American society in overthrowing the colonial rule in India. Pandita Ramabai's associations in the United States resulted in the formation of the Ramabai Association in Boston in December 1887. It pledged financial support, for ten years, for her proposed secular school for high-caste widows in India.

In February 1889, Ramabai returned to India and in March she opened a secular residential school for high-caste widows, the Sharada Sadan, in Bombay. It is important to point out here that the social reformers gave support to Ramabai, in spite of her conversion since she had not discarded her patriotism. Her cultural assertiveness led her to insist that the crucifix worn by the Indian converts should bear an inscription not in Latin but in Sanskrit.<sup>6</sup> In 1908, Ramabai embarked on her ambitious task of translating the Bible into the Marathi language so that the Maharashtrian audience could understand the teachings of Christianity. During her last days, Ramabai's newsletter titled, *Mukti Prayer Bell*, contained writings showing increasing frustration and resentment. The opening years of the 20th century found Ramabai's Sharada Sadan marginalized and the Mukti Sandan facing serious problems with funds.

Meanwhile, in 1919, the British government awarded to Pandita Ramabai, the Kaiser-i-Hind medal for her distinguished service to the Indian education system. The social benefit of transforming the lives of widows, from being considered a burden on society to an empowered individual who could make economic contributions to the society was also acknowledged. Ramabai's daughter Manorama accepted the award on her mother's behalf, as Ramabai was not keeping good health then. However, her own health collapsed soon after, leading to her death in 1921 at the age of 40. Pandita Ramabai survived this sorrow for a year after which she too collapsed to death due to ill health.

## Critique of Patriarchy

The reform movements of those times focused on the caste and gender issues. Gender issues had become the preoccupation of the upper castes, whose women were the most oppressed. In Poona, Ramabai, working towards the aim of gender reform, formed the Arya Mahila Sabha in 1882,<sup>7</sup> and established branches throughout the Mumbai region. The object of this institution was to promote education among native women and discouragement of child marriage. Ramabai urged women to free themselves from the tyranny of Hinduism. She made use of lectures and writing as a medium to bring about change in the lives of women in India. The earliest available text from her literary output was her Sanskrit poem 'Lamentation of Divine Language', submitted to the Oriental Conference at Berlin in 1881, highlighting the violence of colonialism.<sup>8</sup>

Ramabai's role as a spokesperson for the glory of the Vedic age created dilemmas. The more she read and reflected on her experiences, the more she was exposed to the subtle patriarchal structure of society. It was during these young days that Ramabai's political thoughts started getting firmly grounded and expressed. She connected the teachings of the ancient literature with the inferior status of women in society. The caste system that was prevalent in the society during those times did not have any impact on the progressive thinking of Ramabai. She firmly believed that in ancient times people were assigned to the four castes according to their work and merit and not on the basis of their birth. It was much later that caste system became identified with birth and turned discriminatory. These caste-based differences coupled with gender-based differences deeply affected the Indian women. Ramabai understood that the patriarchal ideology of the society placed women within the domestic sphere as a wife/mother/housewife according to her sexual, reproductive and home-making roles. In this caste-ridden, patriarchal society, the highest status for a woman was that of a *saubhagyavati* (or blessed woman whose husband was alive) and a mother of sons, rather than daughters. A woman only with daughters or one without children had a lower status and lived under the fear of being deserted by her husband. A widow had the lowest status, especially a child widow or one without children. A widow had to wear a plain borderless sari, no ornaments and had to shave her head which had to be carefully covered. A widow was expected to sleep on floor, spend time in ritual acts and eat little food.

Ramabai's study of Upanishads, *Manusmriti* and the Vedas made her realize how the caste system, the Hindu *shastras*, society and social customs helped patriarchy to not only thrive but to grow larger. She thought that the low account of women's nature and character depicted in *Manusmriti* was, to a large extent, responsible for their seclusion and suppression. Manu's laws deprived women of the house of all their freedom. Ramabai soon realized that all sacred books in Sanskrit literature shared hateful sentiments about women. Child marriage, polygamy and enforced widowhood thus turned out to be the great social evils in India which were responsible for the pathetic condition of Indian women and which needed to be changed. It was in this context that Ramabai also shared her views on religion which according to her had two distinct natures in the Hindu law: the masculine and the feminine. Both these kinds had their own peculiar duties, privileges and honours. For women, it was believed to be her duty to look upon her husband as God, to always obey him and seek salvation only through him.

Pandita's most popular academic venture *The High Caste Hindu Women* contained a critical account of miseries that were faced by girls and women in the domain of a high-caste Hindu Joint family system. Daughters were taught to do all household works right at the tender age of 9–10 so that they get well trained to adjust to the lives of young married women. They get married off without getting a chance to express their opinions. Women in these families were not permitted to read the sacred scriptures and were found fit only for housekeeping works. As a class, women were never to be trusted. Through this book, Ramabai tried to become the voice of these millions of women. She has particularly drawn the attention of people towards what she considers the biggest curse for a Hindu woman—her becoming a widow, especially a child widow. The hardships that a Hindu widow had to face have all been highlighted and an appeal made to help them to become independent identities. Plight of a Hindu widow is such that even families of

lower castes will not have them as a servant. She is left with no option of making an honest living. Pandita Ramabai considered women of lower castes to be much better off in terms of self-reliance and freedom since they are obliged to depend upon themselves. As a suggestion to improve the condition of these widows, Pandita suggested three areas where focus had to be made: self-reliance, education and native women teachers.

## Gender Justice and Civil Rights

It will not be wrong to say that Ramabai entered the feminist discourse through her book *Stri Dharma Niti*. This book turned out to be a guide of morality for women, asking illiterate, ignorant women to recast themselves in a more cultural mould through self-reliance and through self-education. Through this book, Ramabai advises the women of India on how to prepare for marriage by choice, be a companion to her husband who is worthy of trust, achieve ideal motherhood by nurturing sons who would free India and attain spiritual welfare. It needs to be understood here that Ramabai's feminist consciousness itself began to be questioned through this book. Her endorsement of Sita–Savitri model of femininity could be easily debated within the gender discourse of India. However, by advocating late marriages for women and marriages by choice, Ramabai turns out to be a radical nevertheless.

Her next academic venture *Cry of Indian Women* more explicitly reflected her feminist thinking and her desire to seek gender justice.<sup>9</sup> The change in the approach between *Stri Dharma Niti* and the *Cry of India Women* in June 1883 was a result of many factors. Her close proximity with early feminists like Tarabai Shinde, Anandibai Joshee and Rakhmabai is clearly visible in Ramabai's new book. Another influence that brought an impact on Ramabai's feminist consciousness was her exposure to the more progressive and less asymmetrical gender relations in America and England. Imparting education to women was thought to be the best remedy of the problems. Pandita's hope was that women's education would lead to the rejection of Brahminism and realize the deception of sacred literature. But Ramabai was aware of the mindset of the Indian society which was skeptical of educating women. The few schools that were available as options were often run by missionaries and, as a rule, a high-caste Hindu women would prefer death than go to such schools where there was fear of losing their caste. In her testimony before the Education Commission set up in 1882, Ramabai demanded women teachers for girls and schools. She noted that 'women being one half of the people of this country are oppressed and cruelly treated by the other half'. She also asked for training women as medical doctors to save women who could not consult male physicians. Later, Dr Hunter was invited by Ramabai and the Samaj to attend its special meeting attended by about 280 native ladies, all stressing the need for women doctors.

Within this context, Ramabai raised the issues of the oppressed Indian women—widows, deserted wives and sexually exploited women. Her main contribution was her desire to protect the upper-caste widow, who was the symbol of Hindu patriarchal oppression. In this regard, she played an important role in the congress convention demanding civil rights for these women.

The first meeting of the national Congress in Bombay in 1889 consisted of around two thousand delegates, of which three were women, largely because of the Pandita's influence.<sup>10</sup> The purpose of this meet was the need of unity among different races in India and to catch the attention of the British government to the existing grievances and the needed reforms. Ramabai spoke largely on two resolutions: one relating to marriage and the other to the shaving of the head of the widow. She brought to notice the injustice meted to the widows by depriving her of property if she married again. Both the resolutions were passed by a large majority and the request that the members of the conference pledge themselves not to allow marriage until the girl had completed her fourteenth year was also supported by a large majority. Ramabai's functioning during the conference made her a popular national image and she received many invitations to lecture on education and problems faced by child widows. By this time, Ramabai had made her efforts towards the achievement of gender equality loud and clear.

## Liberation Praxis

It needs to be understood that Ramabai's lecturing and fundraising had only one motive—seeking salvation and liberation for Indian women specially the high caste Hindu widows. Her design of a widow's home was meant for providing a shelter and a community of living for these widows. After collecting funds for such a salvation house from America Ramabai built her 'Sharada Sadan' in Poona and got into disputes with the reformist elites in India. In the meanwhile, the Indian Christian Community began objecting to the Sharada Sadan's policy of religious neutrality. Ultimately, conversions began taking place in good numbers. Hindu widows began reading the Bible, and this led to great criticism of Ramabai's women home. Social reformers slowly dissociated themselves and those few who were the members of the governing body of this house, left by their own choice. Press began calling Sadan, a 'Widows mission house'<sup>11</sup>.

In the midst of all this, bubonic plague epidemic of the late 1890s in Western India made Ramabai to shift her Sharada Sadan from Pune to Kedgaon. Over two thousand women took shelter in this newly constituted, Mukti Mission. It began consisting of not only Hindu widows but also famine victims, sexually assaulted women, blind and the old women all kept in separate sections. This section came to be known as the Kripa such as (Home of Mercy). In this Mukti Sadan, girls did every thing in it—from weaving, dairy farming, cooking, gardening, and farming to running a printing press<sup>12</sup>. The social and economic value of being independent was no doubt the most important of all values to be taught to the Indian women. In Pune in 1879, she came into conflict with the British over their management of famine relief. Her letter to the Bombay Guardian criticizing the plague measures tells us that she had no good opinion of British rule, though she attacked it openly only in terms of her feminist concerns.

Mukti Sadan, rejected both caste distinction and gender discrimination by training women in all the areas of subsistence and profitable production. No doubt, Mukti Mission was the feminist revolution that Ramabai had for long struggled to start. Though when compared to Karve's 'Hindu Widows Home', Ramabai's institution remained marginal to the mainstream society of

India. Yet its value lied in showing to the Indian society an alternative way to salvation and liberation of women in need.

## Internationalism/Nationalism

All the writings of Ramabai reveal her liking for all non imperialistic western world in general and for United States in particular. For her, America was a nation of progress, equality, opportunity and of citizen's rights-a liberal country that suited to be followed by a colonial country like India as an example to gain political freedom and social reform. Few people however realized that all her praise for America was specially highlighted in support of her nationalist and anti colonial ideas- that of building a modern India. This model for emulation was however resisted by the traditional Indian Nationalists like Tilak who refused to recognize her as an icon of progressive Indian womanhood.

In America Ramabai was largely impressed by women's entry into the public sphere in the realm of all kinds of jobs and organizations founded with the aim of social reform. All women's societies and clubs in the United States were inclined towards charity, promoting education, helping the destitute and so on. Such kind of organizations also existed in Britain, Germany, France, Norway, etc. According to Ramabai the reason for the existence of these organizations was that women recognized their own worth and strength and realized that enormous tasks could be accomplished if many undertook an enterprise with a single aim.

It is also important to note that the role that Lucy Stone, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B Anthony played in mobilizing American women around the issue of political rights of women had a deep impact on Ramabai. She stressed on the need of a homogeneous society for any kind of successful movement- anti colonial one in the case of India. America truly made her realize the importance of having a civil and educated society. She also wished that Indian women could learn the value of being educated. For her American model of liberal democracy was the real model that needed to be followed- socially, politically and economically. The traditional nationalists as a result began questioning her patriotism and nationalism. As it is, in India, her religious conversion had created furor everywhere. Both the conservatives and the liberal were critical and suspicious of this deed. At personal level, Ramabai faced both social and religious reservations as far as Christianity was concerned. The social issue was over her teaching men. The Wantage authorities were against this idea since it was against the Hindu concept of women's social and religious place. On the religious front, Ramabai questioned the Christian doctrines of Trinity. Though, she was in full support of the Bible, she often identified the notion of incarnation with the Hindu doctrine of *avatars*.

Ramabai's open letters accusing the British government of helping in enforcing Brahmanic regulations and their lack of efficient management during the famines also helps us to see the nationalist side of Ramabai. She openly condemned the Britisher's non interference in heinous crimes like sati and polygamy in the name of religion as mere excuses. It is however true that her conversion to Christianity perhaps restricted her involvement in the anti colonial movement to some extent.

The little space that the patriarchal nationalist leadership provided to a social rebel in those times was well utilized by Ramabai. The beauty of her thinking lies in acknowledging the goodness of the west and realizing the shortcoming of our society. Ramabai was a nationalist thinker with an international outlook.

## An Assessment of a Liberal Feminist

The story of Ramabai no doubt reveals that by integrating widows into mainstream, she was re-conceptualizing widowhood and womanhood in a way that no male reformers could ever think of. However, at times Ramabai's personality emerges as an anti-thesis of the ideal woman—an ambitious, careerist and irresponsible mother<sup>13</sup>. Yet it needs to be stressed here that despite everything she strove relentlessly to achieve her goal—the emancipation of the Indian women. If Ramabai appeared confused and disturbed at places, it is only because she was a human being. Given the limitations of family support, fund and social acceptance, Ramabai did what best she could have in those circumstances. The kind of sorrows which she had to face right from her childhood, no doubt made her appear as a rigid, tough but a practical person for whom emotions had little meaning.

As far as her role of a social reformer is concerned, Ramabai triumphs as a leader who had a futuristic and modern outlook that was much ahead of the times. The issue of her religious conversion, her not being active in national struggle, all have come up from within the Hindu patriarchal society which could not easily grasp, a woman riding high on the success ladder not only nationally but also internationally. How much power and space would a male dominated nationalist struggle provided to a single widowed woman can well be anticipated. Ramabai's love for liberalism and feminism thus rules over all her other political thoughts and establishes her as India's one of the earliest liberal feminists—liberal because she loved and supported the notions of freedom and equality and feminist because she was all for women's rights on the same terms as that of men.

To understand the life story of Ramabai is to understand the history of the first wave of feminism in western India<sup>14</sup>. A high caste Hindu herself, who challenged patriarchy both through her personal life and the causes she adopted for her struggle—self improvement and women's participation in public. Her personal independence, her marriage of her own choice to a man of different caste and her conversion to Christianity truly marks her out as a liberal feminist with a secular outlook.

The life of sketch of Ramabai needs to be analysed keeping in mind the conventional Indian society of those times which had yet to understand the meaning of 'freedom', 'liberty', 'individualism' and 'justice'. Liberalism followed by feminism had brightened the western world right in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century but it had yet to gain acceptance and recognition in the class/caste ridden Indian feudal society. Hence the actions and preachings of Ramabai need to be seen within this context. Ramabai was politically far ahead of her time in the importance she attached to individuals in general and women in particular, the indignation she displayed on their

exploitation and her desire for the country to get the benefit of western notion of democracy and freedom. By subscribing to the notions of individualism, pluralistic democracy and absolute freedom Ramabai becomes one of the earliest liberals of her times and by supplementing them with her belief in equal rights for women, she also becomes one of the earliest feminists in India. The feminist and liberal ideas she propounded were revolutionary for India of her times and had tremendous influence on subsequent political thinking in India.

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## Gandhi: Swaraj and Satyagraha

*Himanshu Roy*

Gandhi's theories of *swaraj* and *satyagraha* have been an integral part of his liberation struggle and his public discourse since the beginning of the 20th century, both in Africa and in India. It was different from the typical liberal and Marxian discourse of alternative development as its philosophy was derived from India's past and was uniquely premised on the restoration of *ramrajya*—an imagined, historical, ideal society of small traditional peasants located in autonomous villages, situated amidst nature and guided by *sanatani* ethics and scriptures. The concept of *swaraj* and *ramrajya*, promoted by Gandhi, was based on the idea of governance by an ideal state and regulated by elementary technology and subsistence economy, whose base (an ideal, self-sufficient village) was destroyed by colonial capitalism. Gandhi's arguments were an appreciation of and belief in the traditional peasant world, which he believed was superior to the contemporary urban, industrialized and capitalist civilization, to which humanity must return for its blissful existence. It was a concept of an unalienated world rooted in the simplicity of plough, small villages and cottages, and in 'good conduct'. Unlike the belief of moderates and the extremists, Gandhi's approach was neither a critique of the traditional civilization nor a glorification of it. On the contrary, his writings reflect a balanced account of its past existence—an appreciation of its traditional economy and a critique of its discriminatory practices with regard to gender and caste. His vision was to restore the past glory of our civilization, an ideal life which could form the foundation of the future of humanity. The restoration process was to be actuated through *satyagraha*, a method of struggle, which abhors physical force but resists the evil with moral power without having any ill-will against the evil doers. In this struggle, there is no room for defeat as one does not yield to the evil. The doer, therefore, gradually changes his position, persuaded by the logic of the circumstances, and the evil slowly peters out. In the process, the society witnesses an overall transition towards enlightened consciousness.

The construct of his struggle, epistemologically, may be located in Chapter XII of his book *Hind Swaraj* (1909) and in his article 'Who Can Offer Satyagraha' written for the journal *Indian Opinion* (1909) where he outlined their basic postulates to be subsequently enriched by his new experiences.

## Swaraj

Gandhi's *swaraj* had evolved out of the combination of his Indian roots, his readings and his early experiences in London. His discussions with Savarkar and others in London prompted him to pen down his vision of *swaraj* for India.

Gandhi viewed *swaraj*, or self-rule, essentially, as a 'mode of conduct which points out to m(e)n the path of (their) duty', the path of control over desires and the path of 'mastery over (their) minds and passions'. It meant the knowledge of self and living within bounds. It implied an elevation of a personal moral being that sets a limit to indulgences and sees happiness as largely a mental condition. He envisioned *swaraj* as a life of simplicity, opposed to the pursuit of wealth and power, where the individual could have control over things that were necessary for sustenance of life; the issue involved was the principle of renunciation. According to Gandhi, high thinking was inconsistent with complicated material life. All the graces of life were possible only when one learnt the art of living nobly. Essentially, it meant an ethical world of sovereign individuals who followed their agricultural occupation and lived independently. *Swaraj*, for Gandhi, existed in oceanic circles of village republics ensconced in organic proximity to nature. It was a civilization that abhorred coercive power and functioned through moral persuasion. It was a true home rule manifesting the people's inner world.

Gandhi's objective was to inculcate inner strength in people, and encourage them to be active in godly pursuits and desist from worldly pleasures. He dreamt of a state where people would learn from each other's language and religion voluntarily. They would be conscious of the spirit of nationality and regions. It would be a society possessing assimilative spirit and living in peace. Thus it was to be a *swaraj* in which people were to be guided by the condition of nature, customary rights and duties, and belief in god. It was to be a traditional peasant society using elementary technology, based on subsistence economy and a minimalist state. It was to be 'an India full of valour' inspired by one thought and similar mode of life. In brief, *swaraj* was an ideal state of social existence, ethical and simple in nature, situated amidst ideal villages that existed only in (Gandhi's) imagination and were different from the contemporary villages of his times. It was an idea that was premised on the principle that worldly pursuits should give way to ethical living. His contemporary India was not, however, ripe for it. It was to be built with patience and self-discipline.<sup>1</sup>

Politically, *swaraj* meant the 'capacity to regulate national life through national representatives'. The national life, in course of time, was however to become so perfect that it would be self-regulated and not need any representation, leading to a state of enlightened anarchy where everyone would be his own ruler and would rule himself in such a manner that he would never

become a hindrance to his neighbour. In this ideal state, therefore, there would be no political power because there would be no state. Men and women would live in freedom, prepared to face the whole world. The villagers would not be dull, they would be all aware. They would not live like animals in filth and darkness. There would be no plague, no cholera and no small pox. Nobody would be allowed to be idle or wallow in luxury. Everyone would do manual labour and follow the path of duty. There would be large-scale reorganization of things that would differentiate the ideal society from the contemporary one. In this structure, there would be ever-widening, never ascending circles. Life would not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. It would be an oceanic circle whose center would be the individual always ready to perish for the circle of villages till at last the entire circle becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they would be integral units. Every village would be a republic or panchayat, self-sustaining and managing its affairs to the extent of being able to defend itself against the whole world. In it, the last would be equal to the first or none would be first and last. However, till the time such a state became a reality, the villages could be ruled by the classical concept of Thoreau, which says ‘that government is the best which governs the least’, and political power could be used for the sake of reforms to enable people to better their condition in every sphere of life. Acquisition and application of political power in the absence of the ability to govern would render that power futile, as legislation in advance of public opinion is ineffective.<sup>2</sup>

Gandhi’s corporate activity was guided towards parliamentary, i.e., democratic, *swaraj*. But it was not meant to be ‘an English rule without Englishmen’. It was to be, on the contrary, a different polity premised on local moral economy where ‘people would plough their lands mainly by manual labour’. It was to be a civilization abhorring coercive power and functioning through moral persuasion. The religion would transcend Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, etc., and would create an ordered moral government of the universe. Religion and state, however, were to be kept separate. Religion was to be a personal concern of the citizen, with the state having no role to play in it. There was to be no religious teachings in educational institutions aided or recognized by the state.

All educational activities including university education was to be on the pattern of basic education that was to be premised on the requirement of the locality and universality of learning to be conducted through the mother tongue. English, despite being a world language, was to be only the second optional language and that too only at the university level, and not in schools. In the curricula for basic education, instructions were to be provided in agriculture, horticulture, sericulture, animal husbandry, sanitation and hygiene, electrical engineering, roads and transport, home economics, pottery, rural economics, rural sociology, rural reconstruction, rural trade and bullion and banking. In addition to these, cooperative farming or dairying was to be promoted in the national interest. The intention was not to approach others or be dependent on them for our requirements. The objective was to be self-reliant. This approach reflects in every aspect of his constructive work.

In case of health care, similarly, it meant a return to elementary instruction in medicine with emphasis on cleanliness of dwellings, village paths, general surroundings, fields and

also of livestock. Information about the importance of balanced diet, use of herbs, animal husbandry, model latrine, organic manure, utilization of hides and bones of dead cattle, and maintenance of maternity homes would form part of the lessons to be imparted. The objective was to follow the basic rules of hygiene and nutrition, and to understand that all diseases were caused by insanitation, lack of knowledge of proper diet, lack of proper nourishment or due to eating unhealthy food. It emanated from the belief that diseases spring from a willful ignorant breach of the laws of nature, therefore, a timely return to those laws meant restoration of health.<sup>3</sup>

In this setting there would be no room for the mechanization process that displaced human labour; however, machines that facilitated man in his work were to be welcomed. People were to be taught to help themselves to rely on their own labour and skill which were commensurate with high thinking. Village crafts were to be provided encouragement and compromise in soil fertility for the sake of quick returns and such other activities were to be discouraged. These ideas emanated from 'the concern for the dignity and status of the village as a unit as against big cities and the dignity and status of an individual against the machine'. It was also intended to actualize 'justice between the town and the village' as the villages had faced the brunt of unjust development. Only a few key industries which were necessary and could employ large number of people were to be owned by the state. However, industries were not to be forcibly nationalized and the state was not to be involved in running private or business establishments as this was not to be the function of the state. The state's role would be limited to providing necessary infrastructural/technical support required by the people for progress.

The state was to care for the secular welfare of its people and power was to be decentralized to the grass-root level to be recomposed from the bottom to the top as ultimately it was the individual who was to be the unit of development. Effectively, it meant the reconstruction of polity where real power was to be placed in the general body, from the *gramsabha* to the parliament, at different tiers of legislature. Every panchayat would have five men or women from the village or persons committed to the development of the village. Two such contiguous panchayats were to form a working party under a leader elected from among them. From a group of one hundred such panchayats, fifty first grade leaders were to be elected; in a similar pattern, second grade leaders were to be elected who would supervise the work of the first grade leaders. All second grade leaders were to serve jointly for the whole of India and severally for their respective areas. The second grade leaders were to elect whenever they deemed necessary, from among themselves, a chief who was to, during pleasure, regulate and command all the groups.<sup>4</sup> The contemporary parliament and the existing structure of polity was just to facilitate the transition towards the reconstruction of polity. It was to gradually abdicate its contemporary centralized powers to the *gramsabha* and remain confined to only the functions of defence, currency, international relations and communications. Functioning of the polity was to be transparent and representatives, at each tier, were to be accountable for their duties.

The government officials were to be the true servants of the people, honest and incorruptible men capable in their work. The taxation system was to be framed keeping the poor out of the purview of taxes and the money generated was to be used for the public good. The prices of the food grains were to reach the peasants directly without any middlemen. The laws were

to be non-discriminatory but the economically impoverished were to be supported without any distinction of caste and religion.<sup>5</sup>

Voluntary discipline was to be the first requisite of corporate freedom leading to the marginalization of the coercive state apparatus. Nationalism was to be the embodiment of this freedom. It was to be part of international humanism without any rancour towards anyone and at the same time mean protecting the nation's interest and never submitting to others. It was not to swallow small nations neither was it to allow others to swallow it. Moreover, if foreigners decided to live in India as Indians, they would have no cause to worry. This emerged from the belief that diversity in unity is the law of the world.

In summary, the entire focus of Swaraj was on self-reliance of the individual, village, taluka, district, province and nation in that order. Its soul was decentralization of power and economy leading to a gradual reduction of the role of the state in society and an increased role of the individual and of the local community in their praxis.

## Satyagraha

In 1906, a movement began in South Africa, primarily constituting Indians, that was subsequently termed as Satyagraha. The word *satyagraha* is a combination of two words *satya* (truth) and *agraha* (insistence), which when combined means 'insisting on holding firmly to truth'; it is a force emerging out of love for truth and essentially means belief in a good cause. Gandhi also described this word as a soul-force and said it was different from passive resistance.<sup>6</sup>

As a concept, its elaborate reference can be delineated in the writings of Patanjali's *Yog sutra*.<sup>7</sup> As an isolated, individual non-violent act of protest and corrective measure against perceived injustice, *satyagraha* was in vogue in India for centuries. However, the organized mass application of the technique begins with Gandhi who had conceived of this idea from his childhood experiences. Its fundamental principle was to correct the unjust acts of an individual or a system without having animosity towards them. The method and the procedure to be adopted for it, however, were not bound by any formula. Rather, it was to change according to circumstances. The best part of it was that there were no losers: the opponents, in course of time, were won over, and the Satyagrahis moved ahead to new areas. In brief, it was a technique to harmonize the widely different, sometimes opposite, interests of people for the overall betterment of society. It was a lesson imparted to Indians and the humanity to seek solutions for problems without being violent and being an enemy of others.

In order to differentiate it with passive resistance, Gandhi delineated five points of departure and it was based on his personal and historical experiences. These points are discussed below.

1. In passive resistance, there was always an idea of harassment against the other party while, simultaneously, being ready to undergo any hardships. In Satyagraha, there was not even the remotest idea of injuring the opponent. On the contrary, it was to conquer the adversary by self-suffering and love, by persuading him to abdicate his evil. The

adversary, in course of time, moves away from his stated position as he finds the situation unfit for his operation under the changed consciousness of the people.

2. Satyagraha could be offered against the loved ones as well, for it did not imply any hatred and animosity personally. The fight in Satyagraha was against the evil, the eradication of which served the purpose of Satyagraha. Passive resistance, on the contrary, could never be offered against the loved ones unless they had ceased to be so and had become objects of hatred, because passive resistance did not differentiate between the evil and the evil-doer. The evil and its perpetrators were perceived as one fused whole who could not be reformed. Satyagraha, on the contrary, separated the two and always believed that the perpetrators can be persuaded to abdicate their evil.
3. Passive resistance could be offered along with the use of arms if the circumstances permitted, for resistors often resorted to passive resistance when they lacked armed power and were weak. In positions of strength, they could take to armed struggle. Satyagraha and brute force, on the contrary, were antithetical to each other as Satyagrahis did not consider themselves or their method of struggle as weak. Therefore, even when the circumstances provided them the opportunity to resort to violent struggle, they would not adopt it. They believed that violence breeds violence and it is the weapon of the weak.
4. There was no scope for love in passive resistance as the philosophy of passive resistance was premised on the power struggle between the strong and the weak and in power struggle there was no scope for love and compassion. In Satyagraha, there was no place for hatred as it was not based on power-struggle. Instead, its primary focus was to eradicate evil and not its perpetrators who could be transformed by Satyagraha and awakened public opinion.
5. Satyagraha fostered the feeling of being strong as it emanated from the idea of moral self-strength. This feeling of moral power permeated the participants and that kept their morale high, contrary to the belief of the passive resistors who considered themselves weak. The difference in their belief created wide chasms in their method of struggle and in making their protests effective or less effective. Since passive resistance began with the idea of being weak, its protests petered out at the earliest opportunity.

In brief, Satyagraha postulated the conquest of adversary by self-suffering. It was invented by Gandhi in the modern era to denote the resistance movement of the Indians in the Transvaal, in South Africa, to prevent its being confused with passive resistance.<sup>8</sup> Christ was the only other who, in an earlier era, applied Satyagraha on a mass scale against evil.

Satyagraha pre-supposed self-discipline, self-purification and recognized the social status of the Satyagrahi. A Satyagrahi was not to forget the distinction between evil and the evil-doer. He was not to harbour ill-will or bitterness against the latter. He was not to use offensive language against the evil person, for there was none so fallen in his world who could not be converted by love. A Satyagrahi was always to try to overcome evil by good, anger by love, untruth by truth, and violence by non-violence. No matter how often a Satyagrahi might have been betrayed, he was to repose his trust in the adversary till he had cogent ground for distrust. Pain to a Satyagrahi

was to be similar to pleasure. He was not, therefore, to be misled by the fear of suffering and distrust. Since a Satyagrahi relied on his own strength, the betrayal by his adversary was not to affect him. Satyagraha, therefore, was a priceless and matchless weapon and defeat was a stranger to its practitioners. There was supposed to be no other way of purging the world of evil.

A Satyagrahi was always to introspect about his infirmities and taints of anger and ill-will, for self-purification and penance were to facilitate his victory. He was, first, to mobilize public opinion against the evil to be eradicated. An awakened and intelligent public opinion, he believed, was the most potent weapon against the evil, followed by wide and extensive agitation to create social ostracism or complete non-cooperation of society against the evil perpetuated either by the system or by an individual. This was supposed to chasten the perpetrators of evil in general. In peculiar cases, specific measures were to be applied.

A Satyagrahi was to be free from addiction, needed to have self-control, was to disregard the comforts of life, develop simple food habits and be free from a false sense of prestige.<sup>9</sup> Presence of such things weakened his resolve to fight against the evil. A Satyagrahi, in a word, was to be ready to suffer and to possess the will to fight till the last, or till the evil was conquered. He was obliged to break away from family attachments to avoid concerns about the future of his family. He was to be indifferent to wealth.

Thus, Satyagraha was to be the silent and demonstrative action of truth and love that produced far more permanent and abiding results than many other methods of struggle. It transcended the boundary of nations and was applicable across all sections of humanity. Since it cultivated family-feeling and strove for self-purification and, through it, transformation of social consciousness, it was the most potent weapon for the creation of an ideal society.

## Conclusion

Gandhi's Swaraj and Satyagraha were the philosophical expressions of peasants' idealized praxis which were not recognized in public discourse as predominant ideals of social existence under the expanding capitalism. Worse, these ideals were considered as unfeasible in application and were labelled as unprogressive, un-modern in the age of industrialism and urbanism. Gandhi, who had classed himself as a peasant, partially demonstrated its feasibility and broke through the myth of it being inapplicable. Moreover, he transcended the pre-conceived notion of peasantry as 'buffoons' and its moral life as idiocy. He demonstrated through limited mass praxis that the peasants' dream could be realized once their consciousness was transformed and that it was a better mode of social living than the capitalist civilization, as it provided a contented and unalienated life. But he acknowledged frankly that his was a Sheikh Chilli's dream<sup>10</sup> which was difficult to realize, though he struggled valiantly for it till the last day of his life.<sup>11</sup> He had noticed his marginalization and witnessed history bypassing him after the Second World War. It was inevitable, not ironical, as his peasant base itself was being marginalized under expanding capitalism. The shrinkage of this base in post-colonial development has further

reduced him to a distant historical figure to be idolized only by the mantra chanting political-academic bards who argue about his relevance without applying his mantras. It is the negation of his *ramrajya*.

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2. *Collected Works*, Vol. LXXXV, pp. 32–33; and Raghavan Iyer, pp. 399–400.
3. *Collected Works*, p. 237.
4. *Ibid.*, Vol. XC, pp. 527–28.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 391; Gandhi wrote: ‘It was the British government that constituted the Harijans into separate class. To the popular government, all poor and illiterate people are one, or should be. It cannot distinguish between high and low, between this religion and that, for all are Indian.’
6. *Ibid.*, Vol. XXIV, p. 92.
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# Jinnah: Liberal Constitutionalism and Islam

*Dinesh Kumar Singh*

I am a nationalist first, a nationalist second, a nationalist last.

*M. A. Jinnah*

I still consider myself to be an Indian.

*M. A. Jinnah,  
Governor-General of Pakistan*

Mohammed Ali Jinnah is one of the most controversial figures in modern Indian history. India's collective consciousness and popular imagination still consider him a villain who was instrumental in creating Pakistan. He started off as a staunch secularist, advocating Hindu-Muslim unity to face the oppressive and divisive policies of the British government. However, after 1937 he propounded the two-nation theory, which held that Hindus and Muslims were two separate nations who could not live together. His intellectual journey from the 'apostle of Hindu-Muslim unity' and hero of 'Indian liberation' to the 'propounder of two-nation theory' necessitates analyses of his political ideas and his place in Indian history. The present essay attempts to contextualize and analyse critically the political ideas of Jinnah.

## Nationalism and Constitutionalism

Jinnah was influenced by the liberal and secular ideas of John Morley, who authored the book *On Compromise*. John Stuart Mill's greatest disciple, Morley remained Jinnah's hero. The liberal and

democratic ideas of *On Compromise* fired Jinnah's imagination. He was also influenced by Burke and Mill, who stirred his mind and heart.<sup>1</sup>

Jinnah was also greatly inspired by personalities like Dadabhai Nauroji, Pherozeshah Mehta and Gokhale. Jinnah joined the national movement as a liberal nationalist. In 1906 he attended the Indian National Congress of Calcutta as a secretary to Dadabhai Nauroji. Commenting on the attitude of the Britishers, he told his sister: 'If Dadabhai was black, I was darker, and if this was the mentality of British politicians, then we would never get a fair deal from them. From that day I have been an uncompromising enemy of all forms of colour bar and racial prejudice.'<sup>2</sup> He strongly defended individual rights and liberties. He advocated a nation's right to self determination. Without freedom of speech, he argued, any nation would remain 'stunted' or wither 'like a rose bush that is planted in a place where there is neither sunshine nor air'.<sup>3</sup>

Jinnah was a fierce critic of the British rule in India. He believed in constitutional methods for the emancipation of India from the foreign domination. Despite being Muslim, he vehemently opposed the system of separate electorates and considered it a threat to the basic tenets of Indian nationalism. Till 1912, he remained the most vocal critic and opponent of the Muslim League's communal and loyalist politics. Aga Khan, first elected honorary president of the Muslim League, wrote in his memoirs:

Who was our doughtiest opponent in 1906? A distinguished Muslim Barrister in Bombay, with a large and prosperous practice, Mr Mohammad Ali Jinnah ... We had always been on friendly terms, but at this juncture he came out in bitter hostility towards all that I and my friends had done and were trying to do. He was the only well-known Muslim to take up this attitude, but his opposition had nothing mealy-mouthed about it; he said that our principle of separate electorate was dividing the nation against itself, and for nearly a quarter of a century he remained our most inflexible critic and opponent.<sup>4</sup>

He was opposed to any sort of communalism, whether Hindu or Muslim, and argued that these divisive trends of Indian politics should be discouraged. He realised that the communal differences between Hindus and Muslims was the main challenge to the national liberation movement. It would pose a challenge to the secular and egalitarian foundations of a modern nation state. He moved a resolution disallowing the proposal for extension of the principle of separate electorates to municipal and local bodies.<sup>5</sup>

The annual meeting of Congress and the council meeting of the Muslim League was held in Bankipur in 1912. Jinnah was invited to attend the council meeting of the Muslim League. He attended the council meeting as a Congressman and appreciated a resolution of the Muslim League that indicated its broader outlook. In his speech he said: 'the attainment of a system of self-government suitable to India', to be brought about 'through constitutional means, a steady reform of the existing system of administration; by promoting national unity and fostering public spirit among the people of India, and by co-operating with other communities for the said purpose'.<sup>6</sup> Jinnah joined the All India Muslim League in 1913. He was persuaded by Mohammad Ali and Wazir Hasan of the Muslim League to sign its membership form. But he

declared that his 'loyalty to the Muslim League and the Muslim interest would in no way and at no time imply even the shadow of disloyalty to the larger national cause to which his life was dedicated'.<sup>7</sup>

Jinnah strongly believed that the future of the nation would depend on the harmonious relations between Hindus and Muslims and tried to convince leaders of both communities to devise mechanisms for collective action on the issue of the national liberation movement. At every political meeting from the platform of the Muslim League, he advanced nationalist and patriotic arguments. He marginalised the British loyalist forces and strengthened the nationalist forces within the Muslim League. His patriotic speeches changed its ideological character. In the Muslim League meeting of Agra in 1913, he strongly denounced the principle of communal representation and appealed to Muslims that separate electorates would only divide India into two watertight compartments.<sup>8</sup> He started a two-way movement for amicable relations between Hindus and Muslims. In the Karachi Congress of 1913, he seconded a resolution that appreciated the Muslim League for adopting 'the ideal of self-Government for India within the British Empire'. He expressed 'complete accord with the belief that the League has so emphatically declared at its last sessions that the political future of the country depends on the harmonious working and co-operation of the various communities in the country'.<sup>9</sup> Speaking from the platform of the Muslim League he asserted: 'In its general outlook and ideas as regards the future, the All India Muslim League stands abreast of the Indian National Congress and is ready to participate in any patriotic efforts for the advancement of the country as a whole'.<sup>10</sup>

Jinnah was the main architect of the pact between the Congress and Muslim League in 1916 and succeeded in convincing both organizations to hold their annual sessions at the same place and time. He was also instrumental in creating unity between the moderates and extremists. He was elected the president of the Muslim League to lead it on the path of nationalist and patriotic principle. Presiding over the League he asserted:

Modern India is fast growing into unity of thought, purpose and outlook, responsive to new appeals of territorial patriotism and nationality, stirred with new energy and aspiration and becoming daily more purposeful and eager to recover its birth right to direct its own affairs and govern itself.<sup>11</sup>

He urged the Congress to understand Muslim anxieties and overriding national concern of conceding sufficient quota of elected legislative council seats to Muslims. It would pave the way for convincing Muslim League that joining forces with Congress in articulating a single national set of demands was, in fact, in their own best communal interest.<sup>12</sup>

'India for the Indians' was the central concern of Jinnah's political thinking. He cautioned the Muslims not to nurture the feelings of mistrust, suspicion and discord against the Hindus. Addressing the Muslim League session in 1917, he suggested to the Muslims:

'if seventy millions of Musalmans do not approve of a measure, which is carried by a ballot box, do you think that it could be enforced and administered in this country? Do you think

that Hindus statesmen, with their intellect, with their past history, would ever think of ... when they get self-government ... enforcing a measure by ballot box? Therefore, I say to my Muslim friends not to fear. This is a bogey, which is put before you by your enemies to frighten you, to scare you away from the co-operation with the Hindus, which is essential for the establishment of self-government. If this country is not to be governed by the Hindus, let me tell you in the same spirit, it is not to be governed by the Mohammedans either and certainly not by the English. It is to be governed by the people and sons of this country.<sup>13</sup>

He suggested both organizations:

formulate a scheme of reforms and do it as far as possible in conformity with the scheme to be formulated by the League and the Indian National Congress. After the scheme had been formulated by the League and the Indian National Congress, they could go to the authorities and say these were the reforms which they demanded in the name of united India.<sup>14</sup>

The Delhi war conference was organised by the British in 1918 to enlist the support of Indians in war-efforts. Jinnah confronted Gandhi's loyalist role on the issue of recruiting Indians for the army. He vehemently criticised Britain's recruiting drive. He moved a resolution on constitutional reforms linking India's participation in the war-efforts with British government's promise for reforms in India. In a telegram to Chelmsford, the Governor General of India, Jinnah asserted:

We cannot ask our young men to fight for principle, the application of which is denied to their own country. A subject race cannot fight for others with the heart and energy with which a free race can fight for the freedom of others. If India is to make great sacrifices in the defence of the empire, it must be a partner in the empire and not as a dependency ... Let full responsible government be established in India within a definite period to be fixed by statute with the Congress-League scheme as the first stage and a Bill that effect be introduced into parliament at once.<sup>15</sup>

Governor Willingdon convened the Provincial War Conference in Bombay in 1918. Willingdon doubted the sincerity of the leaders of the Home Rule League in war efforts. Jinnah criticised the shallow assurance the British had given to the Indian nationalists. He commented:

I say that if you wish to enable us to help you, to facilitate and stimulate the recruiting, you must make the educated people feel that they are citizens of the Empire and the King's equal subjects. But the Government do not do so. You say that we shall be trusted and made real partners in the Empire. When? We don't want words. We don't want the consideration of matter indefinitely put off. We want action and immediate deeds.<sup>16</sup>

Even Gandhi appreciated Jinnah's political position on British war efforts. He said: 'As soon as I set about my task, my eyes were opened. My optimism received a rude shock. We had

meetings wherever we went. People did attend, but hardly one or two would offer themselves as recruits. 'You are a votary of Ahimsa, how can you ask us to take up arms? What good has Government done for India to deserve our co-operation?' These and similar questions used to be put to us.<sup>17</sup>

The Rowlatt Bill was introduced to contain and suppress rising national movement. Jinnah assailed the bill as the 'Black Bill'. He vehemently opposed the bill and said that 'no civilised government will accept, no civilised government will ever dream of putting these recommendations in the form of laws'. In his strongly worded letter of resignation to the Viceroy, he considered the Imperial Legislative Council as 'a machine propelled by a foreign executive' and the bill as 'obnoxious and decidedly coercive'.<sup>18</sup> He was of the opinion that

the fundamental principles of justice have been uprooted and the constitutional rights of the people have been violated at a time when there is no real danger to the state, by an over fretful and incompetent bureaucracy which is neither responsible to the people nor in touch with real public opinion ... a Government that passes or sanctions such a law in times of peace forfeits its claim to be called a civilized government.<sup>19</sup>

The session of the Muslim League and Congress was held in Nagpur in 1920. Gandhi moved a resolution proposing 'the attainment of Swaraj by the people of India by all legitimate and peaceful means'. Important Congress leaders supported Gandhi's advocacy of non-cooperation. But Jinnah was the single leader who objected that it was impractical and dangerous to sever connections with the British. He argued that the Non-cooperation Movement 'may be an excellent weapon for the purpose of bringing pressure upon the Government, but ... will not succeed in destroying the British Empire'. His proposal was rejected. Gandhi's resolution was passed with 'deafening, prolonged cheers and applause'. Commenting on the resolution, Jinnah argued, 'At the moment the destiny of the country is in the hands of two men and one of them is Gandhi ... I appeal to him to pause, to cry halt before it is too late'.<sup>20</sup> Colonel Wedgwood, a member of the British Labour Party said that, 'if India had a few more men of Mr Jinnah's strength of character, she would be free before long'.<sup>21</sup>

Jinnah was a champion of civil liberties, individual rights and equal justice. He pleaded, on behalf of readmitting the deported editor of the *Bombay Chronicle*, B. G. Horniman, 'I do maintain, and I have drunk deep at the fountain of constitutional law, that the liberty of man is the dearest thing in the law of any constitution and it should not be taken away in this fashion'.<sup>22</sup>

The Raja of Mahmudabad reminisces about his meeting with Jinnah in 1926. He writes, 'he called me to his side and asked me about my studies. Then came the question, 'what are you, a Muslim first or an Indian first ...' I replied 'I am a Muslim first and then an Indian'. To this he said in a loud voice, 'My boy, no, you are an Indian first and then a Muslim'.<sup>23</sup>

Presiding over the All India Muslim League session held in 1937, Jinnah succeeded in passing a resolution for complete independence for India. He appealed to the Congress for a united front with the League. He argued 'What requires is a completely united front and honesty of

purpose, and then by whatever name you may call your government is a matter of no consequence so long as it is a government of the people, by the people, for the people'. Addressing the students of Osmania University he claimed himself to be nationalist and liberator of India. He said:

I must assure you that I yield to none in the determination to safeguard the interests of my country, nor would I yield to anybody in striving for the attainment of freedom for my country. I am essentially a practical man; I have been in practical politics for over a quarter of a century. The words 'Nationalism' and 'Nationalist' have undergone many changes in their definition and significance. Some people have a dictionary of their own, but within the honest meaning of the term, I still remain a nationalist.<sup>24</sup>

## Religion, State and Secularism

He worked hard to bring the two communities together. He argued that the 'salvation of India lies in the true union of the people and her onward march of progress depends upon the constitutional and constructive methods'. Addressing the Muslim students in 1915, he said 'one of the chief objects should always be co-operation, unity and goodwill not only among the different sections of Mohammadans but also between Mohammadans and other communities of the country'.<sup>25</sup> Jinnah advocated the cause of the Muslims before the Hindus, and of the Hindus before the Muslims. He wanted to create goodwill and remove the misunderstandings between the two communities for cooperation in the larger interest of the national liberation movement. He observed that 'all thinking men are thoroughly convinced that the keynote of our real progress lies in the goodwill, concord, harmony and cooperation between the two great sister communities. The true focus of progress is centred in their union ... But the solution is not difficult ...'<sup>26</sup>

He strongly advocated the formulation of a common demand for both communities. At his initiative, an all parties' conference of the Muslim League and the Congress was organised in Delhi in 1927 for ensuring unity between them. He suggested to the Muslims to abandon the system of separate electorates and adopt the mixed ones under certain conditions of mutual give and take. For him the question of separate or mixed electorates was more a question of methods and means to an end. Jinnah asserted that 'Mussalmans should be made to feel that they are secure and safeguarded against the Hindus majority during transition period'. Jinnah was not enamoured of separate electorates although the overwhelming majority of the Muslims believed that this system would not retard the growth and development of representative government. He also suggested to the Hindus to agree on fair and reasonable constitutional safeguards, which alone could remove Muslim suspicions. He was in favour of negotiating an equitable sharing of power between Hindus and Muslims at the central and provincial levels. He believed that all communities should share the fruits of liberty equally. His central concern was on how to give a real sense of confidence and security to the minorities.<sup>27</sup>

Reacting to the Motilal Nehru report which advocated joint electorates without sufficient safeguards for the Muslims, Jinnah declared that the minorities must have a complete sense of security before its broader political sense could be evolved for co-operation and united endeavour in the national tasks. He argued that, 'majorities are apt to be oppressive and tyrannical'. He considered that the constitutional safeguards and security of the Muslims were requisite conditions for ensuring the political unity between both communities. Speaking as a spokesman of India and not Muslims, he stressed for resolving the vexed and complex problems of minorities. He pointed out that 'the two major communities in India are Hindus and Mussalmans and naturally, therefore, these two communities have got to be reconciled, united and made to feel that their interests are common and they are marching together'. He put forward his famous 'Fourteen Points' which included problems of minorities, issue of separate electorate-s- and the power of the provinces. He cautioned 'if you do not settle this question today, we shall have to settle it tomorrow, but in the meantime our national interests are bound to suffer'.<sup>28</sup>

Jinnah was branded as a communalist and called an exponent of Muslim interest by Hindus. Muslim communal leaders had defeated and repudiated his policy. He did not budge from his ideological position even under pressure from conservative Muslim sections. He remained a defender of Hindu-Muslim co-operation. He considered the Hindu-Muslim issue as a national one which had to be solved in a national way. Jinnah viewed that the Hindu-Muslim unity as a 'sine qua non' of the any future constitution. A constitution would be successful if it provided a comprehensive sense of security to the Muslim community. He argued that 'no constitution will ever receive the support of the minorities unless they can feel that they, as an entity, are secured under the proposed constitution'. At the Second Round Table Conference, he said 'I am an Indian first and a Muslim afterwards. But at the same time I agree that no Indian can ever serve his country if he neglects the interests of the Muslims'. Unity and an honourable settlement between both communities was the pivot upon which national self-government for India could be constructed and maintained.<sup>29</sup>

Jinnah was keen on nationalising and secularising communal Muslim politics. He was opposed to the provincialisation of national politics. He criticised the interference of communal and obscurantist principles in the public sphere and civil society. He advocated the creation of a secular and democratic society. He upheld the liberal, egalitarian and human value systems. Jinnah was critical of religious orthodoxy and the sectarian views of the priestly classes of both communities. He argued, 'I think I have a solution for the Hindu-Muslim problem. You destroy your orthodox priestly class and we will destroy our Mullahs and there will be communal peace'.<sup>30</sup>

He considered that the mixing of religion and politics might help the non-cooperation movement initially, but would later inflict incalculable damage to the national interests of India. He rejected the 'pseudo-religious approach to politics' injected by Gandhi. He deplored the Khilafat agitation which had brought the reactionary religious orthodoxy element to the surface. He warned Congress leaders that this movement would encourage the pan-Islamist sentiment and buttress the tottering empire of the Sultan of Turkey. It would dilute the secular and nationalist

spirit of the Indian Muslims. He abhorred the deep religious colouring of the movement. He called it ‘an essentially spiritual movement’ based on destructive methods which did not take human nature into account.<sup>31</sup>

Jinnah strongly advocated social reforms. He opposed sectarian ideologies, caste and gender hierarchies and the inhuman value systems. He criticised the institutionalised inequality of the caste system which was legitimised by Brahminical ideology. He wanted to create a society which would be free from the shackles of orthodoxy and obscurantist principles. He strongly supported the Hindu Marriage Validity Bill which intended to liberate Hindus from shackles of caste orthodoxy. He argued:

are you going to deny liberty to those whom you have trained on western ideas, and are they to remain the victims of this caste shackles? ... I am as much interested, my Lord, in coming to rescue of Hindu minority suffering today because of this law as anybody else would be interested in coming up to the rescue of a Mussalman minority if it was suffering.<sup>32</sup>

Jinnah considered human liberation from social and religious bondage as an important component of the democratic transformation of society. He advocated the eradication of evil practices prevalent in Indian society. He favoured the extension of the Sharda Bill, which originally aimed at forbidding Hindu child marriage, to bring Muslim girls under its purview. He repudiated the mullah’s arguments that it ran counter to basic principles of Islamic injunctions. He claimed to represent all Indians and not just the Ulema. Jinnah condemned all orthodox ideologies prevalent in Hinduism and Islam which sanctioned cruel, horrible and disgraceful inhuman practices. He felt that the backwardness of the Muslim would retard not only the development of the community but also would handicap and injure the national interest of India.<sup>33</sup>

Jinnah repudiated Congress’ claim that it represented the entire nation. He argued that any future constitutional structure must protect and safeguard the position and interest of the Muslims. This demand of the Muslims did not go against the basic principles of secularism. Muslims stood shoulder to shoulder with Hindu communities and did not lag behind in their patriotic co-operation with Hindus. He asserted that:

it may appear to any amateur politician that such demand savours of communalism, but in reality to those who understand the political and constitutional history of the world, it must be evident that it is not only natural but is essential by ensuring whole-hearted and willing co-operation of the minorities who must be made to feel that they can rely upon the majority with a complete sense of confidence and security.<sup>34</sup>

Even after establishing Pakistan on the basis of two-nation theory and religion, he wanted a modern, liberal, secular and democratic state. Delivering the presidential address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, he talked about an inclusive and impartial government, religious freedom, rule of law and equality for all. He also argued for the separation of church and



state. He assured the minorities, i.e., non-Muslims that they would be treated on the basis of equality of mankind. He argued that the minorities would enjoy fullest security of life, property and honour. Muslims and non-Muslims would be treated on equal footing. He further argued that the new state would function with the will and sanction of the entire body of people in Pakistan, irrespective of caste, creed or colour.<sup>35</sup>

Jinnah was not sure about what the ultimate shape of the constitution of Pakistan was going to be, but he visualised Pakistan polity to be structured on democracy and secularism. Commenting on the future constitution he declared:

I am sure that it will be democratic type, embodying the essential principles of Islam ... In any case Pakistan is not going to be a theocratic state ... to be ruled by priests with a divine mission. We have many non-Muslims - Hindus, Christians and Parsi - but they are all Pakistanis. They will enjoy the same rights and privileges as any other citizens and will play their rightful part in the affairs of Pakistan.<sup>36</sup>

Speaking on the first session of the Pakistan Constituent Assembly, he asserted:

You are free; you are free to go to your temple, you are free to go to your Mosques or any other places of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed- that has nothing to do with the fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one state ... Now I think, we should keep that in front of us as our ideal and you will find that in course of time, Hindus would cease to be Hindus, and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because, that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense of the citizens of the state.<sup>37</sup>

Jinnah's speech in Pakistan's Constituent Assembly on 11 August 1947 throws light on the nature of the Pakistani state. The father of Pakistan had dreamt of a secular state which would guarantee not only every citizen's freedom to practice his or her religion but also ensure that they would not be discriminated by the state on the basis of religion, race and caste. He argued:

If you will work in co-operation, forgetting the past, burying the hatchet you are bound to succeed. If you change your past and work together in a spirit that everyone of you, no matter to what community he belongs, no matter what relations he had with you in the past, no matter what is his colour, caste or creed, is first, second and last a citizen of this state with equal rights, privileges and obligations, there will be no end to the progress you will make. I cannot emphasise it too much. We should begin to work in that spirit and in course of time all these angularities of the majority and minority communities, the Hindu community and the Muslim community—because even as regards Muslim you have Pathans, Punjabis, Shias, Sunnis and so on and among the Hindus you have Brahmins, Vaishnavas, Khattris, also Bengalees, Madrasis, and so on—will vanish.<sup>38</sup>

## Islam and State

After 1937, Jinnah's politics took a different course. He enunciated the 'Two Nation Theory' to advance the interests of his co-religionists after the British withdrawal from the Indian sub-continent. The partition of India caused catastrophic and untold misery for the Muslims who remained in post-colonial India.

The 'Two Nation Theory' had germinated much before Jinnah. The late 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the evolution of this theory. Muslim modernist and reformer Sir Syed Ahmad Khan started the movement for self-awakening and identity. He established the Aligarh Muslim University. The university was one of the centres where the idea of Pakistan was conceived and germinated. The poet and philosopher Muhammad Iqbal's presidential address to Muslim League on December 29, 1930 at Allahabad is considered as the first articulation of the two-nation theory. He talked about it in very vague and uncertain terms. He said:

I would like to see the Punjab, the North-West Frontier Province, Sindh and Baluchistan amalgamated into a single state, self-government within the British Empire, or without the British Empire, the formation of a consolidated North-Western Indian Muslim State appears to me to be the final destiny of the Muslims, at least of North-west India.<sup>39</sup>

Rahmat Ali was the first person who publicly articulated this theory and produced a clear-cut plan. A definite shape to an idea of Pakistan was given by him. He coined the word Pakistan. In a pamphlet, 'Now or Never', issued in 1933 from Cambridge, he proposed that the Punjab, N.W.F.P. (Afghanistan), Kashmir, Sindh and Baluchistan be separated from India and formed into a federation of their own.

Jinnah translated the two-nation theory into the political reality of a nation state. He argued that the Muslims of the subcontinent were separate and a distinct nation from the Hindus. He wanted to negotiate a constitutional arrangement based on equitable sharing of power between the Congress and Muslim League, representing Hindus and Muslims respectively. The Congress insisted on the unity of the nation and refused to share power at British India's unitary centre. It paved the way for the articulation of the two nation theory by Jinnah and the subsequent partition of India.<sup>40</sup> Rebuking the Congress's intransigencies at the annual session of the League at Patna, he considered it, 'a misfortune of our country, indeed it is a tragedy, that the High Command of the Congress is determined, absolutely determined, to crush all other communities and culture in this country, and to establish Hindu Raj'. He further argued, 'I say the Muslims and the Muslim League have only one ally, and that ally is the Muslim nation'.<sup>41</sup>

The idea of Pakistan was in his mind even before 1940. But he did not discuss the idea of a separate state with anybody. In 1938, after the refusal of a Muslim representation in the provincial cabinet by the Governor of Bombay, he conveyed his ideas to the editor of the *Times of India*:

This means that we of the Muslim League who represents the Muslims are to have no further say in the government of this province or of any other province in India where

Congress is in majority. That is the end. There is nothing more to do except to get a state of our own for the Muslims of the country'. He argued that the Congress had created, 'a serious situation which will break India vertically and horizontally.'<sup>42</sup>

Despite the advocacy of partition of India by colleagues and followers, he was reluctant to forcefully articulate the two nation theory.

Jinnah, in his article in *Time and Tide* in January 1940, argued that the Muslim League was opposed to the domination of Hindu majority over Muslim and other minorities and vassalisation of Muslim India. He vehemently opposed any federal arrangement which may result in domination of the majority community over the minority under the guise of parliamentary democracy. Parliamentary democracy was not sensitive to concerns and problems of the minorities. India was a pluralist and multi-cultural society. This system was totally unsuited to the genius of the people of the country which was composed of various nationalities. He argued that the Hindus and Muslims were two separate nations. He said:

A plan of action must be evolved that recognises that there are in India two nations, but both must share the governance of their common motherland. In evolving such a constitution, the Muslims are ready to co-operate with the British Government, the Congress or any other party so that the present enmities may cease and India may take its place among the great countries of the world.<sup>43</sup>

Jinnah presided over the second session of the Lahore Muslim League in 1940. He was instrumental in passing the famous resolution which called for a separate Muslim homeland. It was considered as the intellectual bedrock of Pakistan. It did not mention the two nation theory. It stated:

that it is considered view of this session of the All India Muslim League that no constitutional plan workable in this country or acceptable to the Muslims unless it is designed on the following basic principles, viz., that geographical contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted, with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary, that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority, as in the North-Western and Eastern zones of India, should be grouped to constitute Independent states in which the constituent unit shall be autonomous and sovereign.<sup>44</sup>

The Lahore Resolution called for a separate Muslim homeland in vague and uncertain terms. It did not use the word Pakistan. The Indian and British press considered it as a 'vivisection of the motherland,' 'dividing the baby into two halves' and 'cutting the cow'. Congress leaders attacked him using derogatory language. He was branded as anti-Hindu. Reacting on these attacks, he argued:

we had not used the word 'Pakistan'. Who gave this word ... You know perfectly well that Pakistan is a word which is really foisted upon us and fathered on us by some sections of

the Hindu Press and also by the British Press. Now our resolution was known for a long time as Lahore Resolution, popularly known as Pakistan. But how long are we to have this long phrase? I now say to my Hindu friends and British friends: we thank you for giving us one word.<sup>45</sup>

Jinnah stated that Hindus and Muslims belonged to two different religious philosophies, with different social customs and literature, with no intermarriage and based on conflicting ideas and concepts. Their outlook on life and of life was different and despite one thousand years of history, the relations between the Hindus and Muslims could not attain any level of cordiality. Delivering a political speech, he argued:

It is extremely difficult to appreciate why our Hindu friends fail to understand the real nature of Islam and Hinduism. They are not religions in the strict sense of the word, but are, in fact, different and distinct social orders, and it is a dream that the Hindus and Muslims can ever evolve a common nationality, and this misconception of one Indian nation has troubles and will lead India to destruction if we fail to revise our notions in time. The Hindus and Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social customs, literature. They neither intermarry nor interdine together and, indeed, they belong to two different civilizations which are based mainly on conflicting ideas and conceptions. Their aspects on life and of life are different. It is quite clear that Hindus and Mussalmans derive their inspiration from different sources of history. They have different epics, different heroes, and different episodes. Very often the hero of one is a foe of the other and, likewise, their victories and defeats overlap. To yoke together two such nations under a single state, one as a numerical minority and the other as a majority, must lead to growing discontent and final destruction of any fabric that may be so built for the government of such a state.<sup>46</sup>

He considered religion as the basis of nation. He argued:

Religion alone is a cohesive force for the idea of a nationality. In countries where the allegiance of people is divided on the basis of religion, the idea of a single nationality has never finally succeeded. In Germany, the Christians and Jews have lived together for centuries and yet failed to weld together into a single nation.<sup>47</sup>

For rationalisation of his two nation theory he argued that they are not simply religions, but a distinct cultural and national community. He asserted:

Religion is considered not merely religion, in the strict sense as understood in the West by a Hindu or a Muslim but a complete social order which affects all the activities of life. In Islam, religion is the motive spring of all actions in life. A Muslim of one country has far more sympathies with a Muslim living in another country than with a non-Muslim living in the same country ... Even now an Indian Muslim feels far more stirred by the distress of his Muslim brothers beyond India than by a similar calamity affecting non-Muslims in India.<sup>48</sup>

Jinnah advocated the compatibility of democracy and Islamic principles. The ideological structure of Islam's world view was conducive to democracy. He argued that democracy was in consonance with the principles of Islam. He did not advocate an orthodox Islamic state. Islam would provide ethical value to the modern democratic structure of the state. It was not to be a religious or theocratic state. Addressing the Muslim legislators' convention in Delhi in 1946, he argued: 'What are we aiming at? It is not theocracy. It is not for a theocratic state'.<sup>49</sup> He did not provide a detailed description of the constitution. His vision of Pakistan polity saw it structured on the lines of democratic principles. Commenting on the future constitution, he declared:

I do not know what the ultimate shape of (Pakistan's) constitution is going to be, but I'm sure it will be democratic type, embodying the essential principles of Islam. Today they are applicable in actual life as they were 1300 years ago. Islam and its idealism have taught us democracy. It has taught equality of men, justice and fair play to everybody ... In any case, Pakistan is not going to be a theocratic state to be ruled by priests with a divine mission. We have many non-Muslims—Hindus, Christians and Parsis—but they are all Pakistanis. They will enjoy the same rights and privileges as any other citizens and will play their rightful part in the affairs of Pakistan.<sup>50</sup>

## Conclusion

Jinnah represented the aspirations and interests of the Muslim elite. Jinnah's main concern was to protect the interests of the upper middle classes (aristocratic-feudal and western educated) and capitalist classes of the Muslim community. He was articulating the communitarian interest of the upper classes. As Moin Shakir argued that the response of lower and upper classes of the Muslim society to colonialism stood in sharp contrast to each other. The political thinking of the lower classes was entirely different from the political thinking of the Muslim elite. He further opined that 'the upper classes, even if they happened to be losers in consequences of the colonial policies, did not join hands with the aspirations of the lower classes. The reasons were many: absence of any contact with the lower classes, perception of cultural values and historical identity, great desire to have a share in jobs and the political imperatives to find out ways and means to strike a compromise with the ruling powers'.<sup>51</sup>

Jinnah's conceptualisation of nationalism and democracy was based on the ideology of the bourgeoisie. His notion of nationalism seems to be hegemonic from the perspective of poor Muslims. Gramsci, through the twin concept of the 'national-popular' and 'hegemonic', discussed forging commonality of purpose and of programme among people differently located within the power structure in the national context. Gramsci argued that class rule was to be transformed into a national one through the active and collaborative consent of the masses. For him, hegemony '... is a system of alliances which enables it to mobilise the majority of working population'.<sup>52</sup>

The Congress was ready to partition Punjab and Bengal as the price for acquiring centralised state power. The British colonial power was eager to quit with the least possible damage to imperial interests. Ayesha Jalal argues that the demand for the partition of India was a colossal miscalculation. The prevailing conditions compelled Jinnah to acquiesce in the creation of the very ‘maimed, mutilated and moth-eaten’ nation which he had rejected in 1944 and again in 1946.<sup>53</sup>

The two-nation theory is beset with theoretical fallacy and a lot of problems. The majority of Muslims decided to stay back after partition. The emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 falsified the Two-Nation Theory. Salman Rushdie, in one of the most ingenious parts of *Shame*, a political commentary on Pakistan scripted as a novel said: ‘Pakistan may be described as a failure of the dreaming mind ... perhaps the place was just insufficiently imagined’.<sup>54</sup>

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# Savarkar: Hindutva and Critique of Caste System

*Sangit Kumar Ragi*

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, popularly known as Veer Savarkar,<sup>1</sup> was born in a Marathi Chitpawan Brahmin<sup>2</sup> family in 1889 in Bhagur, a village close to Nasik. Savarkar was second among two other brothers and a sister. His mother died of cholera when he was just nine. Seven years later his father died in a plague. He grew up under the protection and care of his elder brother Ganesh. When he was barely twelve he was married to Yamunabai, daughter of Ramchandra Triambak Chiplunkar, who supported his university education. It was from here that his revolutionary journey in the actual sense started.

If one looks at the writings and activism of Savarkar, one can conveniently divide his philosophy and praxis into three broader categories—his early revolutionary years, the ideology of *Hindutva* and *Hindu Rastra* which reflects his political ideology and lastly his critique of Hinduism, which he found grossly embedded with illogical beliefs, rituals and related religious and social superstitions.

## Revolutionary Savarkar

The revolutionary orientation of Savarkar can be attributed to several factors working at that moment of history in the country in general and in Maharashtra in particular. In fact, the first decade of the 20th century during which Savarkar got into revolutionary ideals was the time when the revolutionary atmosphere in the country had unfolded itself. The anti-partition movement in Bengal and the Swadeshi movement attracted him and he too engaged himself in organising bonfires of foreign goods and clothes at several places. The revolutionaries of Bengal had opposed this division tooth and nail, and it was finally annulled in 1911. This annulment



could be possible because of unprecedented protest movement against the British government. At home, in Maharashtra, the climate was no different from that of Bengal. In the post-Gokhale era, Maharashtra had emerged as one of the leading and fertile grounds for revolutionaries. Tilak was another leading advocate of revolutionary methods. His newspaper *Kesari* spit fire against British colonialism. The language of the editorials and articles published in *Kesari* were highly provocative and motivating for the revolutionaries. Another newspaper which published equally provocative articles and editorials was *Kal*. Savarkar was a regular follower of these two publications. Savarkar was highly appreciative of *Kesari* and Tilak and considered him as his ideal and Guru. Thus, the cumulative effect of several factors such as his family background, a politically conscious and active mind and more importantly the political climate of the country in general and Maharashtra in particular influenced and shaped his understanding of the politics of the day and strengthened his revolutionary spirit.

The revolutionary life of Savarkar actually spans between 1902, when he joined Fergusson College in Pune, to 1921 when he came out of the Andaman Jail. During this period, he engaged in writing revolutionary articles, holding talks and discussions, organising people and motivating the youth towards revolutionary acts for the emancipation of the nation from British clutches. It was so powerful that he shortly came on the watch list of the government.

At Fergusson College he formed a political group called the Abhinav Bharat, which consisted of a group of people of revolutionary and nationalist inclination. The activities of the group were mostly to talk and discuss within itself the ways and methods, including violent ones, to win freedom. But the government and the college management found him extremely dangerous, and he was expelled from the college, though he was allowed to write the final-year examination.

Shyamji Krishna Verma, a noted Indian lawyer in London, who established the India House to promote nationalist feelings amongst the students coming to Britain for study, came forward to help Savarkar. Savarkar went to England to study law on a scholarship and stayed at the India House. In fact India House, which later on became a hub of Indian revolutionaries in London, acquired much of its fame during the period of Savarkar's stay there. In London, Savarkar came into contact with several revolutionaries there who were not averse to armed struggle to liberate the country. Savarkar soon became the key man of all activities at India House. By 1909, he was in full control of this revolutionary centre. Savarkar also set up a Free India Society in London with the purpose of organising and mobilising Indian students there towards the freedom movement. In London, he found greater exposure to revolutionary literature and men. He was highly fascinated by the writings of Mazzini.<sup>3</sup> In London, Savarkar is also said to have met Russian revolutionaries and learned the techniques of guerrilla warfare and bomb-making which he imparted to the Indian revolutionaries.

Savarkar had a vision of a free India and he justified the use of all means and methods to achieve it. He however found armed revolution the most appropriate course. He was not against the moderate measures and initiatives like refusal to pay taxes, practice swadeshi, protests and boycott. But they had limited relevance. They could create mass awareness but they were not sufficient enough to wrest freedom. Revolutionary and violent assault against the British was a

must. He refused to buy the Gandhian premise of non-violence and advocated taking up arms in order to achieve the goal of freedom.

Savarkar's genius lay not only in his organising skills but the amount of intellectual sharpness he had and his powerful oratory which was always embedded with convincing logic and facts. He rejected the British premise on India and its history. He found that British historiography deliberately intended to belittle Indian heritage and its culture. And he applied this to the interpretation of the Revolt of 1857 which the British depicted merely as a 'Sepoy Mutiny' whereas the facts proved that it was a declaration of revolt against the British rule in India. He propagated it as the 'first war of independence' and wrote the famous book titled *The History of the War of Indian Independence*, which was published in 1909. The book was originally written in Marathi. It was translated later on by a well known revolutionary of Tamil Nadu, V. V. S. Aiyar. He was with Savarkar at India House in London. The book 'offered both the historical accounts against the British and the detailed assessment of insurrectionist tactics'.<sup>4</sup> This book created a great deal of ruckus and uproar in British society. The government banned its publication throughout the British Empire. Madame Bhikaji Cama however got it published in the Netherlands, France and Germany. It was later smuggled into India and very soon became a popular text for the revolutionaries.

Savarkar's revolutionary activities came to an end with his arrest on 13 April 1910 in the case of the murder of Curzon Willie as well as the collector of Nasik city A. M. I. Curzon. He was finally deported to India so that he could be sent to the Andaman Cellular Jail. Though he made a brave attempt to escape by jumping into the sea from the porthole of the ship carrying him and swam through a long distance to nearby Marseilles, a place on the French coast, he was caught. He was sent first to Yerawada Jail in Pune and then, after a quick trial, was given a 50 years sentence and shifted to the Andaman Cellular Jail on 4 July 1911 where his brother was already interned. In Andaman he and his brother were subjected to severe punishment and torture. The imprisonment consisted of 'six months of solitary confinement, seven days of standing handcuffed, ten days of cross bar fetters and other tortures'. He spent 11 years in that jail. In 1921, he was shifted first to Alipore Jail, then to Ratnagiri Jail on 2 May 1921 and, finally, to the Yerawada Jail from where he was released on 6 January 1924.

## Hindutva and the Ideology of Hindu Rashtra

Once he was out of jail, he immediately plunged into politics. He was invited by several organizations to join them in the struggle against the British rule. But he chose to follow the path of Hindu nationalist politics, and founded the Ratnagiri Hindu Sabha on 24 January 1924, which later merged with the Hindu Mahasabha, a political party founded in 1915. Several factors contributed to this choice. First, he had never appreciated the Gandhian approach to the struggle for freedom, especially Gandhi's emphasis on non-violence and his policy of taking up what he felt were issues pertaining largely to the Muslim world and not really germane to the Indian situation.

He had severely criticised the suspension of the non-cooperation movement on the issue of the killing of twenty-two policemen in Chauri Chaura in 1922. In post-Khilafat Indian politics there were a large number of other leaders including Raj Gopalachari and K.M. Munshi, who had opposed Gandhi on the issue, fearing that it would herald the spirit of communalism by releasing the forces of religious fanaticism.<sup>5</sup> In post Khilafat national politics Hindu-Muslim communal polarization had already taken shape and a series of communal riots was a testimony to it. The Congress never took up this cause and always made a meek response to this. Savarkar was very critical of Gandhi due to the stand of the latter on the Moplah riots in which several Hindus had been killed and many were forced to convert to Islam. Savarkar wrote a series of articles later on the Moplah riots and found the absence of effective Hindu protests. Secondly, he had no belief in the ideology of Communism. And therefore the course of Hindutva was the only option left to him which was also close to his political understanding of India.

He wrote the pamphlet *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?* in 1923, when he was incarcerated in the Ratnagiri jail, in which he clearly articulated his ideas on Hindutva and the Hindu Rashtra. This was to become one of the foundational texts of Hindu nationalists. Savarkar joined the Hindu Mahasabha and soon took over the charge of its leadership and dedicated himself to Hindu organization and unification. The Hindu Mahasabha was formed in 1915 with the purpose of organising and defending Hindu interests to which the Congress leaders were 'indifferent and even hostile'.<sup>6</sup> People like Swami Shradhanand, Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya and Lala Lajpat Rai were attached to this organization. Savarkar became the president of the Hindu Mahasabha on 10 December 1937 at its 19th session at Karnavati (Ahmedabad). He was re-elected president consecutively for the next seven years. Savarkar gave a new ideological sharpness to the organization, though he failed to make it an alternative to the Indian National Congress. Savarkar while addressing the gathering of the Hindu Mahasabha as the president of the organization called for the organization of the Hindus as a political force. He said 'We Hindus are a nation in ourselves'.

## Hindu, Hindutva and Hinduism

Hinduism and Hindu culture had fascinated him from his childhood days. His first article, published by *Nasikvaibhav* in its editorial columns in two instalments, was 'The Glory of Hindu Culture'. He was at the time a third standard student in Shivajee School.<sup>7</sup> The most comprehensive writings on this issue however came in 1923 when he penned *Hindutva* which proved to be the seminal guide book for those who advocate Hindu nationalism.

His premise of Hindutva outlined in the book is broadly the same which the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) champions today with a crucial difference: while Savarkar wanted a Hindu state, RSS wants a Hindu nation, i.e., a nation which reflects Hinduness without making Hinduism a state religion. The difference stands in perspective. RSS wants the state and

its policy reflecting the predominance of the Hindu ethos without realising a theocratic state which it considers alien to the nation. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, however, considers him one of its important guiding lights, though Savarkar considered the Sangh of that time a timid Hindu organization.

Savarkar defined India not only in terms of Hindu idioms but considered both terms as synonyms. The term 'Hindu' for him was not about a particular religion or tradition but a race and a nationality. He did not use the term 'race' in biological and rigid anthropological terms. By race he meant that the people of the territory which we call Bharat or Hindustan constituted one unit as they all were the descendants of common forefathers. He sought to make a distinction between Hindu religion and Hindutva. He found that the common understanding of Hindutva articulated in terms of Hindu Dharma was incorrect.<sup>8</sup> Hindu Dharma is actually the sum total of the spiritual and religious codes and philosophies written in and spread out in several texts of the native tradition. That includes several *panthas* or sects. And this race included all the native traditions, religious and other components. He rejected the definition of Hindu Dharma as synonyms of Vedic Dharma or the one which was popular and in practice amongst the majority or in the mainstream but the one which encompassed all native traditions, cultural and religious systems that originated and prospered on Indian soil.<sup>9</sup> In his definition of who is Hindu he rejected all such definitions which lead to the exclusion of any native components of the Hindu race.

He said that the term Hindu initially referred to the people who were, primarily, settled across the river Sindhu and along the rivers Shatadru, Ravi, Chinav, Vitasta, Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati. Since among these rivers Sindhu was the mightiest one people identified themselves with this river and called themselves 'Sapta Sindhu'. Persians pronounced the 's' as 'h', which resulted in the Sapta Sindhu pronounced as 'Hapta Hindu'. According to Savarkar the term Hindu is more ancient than the term 'Sindhu'. Savarkar applied the theory of Aryan invasion and argued that probably the people who came from outside called the river Sindhu due to their peculiar pronunciation. Savarkar seems to be caught here in a circular logic, because if this premise is true then the river should originally have been Hindu river, which during the Vedic period assumed the name Sindhu. But then the Avesta already talks of Hapta Hindu. This proves the point that the term originated from the Persian language, a point which Savarkar rejected altogether. Savarkar accepts that the term is an ancient one but fails to decide the time when and at what moment in history it emerged. He accepts that it is difficult to decide the time when and from where the term originated and also that even the Puranas which depict the historical narratives of India fail to mention it.

He however said that there were several terms which came in use to denote the territorial and racial inhibitions of the Hindu people such as Aryavrata, Brahmavrata, Dakshinapath, etc. but these terms did not encompass the whole of the territorial expansion of the Hindu race. For example, Aryavrata denoted to the territory from North of Himalayas to the Vindhya. It probably happened because by that time the Hindu expansion had been confined to this area and it was only in subsequent centuries that it reached further south. Therefore, they were limited in expression or did not express the totality of the geographical boundaries. It happened even

with the terms like Bharatkhand which came to be known after King Bharat, who finds mention in both the Vedas and Jain texts. Thus, though the territory came to be known as Bharatkhand, the term Hindu continued to be in use and people outside its territorial boundaries continued to call it Hindustan, land of Hindus. (Vol. IX, p. 86). Greeks and Europeans followed it. Greeks pronounced Hindus as Indose and European later called it India. Chinese called it Shintus. Thus the term became coterminous with the nationality of the people from Afghanistan to the Southern sea.

Savarkar deliberately preferred and picked the word Hindutva over Hinduism despite the fact that he was deeply influenced by Vedantic Hinduism. His concern was primarily to accommodate the diverse main native faith systems, beliefs and religious practices. Hinduism did not connote all these native faiths. He was very much aware of the diversities and sectarian divides on religious lines and this applied to Hinduism also. He considered this to be a big reason behind the absence of political consolidation of the Hindus as one entity and which, he felt, finally resulted in the colonization of the country by the British and the Muslim rulers. He refused to accept the Hindu Dharma as a synonym of Vedic Dharma, the Dharma which was in practice among the people which constituted the majority or mainstream. Hindu Dharma for him should be comprehensive enough to absorb all the diversities which the Hindu race constitutes of whether it is related to caste or clothes or thought systems or the religious social rituals.

Hinduism thus was only one religion of the nation amongst the many others that originated in India. Hindutva engaged all shades and all traditions and thus covered a larger political, social and cultural space. Secondly he defined Hindutva not in religious and spiritual terms but more as a civilizational and politico-cultural category. He did not engage in the spiritual discourses of Hinduism as one finds in case of Aurobindo and Gandhi. His definition of who is Hindu clearly indicates this without any ambiguity. He said a Hindu is one who feels attachment to this land that extends from Sindhu to Sindhu and considers it as both his fatherland and motherland.

Savarkar outlines four essentials of Hindutva. First, A Hindu is one who on his own or whose parents have roots here is a citizen of this country. That means anyone who is born here or whose father has his origins here is Hindu. Thus an American who even if he becomes a citizen of the country is not a Hindu in the view of Savarkar till he is completely absorbed in the cultural stream of the nation. The same applies to the Muslims.<sup>10</sup> The second essential of Hindutva is that the people of this land not only belong to a nation but also represent a common race and share blood relations. He did not interpret race in true anthropological and biological terms but merely to convey that the population which inhabit the land constitute a distinct civilization and are the children of common forefathers/ancestors and they all respect them. There were inter caste marriages and then children born out of them got developed into castes and sub-castes. Thus whether it is Brahman or *shudra* the same blood flows through both their veins. Thus, it does not matter whether someone belongs to a particular caste and is atheist or theist, they are Hindu if they share the same blood. An inter-caste marriage does not make one a non-Hindu. The third essential of Hindutva is the existence of a common culture. Since we constitute one nation and one race therefore, we have also one culture. It is this culture that unites us.<sup>11</sup> Culture is an accumulation of what we have created to win over the nature. It is a man made creation

of new world of thoughts and art, customs and rituals, festivals, religious and spiritual code of conducts and so on. Hindus have common customs and religious texts, festivals and rituals, history, and codes of conduct. It is not essential that it takes the same form in all regions but its common distinctiveness lies in the fact that it makes it different from other cultures. It is the love for this complex culture created by him and his forefather that makes him different from the English or the Americans or Muslims. Thus anyone who is Hindu but subsequently converted to Islam though having a common fatherland is cut off from his forefathers and native culture.

He accepted that his doctrine of Hindutva has exclusivist connotations but that is inseparable till all the religious and racial denominations leave aside their attitude of dominance and aggression and work out towards some fundamental and rational human values as guiding and working principles which is not in sight at least at moment. Till such things happen 'Hindustan belongs to Hindus' only will remain to be guiding framework of the Hindu Rashtra.<sup>12</sup>

His definition of Hindutva certainly excluded all the faiths and beliefs that had an origin outside the territorial geography of India. Christianity, Islam Judaism obviously did not fall into it because they failed to fulfill the criteria laid down by him. By this definition any one born on this soil but having their holy land outside India was not a Hindu even if he shared the cultural and social elements of the country such as common dress, customs, folk lore, language etc. Thus, if on the one hand he tried to bring together all the native traditions, he sought to exclude the outside religions from the definition of Hindutva which he considered as the bedrock of Indian nationalism. He thus clearly defined and demarcated the idea of 'we' and 'they' representing Indian religion and the non-Indian religions and corresponding civilizations respectively. This clearly indicated his basic premise that this land was primarily a Hindu land. It was the forefathers of Hindus who were the original inhabitants of the land and it was they who created a distinct culture and civilization over here. The British and the Muslims came from outside, conquered the land and established their rule. Not only this, he felt, that political adventurism was deeply intertwined with religious prejudices and agendas, which in turn supported attempts to homogenise existing religious and social practices, denied native roots and denigrated indigenous cultures and religious traditions.

Savarkar did not identify India in terms of territorial or political nationalism. He identified India in religio-cultural terms, as having a distinct civilizational boundary. In his presidential address to the Hindu Mahasabha in 1937, he said: 'we are one because we are a nation, a race and own a common civilization'.<sup>13</sup>

For him the idea of territorial and political nationalism as conceived and cherished by the Indian National Congress was a political sin. He considered territorial nationalism a mirage. He found it detrimental to the growth of a cohesive Hindu nation. He went on to say, 'We Hindus are nation by ourselves because religious, racial, cultural and historical affinities bind us immediately into a homogenous nation'.<sup>14</sup>

Interestingly both Gandhi and Savarkar located Indian nationhood in the ancient cultural and religious heritage of the country. Gandhi in his *Hind Swaraj* went back to recalling the tradition of creating religious pilgrimage centres. He felt that our forefathers had a purpose in mind. They

created pilgrimages or the Shankaracharya established religious *maths* at four corners of the country just to mark the cultural and civilizational bond and unification of the nation. Gandhi wrote in the *Hind Swaraj*:

Our ancestors established Rameshwaram in the South, Jagannath in East, and Haridwar in North as places of pilgrimage. They knew that the worship of God could have been performed just as well in their homes. But they saw that India was one undivided land, so made by nature. They therefore argued that it must be one nation.<sup>15</sup>

Savarkar wrote in *Hindutva* ‘behold the rampart of nature. The Himalayas have converted this vast continent into a cosy castle. This Indian Ocean, with its bays and gulfs, is our moat. A country, a common home, is first essential of stable, strong nationality’. Thus both of them looked toward the natural boundary lines and cultural constructs to define and demarcate the Indian nation. Gandhi saw a thread uniting the country. And more importantly that thread that comprised of cultural and emotional unity prevailed. It was the cultural linkages that kept India united for centuries. Gandhi did however emphasise the Islamic heritage too, a crucial point on which he differed from Savarkar. Savarkar, on the other hand, rejected the very idea of composite nationalism. He was not alone in advocating the preponderance of Hinduism. Aurobindo Gosh supported it too. In fact there were two schools within Hinduism which were divided on the fate of Hinduism. One was led by Gandhi who saw the future in composite nationalism without sacrificing spiritual Hinduism. On the other hand, there was a school represented by Aurobindo and Savarkar which thought that spiritual Hinduism would be in danger if political Hinduism was not made stronger and united.

## Critique of Hinduism

He firmly believed that Hindu consolidation was impossible to achieve in light of the practice of untouchability and the rigidity of the caste system in India. He found the caste system oppressive and inhuman. He therefore condemned the practice of untouchability calling it the biggest malaise of the Hindu society and came down heavily upon it.

Though he was born in a relatively well to do Brahmin family he never subscribed to the logic of the working of the caste system. Way back in 1920, he wrote from the Andamans ‘just as I feel that I should rebel against foreign rule over Hindustan. I feel I should rebel against the caste discrimination and untouchability’. In 1927 he again said that untouchability should go mainly because unnecessarily our co-religionists untouchables are subjected to treatment worse than the animals, which is not against the human dignity and an insult to the human race but also a great insult to our soul.<sup>16</sup> He posed a question before the Hindu upper castes asking how they justified practicing untouchability against a human being when they played with pets like cats and dogs. Moreover, if the movement of the animals like cats and dogs don’t make the road or street they

walk on impure, how did the movement of the so called untouchables on the same road bring impurity? The practice, he said, was a heinous crime against humanity.

One must understand that his Hindutva was essentially political and cultural in nature. He wanted a united Hindutva. And the right and oppressive caste system was doing all harm to this cause. The untouchables were not allowed to enter the temple and even a shadow of theirs' upon the upper castes invited punishments. What could be a stigma greater than this on the entire Hindu ethos? It was both against the noble teachings of spiritual and Vedantic Hinduism as well as humanity at large, Savarkar was convinced that political Hindutva would remain weak and continue to suffer if a great majority of the population was not emancipated from social and cultural humiliation and further integrated into the mainstream.

Apart from temple entry, Savarkar also challenged some of the practices which were the exclusive rights and privileges of the upper castes Hindus such as wearing sacred threads, chanting of Vedas etc. He thought of these as essential in imparting fair treatment to the lower caste Hindus and removing the untouchability. He undertook the task of distributing sacred threads to the untouchables which till then was worn only by the upper castes Hindus. While speaking at one such programme at Ratnagiri on 20 May 1929, he told the untouchables that the Hindu Dharma and the Hindu heritage like the Vedas belonged as much to them as to any upper caste Hindu. He challenged the Hindu orthodoxy and the conservative priestly class. He called upon the dalits and untouchables to unite under the Hindu Dharma and assert themselves to obtain the rights that were theirs.

His social works also had a political objective as he wanted to unite all Hindus under one banner but at the same time it sincerely aimed at 'securing a better life for the untouchables'. He said that untouchability should go, not only because it would strengthen Hindu unity and ensure the consolidation of a fragmented society but also because it was more important from the yardsticks of justice, dharma and Hinduism. What the Hindu society would gain from it was a secondary question. Their emancipation was necessary because for no reason they were pushed to live a life worse than an animal.<sup>17</sup> He reiterated it in 1924. He said 'I am confident that I shall live to see the eradication of untouchability. It is my fervent desire that after I die, my dead body should be lifted by Dhends, Doms along with Brahmins and Baniyas and they should all cremate my body'.<sup>18</sup> In fact in India there were two schools of thought with regard to the social reforms at that time. One school suggested that political reform should precede social reform. The others were of the opinion that social reforms must precede political reforms. Savarkar blended the two and argued that both should go hand in hand. Like Gandhi he too argued that law alone was not the answer to the question of untouchability and wanted to eradicate this disease within the framework of Hindutva.

The idea of his Hindutva and Hindu Rashtra certainly also included, apart from uniting and organising Hindus, the reinforcing of the cultural and civilizational icons and heritage which were distinctively associated with the Hindu civilization such as language. Despite the fact that Savarkar was a great scholar of Marathi literature and Marathi history, he advocated for Hindi to be declared as the national language and the Nagari script as the national script



as they are close to Sanskrit which is close to Hindu Civilization. He articulated the spirit of the popular slogan 'Hindi Hindu Hindustan'. For him, like Hindu, Hindi too connoted the nationality of India.

## Conclusion

Savarkar's Hindutva which forms the bedrock of modern Hindu nationalism certainly is a political doctrine which seeks to establish a majoritarian nationalism in which Muslims and Christians, which he considered foreign faith systems, have no equal cultural and political space. It certainly does not want cultural homogenization of the native systems but argues for a majoritarian nationalism as a proponent of Hindutva. However, he was certainly not a religious fanatic. Contrary to common perception that the prophet of Hindu nationalism was an uncritical supporter of religious fanaticism, obscurantism and everything written in the Hindu religious texts, one finds Savarkar a great rationalist who openly confronted the illogical and irrational practices and customs within Hinduism.

In fact he condemned the fanaticism prevalent in all religions including Hinduism. He was not a blind follower of the *shastras* and the rituals developed by the Brahmins and condemned superstitions of all kinds prevailing in the Hindu society: be it the issue of worshiping of trees or animals like cow or ox or be it the issue of beef eating, and trenchantly criticised rituals based on stories such as the *Satyanarayan Katha*, which he considered to be developed by the Brahmins for their own interests. He forcefully argued the point that beef eating or defying the ongoing practice of worshiping cows or trees was not going to settle or unsettle Hinduism. He definitely did not favour a Hindutva which aimed at the homogenization of rituals and practices followed in different parts of the country but wanted instead to reinforce the cultural diversity without eschewing the need for political consolidation.

## Notes and References

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1. His family nickname was Tatyā.
2. The Chitpawan Brahmins were highly politically awakened community and many great political and nationalist figures like Vasudeo Balwant Phadke, Tilak, Ranade, Chiplunkar, Karve, etc. were already in limelight. Former Governor of Bombay, Sir Richard Temple said of the community '... never have I known a national and political ambition, so continuous, so enduring, so far-reaching and so utterly impossible for us to satisfy, as that of the Brahmins of Western India'. Dhananjay Keer, *Mahatma Jotirao Phuley: Father of Indian Social Revolution* (Bombay: Popular Publication, 1997), p. 16.
3. He translated Mazzini's autobiography into Marathi.
4. Richard H. Davis, *The Cultural Background of Hindutva*. <http://inside.bard.edu/~rdavis/PDFs/hindutva.pdf>

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6. R. C. Mazumdar, *Struggle for Freedom* (Bombay: Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan, 1969), pp. 988–989.
7. Jaywant D. Joglekar, *Veer Savarkar: Father of Hindu Nationalism* (Bombay: Veer Savarkar Publication, 2006), p. 27.
8. *Samagra Savarkar Vangmay* Vol. IX, pp. 33–34.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
13. See A.G. Noorani, ‘Savarkar and Gandhi’, *Frontline*, March 15–28, 2003.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Hind Swaraj*, 1909.
16. *Samagra Savarkar Vangmay*, vol. III, p. 483.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Balarao Savarkar, *Hindu Samaj Sanrakshak Savarkar* (Mumbai: Veer Savarkar Publication, 1972), p. 67.

## Nehru: Ideas of Development

*Himanshu Roy*

Nehru's ideas of development are part of his efforts to modernize the Indian society. Generally, modernity is understood as a social process of change, beginning with renaissance, which incorporates new technology, creates balanced social relations and introduces rationality of thought. Over the centuries, it has become a metaphor of social progress associated with the rise of liberalism and capitalism. The process of change, however, is witnessed in every age and is a constant act that actuates either subterraneously or in bold reliefs. Contrary to the popular perception, it is not a one-time occasional phenomenon, event, occurrence or process, but an ad continuum, a transformation that is taking place continuously in every large society including the pre-renaissance social formations. Thus, modernity is a combination of (a) deliberate overt and covert policies designed for social change and (b) a passive, subterranean or collateral effect that emerges as a result of intended and unintended social acts over decades and centuries. It is a combination of individual and collective efforts in different forms.

Nehru's modernity was a conscious design for rapid technological and relational (institutional as well as social) change mediated through dynamic policy formulation and their application through state interventions and mass participation. It was intended to shatter or transcend the feudal structures and their related associations, both ideational and actual, and to substitute them with a holistic democratic structure, both societal and governmental. This democratic social structure in India was ideally to be a classless society of the future, 'the final goal ... might well be communism'.<sup>1</sup> However, in the historical context situated in post-colonial economy, this structure was to be a transitional liberal-democratic society, an euphemism for bourgeois-democracy uninhibited by the pre-capitalist primordialities, designed to propel rapid social mobility for better material existence and equitable citizenship. It was to be a society governed through active participation of citizens imbued with knowledge imparted through command guidance;

and for it, there was to be 'a raging campaign to secure popular support and participation ... (through) a more effective machinery and a more far-reaching outlook'.<sup>2</sup>

## Economy and Technology

The dynamics of this development, assisted by the intervention of state, was premised on the rapid development of the bourgeois economy. This economy was being expanded into rural hinterland through land reforms, agricultural cooperatives, bank loans, subsidies, cottage industries, etc. Nehru had argued that 'scientific as well as mechanized agriculture (has) to be promoted and attention given to providing better ploughs, seeds and manure ... (also) to extending credit and market facilities .... Intensive cultivation to enable not only self-sufficiency but a surplus was crucial if India were to progress'.<sup>3</sup> In urban areas, it was primarily through the production process of state-owned capital, euphemistically called the public sector which reserved the right to start new industries 'in coal, iron and steel, aircraft manufacturing, ship-building, telephone and telegraph, materials and minerals, and in munitions, atomic energy and railways'.<sup>4</sup> The focus was on growth which essentially meant enhanced production (which itself was the result of improved techniques based on scientific advancement), industrialization, capital formation and expanded reproduction of bourgeois social formation that negated pre-capitalist relations. For all this, 'the state (was to) control the principal means of production and strategic points of the economy'.<sup>5</sup> The modernization drive hinged on planned development which intended to (i) pre-determine the objectives of different projects proposed for initiation, (ii) regulate the market, (iii) check the crisis of unbridled production leading to glut, (iv) generate resources to fund projects and (v) to industrialize all the regions to create a uniform capital-labour relations and market economy. It initiated scientific management to enhance its profit through constant introduction of new technology in every sphere and to improve productivity and the quality of products. The idea was that scientific management would ensure non-conflicting capital-labour relations. Nehru reiterated this, time and again, in his speeches: 'the approach had to be clearly defined and production formulated and controlled in the right direction and at the right pace ... Merely to make a list of schemes and up the cost without formulating basic policies was not planning ... The purpose of planning was controlled growth, balance in agriculture and industry, and between production, consumption and purchasing power, all maintained in equilibrium on an ever-rising spiral'.<sup>6</sup>

The Nehruvian state, under the rubric of planned development and nation building, created new markets (which subterraneously undermined the semi-feudal relations), and through it speeded up the transformation of the isolated diversities of the village autarkies into a unifying commonality of a homogeneous society. The market, through the standardized attributes of the production process and the general features of the economy, generated similar social requirements and created a kind of interdependence among people across diverse regions, facilitating integration and universalism. In fact, it was the socialized functioning of the new production process that acted as the fulcrum of national unity. Simultaneously, the protected market,

under the rubric of a socialistic pattern of society, provided opportunities to business for capital formation, uprooted the peasants and created a new unequal society. It expanded the monetization of social relations, standardized functioning of the service providers and discarded the carefree approach of the past. It facilitated the transformation of time into money and polity into a corporate organization; at least, the signs had begun to appear in elementary form.

Thus the bourgeois economy presided over by Nehru was deepened and expanded during his tenure, benefitting, primarily, the business environment. It was the driving force of his modernization initiative that put an end to the semi-feudal past and expanded the colonial foundation of a new divisive social structure. It expedited the formation of new monetized social relations and positioned the ruling class in the international business arena between the two power blocs, without allying with either, to seek economic benefits from both in the emergent historical context. His was the era of expansion of industrial–infrastructural base in the early decades of the post-colonial economy which had nothing socialistic about it except for the rhetoric. He had once remarked, ‘I don’t myself see where socialism comes in the present policies that we are pursuing. It is true that we have some major industries in the public sector. That is hardly socialism?’.<sup>7</sup>

## Culture

The ideological representation of this economy, in its best crystallized form, was reflected in the formation and functioning of different institutions which were partly indigenous but substantively western in content and form. These were academic, political and cultural in nature which perpetuated bourgeois social relations in the public sphere and created a replica of themselves in new areas. These institutions were part of the state as they were funded, promoted or recognized by the state which, in turn, was itself the apex juridical representative of the new dominant Indian bourgeoisie that emerged triumphant over the zamindars and princes representing the legacy of the feudal relations of the colonial era.

The Nehruvian state did not leave the job of expansion of the new bourgeois relations to the market alone because ‘mere economic development, however essential, was not sufficient. There was a need too for modernization of society if India were to be a civilized nation’.<sup>8</sup> The state, therefore, vigorously pursued the expansion of its ideological apparatus as the new symbol of progress to be emulated by all. Through its various mediums and justificatory kernel, it influenced the thought process of the citizens to make them regard bourgeois social relations as *avant-garde*, desirable and fashionable. The objective was to transform the ideas of these specific social relations as the dominant ideas of society. In fact, more pertinently, the intention was to mould the mind of the citizens, preferably from childhood, to avoid the application of a coercive state apparatus. It was in the ‘impersonal context of binding the masses to the government’. The grooming was patronized in the public domain through interpretation of history or through critical appreciation of the functioning of polity, promotion of visual and performing arts or of popular culture, formulation of curriculum, loyalty to nation (and through it to the ruling class) and its symbols, etc. The citizens were encouraged,

in their personal spaces, to promote the niceties of liberalism, respect for their laws, avoidance of politics, etc. Through the combination of the two—public and personal—domains the critical faculties of the citizens were guided to limit themselves, at best, to reforms within the existing polity. The citizens were conveyed in the public sphere, through logic and facts, about the occurring *radical transformation* in the society manifesting in the emergence of public sectors, abolition of estates and principalities, beginning of land reforms, creation of linguistic provinces and panchayati raj, etc. It was argued that these economic—infrastructural—administrative developments were socialistic and in the interest of the democracy. The intent of this rhetoric, however, was to subtly confuse or resist the existence or progression of revolutionary ideas and the actual overthrow of the existing system. It was to sanitize the revolutionary contents of the ideas and to posit them for public discourse bereft of their context. The ideas were, however, thus ultimately transformed into semantics.

Thus the Nehruvian cultural modernity represented itself as a paradigm shift from the past in terms of its critique of colonial and feudal narrowness and its progression to contemporary universalism. Its social matrix contained, as per its representation, opportunities for all in their social mobility through growth and elimination of cultural discrimination. It represented juridical equality. In essence, it was the expression of interests of the expanding new bourgeois social formation which was striving for its predominance against the existing culture. In the personal domain, however, Nehru retained, to the end, his wide range of sympathy and interest, his sensibility and his dislike of vulgarity in all its forms and saw no reason why all Indians should not, like him, possess energy, gaiety and imaginative curiosity. He sought to enlarge their values till they matched his vision and conceptions.<sup>9</sup> The strength of his policy lay in being new and different to its immediate regressive colonial and feudal contest.

## Politics

Nehru's political modernity envisaged the negation of the existing primordial political structures, their transformation into contemporary relevance and creation of new institutions if required. It was an endeavour to democratize the urban and rural political structures, to reform the administration and its functioning to discard the colonial/feudal residues of being subjects and rulers, to create modern citizenry, and to institutionalize equitable governance, transparency and accountability. His goal was diminution of bureaucratic control, open discussion and consultation in policy formulation, freedom of expression and criticism, and creation of new methods of representative governance which he equated with self/collective governance. Moreover, he encouraged new ideas, constructive criticisms and tolerated political dissent. He strove 'to strengthen libertarian traditions' and provided 'importance to the institutional aspects of the democratic system' which was reflected in his insistence that 'all important matters should at some stage be brought up in cabinet (and) the procedures of collective policy making be established'.<sup>10</sup>

But Nehru was not open to the idea of formal power-sharing where powers of his office were to be collective and he was to be only the first among equals. His opposition to it was premised

on the logic that 'by virtue of his office (he) was more responsible than anyone else for the general trends of policy and it was his prerogative to act as coordinator and supervisor with a certain liberty of direction. This meant that, if necessary, he should intervene in the functioning of every ministry though this should be done with tact and with knowledge of the minister concerned. It would be impossible for him to serve as prime minister if this overriding authority were challenged, or if any minister took important decision without reference to the prime minister or the cabinet'.<sup>11</sup> His tussle with Patel or his stance on a strong centre vis-à-vis states in the federal structure reflected his political stand. Patel's interpretation of the prime minister's role, for example, was very different from that of Nehru. Patel argued that once the cabinet adopted a decision, 'it was for each ministry to implement the decisions of the cabinet; and the prime minister's responsibility was merely to see that there was no conflict between ministries'.<sup>12</sup> The ministry was responsible to the cabinet in the collective system of the governance and the prime minister was the coordinator. It was the cabinet that was supreme and was to guide the ministries. The interference of the prime minister in the functioning of the ministry, therefore, was unjustified.

Nehru's stand for a strong centre (his rejection of the Cabinet Mission Plan which was highly federal), his dismissal of the Communist Party-led government in Kerala, the repression of the Telangana movement led by the Communist Party of India (CPI), opposition to the linguistic provinces (which were equated with parochialism and rejected twice by him), etc. demonstrates his attitude to 'supervise every branch of policy'. His long story at the helm provided continuance of his ideas and their application.

His paradigm of political development was critical of the colonial past in which citizenship was limited, secularism distorted and the role of the state in economic development minimal. He transcended these barriers through the medium of the Constituent Assembly and state intervention, and was instrumental in facilitating the expansion of democracy (which had a narrow base of only 27 per cent of the population with voting rights in 1946) and of citizenship for every Indian. The chapter on fundamental rights, both of political and economic nature, was largely formulated/guided by him (in consultation with Patel). It bestowed liberal democratic rights of citizenship to Indians. It was a combination of individual and community rights which determined the nature of relationships between citizens, and between the elite and the masses. However, despite shattering many colonial distortions of citizenship, the classical liberal revolutionary rights prevalent in Europe, like the uniform civil code which was much appreciated by Nehru, could not be transplanted in India; something Nehru was to regret later.<sup>13</sup> Nehru's efforts to secularize Indian minds are unquestionable and were primarily based on the formulation and application of secular laws, confinement of religious beliefs to the personal domain and the state's neutrality towards religion by not being theocratic and by being equal to all the religions. He always remained sensitive 'to the needs and complaints of the minority communities' so that 'they should have no sense of grievance'. He, therefore, encouraged chief ministers and his cabinet colleagues to provide them more representation in jobs to inculcate a sense of partnership in them.

He strove to keep the public sphere bereft of any display of religiosity or any primordiality. Democracy to him was ‘something deeper than voting, elections or a political form of government: in the ultimate analysis, it (was) a manner of thinking, a manner of action, a manner of behaviour to your neighbour and to your adversary and opponent’.<sup>14</sup> He, therefore, endeavoured to free the citizens’ minds, even in their private domains, from any regressive ideas inherited from the feudal-colonial past. In brief, he desired to create a realm of avant-garde ideas, even if it came from a labourer, to formulate policies for their development.

Nehru never appreciated primordial (caste, language, religion) parameters of protective discrimination which, to him, were archaic in content and form that preserved the old world. Their role in facilitating social uplift was minimal and, therefore, his unwillingness to extend these parameters to other sections of society for their development, beyond the measures applicable for the scheduled castes and tribes, was palpable in his ruling years. Even the reservation for the scheduled castes and tribes was conceded as a one-time historic measure for a primal social category which under capitalism and democracy was becoming redundant. The better measure, to him, was to create conditions for individual mobility for all through new job opportunities, compulsory school education, expansive health services, and removal of discriminatory laws and social practices. The intent, in a nutshell, was to provide a condition to every citizen for their positional shift according to their abilities. In essence, it was a social democratic parameter that was holistic rather than segmentary.

## Foreign Policy

His foreign policy, similarly, was to break away from the past given the historical context. A manifestation of the collective interests of the dominant class was reflected in the resolution passed by the Constituent Assembly, in the wake of the legacy of the freedom struggle, for a ‘free and sovereign’ republic. It meant, derivatively, to maintain independent relations with the two global power blocs who had their protected market and multifarious internal economic linkages. It reflected, simultaneously, the determination and capability to decide their own interests demonstrating the popular support base and using and benefiting from the inner contradictions of the two power blocs. The intention behind remaining non-aligned was to appropriate the maximum economic benefits on a long-term basis from both the blocs with minimum conditions laid down or to secure the time for it through negotiations from a vantage point without being bound by any conditions in a hurry. Indian business had the breathing space and time to expand its market at home, which it preferred, rather than to accept the strings of conditionalities from either of the blocs for a quick inflow of capital in the domestic market, risking political stability at home.

It was such enlightened self-interest that had prompted Nehru to turn down the proposal of Attlee for allegiance to the British crown and had suggested in return for a ‘Common Commonwealth Citizenship’. The argument was that ‘the commonwealth countries would not be treated



as foreign states or their citizens as foreigners; and in any new commercial treaties it would be made clear that for the purpose of the most favoured nation clause the Commonwealth countries were in a special position and not regarded as foreigner states'. Similarly, when the Soviet Union was willing to help India with regard to Kashmir and Hyderabad, Nehru did not seek their help. India, however, was definitely willing to seek help from both the blocs for her economic development, preferably with no or least conditions, and not antagonizing them to adopt an anti-India stance.

Thus the foreign policy, in the making of which Nehru played a prominent role, was an outward reflection of the inner strength of the dominant class and of its determined pursuit to maintain political freedom. It succeeded substantively in its path, compelling the power blocs to modify their policies to expand their arena of interests.

To summarize, Nehru's modernity was the reflection of the collective interests envisaged and endeavoured by the triumphant bourgeoisie in the wake of the freedom struggle which underwent partial modification with the change in the circumstances after the transfer of power. In the making of it, Nehru's influence was substantive; therefore, he could not transcend or break away from the bourgeois political economy. In fact, as an individual in history who was at the helm of the liberal democratic state for so long, his role cannot be, primarily, more than taking care of the collective interests of the class which dominated the governance in the exploitative property regime and expanded it further. Yet he created an autonomous political space for himself through which he posited new ideas for societal consideration and attempted to minimize the social pain of a transitional society. He facilitated the expansion of democracy and its liberalization, and sensitized the ideological state apparatus towards scientificism and folk culture. His role in expanding the secular public sphere was creditable. A cultured gentleman, he was a classical liberal democrat who implemented new ideas but was flexible to compromise if the circumstances compelled him.

## Notes and References

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1. S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography* (abridged edition) (New Delhi: OUP, 1989), p. 63.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 233.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 373; See also *Jawaharlal Nehru's Selected Speeches*, Vol. 4, (New Delhi: The Publications Division, Government of India, 1964), p. 151.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 192; See also *Jawaharlal Nehru's Selected Speeches*, pp. 132–133.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 327; See also *Jawaharlal Nehru's Selected Speeches*, p. 133.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 370–372; See also *Jawaharlal Nehru's Selected Speeches*, pp. 134–142; Partha Chatterjee, 'Development Planning and the Indian State' in T. J. Byres (ed.), *The State, Development Planning and Liberalization in India* (Canada: OUP, 1998).
7. Quoted in S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*, p. 371.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 319–320; See also *Jawaharlal Nehru's Selected Speeches*, pp. 165–167.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 313.

10. Ibid, p. 194; See also S. Gopal (ed.), *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. 5 (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1987), pp. 472–473.
11. Ibid, p. 194; See also S. Gopal (ed.), *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. 5, pp. 472–475, footnotes 3, 6 and 8.
12. He regretted that ‘nothing could be done for Muslim women because that might alarm the Muslim Community’, Ibid., p. 319.
13. Ibid, p. 351.
14. Ibid, p. 202.

## M. N. Roy: Twentieth-Century Renaissance

*Dinesh Kumar Singh and A. P. S. Chouhan*

### Early Radicalism

M. N. Roy symbolised a new ideology of the freedom movement that was neither moderate liberalism nor Gandhism. Before the First World War, he was attracted to the ideology of nationalist terrorism. He was a revolutionary. The partition of Bengal in 1905 gave rise to a national upsurge in India. The Indian political scene witnessed great turbulence. The Bengal revolutionaries' avowed object was to achieve the emancipation of the country. They realised that the British imperialist power based on force could be overthrown by violent methods alone. The violent anarchical movements in contemporary Europe inspired them. They believed in the language of violence and terror. M. N. Roy joined the influential group of Bengal Revolutionaries operating in Bengal. The Anusilan Samiti was the only revolutionary organization spread throughout Bengal. The *Yugantar* was its organ. Amongst Indian nationalists, he was an ardent radical as a practitioner and thinker. As he wrote: 'When, as a school boy of fourteen, I began my political life, which may end in nothing, I wanted to be free, the old fashioned revolutionaries thought in terms of freedom. In those days, we had not read Marx. We did not know about the existence of the proletariat. Still, many spent their lives in jail and went to the gallows. There was no proletariat to propel them. They were not conscious of class struggle. They did not have the dream of communism. But they had a human urge to revolt against the intolerable conditions of life. They did not know exactly how those conditions could be changed. But they tried to change them, any how I began my political life with that spirit, and I still draw my inspiration rather from that spirit than from the three volumes of capital or three hundred volumes by the Marxists'.<sup>1</sup>

M. N. Roy was strongly influenced by Vivekanand and Bankim Chandra. He was attracted to the political ideas of Aurobindo Ghose. Bhupendra Nath Datta was his associate. His brief association with the revolutionary group was crucial to his career. 'It was not an apprenticeship in making a revolution but his terrorist days may have shaped some of his persistent dislikes'.<sup>2</sup> This revolutionary group did not rely on mass support. There were inherent weaknesses in the techniques and methods of this group. After its failure, M. N. Roy went to Mexico where he was influenced by socialist ideas. He was associated with the formation of the Mexican communist party.

## The National and Colonial Question

M. N. Roy had differences of opinion with Lenin at the Second Congress of the Comintern on the strategy and tactics to apply to the national and colonial questions. Roy went to Russia to attend the Second Congress of the Comintern. Both Lenin and Roy had disputes on the issues of bourgeois democratic revolution and socialist revolution. Roy's debate with Lenin has to be interpreted in context of application of Marxian theory to colonial society. Both Marxist and liberal theoreticians have commented on the debate on the national and colonial question.<sup>3</sup> Lenin's thesis on the 'National and Colonial Question' called for the liberation of the peoples subjugated by colonial powers. As a corollary to this policy, Lenin put forward his thesis 'The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination'. With respect to the self-determination of nations, he mentioned three groups of nations. The first group consisted of Western Europe and the United States, the second group of Eastern Europe and the third comprised of semi-colonies and colonies. He called for the immediate and unconditional liberation of the colonies. He recognised a colony's right to self-determination including national secession. The proletariat's task in the first and second world, according to Lenin, would be unfinished without championing the right of nations to self-determination. They had to support bourgeois democratic movements for national liberation in colonial countries against the oppressive imperialist powers.<sup>4</sup> At the Second Congress of the Communist International Lenin propounded his thesis that the bourgeois democratic movements in oppressed countries retained their revolutionary potentialities. He considered these nations as separate entities oppressed by imperialism.<sup>5</sup>

Lenin unmasked the new set of contradictions of capitalism. By analysing the different phases of capitalism he advanced his thesis that imperialism was the highest stage of capitalism. Lenin's theory of imperialism maintained that colonial expansion strengthened the foundation of capitalist system in Europe. This development of capitalism delayed its inevitable downfall in metropolitan countries according to the prediction of Karl Marx.<sup>6</sup> Marx, due to historical limitations, did not visualise the different phases of capitalism. He taught that the proletarian revolution would take place in capitalist countries. Lenin further wrote that the finance capitalist phase of the world economic system had linked the metropolitan countries with their colonies. The survival of this system depended on the stability of both the first and third worlds. The

revolt in the colonial countries would destabilise the imperialist system. Lenin held that capitalism did not impoverish the proletariat in metropolitan countries. The exploitation of the colonial masses yielded a super profit. The capital was exported to colonial countries where cheap labour was available. In metropolitan countries a part of the profit could be conceded to the proletariat. He traced the development of the privileged aristocracy in the proletariat of the metropolitan countries. He maintained that a successful revolt in the colonial countries was a condition for the overthrow of the capitalist system in Europe. Therefore he emphasised on unity between the bourgeois democratic movements of the colonial countries and the proletarian movements of the metropolitan countries.<sup>7</sup> M. N. Roy's debate with Lenin was related to the Comintern's oriental policy.

On application of Marxian theory to colonial countries, West European socialist thinkers differed from Lenin. The Leninist's theory of imperialism encouraged the revisionism of Edward Bernstein. Kautsky and Hilferding rejected the idea of dictatorship of proletariat. Rosa Luxemburg, in her book, *Accumulation of Capital*, maintained that the imperialist capitalist system survived on the external markets of colonial countries. Lenin considered the 'Ultra Imperialism' of Kautsky and 'Capitalist Imperialism' of Rosa Luxemburg as erroneous. Her work was theoretically reformist. She rejected the idea of dictatorship of proletariat. She criticised the Leninist theory of revolution. Lenin differed from these Marxist theoreticians on the application of Marxism to metropolitan and colonial countries. As one scholar comments:

Marxist theory assumed that decision about what to do in politics depended on what kind of society it was, what its class structure was, and how these classes were likely to behave in political life. But the primary difficulty was, of course, that these societies were structured quite differently from European societies which had either undergone capitalist transformation, or were on the brink of it ... Marx had made of nineteenth century European states, but the application of his method to a society that was structured in a very different way. It was not the categories or the formulation that were to be common between the European analysis and the colonial analysis, but the method.<sup>8</sup>

Marx maintained that Britain, the world's first industrial country, was not susceptible to revolution. In industrialised France, the proletariat lost its revolutionary fervor.<sup>9</sup> When Germany became fully industrialised, the bourgeoisie there was caught between two historical contradictions. The first contradiction was between the bourgeoisie and feudal landlords. They were constantly checked by the contradiction with the rising proletariat. The bourgeoisie, in these cases, compromised with feudal elements to contain the proletarian's revolutionary task. Marx advanced his thesis in 1849 in an article on the 'Bourgeoisie and the Counter-Revolution'.<sup>10</sup> It was called the theory of late capitalism. In communist debate, this theory was advocated by M. N. Roy and Trotsky to apply to colonial countries and the bourgeoisie. The application of this theory was what Trotsky called 'the law of uneven and combined development'. Trotsky wrote: 'the further East you go, the more reactionary the bourgeoisie becomes'.<sup>11</sup> Lenin differed with this thesis. He maintained that the communists of colonial countries had two avowed tasks. On the one

hand, they had to train Marxists organizationally and politically, and rally the proletariat behind them. On the other, the communists had to assist bourgeois democratic liberation movement in colonial countries, to be able to back up all the forces which put forward progressive demands including the national bourgeoisie in so far as it acted from anti-imperialist positions. It had to strive to build up the revolutionary democratic potential of the colonial national movement. The communists had to, in Lenin's view, raise the role of the proletariat in it. Lenin visualised the national liberation movement led by the bourgeoisie as a sphere of activity for the communists to gain strength that would enable it to eventually claim leadership on a national level. But Lenin warned that support to the national democratic movement implied not only supporting anti-imperialism and bourgeois leadership but also consistent criticism of its wavering for compromise. This was, in Lenin's and the Comintern's view, the political line to be followed in colonial countries for national and social liberation.<sup>12</sup>

M. N. Roy had differences of opinion with Lenin on the national and colonial question. Roy was invited by Lenin to prepare a draft thesis on the colonial question on the eve of the Second Congress of the Communist International in Moscow in 1920. Roy came forward with his own thesis known as the 'Supplementary Thesis on the Colonial and National Question'. The Congress faced the problem of what sort of revolution could be fostered in the colonial countries, whether it had to be a bourgeois democratic liberation movement or a socialist revolution. By quoting Plekhanov, Roy opposed Lenin's idea. Roy held that peoples in the colonial countries need not go through the stage of bourgeois democracy. He gave primacy to a socialist revolution. The communists, in Roy's view, were not to support the bourgeois democratic movement but only the revolutionary elements. The Comintern, according to him, had to contribute towards the development of communist parties alone. The communists had to engage themselves wholly in the struggle for the class interests of the working people. They should lend moral and material support to the revolutionary forces of the colonial countries. He maintained that revolution in the colonies was a pre-condition for revolution in industrialised countries.<sup>13</sup>

In countries like India, bourgeoisie as a class, in Roy's view, was not different from the feudal elements. The national movement in colonial countries, Roy opined, was ideologically reactionary. 'Its triumph would not necessarily mean a bourgeois democratic revolution'.<sup>14</sup> He had differences of opinion with Lenin on the role of Gandhi in the national movement. Lenin believed that Gandhi was an inspirer and leader of the mass movement. But Roy held that Gandhi was a cultural and religious revivalist. As he wrote: 'he was bound to be reactionary socially, however revolutionary he might appear politically'.<sup>15</sup> Roy developed the theory of non-capitalist path of development to support his thesis. Both Lenin and the Comintern recognised his intellectual eminence. Both theses were debated in the Second Congress where Lenin observed:

There was quite a lively debate on this question (non-capitalist path of development) in the commission, not only in connection with the thesis I signed, but still more in connection with comrade Roy's thesis ... The question was put as follows: 'are we to consider as correct the assertion that the capitalist stage of economic development is inevitable for backward

countries now on the road to emancipation and among whom a certain advance towards progress is to be seen since the war ?' We replied in the negative.<sup>16</sup>

M. N. Roy, like Trotsky, applied the Marxian model of late capitalism to the colonial countries. Unlike other colonies, the bourgeoisie in advanced colonial countries like India was highly developed. As Sudipta Kaviraj comments: 'Roy's picture of the political economy of colonial India was markedly similar to Marx's depiction of Germany in the mid-nineteenth century ... If understood relatively, this judgement was certainly correct; but Roy crucially misjudged its corollaries'.<sup>17</sup> He overplayed the strength of the working class in colonial countries. He underestimated the influence of the nationalist parties on the proletariat. Roy had not visualised that proletariats and peasants considered bourgeois leaders and organizations as representatives of a nation rather than as spokesmen of the interests of the bourgeoisie.

## Indian History

M. N. Roy attempted to analyse the past, investigate the present and visualise the future of Indian society and history from a Marxist standpoint. This analysis of Indian society and history was contained in Roy's main Marxist work, *India in Transition* in 1922. This book also contains the fundamental ideas of Roy regarding the character of Indian national movement and production relation and the productive forces involved in it. It points out the social character of the people's movement indicating the revolutionary trend of the rising mass movement. By using Marxist theory, Roy presented a comprehensive critique of three prevailing theories about the character of the rising Indian nation. The imperialist writers maintained that 'a new India, a young India is in the process of birth'. They held the opinion that nationalism should not grow too fast against the hegemony of British power. The moderate nationalist, the most conscious vanguard of the rising nation, believed in gradual development along orderly and constitutional channels. The third school, the extreme nationalists, accepted the revivalist ideology. According to them, India was passing through a revivalist period and was not in a state of transition. Roy held the opinion that India was in a state of transition. He maintained that the future of Indian nationalism would be shaped by the inexorable evolution of the progressive forces latent in Indian society.<sup>18</sup> Roy also presented a critique of the two prevailing historiographies which ignored the social and economic history of Indian society. As he wrote:

At best we can have some idea of the glories and grandeur of the Hindu and Muslim Courts. Thanks to the painstaking research of some modern historians, one can learn how many sacks of *kishmish* the great Aurangzeb consumed in his life, or how the noble Siraj-ud-Daula has been painted in such a black colour by the English Writers.<sup>19</sup>

This historiography gave little information about the social and economic conditions of the toiling masses and what little it gave was on blurred and irregular lines. The transition of Indian

society, in Roy's view, was to be judged on the basis of the analysis of the economic development of a section of the population and the corresponding exploitation of the rest. This transition would result in ushering the people of India into a more advanced stage of socio-economic development. Further he wrote:

Therefore her entire stage of popular energy is in a state of revolt against everything which has so far kept her backward and still conspires to do so. This revolt, this great social upheaval, is the essence of the present transition, which marks the disappearance of the old, bankrupt socio-economic structure in order to be replaced by one which will afford the people greater facilities for progress.<sup>20</sup>

The social struggle, of historic and to a certain extent of unprecedented character, is being waged by the people of India.

In the middle of the 18th century, British imperialist power, according to Roy, undermined the feudal system in India. But feudalism remained in existence in form even after the British occupation of India. Indian society was divided into the following classes: (i) the landed aristocracy, (ii) the bourgeoisie and the intellectuals, (iii) petty peasantry, and (iv) working class including the landless peasants.<sup>21</sup> The bourgeoisie was now a potent force. The main political tactics of the Indian bourgeoisie was to acquire concession and support from the British Government to further its own interest. It was not in a position to pose a challenge to the rule of British power. It was aware of the fact that British rule could not be challenged without the support of the masses. Therefore the bourgeoisie had opened the doors of the Indian National Congress to the masses to deceive them. The Indian bourgeoisie, being the vanguard of national upheaval, may overthrow foreign rule. But when it became class-conscious it would deceive the masses. This class could not be relied on for the purpose of destroying British rule in India. Indian nationalism would have to rely on lower social classes.<sup>22</sup> Roy viewed that capitalism did not alter the existing form of production relations. The international capitalist system controlled the whole Indian economy. The British Imperialist system, in Roy's view, implanted the capitalist system in India. In fact Roy applied Marx's analysis of classes in nineteenth century capitalist society in Europe, to Indian society without any adaptations. Marxists regard class analysis as a method to be applied to all societies with modifications. But Roy considered Marxist theory as a set of conclusions which could be transferred to any society.<sup>23</sup> Roy's class analysis of Indian Society was exactly similar to Marx's analysis of class in Europe. Sudipta Kaviraj comments: 'Roy's analysis of classes in Indian society is in marked contrast to Mao's famous depiction of the Chinese rural structure. While Mao applies a method, Roy applies a model'.<sup>24</sup> As far as Indian nationalism was concerned, Roy analysed it in a narrow perspective. He considered it a mere instrument and strategy of the bourgeoisie.<sup>25</sup>

Roy gradually changed his Marxist theory to what was later known as the decolonization theory. The term decolonization was firstly used by Bukharin. This theory was propounded by him at the time of the Sixth Congress of the Communist International in 1928. The basic idea, in his decolonization theory, was that the national movement of India was a bourgeois movement. The



main objective of the bourgeoisie was the unfettered capitalist development of the country to strengthen its economic position. The bourgeoisie, getting an opportunity, through the concessions given by the imperialist power, of competing with them in the exploitation of the masses, had exhausted its revolutionary potential. It had ceased to be the vanguard of an anti-imperialist force. The decolonization was taking place in the sense that the Indian bourgeoisie had betrayed the national movement.<sup>26</sup> Roy, in his book *The Future of Indian Politics* in 1926, held the opinion that the Indian bourgeoisie had distanced itself from revolutionary forces and formed a united front with the imperialist powers. The book mentioned the attitude of Indian National Congress to the issue that was debated inside the Comintern and Indian communist party. Roy suggested Indian communists to organise the forces of the national movement into a democratic party. The existing nationalist party, according to Roy, could not serve the purpose.<sup>27</sup> Roy differed with Lenin on the question of the national bourgeoisie. This position of Roy remained unchanged. Roy submitted his decolonization thesis to the Comintern after his return from China. The communists associated with the Comintern including Lenin, criticised Roy's theory of decolonization. He was expelled from the Communist International in September 1929. Overstreet and Windmiller rightly say: 'The Russians were clearly bent on making decolonization an odious word. ... they ascribed to it a meaning which Roy certainly never intended, namely, the voluntary cessation of imperialist exploitation'.<sup>28</sup> His theory needs to be analysed. After the collapse of colonialism the imperialists lost their direct political control over the colonies. In the face of the mounting struggle of the colonial people for national liberation, the imperialists realised the impossibility and impracticability of territorial colonization in the sense of direct control. Instead of colonialism the world witnessed the development of a new ramified system of political and economic policy which was defined as neo-colonialism in Marxist theory. Roy's theory tried to explain this phenomenon. The later development in world politics falsified and refuted his theory. Roy did not differentiate between the different sections of the bourgeoisie. His theory negated Lenin's Colonial Thesis but the historical experience of the Chinese Revolution also negated Roy's thesis. In China, the bourgeoisie played a significant role in national and social liberation. Thus we find his theory came closer to A. G. Frank's formulation of imperialism.

## Interpreting Marxism

M. N. Roy returned to India in 1930 and was arrested. He was set free from prison in 1936. From 1930 to 1936 Roy felt the need to rethink the basic assumption and theoretical visions of Marxism and the strategy and tactics of revolution. By the late 1920's, new trends had emerged in Roy's view. These new trends manifested themselves in full during this period. Roy still claimed that his basic ideology was Marxism. 'Socialism, or communism', in Roy's view, 'is not the issue of the day, and socialists and communists should realise that the immediate objective is national independence'.<sup>29</sup> He maintained that bourgeois democratic independence should be the aim of Indian revolution. He held that the Indian National Congress was a progressive organization which could liberate Indian nationalism from British Imperialist power.

In his letters to August Thalheimer, Dehradun, Roy maintained that 'Indian workers are too backward politically to play a completely independent role'.<sup>30</sup> The Indian worker's attempt to establish an independent organization would only serve to isolate them from the anti-colonial struggle. During the early 1920's, M. N. Roy overplayed the maturity of the proletariat to lead the national liberation movement and the socialist revolution. He moved closer to Menshevik ideology. He did not rely on the revolutionary potential of the working class. It showed the nihilistic attitude of Roy. In the early 1920's Roy advocated that the Comintern's goal should be a socialist revolution and not a bourgeois democratic revolution. It should strive to establish a socialist society. In the late 1920's and 30's, he changed his ideological position. His earlier thesis of a socialist revolution, in Roy's view, was unrealistic. He diluted the communist vanguard in a larger democratic and petty bourgeois movement.

Roy proposed the idea that communism should be replaced by the Jacobinism. In 1940, Roy held that Indian communists should 'raise the banner, not of communism, but of Jacobinism'.<sup>31</sup> He considered the French Jacobins as the Marxists of their time. He suggested that the Indian communists follow Jacobin ideology. He regarded the slogan of national democratic revolution ideologically due to petty bourgeois radicalism with Jacobinism as its political expression.<sup>32</sup> M. N. Roy considered the Indian National Congress as an organ of national struggle with the support of the Indian masses. Roy said in 1936: 'My message to the people is to rally in the millions under the flag of the National Congress and fight for the freedom ... we should realise that the National Congress is our common platform'.<sup>33</sup> He considered the Congress as the nation's democratic force which had to free the revolutionary movement for national independence from the leadership of the bourgeoisie, and from Gandhi.<sup>34</sup> He wanted the Congress to get rid of the influence of Gandhism and from that of the bourgeoisie. The Congress, according to him, was a mass nationalist movement. It was not the party of any particular class. In the 1930's Roy considered the Congress as synonymous to a united national front. He was opposed to all attempts of the left forces to create an organization of working people and revolutionary elements independent of the Congress. It would have weakened the congress and go against the ideology of a united front. Roy opposed the formation of the Congress Socialist Party inside the Congress because it would prevent it from accepting as an alternative to Gandhi's programme for a national revolution. It would divide the Congress between the proponents and opponents of socialism.<sup>35</sup>

## Radical Humanism

M. N. Roy, in the closing years of his life, totally revised his outlook. He advocated a new philosophical idea known as Radical Humanism or New Humanism.<sup>36</sup> The principle of Radical Humanism was a total renunciation of Marxism, Roy's own views of the preceding period and rejection of parliamentary democracy. His intolerance of religion and nationalism remained unchanged. This new philosophy was seen by political analysts as 'a resuscitation of the rationalist humanism of the European renaissance and which perhaps explains his fascination for the renaissance motifs'.<sup>37</sup>

He renounced Marxism. He said that

the popular remedies offered by the leftist parties will not serve the purpose. When a country has still to build industries, their nationalisation is evidently a premature proposition. Socialism was conceived as a way out of the crisis of capitalism in advanced society with a high degree of industrialisation and a mature working class. That is very different matter from building up new industries in backward countries where the workers are still half peasants. Socialism today would mean a more or less equal distribution of poverty. Therefore, the main plank in the economic programme of the leftist parties has very little in common with the scientific socialism evolved by Karl Marx under entirely different circumstances.<sup>38</sup>

He considered Marxism as a faulty doctrine which retarded the growth of a free man. He further wrote 'economic interpretation of history is deduced from a wrong interpretation of materialism'.<sup>39</sup>

Roy enumerated the main inadequacies of parliamentary democracy. It reduced civil liberties to a mere formality. Its doctrine of laissez faire perpetuated the exploitation of man by man. It negated the liberating doctrine of individualism.<sup>40</sup> Radical Humanism, according to Roy, stood for the ideals of democratic freedom and economic equality. He said, New Humanism advocates a social reconstruction of the world as a commonwealth and fraternity of free men, by the cooperative endeavour of spiritually emancipated moral men. The common wealth and fraternity of free men 'will not be limited by the boundaries of national state—capitalist, fascist, socialist, communist, or of any other kind which will gradually disappear under the impact of twentieth century Renaissance of Man'.<sup>41</sup>

Organised democracy, in Roy's view, was the alternative to parliamentary democracy. In formal democracy, the individual was reduced to powerless atomised individual citizens. Roy maintained that the pyramidal structure of the state rested on the foundation of organised democracy. The system of recall and referendum ensured that power had to remain vested in the people. The foundation of organised local democracy would enable individuals to exercise direct and effective control of the entire state machinery.<sup>42</sup> In the new set-up, democracy would be placed above party politics. Roy maintained that politics should be devoid of party politics. It should be scientific, moral and rational. In the new democracy, 'party loyalty and party patronage will no longer eclipse intellectual independence, normal integrity and detached wisdom'.<sup>43</sup> He further said that democracy had to recover the humanist tradition of modern culture. Man should be the measure of things. The conduct of public affairs by spiritually free individuals could guarantee the fundamental democratic principle - the greatest good of the greatest number.<sup>44</sup>

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## Periyar: Radical Liberalism

*Niraj Kumar Jha and A. P. S. Chouhan*

Erode Venkatanacker Ramasamy (1879–1973), better known as Periyar (The Great Man) has a complex legacy. He began as a nationalist, worked as a follower of Gandhi, but turned into a firebrand leader of the anti-Brahminism movement in Madras Presidency. He saw the salvation of the country in the destruction of the Congress, the Hindu religion, and Brahmin domination. He declared the goal of the Dravida Kazhaghham, the new avatar of the Justice Party in 1944 to be a ‘sovereign, independent Dravidian Republic’ and called upon his followers to observe Independence Day as a day of mourning representing the enslavement of the southerners.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, he saw himself as a social reformer and then as a Communist and again as a social reformer. Even in his call for social justice, we find a juxtaposition of race, *varna*, caste, class, gender, language, urban-rural divide and Tamil nationalism. On the one side of the divide of inequity, he places the Brahmins, the descendants of northern Aryans and, on the other, the Dravidian *shudras*. However, underlying his untiring campaigns spanning from 1917 to 1973 is a passionate advocacy of human dignity and in this lies his lasting contribution.

Even in more concrete terms, Periyar’s accomplishments are phenomenal. His movement indeed led to the end of Brahmin hegemony in Tamil politics and social life. His mission helped in spreading the message of egalitarianism and scientific temper. Elimination of caste-based social segregation and discriminations, improvement in the condition of women, right of temple entry and management to non-Brahmins, prevention of supremacy of Hindi over Tamil and obtaining Tamil as official language thereby enhancing its status and contributing to its growth, reservations for backward castes in government jobs, which entailed the first amendment in the Indian Constitution, and the emergence of a new leadership in Tamil Nadu from backward castes are solid instances of his revolutionary legacy which are too visible to be ignored.<sup>2</sup>

## Situating Periyar

Understanding Periyar must begin with understanding the person. He was born in a rich business family of the backward caste of Naickers in Erode, a town in the former Madras Presidency (Now Tamil Nadu). He studied only up to the fourth standard and as a young man left home to tour the nation. He even lived the life of an ascetic in Benares. It was here that he learnt the deceptions spread in the name of religion. Back home, he reflected his proficiency in business and became active in public activities. He was the Chairman of the Erode Municipality and an honorary magistrate. He held numerous positions of social importance. He joined the Indian National Congress in 1919 and became a staunch Gandhian. He held the positions of the Secretary and President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee. In each of his positions, he always strove for social justice, and 'service' was his sole motto. In 1924, he led the famous Vaikom Satyagraha in Kerala. The Ezhavas were not allowed to enter the streets around the Vaikom temple because of their 'low birth'. He faced imprisonment but he ultimately succeeded in his satyagraha and was declared the hero of Vaikom. Though he worked in the Congress in an important capacity, he faced caste prejudices within the organisation. He tasted the prejudices in the party first-hand when he was elected the first non-Brahmin President of the Tamil Nadu Congress party. No sooner was the result declared, than a no-confidence motion was brought in on absurd grounds. It was nonetheless defeated. In 1925, when his resolution for the 'communal representation' at the Kancheepuram Congress, which he had been trying to get the party to accept for six years, was disallowed in the open session, he left the Congress once and for all, declaring it as the fortress of Brahmin imperialism.<sup>3</sup>

Thereafter, he associated himself with the Justice Party which he headed in 1938. Six years later, he converted it into the non-political social outfit Dravidar Kazhagam. The original formation has now been sidelined and its offshoots—the DMK, AIADMK, and MDMK—dominate the politics of Tamil Nadu today. Meanwhile, he launched the Self-Respect Movement committed to social reform and social upliftment. The first Self-Respect Movement was held at Chengalpattu in February 1929. In 1932, Periyar travelled extensively within the Soviet Union and was very much impressed by the rationalistic anti-religious egalitarian social order and scientific, technological, and economic advancements therein. After his return from his prolonged exposure to Communism, he started the Self-Respect Communist Party as a political offshoot of the movement. He was imprisoned and the party was later banned. He was warned that if he did not stop working for the Communist Party, all his activities would be banned. He gave up his communist activities to be able to continue with the Self-Respect Movement but his ideas carried their influence.

Periyar cannot be understood without referring to the colonial context. The colonization of India exposed her to the renascent spirit of Europe. For a civilization, ancient but moribund, the encounter was overwhelming. The vigour of their overseas rulers and their modern ways were eye-openers for the enlightened Indians of the early colonial phase. The Indians who regarded themselves as proud descendants of an ancient civilization were not to submit to the cultural supremacy of the West. Instead, they raised serious concerns about the state of their own culture

and civilization. Many rose to the occasion to redeem what they considered as the lost glory of their ancient civilization. The great project endeavoured to entwine the essence of modernity with what they considered good in Indian traditions. In fact traditions were tested on the bases of rationalism and humanism—the twin interdependent fundamentals of modernity. Their endeavours and the accomplishments are known as the Indian Renaissance. The next stage was the propagation of Indian nationhood. The phenomenon of nation, like modernity and related to it, emerged in Europe. It was essentially an ethno-militaristic phenomenon which substituted religion to a great extent in the new rationalist world view of Europe. The phenomenon seeped into colonies too through the empires. In India, the concept of nationhood was also combined with the civilizational mission of self-redemption and with the passage of time a new nation was born but with an ancient spirit.

Renaissance and nation in the beginning were upper caste elitist projects. Nationalism which germinated in the course of the reformist spell of colonial India later subsumed the reform process and also spread to the emerging and expanding middle and lower middle classes. But its appeal was not universal.<sup>4</sup> Civilizational redemption carried hardly any meaning to the vast majority of the population of this land. Imperial exploitation, oppression, humiliation and national pride mattered little to those, who led even otherwise, lives of gross degradation and deprivation. Nonetheless, the philosophical foundations of these projects, i.e., rationalism and humanism raised concerns which though not addressed by these projects did awaken people of even those sections who had suffered a dehumanised existence for centuries. The essence of this awakening was the worth and dignity of human beings as such. For many the struggle for dignity and liberty became, and very legitimately so, more important as a social struggle than the anti-imperial struggle.

Periyar was certainly one of the greatest champions who raised the issue of this fundamental freedom. The problem of colonial subjugation was secondary for most Indians who were at the lower rung of the hierarchical caste order of India. The exploitation and oppression perpetrated by the ancient social regimen was immediate and an excruciatingly painful experience. Large numbers faced a scriptural or religious sort of apartheid. Periyar himself faced such caste prejudices despite being an influential Congress leader of the South. Despite the fact that he belonged to a wealthy family, he established himself as a great social and religious reformer and was a very important Congress leader. Yet, he could not avoid being treated as one whose presence or contact was considered polluting or defiling. And he found every move for the empowerment of the depressed castes blocked by a very active and powerful lobby of Brahmins.

In this mission, he did not appeal in the name of God, as has been the practice among most of the great leaders of the world, rather he dismissed the concept of God in the most forthright manner. Neither did he exhort the people in the name of some other lofty ideals. He relied mostly on the faculty of reason possessed by everyone and for this he indulged himself till his last in arguments with people, provoking them to come out of their stupor not only by his words but also with his deeds. He is rightfully addressed as the Socrates of East, as his ways bear a striking resemblance to Socrates.



He was also very impressed by the achievements of the West. He keenly observed that their advances in science and technology had made them the masters of the world and freed them of many of the miseries inflicted by nature. He found their rational orientation, instilled in them by their schooling system, the reason behind their advancement. The western philosophical traditions starting with Socrates and passing through Ingersoll, Broadlaw and Herbert Spencer had strengthened his conviction and even Indian rationalist traditions propagated by such greats like Gautama Buddha and Thiruvalluvar had inspired him and he took on the mantle of completing their unfinished task. His contemporary, Jawaharlal Nehru, who was also an unwavering rationalist, also won his admiration.

Another very powerful phenomenon of his times, Communism, also affected his thinking profoundly. He was very impressed by the rationalistic and anti-religious approach of the movement and the economic development with egalitarianism achieved in the Soviet Union.

## Periyar's Theorization

Periyar was a rationalist with all his being and objectivity was his avowed means of analysis. Though his tools were scientific and universalistic, his concerns related to his milieu. He was deeply anguished by an imposed and historically institutionalised order of Brahminic hegemony in the name of religion, caste and spirituality which dehumanised the overwhelming majority of Dravidian peoples in the South. He took upon himself the mantle of undoing injustices and laying the foundation of a fair and egalitarian society. But it was a complicated mission. The fight was against something which was internalised and accepted by the suffering people as natural. The battle lines he drew and the wars he fought were more within the minds of the individuals and their collective consciousness. He was perturbed by the miserable existence of the Dravidians in southern India, particularly in Tamil Nadu. He fought for their emancipation but his ideas indeed have wider applications as well implications.

Rationalism, the very basis of Periyar's principles, was however not impersonal. His appeal for social justice was based on concrete rationalism but as it had to be a missionary campaign in order to defeat deep-rooted injustices perpetrated by a deeply entrenched caste which derived sanctity from a fossilised religion, his approach to the issue was very personal. The war he waged was not abstract. It was direct and very personal. He proclaimed:

I, E. V. Ramasamy, have taken upon myself the mission of making the Dravidian society acquire awareness and become a society of dignity like the societies elsewhere in the world.

I consider myself qualified enough to carry on the mission insofar as I am attached to nothing else, perceive concepts and devise schemes on the basis of rationalism. I consider that by itself it is enough for any one who takes up a social mission.<sup>5</sup>

He also personified the ideas he professed. For instance, he propagated atheism to be a great personal virtue. 'If one professes that there is no God, he should then have godly attributes

about himself. ... he should be aware of the causes behind the phenomenal realities of the world? ..., to whom is there no God? There is no God to the truly enlightened. He should have the end of all philosophy. No one would be prejudiced against such an enlightened man. He would also not hate anyone. Anyone who hates him is an idiot.<sup>7</sup> And he demanded that a true atheist should not be hated; he is to be appreciated and followed.<sup>6</sup>

Generally, normative theorizations seek an axiomatic proposition to be developed into a system of thought in a geometrical fashion. This fundamental proposition is either deductive or inductive. Related to this is another aspect of such theorization, that is related to the position of the theorist. There are armchair theoreticians who construct societies in their imagination only, which have little to do with real societies and real peoples. Periyar was not an armchair theorist, who conjectured new worlds in his/her (logical) imagination. He derived his ideas from practice. What he believed in he practiced and what he practiced he believed. He reached his rationalist worldview without taking any recourse to books or research.<sup>7</sup> He derived his principles from observing life.<sup>8</sup> At the other end, there are practitioner-theoreticians who are so obsessive about their immediate surroundings that their visions do not go beyond the immediate. Periyar's ideas were indeed derived from experiences - experiences of a very active and effective political leader and social reformer. But his derivations were based on objectivity. He surmounted the follies of both science and activism with considerable success.

Many positivists were also prophets of utopia. Periyar was free from this predilection of scholarship too. He did not provide any visions of utopia. His message was hard-hitting and realistic. He did believe in Communism. But his notion of Communism was rooted solidly in the ground and deeply imbedded in the specificities of the Tamil land. What he wanted from people was very simple—redemption of their humanity. The idea was crystal clear. There was no intimidating philosophy, confusing mystical discourse, jargonised theory building or a goal of an unattainable utopia. The clarity of Periyar's objective made it sound very simple but its actualisation was a process of colossal magnitude. The mission had to confront millennia of misgivings, prejudices and practices. Nonetheless the magnitude of the mission was well matched by his untiring vigour, immense courage and unwavering conviction.

There are rare combinations of activism and scholarship which go beyond the ephemeral and the immediate. Periyar belonged to that genre of activist-philosophers. Besides, clarity of thought, commitment to objective and making rationality an article of faith and basis of his messianic appeal make him stand out even in that rare genre of activist-philosophers.

## Abolition of Caste

The fundamental problem confronting Periyar was thus the denial of basic dignity to the large majority of humanity around him. And basic to his philosophy was the view that all men and women should live with dignity and have equal opportunities to develop their physical, mental and moral faculties. In order to achieve this, he wanted to put an end to all kinds of unjust discriminations and promote social justice and a rational outlook.<sup>9</sup> The problem was not related to

outright physical subjugation but to an order of oppression garbed in spirituality and religiosity. The order he sought to encounter was Brahminism. This holistic order entailed a hierarchical social system, in which economic vocation, social relations and a number of privileges and restrictions were associated with castes located in that hierarchy. The worst aspect of this order was the practice of pollution and purity which were so extreme that even the sight and shadows of the outcastes, the lowest in the social order, were considered polluting. In this order, the Brahmins occupied the highest position, were considered the purest, and commanded a supreme position not only ritually but in every respect. Ironically all castes were graded superior or inferior in relation to each other except the Brahmin sitting at the top of the heap. And this order as such was sanctified as a divine creation. Periyar himself, though a wealthy man, a man of influence as he worked for the Congress as a leader, suffered humiliation because of his caste even within the set up of that national organisation, the greatest platform of the national movement. He was treated as a being that defiled his surrounding by his presence and the articles he used. Casteism flourished not only in traditional social set-ups and upcoming political organisations but also in factories and trade unions. Even the progressive Marxists were not able to address this deeper malaise of Indian social relations. He fought these discriminations by exposing the conceptual hollowness and deception behind them and by making the fight his personal mission. He asked, 'A sizable population today remains as untouchables, and another sizable population exists in the name of *shudras* and the serfs, coolies and menials. Who wants an independence that cannot help change these things? Who wants religion, scriptures and god, which cannot bring about a change in this sphere?'<sup>10</sup>

The fundamental problem had its ramifications - the moral and material backwardness, social schisms, and mutual hatred among people, which made society weak and caused untold miseries. He theorised that the main reason behind social malaises was casteism, which was imposed on the people of the South by the Aryans for their own benefit. The people were naïve, did not realise the deception of the Aryans and became victims of their divisive designs and domination. The system was sanctified by the basic Aryan scriptures—the Vedas. The principle was the Varnashrama Dharma. According to this the society was divided into four Varnas, viz. Brahmins, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra and were assigned specific social functions. Brahmins, the offspring of the Aryans, became the self appointed legislators of Indian society. They wrote the Vedas, in fact, for their own benefit and declared them to be the words of God. This was a ploy to avoid comprehension of the truth based on reason, reality, experiences and experiments. They forbade inquiry, and spread the canard of sin and hell to frighten people into subjugation. The Brahmins assigned a superior position to themselves in this order; the other Varnas were extended a hierarchical division among themselves. There emerged castes within Varnas with the distinctions of superiority and inferiority. In this arrangement the society got irresolutely divided. The root of this division was Brahmin supremacy and Periyar decided to eliminate this supremacy.<sup>11</sup>

Periyar made it sufficiently clear that he was against Brahminism and not the Brahmins. To him, Brahminism was the basis of the caste system which justified social inequality, untouchability and many other problems. His prime goal was the elimination of the caste system which

he found against the principles of human civilization and self respect.<sup>12</sup> It did all these things on the basis of divine ordination. He raised the fundamental issues of human dignity in a rational manner to counter these social evils. His exhortations were straight and hard-hitting.

A bunch of rascals have enslaved us. They have imposed upon us a certain system that brands us their slaves.<sup>13</sup>

Your very birth is ignoble of course. The reason for that is ignoble about you is that you have accepted the status of the *shudra*. At least hereafter, you should feel ashamed of it. It is not harmful to die for the sake of undoing the name of *shudras* instead of procreating in the name of the *shudras*.<sup>14</sup>

How long hence are we going to remain *shudras* in this world? How long are we going to allow our children to be called the *shudras*? Aren't we supposed to do something to eradicate the dishonour and become human at least during this age of freedom and scientific temper?<sup>15</sup>

When stained with the excreta of a man or an animal we wash our hands with water. However, they insist upon taking a bath if they came into contact with the body of a person or even if the dress of a man brushes against them. Is there anything human about such human beings?<sup>16</sup>

They lead the cow; take dung and the urine of cows to sanctify the temple. But if a man enters the same temple, they consider the temple to have been defiled and arrange for sanctification. Are they reasonable men?<sup>17</sup>

We should eradicate casteism in the name of the Brahmin and the pariah getting rid of God, getting rid of all the scriptures.<sup>18</sup>

He also attacked the caste distinctions among non-Brahmins using only logic to prove his point. 'Though each caste ascribes superiority to itself on solid bases, all their arguments only serve to show that all of them together are inferior to the Brahmins. Otherwise, all the evidences they cite do not serve any intended purpose. This is the picture of reality as such.'<sup>19</sup> This, according to him, meant that people of castes other than the Brahmins belonged to inferior castes, and were untouchables. This deprived them of certain civil rights on par with the Brahmins and made them slaves to the Brahmins. According to Periyar, this discrimination meant that the birth of persons of other castes lacked honour since it may be the result of prostitution or cross-caste union. And he gave the clarion call to do or die.

The untouchable should not go within the sight of the Brahmins. He should not walk about the streets. He should not take water from the pond. What social justice is there in such restrictions? If God does not bring destruction on such a society, how could he be merciful? For how long do you desire such oppressed, suppressed society to be patient, non-violent and passive? It is better to die fighting such social evils rather than live in a society that is the scene of such inhuman acts and attitudes.<sup>20</sup>

His approach was to tackle the root of the social problems. For untouchability, the worst form of human degradation, he analysed the evil and traced its origin. Untouchability, he found, was based on religion and religion found its base in scriptures which again claimed to be the words of God. Attacking the very root of human degradation, he rejected the trio of God, scriptures and religion in totality. Periyar did not stand for cosmetic changes. For instance he did not advocate equality of castes in jobs or in social positions as the only solution to caste discrimination.<sup>21</sup> He sought a complete normative and physical transformation to root out caste-based discrimination.

## Women's Liberation

Caste was not his sole concern. Among the many issues he touched upon, gender was a major one. For the subjugation of women, he said, they themselves were responsible as they did not feel that they deserved total freedom. And they did not suffer alone from their own bondage. Men lost their honesty and freedom too, since they had families dependent on them. They had to assume unnecessary responsibility and suffer needless anxieties. But men didn't see reason. They had enslaved women, devised concepts like chastity and categorised women who were 'unchaste' as prostitutes but they themselves did not observe such norms with respect to conjugal conduct. Whatever and wherever women were, they were monitored by men. Only when a woman was able to attend to the business of her life independent of a husband or a son could they attain the position they deserved.<sup>22</sup>

In fact his approach towards women's issues was quite gendered as he viewed the problem as a separate one. His depiction of the state of women made it clear that women's liberation was independent of the larger plans of liberation.

The way man treats women is much worse than the way landlords treat servants and the high-caste treat the low-caste ... Women in India experience worse suffering, humiliation and slavery in all spheres than even the Untouchables ... A woman is for the male, a cook for himself; a maid for his house; a breeding farm for his family and beautifully decorated doll to satisfy his aesthetic sense. Do enquire whether they have been used for any other purpose. The slavery of women is only because of men. The belief of men that God created man with superior powers and woman to be slave for him, and woman's traditional acceptance of it as truth are alone responsible for the growth of women's slavery.<sup>23</sup>

Women were denied education so that they did not have the ability and intelligence to question their slavery. However, the most important factor for women's subjugation, Periyar held, was that they lacked the right to property. In fact men treated women as their property. It was for this purpose that they devised the principle of chastity exclusively for women.<sup>24</sup>

Qualities like freedom and courage were claimed as 'masculine' thus characterising male superiority as a natural phenomenon. Women would never be free unless they put an end to male

domination and they could not depend on men for the same. ‘The pretence of men that they respect women and that they strive for their freedom is only a ruse to deceive women. Have you ever seen anywhere a jackal freeing the hen and the lamb or the cat freeing the rats, or capitalists freeing the workers?’<sup>25</sup>

Women must get rid of their slavish mentality and they should realise that being civilised was not about dressing fashionably or looking good but living on equal terms with men. He sought rigorous education in rational thinking for women, changes in the custom of marriage and birth control for the sake of women’s liberation. He considered the terms, ‘husband’ and ‘wife’ inappropriate and called them companions and partners. He also rejected the words, ‘wedding’ or ‘marriage’ and termed it as a ‘contract for companionship in life.’<sup>26</sup>

## Rural–Urban Divide

Periyar’s propagation of social justice touched another inequity plaguing India—the urban-rural divide, or what is often today referred to as the divide between India and Bharat. The fact is that economic relations between town and country dwellers are based on unequal exchanges and while villagers do back-breaking labour and survive on the bare minimum, the city dwellers exploit their produce. Periyar equated the status of villagers to that of the Panchamas (untouchables) in the Varnasharama (caste) system, wherein the high castes flourished by exploiting the toiling low caste people. The notion that *shudras* (backward Dravidians) and the Panchamas were created to serve the high caste Brahmins was applicable to villagers too as it was believed that villages existed to serve towns. He in fact advocated that villages should be eliminated and even the word ‘village’ deleted from dictionaries. Villages, bereft of bare amenities like hospitals, school and parks where ninety per cent of people resided, were hardly places worth living. All the schemes for village development were mere hogwash.

The way out was complete urbanization. He sought newer methods in industry and reorganization of agriculture and total mechanization of all feasible agricultural activities. He wanted the farmers to be brought under co-operative bodies so that the produce could be shared equally by all of them. Villages must be linked together and developed as towns with schools, hospitals, parks, cinema theatres, drama halls, recreation centres, libraries etc. and there should be a magistrate and market for securing all commodities. He also stated that agriculture should be supplanted by small-scale industries located in the vicinity of such clusters.

## Rationalism

The root cause of this human bondage and suffering, he found, was the lack of a rational outlook among the people. ‘The reason for the present chaos and deterioration in our country is that we have been hindered from enquiry and repressed from the use of rationality.’<sup>27</sup> The Tamilian outlook was largely based on their perceived ancient wisdom. They assumed that they

should be what they were two thousand years before. They rationalised their actions on incomprehensible bases. They justified their acts in the name of Gods, writings in scriptures and sayings of sages. This was unlike the West where people were marching ahead, exploring new frontiers of knowledge, inventing new technologies. Their progress was based on their future-oriented rationalist approach. He differentiated scientific approach from the traditional belief systems. His one such illustration made his point clear. He said that Gods, religions, preachers and scriptures all for instance told people that an act of kindness to the poor guaranteed a place in heaven, whereas modern science would work for finding the causes of poverty and try to eliminate it. Here he found, that in the name of scholarship the same old ideas were reiterated. The mode of education was such that it forbade new thinking and forced the learner to accept the old uncritically. In the end this kind of education blunted the faculty of reasoning among people here.<sup>28</sup>

Periyar asked people not to accept anything without ratiocination. One should not accept anything only because it is old, customary, habitual, generally accepted, based on hearsay, appeared mysterious, magical or divine, spoken by some saint, or claimed to be said by God.<sup>29</sup> The distinctive aspect of a human being was reason and s/he must apply his/her this faculty in order to lead a life which could be called proper.<sup>30</sup> In this process, he made rejection of God the fundamental application of rationalism. He said, 'I have examined thoughts fibre by fibre, maintaining the attitude of a dispassionate enquirer into Truth. I could not achieve any perspective of God.'<sup>31</sup> He found that the concept of God drained energy out of Indians. He was very particular about not accepting anything on hearsay without applying one's own reason, which, he maintained, resulted in disappointment and misery. He said, 'God has never revealed himself to anyone. God is only taught and projected to the uninitiated by those who claim enlightenment.'<sup>32</sup> He conjectured that worship in the old human societies as well as the modern ones had its origin from fear and dread of the unknown natural phenomena. He believed that a rational approach was the key for social emancipation and crucial for development. He surmised that economic development was possible only through rationalistic thinking.

Periyar started the Self-Respect Movement with the objective of guiding people to redeem their deserved place in society. Periyar stated, 'The aim of a genuine Self-Respect Movement is to change whatever appears to be adverse to man's feelings of self-respect. That which enslaves you to customs of the world, to orthodoxy, to the rigours of religion, contrary to your rationality and awareness of truths of experience, is what I shall describe as antagonistic to self-respect. This all-important awareness of self-respect based on feelings of dignity and indignity, may be deemed man's birth right, as the word 'man' is itself a word based on dignity. Therefore, he who is called 'man' embodies dignity in himself, and only through his right to this dignity, reveals his human qualities. That is why self-esteem is his birth-right. Man must cast aside his feelings of inferiority, the feeling that he is less important than other beings, and attain self-confidence and self-respect, it will automatically set right politics, nationalism and also theology.'<sup>33</sup> The Self-Respect Movement was aimed at eradication of caste based discrimination. The objectives of the movement were the establishment of a casteless society based on complete equality of the masses, eradication of all social evils and freeing society from the shackles of superstition and

blind faith in God and religion, promotion of educational and employment opportunities for women, popularization of self-respect marriages conducted without any Brahmin priest and propagation of rationalism.<sup>34</sup> Conceptually self-respect was the basis for ensuring equality in society. He wished every non-Brahmin to realise that they had their own self-respect to maintain in all their dealings with their fellow-beings. If a man realised that he was equal to all other men and that he had the right of equality with all other men, then he became a self-respecting person. He also wished women to have this self-respect.<sup>35</sup>

## Revolution and Communism

Another aspect of Periyar's thought was his belief in Communism. He exhorted people to be unafraid of revolution and ready themselves for the next change. He said that revolutionary changes in the affairs of men had been a continuous process since time immemorial. He cited numerous contemporary changes. He cited the abolition of a large number of kingships, which were treated as divine institutions earlier and people feared speaking ill of kings. Similarly in India some people were regarded as agents of God on earth and certain others not fit to be seen or even touched. The disappearance of untouchability indeed brought about a revolutionary change in society. Holy books also ordained girls to be married before puberty banning child marriage legally was also a social revolution. This was also a religious revolution in that the gods of the *puranas* (mythologies) had become the laughing stock of the people and so did the religion propagating them.<sup>36</sup> He moved to exhort people for the final stage of change.

'Because of these revolutions in man's ideas and attitudes, we have come to question about the need for kings, priests, castes, religions and Gods as well. The present century has taken on a more revolutionary cry. People are now questioning the very existence of rich people, capitalists and tilted barons. Why should these people exist? We are trying to see how far these parasites are responsible for the misery of the proletariat - the poor of our land.'<sup>37</sup>

He, however, adapted the ideology to his own vision and mission. He merged the Self-Respect Movement with Communism and founded the Self Respect Communist Party. The action plan of the Party included the nationalization of all industries, railway, banks, waterways, all agricultural lands, forests, botanical wealth, community farming, writing off all debts of peasants, limiting the working hours to eight hours, enhancing the wages and improving working conditions, and providing amenities like access to libraries.<sup>38</sup> He later disbanded the party in favour of the Self-Respect Movement but his ideas remained influenced by Communism. He iterated that God, religion and law support the prevalence of the distinction between the rich and the poor, the existence of caste hierarchy and the cruelty of supremacy and servility. Periyar vowed to destroy the government, justice, morality and customs that permitted them.<sup>39</sup> Periyar explained the Dravidar Kazhagam was an institution of the workers. Every Dravidian to him was a worker because they worked for the others and had been through the ages, servants as per the scriptures of Manu. All men, whether a cart man, scavenger, street cleaner, washer man, barber, potter, tiller, carpenter, cobbler, weaver or anyone who lived by the dint of manual labour were



workers for him. The Brahmins and caste Hindus were not labourers as they did not do any manual labour. Only the *shudras* did and they were the Dravidians. The movement of the Dravidians was therefore the movement of the workers.<sup>40</sup>

He offered an economic explanation for women's subjugation. It was with the advent of private property that the concept of marriage came into existence. Private property created the problem of its inheritance. Men would have thought of bequeathing his property to his own progeny alone which necessitated marriage.<sup>41</sup>

Periyar believed that only if women, workers and agricultural labourers all joined in the revolution could there be communist government in India.<sup>42</sup> He however sought the revolution by revolutionising the thinking habits of people.<sup>43</sup> He said that the end of right to property would be the end of God. There would be no place for God, religion, or scriptures in a nation of socialism where property rights did not exist. Intellectual ability assumed the position of prominence in such a nation. There was neither superior nor inferior and no professional hierarchy. All individuals were equal and paid the same wages. The nature of work done alone was different and whoever assumed a higher office assumed greater responsibilities.<sup>44</sup>

He believed that Communism would hold the whole world in its grip ensuring international peace and prosperity.<sup>45</sup> To him, Communism's objective was making a family, a fraternity of all people of all nations in the world. The wealth of the whole world would be the common property of all in the family. Every member of the family would be equal partner in the larger family.<sup>46</sup>

Periyar also championed a socialist agenda. The resolution adopted in the Eighteenth State Conference of the Dravidar Kazhagam in December 1948 at Thuthukkuti called for the nationalization of all service industries like the generation of electricity, mines, transport, airways and waterways which were essential to the welfare of the common man; fixing ceilings on property holding in the form of lands, houses and cash as the first step in the process of promoting a socialist state and reducing the wages of the higher income group at the same time increasing the minimum wages to the workers in India.<sup>47</sup>

## The World of the Future

Periyar did have a vision for the future. He said that a rationalist deduced from the past, examined the present and constructed the future on a scientific basis. Nature had provisioned for people in plenty and in modern times mass production had resulted in a glut in markets and yet millions of people did not have the means to meet their basic needs. Periyar rued that though many extraordinary men had claimed to have realised God and were even associated with godhood, none of them could find any solution for the miseries of the people. It was only because people were unable to dissociate themselves from God and religion and see the affairs of the world independently. With rationalist thought and science, the future world would be reshaped. The future was a socialist world in which there would be no private property. In the future plutocrats would not be there to dominate the people; technology would free people from the drudgeries of hard labour and demeaning jobs (like scavenging), slavery would be unknown,

one would not live on the mercy of another and women would not want special protection, safeguards and support. With only an hour or two of work, it would be possible for the people to produce the goods they need. The rest of the time would be available for leisure to indulge in fine arts or simple pleasures. Communal life would have reached such heights that the pains and trials of some citizens would be the pains and trials of the whole community. Co-operative effort and unitary feeling would have wiped out all differences and discriminations. Wars and armies would be unknown in the cooperative world state of the future.<sup>48</sup>

## Humanism

The common thread which joined Periyar's Self-Respect Movement, his advocacy of rationality and his championing of Communism was his essential humanism. To him humanity alone was the supreme value. He said, 'Forget God; think of man.' And the most human act to him was not to cause any suffering to anyone and help fellow beings. It was the very basis of community living. When man chose to live in communities giving up his barbaric way of living, he ought to have sought mutual support, through which each other's life could be bettered. He further thought that inequalities must be removed in order to ensure a humane society. The only means for achieving equality of all was to form a rational society where there was no place for any superstitions.<sup>49</sup>

He opposed any sort of violence in human relations. He reasoned that it was in the nature of the tiger to growl and kill other animals. But violence was not natural to man. On the contrary to be human was to be aware of it. It is to the extent one lived without causing suffering to the other that one became a rationalist creature. He advocated that one had to protect oneself from personal suffering but at the same time desist from causing suffering.<sup>50</sup> 'If I were to encourage violent struggle, only the Dravidian would spring upon each other's throat. None of the Aryans who instigate violence would be touched in the least.'<sup>51</sup> He was in favour of results achieved through peaceful rational and loving means even if they were delayed because of the very process. He firmly believed that only such revolutions without any violence involved would ensure real and permanent welfare to the people.<sup>52</sup>

According to Periyar, humanism consisted of respecting the sentiments of the other. There were bound to be divergent opinions and it was not necessary to accept all but no one could be deprived of the right of the expression.<sup>53</sup> He attached great importance to good human behaviour and conduct. He reiterated that one should behave or conduct himself in the same manner in which he expected others to conduct or behave themselves towards him.<sup>54</sup>

Lastly Periyar's respect for all individuals and their reason was reflected in his statement, 'I have told you whatever I could perceive. I request you to accept whatever appears to be right to you and act accordingly. If there is anything wrong in whatever I have said. I request you to pity my ignorance.'<sup>55</sup> Though he worked for the Dravidians, his concerns were universal. He clarified that he held no attachment towards any particular country, people or language and that all his activities were guided by his love of humanity and the need to serve it.<sup>56</sup>

## Periyar's Legacy: A Critique

Periyar aspired and worked for a new society where rationalism would rule the roost. Rationalism to him was freedom. He was very enthusiastic about science and technology which he felt made people's life easier. He talked of what fundamentally could be construed as self-empowerment. For this matter he was very particular about the prevailing notions and terminology. He never intended to treat a social malaise symptomatically but worked for rooting out the problem and all other systems supporting that evil.

Despite his insistence on rationality and humanism, Periyar presented all the values he championed in his own life. He, in fact, personified rationality, atheism and the cause of justice. He tried but failed to separate his persona with his ideas and his towering persona indeed subsumed the values he imparted. This was perhaps necessary for the wider appeal of his ideas. However its implication in the long term was counterproductive. He was now viewed as a prophet.<sup>57</sup> A prophet as an analogy reflected the personality cult and reduced rationalism to revelation. One author presented him as an *avatar*, 'The old saying is that whenever impropriety came to reign supreme, God will manifest himself in human form and restore propriety in the world. It is in a way thus that Periyar was born to defeat the impropriety of vested interests and to endow the illiterate and irrational common man with reason and self respect so that he can walk with a head held high.'<sup>58</sup> The message was subtle and unintended but it had its repercussion. In this rationality was not an approach to be cultivated by each and every individual but a gospel to be told and believed. The Movement's fall from grace to become part of the personality cult of Tamil Nadu was perhaps the logical culmination of this approach.

At the second level, even for a rationalist movement, if the social bases of change and mobilization were a parochial or pre-modern collective identity, the mission itself stood negated. Though he proclaimed to attack brahminical practices alone, in reality it seemed to be against Brahmins as individuals. It was testified by the flight of a large number of Brahmins from the state. The caste system he sought to eliminate was in fact reinforced. Like the 'new class' of the Communist world, Tamil Nadu also saw the rise of the 'new caste' or 'neo-Brahmins' negating freedom in newer fashions. The personification of ideas and primordialism in social mobilization went against the modern makeover of Tamil society and politics.

Social relations according to Marxism were based on the mode of production. Periyar's analysis of caste-oppression as an Aryan import does not fit the bill. Moreover tracing an ancient and unconfirmed causation<sup>59</sup> and racial social base of an unjust order was not justified. The fact that displacing Brahmins from positions of power in Tamil Nadu simply did not result in a just society has proven the fallacy in Periyar's approach.

Godhood is a very high level of abstraction, and it is functional. It is not apparently comprehensible. It is the fulcrum of religiosity which has been a major tool of social organisation so far. For instance Mahatma Gandhi defined God as truth. It is such a high level of abstraction that it sounds almost superstitious and indeed for a layman it remains a superstition, because s/he believes in the concept without knowing its import and his/her conduct in this respect does not conform to the real meaning of Godhood. The fact remains that if Godhood has been used as a justification of status-quo so it has been employed as an inspiration for revolutions.

Nonetheless, Periyar raised issues which are equally relevant today. The problem of dignity is one such vital issue. The point to ponder, which Periyar raised so forcefully, is that the oppression is often self-inflicted. It is the result of ignorance, fear, greed and inaction. One is in fact down because of one's own vices. Domination and oppression is the product of the belief system rather than of actual social relations. Slavery which is the highest state of domination and oppression is more metaphysical than physical. His great contribution lies in fighting against oppression and for the sovereignty of individual human beings. He attacked the metaphysics of oppression with aplomb but he left his job half-done. He failed to provide a credible philosophy of freedom—a philosophy ensuring and sustaining freedom.

## Note and References

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3. K. Veeramani, *Periyar and his ideologies*, (Chennai: Periyar Self-respect Propaganda Institution, 1979), p. 4.
4. For instance these words of Periyar can be cited, 'Is it not shameful on the part of such a country to aspire for Swaraj, Dominion Status or complete Independence? Politicians may say that untouchability will go if we get Swaraj. To them I say not merely Swaraj but Dharma Raj, Rama Raj, Harischandra Raj and the Raj of the very Gods—these were responsible for originating and organizing this blot on humanity.' See *Speech*, 'Revolt'—Volume 1. No. 6, Dated 12 December 1928, Erode.
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47. N. Velusamy, *op. cit.*, pp. 171–173.
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49. *Ibid.*, p. 181.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 181–182.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 173.
52. K. Veeramani, *op. cit.*, pp. 11–12.
53. N. Velusamy, *op. cit.*, p. 192.
54. K. Veeramani, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
55. His prophet like demeanour, though in opposition to Godhood, must have been certainly irksome to many, as it emerges in this statement of Ravikumar, an activist—theoretician of the Dalit movement, ‘Periyar’s eccentricities seem to have provoked people to turn more zealously to religion. Tamil Nadu produces the largest number of mass circulation magazines devoted to spreading bhakti and astrology.’ Quoted in S. Anand: ‘Iconoclast, Or Lost Idol?’ *Outlook*, New Delhi, 20 September 2004, p. 22.
56. Velusamy, *op. cit.*, p. 155.
57. Periyar’s use of history is problematic. To quote from Adiya Nigam, ‘He ... produces a narrative of Indian history as one of the perennial struggle between the subjugated Dravidas and the subjugating Aryans. His search leads him to the discovery of the Dravida Self, which he occasionally expands to include the *sudras* and the *atisudras* of the north—an untenable exercise in terms of the canons of history in whose name the fight was being conducted. But then, there is precisely the point—it was what it has always been. It was a narrative already constituted by and therefore subordinate to the political demands of the present.’ ‘Secularism, Modernity, Nation; Epistemology of the Dalit Critique,’ *EPW* Special Articles, 25 November 2000s, <http://epw.org.in>

# Ambedkar: Constitutionalism and State Structure

*Mabendra Prasad Singh*

## Background: Political Mobilization

The 1980s may be regarded as the phase of Indian electoral democracy that witnessed two major developments: the fruition of the process of federalisation of a predominantly parliamentary regime and the political arrival of the *dalit* citizens. It is not my argument that these two trends were entirely new in Indian politics. The antecedents of both may well be traced back to the entire post-Independence decades. However, it was by the 1980s and later that these two processes crossed the thresholds of new moments of efficacy in the politics of the Indian nation. Ambedkar is a posthumous *purodha* (high priest) of the *dalit* political assertion and arrival.

There have been two models of political mobilization and participation of the section of the Hindu society variously called the *panchmang* (the fifth class beyond the four Varnas of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras), most depressed classes, scheduled castes, Harijans (by Mahatma Gandhi), and *dalits* (by Ambedkarites) through the ages. We may delineate here two models of politics, i.e., the Harijan model of political mobilization and the *dalit* model of political participation. If the Harijan identity formation and Jagjivan Ram in Congress politics since the mid-1930s represented the first model, the Bahujan-*dalit* identity formation and Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar since the late 1920s represented the second model.<sup>1</sup>

With minor variations, both Ambedkar and Jagjivan Ram initially conformed to the sanskritization-cum-Westernization model of social change and political participation. Ram began as a liberal and Gandhian brand of Congressman who believed in a secular and modern Hindu identity and never wavered from the Congress path of national freedom struggle against the British colonial rule. Ambedkar also began with a secular and modern Hindu identity, but subsequently graduated to a more radical assertion of *dalit* political identity, and after much

soul-searching embraced Buddhism in 1956. Apparently, under the belief that in the context of the Indian, especially Hindu society, social reform with a focus on the emancipation of untouchables must precede political independence, Ambedkar took his political plunge in organizations and activities of radical Hindu social reform. In his submission to the Simon Commission in the late 1920s and during his participation in the first Round Table Conference on Indian constitutional reforms in January 1931 (boycotted by the Congress and Gandhi), Ambedkar supported separate electorates for untouchables (like the one for the Muslims). Ambedkar changed this stance only in the face of a fast unto death by Gandhi and settled for reservation in the general electorate meant for Hindus.

Ambedkar has written intensively and extensively on the basic structure of the Hindu society as well as the fundamental structure of the Indian state. Since the recent spurt in Ambedkar and *dalit* studies has already produced tomes on the first dimension, this paper purports to discuss Ambedkar's contributions to the making of the Indian Constitution and the praxis of the Indian state.

### *Constituent Assembly Entrée*

The Constituent Assembly of India was elected in July 1946 under the British Cabinet Mission Statement of May 16. The desire of the Congress nationalists for a directly elected Constituent Assembly was rejected in favour of an indirect election by the Provincial Legislative Assemblies elected on the basis of a franchise restricted by educational and property qualifications that gave voting right to about 25 per cent of Indians under the Government of India Act, 1935. Elections were held for 296 seats from British Indian provinces under the direct rule of the Crown. The remaining 93 seats were allotted to the Indian princely states holding suzerainty under the paramountcy of the British Crown. By agreement between the elected component of the Constituent Assembly and its prospective princely part, at least 50 per cent of the latter's representatives were to be elected by assemblies in princely states wherever they existed and the remainder could be nominated by the rulers.

It was such a Constituent Assembly that Ambedkar entered as the leader of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation, a party he founded in 1930. This party could elect only two representatives to the Constituent Assembly, one from the Central Provinces and the other, Ambedkar himself, from Bengal. There were four independent scheduled caste members from Bengal besides Ambedkar. I could not ascertain how many scheduled caste members were elected on Congress tickets, except that Jagjivan Ram, President of the All-India Depressed Classes League, was there as a nominee of the Indian National Congress. Congress as a party commanded the overwhelming majority in the Indian part of the Constituent Assembly, especially following the partition of India under the Mountbatten Plan of 3 June 1947. In addition to being a party leader, Ambedkar's eminence at that time also rested on the fact that he was an ex-member of the Governor-General's Executive Council.<sup>2</sup>

### *Work in Various Preparatory Committees*

In pursuance of paragraph 20 of the Cabinet Mission's Statement of 16 May 1946, the Constituent Assembly resolved to constitute an Advisory Committee consisting of not more than 72 members who might include persons who were not members of the Assembly on a resolution moved by Govind Ballabh Pant (the Premier of the United Provinces and elected on a general seat) on 24 January 1947. Ambedkar was a member of this all-important committee of the Assembly chaired by the President, Rajendra Prasad himself, to determine the fundamental rights and minority rights of citizens and appoint subcommittees to prepare for the administration of the north eastern (and north western) tribal areas and the excluded and partially excluded areas from both British India and Indian states. Besides Ambedkar, the Congress Harijan Jagjivan Ram was also a member of this committee.

Besides this advisory committee of overriding importance, there were over eighteen committees or subcommittees of standing and ad hoc character. Among other substantive committees were the following with the names of their chairs:

1. States Committee: Jawaharlal Nehru
2. Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights, Minorities and Tribal and Excluded Areas: Ballabhbhai Patel
3. Union Powers Committee: Jawaharlal Nehru
4. Union Constitution Committee: Jawaharlal Nehru
5. Provincial Constitution Committee: Ballabhbhai Patel
6. Drafting Committee: B.R. Ambedkar

Overview notes and questionnaires were first prepared by Benegal Narasimha Rao, who had served earlier as a member of the famed Indian Civil Service (ICS) and a high court judge and finally became the legal advisor to the Assembly and its president. Partial drafts were produced by the myriad committees and sub-committees. These were then passed on to the drafting committee for scrutiny, settlement, and presentation for clause-by-clause debate in the Assembly. Besides Ambedkar, the other members of the drafting committee included Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar, N. Gopalaswami Ayyangar, K. M. Munshi, Saiyed Mohammed Sadulla, B. L. Mitter, and D. P. Khaitan. Ambedkar had occasionally participated in the debate on the reports of the committees and sub-committees. His main task was to present the draft Constitution once it was crafted by the drafting committee for debate in the Assembly, defend it, and finally reply to the debate which spanned over 13 months.

### *Piloting the Draft Constitution*

Ambedkar presented the draft constitution for debate in the Assembly on 4 November 1948 and rose to reply to the deliberations on 24 November 1949. I will take the texts of these two



memorable addresses as the basis of my explication of Ambedkar's understanding and interpretation of the philosophy and basic structure of the Constitution<sup>3</sup>. He began by explaining its 'salient and special features'. He drew attention to the fact that even before its formal tabling in the Constituent Assembly, the draft constitution had already been in the public domain, and its 'friends, critics and adversaries have had more than sufficient time to express their reactions to the provisions contained in it'.<sup>4</sup> Ambedkar went on in his masterly and magisterial exposition to make the point that the form of government preferred was parliamentary rather than that of executive presidency. Said he:

Under the draft constitution the President occupies the same position as the King under the English Constitution. He is the head of the state but not of the Executive. He represents the Nation but does not rule the Nation. He is the symbol of the Nation. His place in the administration is that of a ceremonial device on a seal by which the nation's decisions are made known.<sup>5</sup>

Despite this clear-cut postulation, Ambedkar did leave a few ambiguities. Consider, for example, a few of the pregnant sentences in this address:

The President of the Indian Union will be *generally* bound by the advice of his Ministers. (The emphasis is mine)<sup>6</sup>

He can do nothing contrary to their advice nor can do anything without their advice. The President of the United States can dismiss any Secretary at any time. The President of the Indian Union has no power to do so long as his Ministers command a majority in Parliament.<sup>7</sup>

Ambedkar proceeded to say that a democratic executive must satisfy two requirements: it must be *stable*, and it must be *responsible*. Stability is the hallmark of the U.S. and Swiss executive, whereas responsibility is characteristic of the British executive. 'Draft constitution is recommending the Parliamentary system or has preferred more responsibility to more stability.'<sup>8</sup>

Having explained the 'form of government' under the draft constitution, Ambedkar went on to discuss the 'form of constitution' in the draft, making a distinction between unitary and federal constitutions exemplified classically by the United Kingdom and the United States respectively, Ambedkar made the perceptive point that even though the USA and India had both adopted the federal form of constitution, the two were very different. To quote him, 'The differences that distinguish them are more fundamental and glaring than the similarities between the two.'<sup>9</sup> The fundamental differences between the two federations that Ambedkar specified boiled down to dual citizenships and dual constitutions that the US federation and the federating states maintained unlike India.<sup>10</sup>

Why did Ambedkar not bring in here the obvious and patent difference between the presidential-federal system and the parliamentary-federal system? Was it deliberate? I am raising this question with the benefit of hindsight as with the advent of a multi-party system

with federal coalition governments in New Delhi and the rise of strong regional parties the Indian political system is becoming more confederal in its dynamics.<sup>11</sup> By now it is becoming evident that due to the phenomenon of divided governments in a fragmented society, the parliamentary federal system is showing signs of a separation-of-powers political configuration.<sup>12</sup> Ambedkar next tried to draw attention to ‘some other special features of the proposed Indian Federation which mark it off not only from the American Federation but from all other Federations’.<sup>13</sup> In his opinion, the American and other federal systems ‘are placed in a tight mould of Federalism’ that can never be broken. Contrariwise, the draft Constitution was a two-in-one framework of government, which ‘can be both unitary as well as federal according to the requirements of time and circumstances’. In times of constitutionally contemplated emergencies, the same constitution gets transformed into a unitary one.<sup>14</sup>

Ambedkar then took up two typical weaknesses of federal constitutions, especially the American, namely, rigidity and legalism, and scored a debating point on how the draft constitution had intentionally tried to avoid both. Like the Australian constitution (Ambedkar here could have also easily added the Canadian Constitution), the draft constitution had kept rigidity under check by giving the Parliament wide powers of concurrent legislation. Moreover, the draft constitution also sought to escape rigidity and legalism by keeping the amending procedure fairly easy. On this point, it must be added, Ambedkar did not visualize the present political scenario when due to the phenomenon of divided government and differentiated party systems in the two chambers of the Parliament and at the Union and state levels, the task of constitutional amendment has become extremely difficult, if not impossible.

A third way to reduce rigidity and legalism in the draft constitution was, according to Ambedkar, to avoid the American practice of having dual citizenship and dual constitutions, one for the state and one for the nation/federation. In addition, the draft constitution also preferred an integrated single hierarchy of courts, uniformity in fundamental laws of the land (civil and criminal - it was intended have a common civil code as well), and a common All India Services system to man the highest posts in both orders of governments.<sup>15</sup>

Reading this long presentation speech of Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly, it is difficult not to be amply convinced of Ambedkar’s abiding conviction in nationalism, strong state, democracy, and minority rights. His defence of the draft constitution, the values it stood for, and the state apparatus it intended to establish is absolutely unambiguous and unexceptionable.

Ambedkar finally rose to reply to the debate on the draft constitution on 24 November 1949. He meticulously took up the criticisms made by ideologues—Communists, Socialists, Gandhians—as well as those made by legal experts and political activists about specific details in the constitution. He stood by the liberal-democratic credentials of the constitution, pointing out that India did not need either communist dictatorship of the proletariat or socialist collectivism or the Gandhian traditionalist village society because all these were undemocratic and unjust. An important point of constitutional import in the critique to the constitution that Ambedkar chose to reply related to fact that too much of centralization reduced the states to municipalities. He argued that the crux of federalism lay in the demarcation of legislative and executive powers

between the union and states umpired by a judiciary. And this was, in his opinion, the constitutional order envisaged by the draft constitution in normal times, barring constitutional emergencies.

Finally, he philosophically reflected on the paradox that India, under the constitution, would come to have procedural democracy without a substantive democracy. He laid down three conditions to actualize this goal. First, India must 'hold fast to constitutional methods of achieving our social and economic objectives'.<sup>16</sup> Secondly, he stressed that 'Bhakti in religion may be a road to the salvation of the soul. But in politics, Bhakti or hero-worship is a sure road to degradation and eventual dictatorship'.<sup>17</sup> Thirdly, he emphasized that 'We must make our political democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy'.<sup>17</sup>

## On Safeguards for Scheduled Castes

The problems of the scheduled castes were always uppermost in the thoughts and actions of Ambedkar, especially prior to his deep involvement in the making of the constitution for India. Since he was born an untouchable, he had been a victim of untouchability himself. This remained unchanged even after his elitist higher education and his marriage to a Brahmin lady, Savita Ambedkar.

His views on what the Constituent Assembly could do to better their lot can be gleaned from a memorandum he prepared on this question to be submitted to the Constituent Assembly on behalf of the Scheduled Castes Federation. It was subsequently published in 1947 (Preface date) for wider readership. He countered the view that the scheduled castes were not minorities; in fact, he also referred to Gandhi's editorial in the *Harijan* (21 October 1939, 'The Fiction of Majority') saying that in India the scheduled castes were the real minority among minorities.<sup>18</sup> Religious affiliation was not the only criterion of a minority; the correct test was social discrimination, Ambedkar argued.<sup>19</sup> He deplored the tendency of dubbing any demand on the part of minorities for power sharing as 'communal'. In his opinion the scheduled castes were in a worse condition than any other minority. He made out a case for constitutionally entrenched rights for the scheduled castes and reservations for them in legislatures, executives, and civil services in proportion to their population in the country. He also pleaded for constitutional provisions casting special responsibility on the union and state governments for state-funded higher education for the scheduled castes.<sup>20</sup>

## On Linguistic States

The Constituent Assembly left the task of the reorganization of internal boundaries of the federating states unresolved. The matter was forced upon the post-independence Nehru government by linguistic agitations in several states in western and southern India. A reluctant

Nehru government first appointed a States Reorganization Commission in the early 1950s, and on the basis of the commission's report (1955) enacted the States Reorganization Act (1956). The approach of the commission as well as the government was to maintain, wherever possible, multi-lingual composite states, and concede the demand for a linguistic states only in face of a strong mass pressure.

During the parliamentary debate on the 1956 Reorganization Act, Ambedkar was incapacitated by illness. Yet he took pains to write a critique of the States Reorganization Commission Report (SRCR) in a pamphlet, *Thoughts on Linguistic States* (Preface date December 23, 1955)<sup>21</sup>

In the booklet, Ambedkar candidly admits what other Indian nationalists fought shy of, even those who agreed with the arrangement which the British settled on the eve of their departure:

I was glad that India was separated from Pakistan. I advocated partition because I felt that it was only by partition that Hindus would not only be independent but free. If India and Pakistan had remained united in one State, Hindus, though independent, would have been at the mercy of the Muslims ... A merely independent India would not have been a free India from the point of view of the Hindus. It would have been a Government of one country by two nations, and of these two the Muslims without question would have been the ruling race ...<sup>22</sup>

Interestingly, while Ambedkar perceptively welcomed the partition based on religion in 1947, he lamented the divisiveness of the linguistic states and their penchant to make regional languages as their official languages. To Ambedkar, it 'will be a death knell to the idea of united India.'<sup>23</sup>

Ambedkar's main criticisms of the SRCR may now be briefly enumerated:

1. It regarded apparently that the vastly varying sizes of various states was federally irrelevant. This was 'the most terrible error'. He referred approvingly to the dissenting note to the Report given by K. M. Panikkar that the federating units were left very asymmetrical and the undermining effect of this factor on the federal structure was left unmitigated by the failure of the constitution to give them equal representation qua state in the Rajya Sabha. Ambedkar added that the failure of the constitution in this respect was in not making the federal second chamber equal in power with the popular parliamentary chamber.<sup>24</sup>

Ambedkar's solution to this problem was a thorough reorganization of states in India to make them comparable in size in terms of population and territory.

2. The SRCR willy-nilly contained the effect of consolidating the North and Balkanising the South in as much as the former region would have smaller linguistic states, while big states in the North like Bombay, U.P, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh would remain intact. He asked: 'How can the rule of the North be tolerated by the South? Already there are signs of the South wanting to break away from the North.'<sup>25</sup> Ambedkar also narrated what C. Rajagopalachari once told him: 'You are committing a great mistake. One federation for the whole of India ... will not work ... you should have two Federations, one

Federation of the North and one Federation of the South, and a Confederation of the North and the South with three [common] subjects for the Confederation to legislate upon and equal representation for both the Federations.<sup>226</sup>

Ambedkar's solution to this problem was a trifurcation of the old Bombay state into Western, Central, and Eastern Maharashtra. Uttar Pradesh was to be similarly divided into three parts and Bihar and Madhya Pradesh into two parts.

3. The SRCR in Ambedkar's opinion had ignored the fact, or failed to realise that smaller states were a safeguard to the minorities. With the safeguards of separate electorates gone in the constitution of post-colonial India, 'The lambs are shorn of the wool,' and 'They are feeling the intensity of the cold.'<sup>227</sup>

The solution to this problem was offered as follows: 'It would be [simple] enough to have plural-member constituencies (of two or three) with cumulative voting in place of the system of single-member constituency embodied in the present constitution. This will allay the fears which the minorities have about Linguistic States.'<sup>228</sup>

4. Ambedkar alleged that the SRCR conceded in agitating states that all people speaking one language should be brought within one state. Ambedkar's preference was that 'people speaking one language may be grouped under many States, provided each state has under its jurisdiction people who are speaking one language.'<sup>229</sup> To quote Ambedkar again: 'The formula one state; one language, must not be confused with the formula of one language, one state.'<sup>230</sup>
5. Climatic conditions, feeling of the people of the South, and considerations of defence prompted Ambedkar to suggest two capitals for India, Delhi and Hyderabad.<sup>31</sup>

## Conclusion

Ambedkar's political thought may well be the gateway to the constitutional architecture of the state in India. Those who have surveyed the entire spectrum of his social and political thought would probably find it difficult to determine whether he can be said to be primarily a theorist of the Hindu social structure with special reference to the formerly untouchable castes and their emancipation or primarily a comparative political theorist of constitutional engineering and constitutional government. In my opinion, he was, on hindsight, a statist in both the social and political domains. The overriding role of the state loomed large in his political thought not only in the realm of the internal structure of governments in India's parliamentary-federal democracy but also in the spheres of the civil society and economy. Consider, for example, his proposal at one stage to reform the temple establishments by instituting the system of recruitment of priests across the caste divisions and their training and appointment under a positive law.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, his memorandum on rights of and safeguards for scheduled castes to the Constituent Assembly that were largely incorporated in the constitution also banked upon state law and action. The same memorandum also proposed collective farming under state ownership in agriculture and state socialism in the industrial sector. Neither tenant ownership nor consolidation of land hold-

ings would, he was sure, benefit the scheduled castes. State socialism to his mind was essential for the rapid industrialization of India.<sup>33</sup> These arrangements were not to be instituted by parliamentary enactment or executive action, as Jawaharlal Nehru unsuccessfully pleaded cooperative farming for the agricultural sector at the Awadi session of the Indian National Congress in 1955 and successfully introduced state ownership through the process of planning since the early 1950s in the public industrial sector in the framework of mixed economy. Ambedkar advocated state socialism with constitutional entrenchment that could not be undone by legislative or executive action.

## Notes and References

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1. See Mahendra Prasad Singh, 'Political Arrival' in *Seminar*, New Delhi, No. 243, November 1979: 12–18, a special issue on Harijans guest-edited by MPS.
2. See B. Shiva Rao et al (eds.), *The Framing of India's Constitution: Select Documents*, Vol. I, New Delhi: Indian Institute of Public Administration, 1966: 287–310.
3. I must clarify that I use the term 'basic structure of the constitution' in a general sense, not in the sense of the judicially constructed constitutional theory of the basic structure of the Indian Constitution since the Supreme Court judgement in *Keshavananda Bharati V. State of Kerala* in 1973 and further elaborated in various other judgements since then.
4. *Constituent Assembly Debates: Official Report*, New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1999, 3rd reprint (New Delhi: Jainco Art) Book No. 2:31.
5. *Ibid.*, 32
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, p. 33
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, p. 34
11. Douglas V. Verney, 'From Quasi-Federation to Quasi-Confederacy: Transformation of India's Party System', *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, Vol. 33, No. 4, Fall 2003.
12. M.P. Singh, 'Foreword', in Rekha Saxena, *Situating Federalism: Mechanisms of Intergovernmental Relations in Canada and India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2006: 9–10.
13. CAD, op. cit.: 34.
14. *Ibid.*: 34–35.
15. *Ibid.*, : 36–37
16. CAD, Book No. 5, op. cit: 978.
17. *Ibid.* : 979.
18. Shyam Singh Shashi, (ed.), *Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar: Sampurna Vangamay, Khand 2* (Trans. From English), New Delhi: Ministry of Welfare, Government of India: 208.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 185–87.
21. B. R. Ambedkar, *Thoughts on Linguistic States* (Aligarh: Anand Sahitya Sadan, 1989, reprinted).
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.

23. Ibid., p. 17.
24. Ibid., pp. 10 & 18–19.
25. Ibid., pp. 12 & 22.
26. Ibid., p. 22
27. Ibid., p. 52.
28. Ibid., p. 52.
29. Ibid., p. 18.
30. Ibid., p. 44.
31. Ibid., pp. 53–55.
32. From my memory of reading 'Ambedakarana' but cannot readily cite the source here.
33. Shyam Singh Shashi (ed.), *Babasabeb Ambedkar, Sampurna Vangamay, Khand 2*, op. cit., p. 194.

# Ambedkar: Democracy and Economic Theory

*N. Sukumar*

## The Context

The epistemology of the caste system poses multiple challenges to the universal notions of liberty, equality, fraternity and justice. The discourse of power permeates the entire caste hierarchy so much so that those at the bottom of the hierarchy are almost immobilised. The socio-cultural, economic and political landscape of peoples' lives is enveloped by the caste structure.

For centuries, many protest movements and social reformers have striven to undermine the caste hegemony but it was only in the twentieth century that a vigorous attack was mounted on this behemoth, both ideologically and politically. This exercise was expedited by B. R. Ambedkar, who was influenced by the ideals of the French Revolution and other western ideologues. Simultaneously, he drew upon Buddhist precepts and the works of Jotiba Phule, Narayana Guru and Periyar Ramaswamy Naickar. Coupled with this, Ambedkar's legal acumen enabled him to synthesise his knowledge in the Indian context. During the anti-colonial struggle, Indian society was in transition and Ambedkar received a fertile platform to germinate his ideas.

## Understanding Ambedkar

For Ambedkar, social justice meant giving equal opportunity to each and every person in every sphere of life to develop one's total personality. A free social order consisted of the recognition that the individual was an end in himself/herself and that the terms of association between individuals in a society must be founded on liberty, equality and fraternity. He derived the significance of the value of equality based on the notion that the individual was



inviolable. The concept of justice emphasised the right of the individual to be treated as an equal and to be respected as a member of society; irrespective of his/her caste, class, gender and other discriminations.

The attempt herein is to discuss Ambedkar's philosophy of liberalism within the broader paradigm of liberty, equality and justice. He emphasised political rights which would lead to economic and social rights. For him, rights were not merely standards but were ends as well as means, in that they provided the theoretical perspective and the necessary empowerment that was required for achieving social justice. By struggling against the state, Ambedkar used one set of rights to realise the other rights. For Western societies, state interference in realising rights is minimal. However, as the Indian society is in egalitarian, the state plays a vital role in ensuring rights. This transformative perspective is considered to be a major contribution of Ambedkar to the discourse on Indian liberalism.

## Ambedkar's Notion of Socio-Cultural Rights

The role played by Ambedkar has left its imprint on the social tapestry of the country after independence, and shaped the political and civic contours of India today. It would have been a different India without him and in all probability, a much more inequitable and unjust one. He attempted to forge India's moral and social foundations anew and strove for a political order of constitutional democracy that is sensitive to the disadvantaged, inherited from the past or engendered by prevailing social relations.<sup>1</sup>

There exists scriptural sanction for the caste system among the Hindus. Ambedkar dubbed Manu, the ancient Hindu law-giver, as the founder of slavery. This system characterised a vast majority of the people as untouchables, whose shadow was sufficient to pollute the touchables. Manu listed exhaustive rules which prohibited any kind of transgression at the risk of severe punishment. Needless to say, people at the bottom were treated as virtual slaves. This edifice was sanctified by religion.<sup>2</sup> It was Ambedkar who persevered with the issue of caste.<sup>3</sup> The law of *Chaturvarna* prohibited the *shudras* from pursuing knowledge, engaging in economic enterprises, and bearing arms. This virtually prevented any revolt against the strictures of caste. They became reconciled to eternal servitude as an inescapable fate. In other words, the caste system deadened, paralysed and crippled the people from helpful activity.

As an untouchable, Ambedkar encountered social exclusion and segregation. Early in his life, he realised that a large section of his countrymen were denied their legitimate rights by the oppressive and dominant social customs and traditions. He believed that the establishment of a democratic society in India would be possible only when the untouchables and other weaker sections of society would be given an opportunity to enjoy basic human rights.<sup>4</sup> The untouchables were segregated from mainstream Hindu society. The Hindu would not live in the untouchable quarter and would not allow the untouchables to live inside the Hindu quarter. This was

a fundamental feature of untouchability as practiced by the Hindus. It was not a case of social separation, a mere stoppage of inter-course for a temporary period. It was a case of territorial segregation, of cordon sanitaria, putting the impure inside a barbed wire, into a sort of a cage. Every Hindu village had a ghetto. The Hindus lived in the villages and untouchables in the ghetto.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, Ambedkar came to the conclusion that nowhere except in India, there existed lasting separate camps and there had never been a case of a people, treating a section of their own people as permanent and hereditary slaves. Untouchability was a unique phenomenon unknown to humanity except among the Hindus. Ambedkar proved this by citing the example of the condition of the untouchables during the Peshwa rule.<sup>6</sup>

Plato defined the slave as one who accepts from another the purposes which control his conduct. This could also be applicable to untouchability in India, therefore Ambedkar pointed out that the untouchables were treated as slaves because, they were so socialised as never to complain of their low state; they never dreamt of improving their lot by forcing the other classes to treat them with common respect. The idea that they had been born to their lot was so ingrained in their minds that it never occurred to them to think that their fate was anything so irrevocable and nothing would ever persuade them that men are all made of the same clay, or that they have the right to insist on for better treatment than that it was meted out to them.<sup>7</sup>

Ambedkar described the state of slavery of the untouchables and the denial of human rights before the Reforms Committee (Franchise), and Southborough Committee, on 27 January 1919. For Ambedkar, the exact description of the treatment was not possible. The word 'untouchable' epitomised their ills and sufferings. Not only had untouchability arrested the growth of their personality but it came in the way of their material well being. It had also deprived them of certain civil rights. For instance, in the Konkan, the untouchables were prohibited from using the public road. If some high caste man happened to cross, he had to be out of the way and stand at such a distance that his caste shadow would not fall on the former.<sup>8</sup>

'Tell the slave that he is a slave and he will revolt against his slavery'; this slogan of Ambedkar generated a consciousness in the untouchables and the downtrodden about their plight and the need to secure their human rights. For the steady and systematic upliftment of the downtrodden he started educational and social institutions and journals and also launched a Satyagraha on March 9, 1924 at Damodhar Hall, Bombay. He called a meeting of the social workers both from the untouchables and of other communities which resulted in establishing the Bahiskrit Hitkarini Sabha. He said, 'My heart breaks to see the pitiable sight of your faces and to hear your sad voices. You have been groaning from time immemorial and yet you are not ashamed to hug your helplessness as inevitability. Why did you not perish in the prenatal stage instead? Why do you worsen and sadden the picture of the sorrows, poverty, slavery and burdens of the world with your deplorable, despicable detestable and miserable life? You had better died and relieved this world if you could not rise to a new life and if you could not rejuvenate yourself. As a matter of fact, it is your birthright to get food, shelter and clothing to equal proportion with every individual, high or low. If you believe in living a respectable life you should believe in self-help which is the best help'.<sup>9</sup>

In order to instil a sense of self-respect and dignity among the oppressed classes Ambedkar stressed on education. This in turn would provide the necessary cultural basis for their gradual absorption into the mainstream of a progressive national life. He was acrimoniously opposed to all kinds of oppression and inequality but, at the same time, it was his heartfelt desire to bring about change through peaceful and constitutional means. Ambedkar was a great educationist also. He believed that no democratic process could be complete unless the masses were educated. He considered education as the solution for many problems. He believed that even the experiment of parliamentary democracy would flounder on the rock of ignorance and glaring social inequalities. He had sounded this warning in his last speech in the Constituent Assembly during the debate on the draft Constitution of India. It was because of this perspective that Ambedkar took active part in founding a number of educational institutions in Bombay and, in the backward region of Marathwada.

The Satyagraha launched by Ambedkar was aimed at awakening the self-respect of the untouchables. The Satyagraha at Mahad was a historical event in as much as it was conducted for the purpose of securing for the downtrodden the right to drink water from the public tanks. The Satyagraha received whole-hearted support from Nanasaheb Tipnis, the President of the Mahad Municipality, Kolaba District. According to Sri Tipnis, several caste Hindus like D. V. Pradhan, Anantrao Chitre, Joshi and Sabnis and many members of the Samaj Samata Mandal joined this Satyagraha of the untouchables. In spite of virulent opposition from the orthodox section of the Hindus, the Satyagraha succeeded in attaining its objective.<sup>10</sup>

The rights movement initiated by Ambedkar to inspire the depressed classes to fight for their rights gradually gained momentum and successfully brought about improvements in their economic and social conditions, political representation, educational and cultural achievements. The Mahad Satyagraha for the right of drinking water and the Nasik Satyagraha for right to temple entry were outstanding struggles of the untouchables to win equal social rights. Striving endlessly and sacrificing the pleasures of the present for a glorious future was a magnificent ideal for Ambedkar. That's why Ambedkar disliked that his hungry men should envelop themselves in the culture of Bhakti, the cult of devotion, the opium of helplessness. He asked the common man not to resign himself to his fate and accept his position as a divine dispensation. The ignorant people believed that their fate was pre-ordained and irretrievable. Ambedkar wanted to root out this disease from their minds.

Ambedkar called for the unity of the scheduled castes and other backward communities under one platform to project their united strength and to hold the balance of power in the new democratic set up. He declared, 'Political power is the key to all social progress and the Scheduled Castes can achieve their salvation if they captured this power by organising themselves into a third party and holding the balance of power between the rival political parties'.<sup>11</sup>

Ambedkar initiated the onerous task of awakening the conscience of the downtrodden sections like the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. He told them to forget all about the so-called sins of their ancestors and strongly pleaded with them not to wait for their fictitious rebirth or the amelioration of their sufferings. He urged them that their social liberation must be ensured in this very life and that too as their legitimate right as free citizens. Hindus were

disturbed by the decision of Ambedkar to advise his followers to undergo mass conversion to Buddhism. His decision to leave the fold of Hindu religion along with his followers in essence showed that the Scheduled Castes wanted to vote against the tradition bound Hindu religion which oppressed them. One must view their act of conversion as an expression of dissent and revolt against the social injustice suffered by them.

## Ambedkar's Notion of Political Rights

As the motivator for emancipation of untouchables, Ambedkar launched a series of constructive and ameliorative programmes and demonstrations to redeem them from the grip of slavery and social and economic disabilities. His genuine interest in finding solutions to the vexed social problems is the real basis to evaluate his political ideology.

The basis of political mobilization is political ideology, which legitimises struggle and provides it with a moral foundation. This is also required to engage and retain the people in any meaningful political activity. Ambedkar developed his own political strategy in order to secure political rights for the depressed classes and to ensure proper distribution of political power among the different strata of Indian society. The colonial government deliberately initiated political change in India to better control it. This resulted in change in the political process based on three important principles. The first was the gradual and cautious devolution of power in the hands of Indians who would be loyal to the system, second was a limited franchise and deliberate encouragement to separate caste and religious identities to weaken the majority and finally through social policy, keeping enough space for competition and collaboration with different sections of Indian society so that dissidence could be properly controlled. This model of political development successfully engaged all major Indian classes in competition and collaboration and those who fought against it were punished.

These political developments always encouraged the development of separate caste identities. Caste became a rallying point for political mobilization of the people though the aim of the mobilization was not always narrow. The caste and class factors were often utilised to attain national unity, but despite the growing pressure of the national movement, the political system which the British foisted upon Indians through dubious constitutional devices and by exploiting sectarian cleavages held good.<sup>12</sup> Ambedkar planned to develop his political strategy according to the political developments that existed at the time. This resulted in Ambedkar's entry into mainstream political life in order to improve the conditions of the depressed classes in India. As nationalist leaders did not care for the depressed classes and their problems, this propelled him to start an independent depressed class movement to secure their political rights.

To understand Ambedkar's political strategy, we have to examine his ideology. Phule was his ideal personality. To him the Congress movement for independence was essentially a brahminical conspiracy to capture political power and to perpetuate their caste dominance. Hence, he asked the *shudras* and *atishudras* to be wary of the Congress mechanism. He pointed out that without struggle, Brahmins would not renounce their privileged position; hence, non-Brahmins should

fight against caste dominance to establish a casteless society. In this endeavour, at times, they would have to seek the help of British rulers but there was nothing wrong in it.<sup>13</sup>

Ambedkar was very particular about safeguarding the interests of the depressed classes, while cooperating with the nationalist movement and its leaders; he thought they would compromise the interests of the depressed classes at the cost of national independence. His interests were abolition of untouchability and winning political rights for the depressed classes. In view of the non-cooperative attitude of the leaders of both the national and the non-Brahmin movement, he decided to keep his movement independent of them both in letter and spirit.

The Nehru Committee in its report neglected the untouchables and went out of its way to appease Muslim minorities. This left Ambedkar very disturbed. He realised that the caste Hindu nationalist leaders would never provide justice to the untouchables as they wanted to perpetuate their dominance against the latter. Hence, he considered the report of the Committee as a low Brahminical trick and exhorted his followers to launch a struggle against this injustice.<sup>14</sup> He held that progress and awakening were rooted in struggle and the untouchables should launch a struggle to win the social, political and economic rights that were denied to them. It became increasingly clear to Ambedkar that this social resistance would get converted into a political resistance and he would have to define his strategy in political terms. He made it clear that the major political problems in India were equitable and just distribution of political power among different sections of Indian society because acquisition of some political power was a means to social development.<sup>15</sup> He wanted such safeguards for the untouchables. Hence, he demanded reservation of seats for the depressed classes in government services and in legislative assemblies. He was of the opinion that ultimately the government was based on faith and it was statesmanship to create faith if it could be done through concessions and guarantees.<sup>16</sup>

Believing in the ideology of parliamentary democracy, Ambedkar held that the true spirit of democracy consisted of true equality. He said, 'Our aim is to realize in practice our ideal of one man one value in all walks of life. It is because the representative government is the means for the depressed classes it is to give to it great value'.<sup>17</sup> Realization of social, economic and political freedom in the parliamentary form of democratic government was Ambedkar's goal and he was quite confident that the depressed classes could bring about the democratic revolution in India that ensured self-government as well as good government, right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness, removal of social, economic and political inequality and making it possible for every subject to enjoy freedom from want and fear.<sup>18</sup> Hence, Ambedkar sought to mobilise the depressed castes in order to establish parliamentary democracy in India.

There were three important components to Ambedkar's political strategy which were as follows:

1. By continuous political agitation and bargaining, the Scheduled Castes should try to extract safeguards and guarantees from the British Government.
2. Caste Hindus, Muslims and depressed castes were three separate and independent elements of the Indian society and while conceding some reforms for the Indians, all these elements should be satisfactorily consulted.

3. The depressed classes should capture political power as it was the only means available to them for self-development and protection of their rights.

The depressed classes would not be in a position to share political power, if India did not become independent. Ambedkar did not have any liking for the British and on more than one occasion he said that he could not start a struggle on two fronts because he did not have sufficient power to fight imperialism and feudalism at the same time.<sup>19</sup> But the continuation of the British government would not help the untouchables to secure political power because they were not expected to protect the interests of the untouchables in difficult situations. He said, 'We must have a government in which the men in power will have their undivided allegiance to the best interests of the country. We must have a government in which men in power, knowing where obedience will end and resistance will begin, will not be afraid to amend the social and economic code of life which the dictates of justice and expediency so urgently called for. This role the British Government will never be able to play. It is only a government which is of the people, for the people and by the people that will make this possible'.<sup>20</sup>

Political power played a very important role in Ambedkar's political strategy because he knew that the depressed classes did not possess economic power in both the industrial and agriculture sectors. He thought that in the evolving capitalist structure, they would not be in a position to acquire that power in future also. Further he said that the only alternative left for the depressed classes was to secure jobs in the government services through job reservations and acquire share in political power through reservations of seats in the elected bodies. Thus, through political power alone could the scheduled castes bring about a change in their social, economic and political life. As part of that process he constantly encouraged his followers to acquire political power to engage in key positions in the government so that they could achieve self-development in this way.

His confrontationalist attitude prepared the depressed classes to be ready for political struggle to safeguard their rights. In a gesture reflecting the politics of accommodation, the Congress leadership appointed Ambedkar in the Cabinet and subsequently, he became the chairman of the drafting committee in the Constituent Assembly. The Constitution of India substantially represents the political philosophy of Ambedkar.

In an endeavour to protect the basic interests of the depressed castes, Ambedkar kept the depressed caste movement independent from the national movement. Secondly, due to historical reasons the depressed classes lost their self-respect, self-identity and autonomy. In order to regain them, Ambedkar wanted his followers to recognise the fact that the rights they had secured were their birthright and they had secured them through struggle. He embraced Buddhism to enable scheduled castes to develop their social and cultural identity in a manner they wanted. The logical culmination of Ambedkar's political strategy was his acceptance of Buddhism as a means to self-development and self-realization.

Pressure groups are an essential part of parliamentary democracy. Hence, Ambedkar thought that if the scheduled castes successfully formed their groups in the assemblies, they could bargain their demands with other groups, enter into different alliances and share political power.

It was because of these, that reservations opened avenues for political power for the Scheduled Castes in the post-independence period. The broad aim of Ambedkar's political strategy was to devise a scheme that would allow just and fair distribution of political power among the different segments of Indian society and to some extent, he was successful in doing so. He also developed an independent movement of the backward classes that helped them acquire self-identity and self-realization. The dialectical outcome of Ambedkar's political strategy was the united and concerted effort by all the oppressed classes of the society to capture political power, and his experiment of the labour party and conversion to Buddhism are two contributing factors which would enable them to fulfil his prophesy that only the oppressed classes would move the wheel of democratic revolution fully as it was only moved half way.<sup>21</sup>

For Ambedkar, politics was only a means to achieve a just position for man in society. His mission was man-making and nation-building. His aim in the social and political ideals was to construct a new society and a nation with fully liberated individuals. His philosophy was not Utopian; it was not only to simply quantify disabilities and injustices inflicted upon the down-trodden masses but to act as a guiding star and be a shining beacon to use the right means to end all the social evils and ills which tormented humanity in India.<sup>22</sup>

He was optimistic in his conception that human interest could be achieved by human struggles alone. He established the fact that man was the architect of his own fate, good or bad, which was not built by any external element.<sup>23</sup>

A believer in the Utilitarian philosophy, Ambedkar evolved the theory that the welfare-state alone could give full guarantee to the harmonious development of the individual. In this regard, he was in full agreement with the views of Alexander Pope, who said, 'that government is the best government that governs the least'. He came forward with a necessary programme of preferential treatment and reservations for complete rejuvenation of the Scheduled Castes. Explaining his foremost aim in public life, he remarked 'Attempt to uplift my community rather than winning the Swaraj for the nation is my goal'.

The individual occupied the basic unit of governance which was reflected in the constitutional provisions. To him, there was no limit to the growth of individuality. His unique protests to secure the rights of the untouchables, the legitimacy he claimed on their behalf, and the constitutional means he adopted to claim their rights, themselves constitute a new theory of emancipation, the signifiers of which include getting minority status, separate electorates and constitutional safeguards. Thus, his political ideology conveyed a deep faith in fundamental rights, in the equal rights of men and women, in the dignity of the individual, in social and economic justice, in the promotion of social progress for a better standard of life with peace and security in all spheres of human life. His political theory had been empirically founded and experimentally applied.<sup>24</sup> While demanding separate electorates and reservation for untouchables, he argued that the socially segregated should also further be politically segregated for getting special preferences.

According to Ambedkar, the political majority in India would always be a communal majority, which would be permanent and fixed in their attitude. This would be detrimental to the democratic ideals. As the communal majority was always hostile to the untouchables he insisted

on a policy of safeguards for them. He expounded the truth that only in self-government the untouchables would get full liberation. While asserting the same view in the Round Table Conference in London in 1930, he remarked 'We feel that nobody can remove our grievances as well as we can and we cannot remove them unless we get political power in our own hands.'<sup>25</sup>

He always glorified the nation through his political views. He also asserted that the country should be greater than the heroes. He was against the practice of hero-worship or personality cult. He cautioned the people against hero-worship. He said 'In politics Bhakti or hero-worship is a sure road to degradation and eventual dictatorship—I hope that my countrymen will someday learn that the country is greater than the men'.<sup>26</sup> He was the first Indian political thinker who realised the inapplicability of Western democracy to India. By democracy, Ambedkar meant the fundamental changes in the social and economic life of the people and the acceptance of those changes by the people without resorting to violence, dispute and bloodshed.<sup>27</sup> For him, a democratic society was a society without oppressors and oppressed-classes and with a guarantee to equality of opportunity and rule of law. His criticism of Western writers was that they failed to recognise the social and economic contradictions in the life of Indians such as the position of the governing classes of India and its intention towards the service-classes and servile classes.

Along with economic exploitation, social factors also lead to the sufferings of the downtrodden. Here, Ambedkar differed from Karl Marx. He pointed out that the untouchables in India were suppressed by the rich as well as by the poor caste Hindus.<sup>28</sup> He argued as to how caste consciousness in India had ruined the social consciousness and demolished the national spirit. He also advocated that caste was inconsistent with democracy, for an ideal society was based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity which could be a fitting alternative to caste society.<sup>29</sup> Among the three ideals of democracy he gave inordinate weight and importance to equality. To him equality was another name for democracy, because he thought that 'democracy is not only a form of government but it is a mode of associate living ... it is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence to fellowmen'.<sup>30</sup>

## Ambedkar's Notion of Economic Rights

... I should have expected some provision whereby it would have been possible for the state to make economic, social and political justice a reality and I should have from that point of view expected the resolution to state in most explicit terms that in order that there may be social and economic justice in the country, that there would be nationalisation of industry and land, I do not understand how it could be possible for any future government which believes in doing justice socially, economically and politically unless its economy is a socialist economy

B. R. Ambedkar

The above statement reflects Ambedkar's views on the imperative of socialist economy for ensuring social, economic and political justice. His understanding that social, economic



and political rights were intertwined and had organic linkages was the reason for incorporating part four of the constitution which, to a great extent, dealt with the economic and financial provisions which was not common to many other constitutions in the world. Ambedkar had described the economic position of untouchables as the most pitiable. The untouchables in Hindu society were entirely dependent on such employment as the Hindus chose to give them and wages they found profitable. They neither had the freedom to choose their occupation nor ask for the appropriate compensation for the labour they rendered. They were completely dependent on the Hindu village for their earning and living. This economic dependence was the root cause for the poverty and degradation of the untouchables.

Ambedkar had traced the origin of the economic disabilities of the untouchables to the laws of Manusmriti according to which the former inherited their occupations. The Manusmriti made it a crime for the *shudras* to acquire learning. The Brahmins were not only responsible for the downtrodden status, economic misery and backwardness of the untouchables but they were also instrumental in preventing the non-Hindus from economic competition. If any member of the suppressed community dared change his occupation and enter any other trade, he was socially boycotted. Nobody would purchase anything from him. Therefore, the untouchables had to stick to their low, dirty and menial occupations with no hope or promise for a better future. The economic dependence of the untouchables, Ambedkar argued barred their progress.

This line of thinking of Ambedkar can be traced to his career. The first phase of his economic career until 1921 included several academic contributions in the form of dissertations for different degrees. The second phase started when he returned to India and lasted until his demise in 1956. In this phase he proved himself as a professional economist. His works 'Administration and Finance of the East India Company', 'The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India', 'The Problem of The Rupee: Its Origin and its Solution', reflect his massive input in economics. His contributions testify to a wide range of academic interests: agricultural issues, industrial labour, views on Marxism, State Socialism and his strategies for India's economic development. Ambedkar struggled against the '*Khoti*' system and Mahar '*Vatan*' and was also involved in encouraging the labour movement, for which he founded the Independent Labour Party in 1936.

In his paper 'Small Holdings in India and their Remedies' Ambedkar chose a problem that continues to plague the Indian agrarian system. At that time, British administrators and academics in India who were used to their own country where large agricultural land holdings was the norm, were appalled at the low productivity of Indian land. They ascribed this to the minuscule size of the farm land cultivated by Indian peasantry. He advocated top priority to agriculture as an industry which is the most important one as it feeds the population of a nation. Agricultural development holds the key to the overall socio-economic development of the country in general and that of the rural population in particular. He believed that the principle of equality could be achieved if the problems of the agricultural sector were taken care of very seriously and sincerely.

Ambedkar maintained that the problems of agricultural economy involved dealing directly with agricultural production such as; what to produce, what could be the proper proportion

of the factors of production, the size of the holdings, the tenure of the land etc. The small size of land holdings in India was greatly harmful to Indian agriculture. Ambedkar emphasized the two fundamental problems in Indian agriculture: 1) Consolidation of land holdings and 2) Enlargement of land holdings. To him consolidation of land holdings was a practical problem whereas their enlargement was a theoretical problem. He did not subscribe to the argument that industrialization would foster the enlargement of holdings and that it would be the most effective barrier against sub-division and fragmentation.

Industrialisation may not be a sufficient remedy for consolidation but will facilitate it. It is an incontrovertible truth that so long as there is the premium on land, consolidation will not be easy, no matter how equitable principles are proposed to be carried out. Is it a small service if industrialisation lessens the premium, as it is inevitably must? Certainly not, consideration of another aspect of consolidation as well points to the same conclusion, that industrialisation must precede consolidation. It should never be forgotten that unless we have constructed an effective barrier against the future sub-division and fragmentation of a consolidated holding it is idle to lay out plans for consolidation. Such a barrier can only be found in industrialisation; for it alone can reduce the extreme pressure which, as we have shown, causes sub-division of land. Thus, if small and scattered, holdings are the ills from which our agriculture is suffering to cure it of them is undeniably to industrialise.<sup>31</sup>

According to Ambedkar, small holdings had to be examined in the following context:

1. Why did the agricultural holdings get fragmented despite the fact that fragmentation resulted in inefficient use of resources?
2. Were large holdings necessarily efficient and small ones inefficient? In other words, what was an 'economic holding'?
3. What was the ultimate remedy for solving India's problem of small and scattered holdings?

Ambedkar did not agree with the view that the law of inheritance was the chief cause of sub-division of land. He attributed it mainly to the enormous pressure of population on land. He argued, 'when farming was the only occupation, to get a small piece of land was better than to have none. The grievance of small holdings lies in the circumstances which put a premium on these small pieces of land. The premium is no doubt, due to the large population depending solely on agriculture to eke out its living. It is not, therefore, the law of inheritance that is the evil, but it is the high pressure on land which brings it into operation. People cultivate the small piece not because their standard of living is low ... but because it is the only profitable thing for them to do at present. If they had something more profitable to do they would never prefer the small piece'.<sup>32</sup>

The basic problem of Indian agriculture, for Ambedkar was that it was not capable of generating a surplus which ultimately was the reason for scarcity of capital. This made excessive

use of labour in cultivation inevitable. Secondly, despite the vastness of land under tillage, the land under cultivation was small in proportion to the population of the country. Going a step further, he drew a fine distinction between 'idle labour' and 'idle capital'. He argued that 'capital exists but labour lives'. He elaborated that though idle capital does not earn, 'it does not also consume much to keep itself. But labour, earning or not, consumes in order to live'.<sup>33</sup> He therefore, concluded that idle labour was a calamity: For, instead of contributing to the national income it dragged on reducing the already meagre surplus, which in turn depressed the process of capital formation. But even if we had proceeded for intensive cultivation by using more capital and all other equipment with a given plot of land so as to increase production, had it not happened that agriculture would have required even less labour than before? Ambedkar was aware of this problem. He argued that, 'Even if we enlarged the existing holdings and procured capital and capital goods to make them economic, we will not only be not advocating the proper remedy but will end in aggravating the evils by adding to our stock of idle labour; for, capitalistic agriculture will not need as many hands as are now required by our present day methods of cultivation'.<sup>34</sup>

To overcome this predicament, Ambedkar suggested industrialization as a remedy. He argued that industrialization would have cumulative effects. Firstly, it would help to sponge-off idle labour in non-agricultural channels of production. When productively employed, idle labour would not only cease to live by predation but earn its own maintenance and also give us surplus. Secondly, it would destroy the premium on land and reduce the pressure on it. Constitutively, the necessity of sub-division and fragmentation would be checked. Lastly, a declining pressure of population on land and increasing use of capital and capital goods would forcibly create an economic necessity for enlarging the holding.<sup>35</sup>

In 1918, a new chapter began in economic debates, when Ambedkar submitted a paper on the 'The Problem of Small Holdings and its Remedy' and tried to find out the problems of the overall economic development. He analysed how agricultural backwardness was responsible for it and concluded that industrial development was its solution. The problem was that people's landholdings were small and scattered. One remedy was to consolidate the small holdings. However, the size of the landholdings was debatable. Some suggested voluntary exchange of land to increase the size, others argued for the compulsory consolidation of farms in the villages by the state and restriction of sale of occupancy rights. The compulsory or voluntary restriction was to be decided on the principle of economic holding, which was to be fixed on the basis of acreage of land owned. The lower land ceiling was to be fixed in such a way that it would be 'a parcel of land necessary to keep fully engaged and support one family' or a 'holding which allow a man the necessary chance of producing sufficient support himself and his family in reasonable comfort, after paying his necessary expenses'. The solution offered was more by way of administrative and legal measures and treated the consolidation of holdings as a practical problem.<sup>36</sup>

Extending his debate on Ambedkar's approach towards the problem differently, Thorat notes that Ambedkar focussed on it more as an economic issue rather than as administrative measure. He took into account the underlying farm size and not related to legal or

administrative measures. He differed from other academics on two different grounds which were, firstly the definition of economic holding and, secondly the economic principles governing the size of holdings. Hence, he sought solutions for their enlargement. The other economists viewed an economic holding from the stand point of consumption rather than of production. Ambedkar maintained that consumption was not a correct standard. True economic relation could subsist only between total output and investment. If one paid for all the investment, no producer would think of closing his farm. One could thus speak of the farm as a paying economic unit in terms of production and not consumption. Production in turn was not governed by land as a factor alone but was the result of the use of combination of land, capital and labour. The combination was of utmost importance. There was an optimum combination of factors. It was the right or wrong proportion of other factors of production to a unit of land (and not the size of land alone) that rendered a piece of land economic or uneconomic. A small farm might be economic like a large farm. Further, he stated that the problem of small holdings was not fundamental but derived from the prevention of maladjustment in the social economy. The household with a small holding was unable to acquire and use some factors of production in the right combination. While there was too little capital (in the form of capital goods and implements) and land, the supply of labour was in excess. Land capital being in short supply, they were relatively expensive compared to labour and hence become the major constraints. The solution therefore was to increase capital in the form of capital goods and implements and reduce the use of labour. The remedy was to siphon off the surplus labour to non-agricultural production. This would at one stroke lessen the pressure and eliminate the premium that weighed heavily on the land in India. Besides, the labour would be productively employed and generate surplus, and since more surplus led to more capital, that could be invested in agriculture.

Ambedkar made a critical examination about the land holding conditions and its enlargement and made very significant conclusions. He struck at the very root of the proposal by arguing that there could be no such thing as a correct size of agricultural holding. As he argued, land was only one of many factors of production and the productivity of one factor of production was dependent upon the proportion in which the other factors of production were combined. In his words, 'the chief object of an efficient production consists in making every factor in the concern contribute its highest; and it can do that only when it can cooperate with its fellow of the required capacity. Thus, there is an ideal of proportions that ought to subsist among the various factors combined, though the ideal will vary with the changes in proportions'.<sup>37</sup>

If agriculture was to be treated as an economic enterprise, then, by itself, there could be no such thing as a large or small holding. Ambedkar's answer rested on the inadequacy of other factors of production. The insufficiency of capital which was needed for acquiring agricultural stock and implements could be tapped from savings. But as Ambedkar remarked that saving was possible where there was surplus. Even this was only a facade, the ultimate cause being the chief evil of maladjustment in the local economy. This was partly defined as the non-availability of sufficient land in India to achieve prosperity through the means of agriculture alone.<sup>38</sup>

## Industrialization as an Alternative for Indian Economy

Ambedkar viewed industrialization as the only remedy for India's agricultural problems; it would reduce the surplus labour in agriculture. The cumulative effects of industrialization would lead not only to an increase in labour productivity and capital investment in agriculture but would also create the economic necessity of enlarging land holdings. Industrialization, by doing away with the premium on land, would avert subdivision and fragmentation. Thus, the problem of agriculture would be curbed by the indirect but positive impact of industrialization. Poverty in India, according to him, was due entirely to the economy being made dependent upon agriculture alone. Agriculture failed to produce sufficient food to feed its people. The roots were to be found, as observed earlier, in the maladjustment of its social harmony. Ambedkar argued that India was caught between two sides of a pincer, one side was the progressive pressure of the population and the other was the limited availability of land in relation to its needs. The result was that at the end of each decade we were left with a negative balance of population and production and a constant squeezing of standard of living and poverty. The population pressure was giving rise to an army of landless and dispersed families. It could be stopped when agriculture was made profitable. Nothing could open possibilities for making agriculture profitable except a serious drive in favour of industrialization. For, it was industrialization alone which could gainfully employ the surplus labour from agriculture.

As a policy measure, Ambedkar therefore emphasised the need for industrial development in order to gain increased agricultural productivity and income through the reflex action of the former on the latter. The policy prescriptions, suggested on the basis of theoretical formulation conceived in 1918, were restarted in 1943 and eventually incorporated in the objectives of the post-war reconstruction plan. The section on general objectives mentioned, 'Agriculture is and will remain India's primary industry but the present imbalanced economy has to be rectified by intensive development of the country's industries so that both agriculture and industry may develop side by side. This will enable the pressure of population on the land to be relived and will also provide the means required for the provision of better amenities'.<sup>39</sup>

Industrialization was to generate adequate surplus that was to eventually benefit the agricultural sector. Certainly a shift from primary industry to secondary industry was vital and it was to be attempted seriously to prevent the enlargement of the rural population that was being witnessed. Remedies based on what Ambedkar called 'faulty political economy' were being advocated. For him, industrial development was not the only goal for economic development, what was important was that development had to be maintained at a socially desirable level. It was not enough to bend our energies for the production of more wealth in India. The basic right of all Indians was to share the nation's wealth not only as a means for a decent and dignified existence but also as an insurance against insecurity needs.

Ambedkar desired industrialization in India as the surest means to rescue people from the eternal cycle of poverty in which they were caught. For ages, Indian agriculture had been engaged in only food production which was insufficient for feeding its people. The poverty in India, for him was nothing but dependence on only agriculture. Significantly he believed in

material progress. A socialist economy was to consist of state ownership of agriculture with a collectivised method of cultivation. Similarly, the state was to be in charge of industry and insurance. The state was obliged to plan the economic life of the people so as to gain high productivity with equitable distribution of wealth.

## The *Khoti* System

'Khoti' was a peculiar system of land tenure that prevailed in pockets of the Konkan region of Maharashtra. Khots had rights to land which was cultivated by farmers and in return, the Khots collected land revenue from them and passed on a part thereof to the government. It was an oppressive system that had subjected a vast majority of the rural poor in the region to practical serfdom. All farmers and their families involved compulsorily in the system were treated by the Khots as bonded labour, generations after generations and this had continued in the region for several decades.

An agricultural conference was organised in Chiplun on 14 April 1929. In his presidential address, Ambedkar forcefully critiqued the Khoti system. He said to the farmers, 'I know your grievances; the Khoti system is sucking your blood. This system of land tenure must be abolished. Its abolition will bring you peace and progress. In order to achieve your goal you must keep the agitation going on ... you must take particular care to send to the legislatures the right type of men as your representatives who would devoutly struggle for the abolition of this Khoti system'.<sup>40</sup> This initiated the beginning of a long-drawn struggle for the rights of the farmers who were exploited by the Khoti system. On 17 September 1937, he introduced a historic bill in the Bombay Legislature Council for this purpose.

It is noteworthy that Ambedkar was one of the first legislators in India to introduce a bill for the abolition of the slavery of agricultural tenants. The basic aim of the bill was to secure occupancy rights to the tenants with a provision for payment of reasonable compensation to the Khots for the loss of their rights. The bill projected abolition of the Khoti System and its replacement by the Ryotwari System with a view to giving the poor farmers who were in actual possession of land, the status of occupants under the Land Revenue Code 1879.

## Mahar *Vatan*

Mahar *Vatan* was a form of uncontrolled exploitation of the rural poor. A section of the rural poor belonging to the Mahar caste were subjected to this mode of oppression. According to the Bombay Hereditary Officers Act 1874, the Mahars holding low level government jobs were treated as servants for work in all government departments at any hour of the day and night for a pittance. In the absence of a Mahar servant, any member of his family was forced into government service. The duties of these government servants were never clearly defined so that all sort of odd jobs were assigned to them. For this laborious and continuous work, the Mahars were

compensated with a piece of land called *Vatan* referred to as *Baluta*, i.e., the collection of grain made by *Vatan* holding Mahars from their villages.<sup>41</sup> At times they did receive monetary compensation but it was very low and not sufficient to make ends meet. In the drought season, the government readily exempted farmers, in part, from giving the *Baluta* to Mahars while in the normal season, the government often confiscated parts of these lands under the pretext that they were more productive. Hence, basic rights like the option taking work of their choice, or the earnings from that work, were systematically denied. Mahar *Vatan* was a form of absolute and inhuman exploitation of Mahars. Psychologically, they were made to believe that they were *Vatandars*, and it was their right to perform the assigned duties irrespective of their nature. This psychological belief, widespread as it was, had the unfortunate effect of Mahars being not conscious of the coercive relations. Not only did they lose their self-respect but their aspirations were restricted to the insignificant menial jobs, while ignoring their inborn original potential.

Ambedkar took upon the task of breaking these shackles of servitude. Between 1927 and 1928, he published a series of articles on the Mahar *Vatan* system in *Bahishkerit Bharit*. He organised several meetings and conferences to educate people about the conspiracy of Mahar *Vatan*. Meetings were held at Kamatipura, Bombay, Nasik and Jalgaon, where thousands of Mahar *Vatandars* gathered. On March 19, 1928 he introduced a bill in the Bombay Legislative Assembly to amend the Bombay Hereditary Officers Act 1874. Following were the tenets of the bill:

1. A better arrangement for the hard work of the *Vatandars*
2. To get permission for the inferior village servants to get their *Vatans* exchanged
3. To exchange the money obtained by *Baluta* and obtain permission for the same
4. That the lower-class *Vatandars* may be freed from the service of the tenant
5. The agent *Vatandar's* duties were fixed.<sup>42</sup>

Introducing the bill Ambedkar brought to the notice of the house that *Vatan* lands were given to the Mahars by the ancient rulers of India. But the government had neither increased the land assigned nor the remuneration of these people, whereas the other government servants enjoyed additional income and benefits. He advocated that with the increase in population, the land assigned was divided and sub-divided thereby reducing the flow of income from the *Vatan* lands to almost nothing. Hence, he proposed that the *Vatan* lands should be given to the holders at the full rate of assessment and most of them should be relieved from the obligation to serve. Those who were to be retained in government service should be paid from the revenue derived from the assessment levied on the Mahar *Vatans* and from the *Baluta*, so that there would be no additional burden on the government treasury.<sup>43</sup>

Ambedkar observed that the Mahar *Vatan* was an atrocious system, without any justice. If the government desired these people to work for it, it was absolutely necessary that they took up the responsibility of paying them. It was not right to place this burden in such a careless fashion on a third party, the *ryot*, but that was exactly what was happening under the system. Further he argued that 'if the government has got the nerve, the courage and the sympathy for others to bring forward financial measures to remunerate their services why should not government

have the same nerve, the same courage and the same sympathy in the case of these Mahars?<sup>44</sup> Ambedkar was very specific about the state's involvement in promoting the economic interests of the Scheduled Castes.

In the prolonged debates with the government, Ambedkar and the Independent Labour Party clearly defined the duties of the *Vatan* holders. Ambedkar penned five articles on the Mahar *Vatan* in a book entitled, 'Mahars and their Vatan or Slavery in the Twentieth Century' and also mobilised mass support for the bill by organising a number of meetings and conferences. The bill did not pass even the second time around because of the utter negligence of assembly members belonging to the dominant castes. The government was also disinterested. The persistent efforts of Ambedkar however paid off and after his death the Mahar *Vatans* were finally abolished under the Bombay Inferior Village *Vatans* Abolition Act 1 of 1959.

## The Bombay Moneylenders Bill

Ambedkar was deeply aware about the needs and sufferings of the rural poor as well as the industrial workers. The exploitation of the poor at the hands of moneylenders compelled him to prepare a bill countering the malpractices of moneylenders. The bill was the first and foremost in India which clearly and specifically recommended corrective and innovative measures. The relevance of the Bombay Moneylenders Bill prepared by Ambedkar in 1938 contained innovative provisions, even by the prudential standards advocated today. These included; moneylenders being subjected to licenses from the government which were renewable every year, compulsory written records of all lending operations and the mandatory issue of pass-books detailing all transactions between borrowers and lenders.

## Labour Movement

The caste system was not merely a division of labour but also a division of labourers. It dissociated work from interest, it disconnected intelligence from manual labour, it devitalised by denying a human being the right to collective vital interest and it prevented mobilization. In addition, it was a hierarchy in which the division of labourers were graded on extra-economic basis. Ambedkar further stated that a civilised society undoubtedly needed division of labour but in no civilized society was division of labour accompanied by this unnatural division of caste. In 1934, Ambedkar became the president of the Bombay Municipal Karmkari Sangh. This made him actively involve himself in the labour movement and in 1938 the first successful strike was led against the dominant classes.

In 1942, Ambedkar was appointed to the Viceroy's Executive Council as the Labour member till the Council was dissolved in 1946. Ambedkar believed in the rights of the workers, but he was very clear that all actions should always be in the interest of workers, and not for political gains. Ambedkar was not in agreement with the Industrial Disputes Bill of 1938. The bill aimed



at restricting the right of the labourers to strike and made strikes illegal. Ambedkar reasoned that a strike was a civil right but not a crime. Making a man serve against his will was nothing less than making him a slave. According to him, a strike was the right to freedom of one's service on any terms that one wanted to obtain. If the popular government accepted that the right to freedom was a divine right, then, he argued the right to strike was also a divine one.<sup>45</sup> For Ambedkar workers faced two enemies, Brahminism and capitalism. He said, 'I do not want to be misunderstood when I say that Brahminism is an enemy, which must be dealt with. By Brahminism, I do not mean the power, privileges and interests of the Brahmins as a community. That is not the sense in which I am using the word. By Brahminism, I mean the negation of the spirit of liberty, equality and fraternity. In that sense it is rampant in all classes and is not confined to the Brahmins alone though they have been the originators of it'.<sup>46</sup>

By establishing the Independent Labour Party, Ambedkar launched labour movements and emerged as a labour leader. The party manifesto stated that in the rural sector, the population pressure and fragmentation of land holdings were the causes of poverty. It advocated an extensive programme of technical education for improving efficiency and productivity and favoured the principle of state-management and state-ownership wherever necessary. For industrial workers and their rights, the party manifesto favoured legislations to control the employment, dismissal and promotion of employees, to fix maximum hours of work, to provide for remunerative wages, leave with pay and provide inexpensive and sanitary dwellings etc. The manifesto also proposed, village level planning for housing and sanitation and for modernising the outlook of the villages. The Independent Labour Party was not supported and welcomed by Communists because they thought the struggle led by the party and Ambedkar would result in fragmenting the labour vote. Ambedkar argued that the Communist leaders were fighting for the rights of the workers but never for the human rights of Scheduled Caste workers. He cited an example that the textile mill unions had never raised their voices against the prohibitive barriers that kept Scheduled Caste workers away from the lucrative departments in the mills on account of untouchability.<sup>47</sup>

Ambedkar fought for the rights of workers and peasants. In the late 1920s and especially in the 1930s when he had formed his Independent Labour Party, he took up the cause of tenants (from both the Scheduled Caste Mahars and the caste Hindu Kunbis) in the Konkan region of Maharashtra. With the support of the Congress Socialist Party, the ILP organized a huge march of 20,000 peasants to Mumbai in 1938, the largest pre-independence peasant mobilization in the region. In the same year, Ambedkar joined the Communists in organising a strike of Mumbai textile workers in protest against the 'Black Bill' which the British government was bringing in the Assembly to control workers' strikes. Ambedkar took the lead in condemning the bill in the Assembly and argued that the right to strike was 'simply another name for the right to freedom'. In the public rally attended by over a 100,000 people Ambedkar emphasised, 'I have definitely read studiously more books on the Communist philosophy than all the Communist leaders here. However beautiful the Communist philosophy is in those books, still it has to be seen how useful it can be made in practice ... if work is

done from that perspective, I feel that the labour and length of time needed to win success in Russia will not be so much in India. And so, in regard to the toilers' class struggle, I feel the Communist philosophy to be closer to us'.<sup>48</sup> Critiquing Communism, he stated that Communism and the labour movement was not one and the same thing. He observed that 'trade unionism in India was in a sorry state. It was a stagnant and stinking pool, because its leadership was timid, selfish or misguided'. The Communists, according to him, had misused the power which they had once secured.<sup>49</sup>

Apart from major struggles for workers' rights Ambedkar initiated steps to solve the problems of the workers of the Bombay Municipal Corporation and the rights of the *bidi* industry of the Central Province and Berar. Ambedkar, as a member of Viceroy's Executive Council focused on several issues relating to the labour movement. In several meetings he observed that the Indian labour movement was in a sad state as there were splits in its ranks and it was diffused. He also questioned the expenses on war instead of spending on health and education or in eradicating poverty. He advocated industrial peace based on social justice. Such an approach, which he argued was triangular in nature, had to start with the workers who had to recognise their duty to work. He focused on the issue of establishment of an emolument exchange for streamlining avenues for employment while recognising the demands of the labour for food, clothing, shelter, education, cultural amenities and health resources.

He tried to formulate the following policies to address these issues:

1. A full employment policy for labour
2. A state-supported patronised labour welfare system
3. A tripartite labour tribunal system to solve industrial disputes
4. To develop an ideal labour participatory mechanism in nation-building by asking the unionised labour not to be totalitarian in nature because of their collective bargaining power.<sup>50</sup> This shows his ideas of a proactive state.

## Economics of the Caste System

Ambedkar was one of the first in Indian history to analyse the economic dimensions of social maladies such as caste and untouchability, through his works like 'Annihilation of Caste' and 'What Congress and Gandhi have done to Untouchables?' The traditional division of the society on the basis of Varna system, according to Ambedkar was most vicarious when viewed on the grounds of division of labour. The caste-based division of labour was not based on choice. Individual performance and preferences were not considered in this system. Ambedkar argued that caste was the outcome of certain religious beliefs which were sanctioned by the Shastras. As such, it was not the occupation which was responsible for caste but it was the caste system which was the basis of assigning occupations.<sup>51</sup> This was what made the question of rights integral and inseparable while dealing with the caste system.

The scheme of distribution of economic rights in the Hindu social order, according to Thorat, was as follows:

1. It fixed the occupations for each caste by birth and its hereditary continuation
2. Unequal distribution of economic rights related to ownership of property, trade, employment, wages, education etc., among the caste groups
3. A hierarchy of occupational order based on social stigma of high and low
4. Recognition of the degraded concept of slavery
5. A harsh system of social, religious and economic penalties to enforce the caste based economic order.<sup>52</sup>

Ambedkar further observed that the Hindu social system left no scope for individual choice and inclination in occupational matters. The Hindu social order did not recognise equal need, equal work or equal ability as a basis of reward for labour. Thus in the distribution of good things in life, those who were reckoned as the highest had to get the most and the best. Those who were the lowest had to accept the least and the worst. The Hindu social order was based on three interrelated elements, namely predetermination of social, religious and economic rights of each caste based on an ascribed status at birth, the unequal and hierarchical division of these rights among the castes, and provisions of strong social, religious and economic ostracism supported by social and religious ideology to maintain itself. Ambedkar observed that liberty, to be real, had to be accompanied by certain social conditions. To begin with, there had to be social equality and economic security. Generally, privilege tilts the balance of social action in favour of its possessors. The more equal the social and economic rights of the people, the more able they are to utilise their freedom. If liberty is to move to its appointed place, there should be social equality. Similarly there must be economic security. If people are deprived of security and employment they become a prey to mental and physical servitude incompatible with the essence of liberty. Without economic security, liberty is not worth having.<sup>53</sup>

The caste system in India has been a major obstacle to its economic growth and development. Ambedkar opined that caste would never allow the individual to go for his/her own choice of occupation, but it forced the traditional occupation on individuals, which reduced labour mobility. It also restricted mobility of capital because occupations were inherited from castes. Further he said that social and individual efficiency required us to develop the capacity of an individual to the point of competency to select and make his own career. This principle was violated by the caste system insofar as it involved to appoint its tasks to individuals in advance, selected not on the basis of trained original capacities but on that of the social status of the parents. As an economic organization, caste was therefore a harmful institution, in as much as it involved the subordination of social rules. Hence he advocated annihilation of caste as the only solution for rapid economic growth and development in the country.

True, untouchability is religiously ordained but it is also the worst form of slavery. In slavery, the master at any rate has the responsibility to provide food, clothes and house and keep the slave in good condition, lest the market value of the slave decreased. But in the system of

untouchability, the caste Hindu took no responsibility for the welfare of the untouchable. It was a system of absolute and uncontrolled economic exploitation. He said that the Hindu social system helped Hindus to control everything viz...land, trade, revenue and state. The Hindu social order which maintained untouchability with its socio-economic evils 'is a conspiracy set up to suppress and enslave human rights'. He opined that Swaraj would make Hindus more powerful and untouchables more helpless because it ensured economic advantages to Hindus.

In India, where the major source of living depended on agriculture, the untouchables were more suppressed. They could not buy land because of the strict caste restrictions and were deprived of their source of income and livelihood. Even if they wanted to, they had to compete with the dominant castes. They had to work for caste Hindu farmers for small wages and were subjected to seasonal unemployment. The untouchables were kept away from all avenues of high income and high status jobs. While interpreting the economics of the caste system, he observed that if liberty had to be real it had to be accompanied by certain conditions like social equality and economic security. On the contrary, the caste system imposed restrictions on the mobility and freedom to choose one's occupation.

## Ambedkar's Critique of Marxism

Ambedkar regarded Karl Marx as the father of modern Socialism or Communism. There are certain pre-requisites for Marxism to succeed. The society should be a free society; it should give importance to an individual over society and it should be based on equality, fraternity and liberty.<sup>54</sup>

Ambedkar summarised the Marxist doctrine in terms of the following set of propositions:

1. The purpose of philosophy is to reconstruct the world and not to explain the origin of the universe.
2. The forces which shape the course of history are primarily economic.
3. Society is divided into two classes, owners and workers.
4. There is always a class conflict going on between the two classes.
5. The workers are exploited by the owners who misappropriate the surplus value which is the result of the workers' labour.
6. This exploitation can be put to an end by nationalization of the instruments of production, viz... abolition of private property.
7. This exploitation is leading to greater and greater impoverishment of the workers.
8. This growing impoverishment of the workers is resulting in a revolutionary spirit among workers and the conversion of the class conflict into a class struggle.
9. As the workers outnumber the owners, the workers are bound to capture the state and establish their rule i.e., dictatorship of the proletariat.
10. These factors are irresistible and therefore, socialism is inevitable.<sup>55</sup>

According to Gail Omvedt, Ambedkar ended up disagreeing with Communists regarding 'class'. He was also disillusioned with the Marxian economic solutions. While he continued to see class struggle and class oppression as important, he began to look for answers elsewhere. The values he asserted throughout his life were the classic social liberal values of the French Revolution. His study of Buddhism strengthened his feelings that it was Buddhism which had pioneered these values in Asia. In the conclusion to his essay on 'Buddha or Karl Marx' he states, 'Society has been aiming to lay a new foundation as was summarised by the French Revolution in three words, fraternity, liberty and equality. The French Revolution was hailed because of this slogan. It failed to produce equality. We welcome the Russian Revolution because it aimed at equality. But it cannot be over emphasised that in producing equality, society cannot afford to sacrifice fraternity or liberty. Equality will be of no value without fraternity or liberty. The absence of these factors in the caste-ridden Indian society could not foster the growth of Marxism in India, and that is why Marx failed in Hindu India. Marx could not properly evaluate the importance of caste or its influence on Indian masses. Because Marx failed here, his followers in India talk of 'Class' and not of 'Caste'. It seems that the liberty, equality and fraternity can coexist only if one follows the way of the Buddha. Communism can give one but not all'.<sup>56</sup>

Rejecting the Marxian premise that economic relationships and economic philosophy are the two driving principles that operate in all human activity, Ambedkar pointed out that exploitation had many dimensions, economic, social, religious and political. In the Indian context, social or religious exploitation was no less oppressive than economic exploitation. According to Ambedkar, the two means of establishing Communism were through violence and the dictatorship of the proletariat. He felt that in such a scenario human rights would suffer. He noted that Communism advocated revolutionary methods of overcoming the opposition of the capitalists for establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. As a relentless champion of democracy and human rights, Ambedkar was against dictatorship of any kind. He said that society should aim at laying a new foundation on the basis of 'Equality, Liberty and Fraternity'. Ambedkar believed in democratic and constitutional provisions for social transformation. For Marxists, state is a temporary institution which will disappear in due course. Ambedkar, on the contrary assigned an active role to the state in the social, political and economic affairs of the society.

However, Ambedkar agreed with Marx on the following ideas:

1. The function of philosophy is to reconstruct the world and not to waste its time in explaining the origin of the world.
2. That there is a conflict of interest between class and class.
3. That private ownership of property brings power to one class and sorrow to another through exploitation.
4. That it is necessary for the good of society that the sorrow be removed by the abolition of private property.

On the question of private property, Ambedkar quoted an illuminating extract from a dialogue between Buddha and Ananda. The Buddha stated that avarice was because of possession,

which in turn was because of tenacity. Not only did Buddha prohibit private property in the Sangha, but he put more restrictions which were far more rigorous than (were) to be found in Communism in Russia.<sup>57</sup> Ambedkar then examined the means to achieve these goals. Having summarised Buddha's tenets, he felt that, it was clear that the means adopted by Buddha were to convert a man by changing his moral disposition to follow the path voluntarily. The means adopted by the communists were equally clear, short and swift. They were (1) violence and (2) dictatorship of the proletariat. The communists argued that there were only two means of establishing Communism. The first was violence. Nothing short of it would suffice to break up the existing system. The other was dictatorship of the proletariat to continue the new system. It was now clear what were the similarities and differences between Buddha and Karl Marx. The differences were about the means. The end was common to both.<sup>58</sup>

## State Socialism

In a democracy, every citizen has a right and a duty, the right to criticise it and the duty to obey the law. In a dictatorship you have only the duty to obey but no right to criticise it.<sup>59</sup> Ambedkar believed in placing the state in prior position to prepare plans for the economic life of the people along the lines which would lead to maximum productivity without closing every avenue to private enterprise, and also to provide for the equitable distribution of wealth. He suggested an economic policy framework aimed at providing protection to the vulnerable and deprived sections of the society against economic exploitation. He said that agriculture had to be under the state and the state had to take care of it. He put forth a detailed economic plan for the development for Scheduled Castes so as to ensure their economic rights:

Clause IV of his document 'States and Minorities' emphasises Protection against Economic Exploitation of the Scheduled Caste:

The United States of India shall declare as a part of the law of its constitution the following agenda:

1. That industries which are key industries or which may be declared to be key industries shall be owned and run by the State.
2. That industries which are not key but are basic industries shall be owned by the State and shall be run by the State or by Corporations established by the State.
3. That Insurance shall be a monopoly of the State and that the State shall compel every adult citizen to take out a life insurance policy commensurate with his wages as may be prescribed by the Legislature.
4. That agriculture shall be State Industry.
5. That State shall acquire the subsisting rights in such industries, insurance and agricultural land held by private individuals, whether as owners, tenants or mortgagees and pay them compensation in the form of debenture equal to the value of his or her right in

the land. Provided that in reckoning the value of land, plant or security no account shall be taken of any rise therein due to emergency, of any potential or unearned value or any value for compulsory acquisition.

6. The State shall determine how and when the debenture holder shall be entitled to claim cash payment.
7. The debenture shall be transferable and inheritable property but neither the debenture holder nor the transferee from the original holder nor his heir shall be entitled to claim the return of the land or interest in any industrial concern acquired by the State or is entitled to deal with it in any way.
8. The debenture-holder shall be entitled to interest on his debenture at such rate as may be defined by law, to be paid by the State in cash or in kind as the State may deem fit.
9. Agricultural industry shall be organized on the following basis:
  - (i) The State shall divide the land acquired into farms of standard size and let out the farms for cultivation to residents of the village as tenants (made up of group of families) to cultivate on the following conditions:
    - (a) The farm shall be cultivated as a collective farm.
    - (b) The farm shall be cultivated in accordance with rules and directions issued by Government.
    - (c) The tenants shall share among themselves in the manner prescribed the produce of the farm left after the payment of charges properly liveable on the farm.
  - (ii) The land shall be let out to villagers without distinction of caste or creed and in such manner that there will be no landlord, no tenant and no landless labourer
  - (iii) It shall be the obligation of the State to finance the cultivation of the collective farms by the supply of water, draft animals, implements, manure, seeds, etc.
  - (iv) The State shall be entitled to:
    - (a) To levy the following charges on the produce of the farm: (i) a portion for land revenue; (ii) a portion to pay the debenture-holders; and (iii) a portion to pay for the use of capital goods supplied
    - (b) to prescribe penalties against tenants who break the conditions of tenancy or wilfully neglect to make the best use of the means of cultivation offered by the State or otherwise act prejudicially to the scheme of collective farming
10. The scheme shall be brought into operation as early as possible but in no case shall the period extend beyond the tenth year from the date of the Constitution coming into operation.<sup>60</sup>

## Nationalization of Agricultural Land

Ambedkar studied economic activities in relation to their influence on human welfare. Like the revolutionary British bourgeoisie, he advocated nationalization of land and argued that

industrialization was the main panacea against poverty. He suggested state socialism with parliamentary democracy. His concern was how to establish equality between people in an exploitative society like India. Keeping development as a major concern Ambedkar tried to analyse Indian society. He held that Indian agricultural development was weakened by chronic problems such as fragmentation and small holdings of land. These problems were due to the law of inheritance and social economy. The law of inheritance reduced not only the size of the holdings but also agricultural productivity and increased the dependency of a large number of family members on a small piece of land for their survival. He opined that consolidation of land holdings may not be possible unless the idle capacity of labourers was engaged in industrial activities. At one particular point he stressed that industrialization must precede consolidation, but he later changed his stand and opined that neither consolidation of holdings nor tenancy legislation would help in increasing agricultural productivity. It would also not help in solving the chronic problems of landless labourers and small farmers. He suggested nationalization of whole agricultural land with collective farming as a panacea for the ills of economic development of these people.

Protection against economic exploitation and ensuring economic justice through proper distribution of resources play a significant role in the protection of human rights. The state's obligation was to supply the necessary capital for agriculture as well as for industry for better results. Nationalised insurance gave the individual greater security than private insurance and it also gave the state the resources necessary for financing its economic planning in the absence of which it would have to resort to borrowing from the money market at a high rate of interest.<sup>61</sup>

Ambedkar emphasised that the plan had two special features. One, it proposed state socialism in important fields of economic life, two, it did not leave the establishment of state socialism to the will of the legislature. It established state socialism by the law of the constitution and thus made it unalterable by any act of the legislature and the executive. Further he stated that the purpose of prescription by law to shape and form the economic structure of society was to protect the liberty of the individual from invasion by other individuals. This was also the sole aim and objective in enacting the fundamental rights. The connection between individual liberty and economic structure of society may not be apparent to everyone. None the less the connection between the two was real. It would be apparent if the following considerations were kept in mind.

Political democracy rests on four premises which may be set out in the following terms:

1. The individual is an end in himself.
2. That the individual has certain inalienable rights which must be guaranteed to him by the constitution.
3. That the individual shall not be required to relinquish any of his constitutional rights as a condition precedent to the receipt of a privilege.
4. That the State shall not delegate powers to private persons to govern others.

In order to protect both the unemployed and employed from getting cheated of their fundamental rights to liberty, life, and pursuit of happiness, the possible remedy, he suggested, was



that democratic countries were to limit the power of government to impose arbitrary restraints in political domains and invoke the ordinary powers of the legislature to restrain the more powerful individual from imposing arbitrary restraints on the less powerful in the economic field. An appeal to the legislature to intervene was a very precarious safeguard against the invasion of the liberty of the less powerful. The plan was considered purely as a means of safeguarding individual liberty but there was also another aspect of the plan which was worthy of mention. It was an attempt to establish state socialism without abrogating democracy. He feared that under democracy a majority of legislators at a particular time could be in favour of state socialism in industry and in agriculture but after the next election the majority could be against it. The anti-state socialism majority would use its law-making power to undo the work of those who were pro-state socialism. A majority for pro-state socialism would use its law-making power to again pass such laws. To check such a possibility, he argued for incorporation of socialistic measures in the constitution.

The soul of democracy is the doctrine of one man, one value. Unfortunately, democracy has attempted to give effect to this doctrine only so far as the political structure is concerned by adopting the rule of one man, one vote. It has left the economic structure to take the shape given to it by those who are in the position to mould it. This has happened because constitutional lawyers had the antiquated conception that it was necessary for a perfect constitution in democracy to function. Its aim was to frame a constitutional law which would make government responsible to the people and prevent tyranny of the people. Consequently, almost all laws of constitution which relate to countries which are called democratic, stops with adult suffrage and fundamental rights. They have never advanced the concept that the constitutional law of democracy must go beyond adult suffrage and fundamental rights. People who framed laws believed that the scope and function of constitutional law was to prescribe the shape and form of the political structure of society. They never realised that it was equally essential to prescribe the shape and form of the economic structure of society, if democracy was to live up to its principle of one man, one value. One needed to define both the economic structure as well as the political structure of society by the law of the constitution.<sup>62</sup>

Ambedkar desired that labour should also enjoy liberty, equality and fraternity. Secondly, liberty as conceived by labour included the right to equal opportunity and the duty of the state was to provide the fullest facilities for growth to every individual according to his needs. Further, he pointed out that labour needed equality in terms of abolition of privileges of every kind in law, the civil services, the army, taxation, and trade and industry, in fact, in the abolition of all processes which led to inequality. And finally, labour needed fraternity in terms of all pervading sense of human brotherhood, unifying all classes and all nations, with peace on earth and goodwill towards man as its motto.

## Conclusion

Ambedkar's greatest contribution to our social and political life has been that he made the socially oppressed sections like the Scheduled Castes to challenge social orthodoxy, with the

penetrating question which Abraham Lincoln had raised— ‘It might be in your interest to be our masters, but how is it in our interest to be your slaves?’<sup>63</sup> To the extent this question finds its echoes in the remotest corners of India with the requisite follow-up action, Ambedkar’s lifelong dream of ensuring social liberation of the oppressed and the downtrodden will be translated into reality.

Ambedkar considered that unless the socially suppressed section of the Indian people secured political power concentrated in the hands of the upper castes, it was not possible to completely wipe out all social, legal and cultural disabilities, from which this section suffered.<sup>64</sup> He further said, ‘Nobody can remove these unless you get political power into your hands. ... We must have a government in which men in power will not be afraid to amend the social and economic code of life which the dictates of justice and expediency so urgently call for. This role the British Government will never be able to play. It is only a government which is of the people, for the people and by the people; in other words, it is only the Swaraj Government that will make it possible’.<sup>65</sup>

The task of Ambedkar’s life was to establish human dignity, development of self-respect among the depressed classes. In other words, Ambedkar taught the common man to have belief in his/her potential power, to rouse it, develop it and stand on their own feet. His advice to the downtrodden classes was commendable. He asked them to rely on their self, on their own efforts, to trust and exercise their own intelligence and to seek refuge in reason. To him nothing was more sacred than learning, Nature made none a slave and no man was born a dullard.

His electoral failures did not influence his political strategy. He resigned from the Union Cabinet in 1951. In the first parliamentary election and in the subsequent by-election held in Bandra, he failed to win. This bitter experience led him to start a secular political party, the Republican Party of India that would organise the people on class lines. He pointed out that different groups should come together to forge alliance with like-minded parties like the Socialist Party which was articulating the interests of the backward castes.

Ambedkar emphasised that political rights would lead to economic and social rights, where human aspirations and dignity are protected by the constitution guaranteeing the rights of human beings. For him, rights were not merely standards. They were the ends as well as means in that they provided the theoretical perspective and the necessary empowerment that was required for achieving social justice. So he used the concept of right to realise the other rights through his struggle against the society and the state. This transformative perspective added a new dimension to the rights discourse and is considered to be a major contribution of Ambedkar.

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## Lohia: Democracy

*Sanjay Kumar*

Ram Manohar Lohia believed that self-realization or self-development or complete development of personality was possible in an atmosphere of freedom. So, liberty was the necessary condition for the attainment of human awareness or self-realization. Further, the enjoyment of freedom was possible only in an atmosphere of equality. Therefore, liberty was inseparable from equality. Liberty and equality were the two sides of the same coin. The existence of one was impossible without the other. A society in which men were given an equal opportunity of self-realization was also a society where there was liberty. Moreover, the fulfilment of equality was possible only under the state. So the present study is an attempt to critically draw together Lohia's ideas regarding freedom, equality and state.

### The Concept of Freedom

Lohia divided freedom into two parts: the first part was connected with non-property matters and the second one connected with property. He gave full freedom to individuals in non-property matters. He asserted:

Rights of privacy and freedom must be recognized in all those spheres, which are not directly connected with property.<sup>1</sup>

However, Lohia did not give us a comprehensive list of non-property matters or those matters which concerned the private life of individuals. He simply mentioned that there were certain spheres of life that had to be free from the control of the state, government, organizations and

groups. Individuals should be free from all sorts of control in the sphere of house-keeping, entertainment, marriage, livelihood, etc. Every individual should enjoy full liberty in choosing the membership of any political party. Lohia strongly supported every individual's right to commit suicide. So he was a through individualist in non-property matters.

Lohia further argued that 'Rights of privacy in the sphere of house-keeping or entertainment, for instance, may have indirect effects on the institution of property. What is then to be done? One must be ready to take risks. It should for instance not be permissible to encroach on privacy on the ground that sentiments rather than the institution of property would be encouraged'.<sup>2</sup>

The second part of Lohia's freedom was basically connected with property. Lohia did not allow full freedom to individuals in those spheres which were directly connected with property, because, '... no direct connection between property and privacy seems logically to be necessary'.<sup>3</sup> But, democrats and capitalists insist that recognition of the rights of privacy must necessarily permit property and its rewards in some form. It means that they believe in the right of privacy in the field of property also. Lohia disagreed with this view. He also rejected the communist ownership of property because it 'has led to encroachment on privacy on all kinds of relationships from child-bearing to making of speeches'.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, both the communist and capitalist systems have failed to give us a correct or balanced concept of individual freedom which involves individual good and social good as well. Lohia tried to reconcile individual good and social good by allowing full freedom to individuals in non-property matters and by permitting state or government control over the sphere of property. But, how far did he succeed in this direction? It needs proper evaluation and thorough discussion.

However, the line of distinction between property and non-property matters is extremely hard to draw. Moreover, he gave the right of committing suicide to every man and woman and even to children, which cannot be defended because an individual's life is related to his or her relatives. Sudden loss of his or her life may relieve him or her of all worries for ever but at the same time it creates many social problems. His or her dependents become a social liability. Therefore, at no cost, can the right to commit suicide be granted to any one, if he or she is a social animal.

Lohia supported full freedom in the sphere of non-property matters. Such unlimited freedom cannot be justified because it would create chaos and anarchy in the society. And in absence of a comprehensive list of non-property matters and an authority, every individual would interpret and claim his freedom or privacy with regard to non-property matters, in different ways, which would finally result incomplete lawlessness. Therefore, some restraints of the state or organizations or groups, in the sphere of non-property matters also, should be allowed in the interests of individual and society both. It was not necessary that all individuals would always act wisely, honestly and selflessly. At the same time state control in the spheres which were directly connected with property should be relaxed as the social good may remain a dream in absence of individual interest in the growth of national economy.

Lohia's argument rested upon a negative conception of liberty. He was convinced that human personality could develop and expand only in an atmosphere of freedom. From this it naturally followed that for him liberty consisted of the absence of external restraint; the best thing for

the individual was that he be left alone to do what he deemed best, at least in the spheres of non-property matters.

Furthermore, Lohia believed in the maxim that the individual was not responsible to society for his action in so far as they concerned the interest of no person but himself. This clearly involved the view of society as a collection or aggregate of self-seeking individuals, and of the social good as nothing more than the sum total of their separate satisfactions. Therefore, Lohia considered an individual as an end in the sphere of freedom of non-property matters. And, ultimately society became a means to an end. Moreover, in the second part of freedom, an individual was regarded as a means and the society as an end.

For Lohia, freedom was for the development of individuality, and individuality was both a personal and social good. Individual development must have a social value. The freedom of the individual good in itself should also be a means to the happiness of society as a whole.

Lohia wanted to give the backward peoples or races the benefit of liberty. He was a staunch supporter of liberty to backward peoples. He wanted to give preferential opportunity to them for a certain period.

Lohia considered individual initiative from the viewpoint of social progress, and hence he saw the need for proper checks upon the individual freedom. He reacted against the over-centralization of government administration. He believed that an organization should be much more flexible, more relieved by local autonomy, and less oppressive to the individual. Although, he seemed to be a socialist when he opposed capitalism and showed his concern for economic equality to the individual, he did not like the idea of too much state control. As he was primarily an individualist, he retained the idea of individual initiative and freedom.

To Lohia, individuals were the rational beings, and hence they had to work for themselves. They had to be granted proper opportunities for the development of their life. Freedom was freedom not for animal wishes and desires, but for social good. The freedom of the individual was confined to the realization of self-consciousness. Man attained moral freedom when he remained aware of others while considering his own interests. Thus Lohia discussed individual liberty in the context of other individuals in society. For him, individual good was necessarily a social good. There was no difference between moral action and a social action. A moral action, he argued, was always an action based on reason. And our action was reasonable when it was performed with reference to other individuals.

### *Limitations on Freedom*

Lohia asserted that we could not escape state planning or socialization. Even in extreme capitalist societies, some types of sickness insurance or unemployment relief have become obligatory. 'State investment in regions and industries which do not attract private capital, is becoming fairly general. Planning to do good may therefore be expected to increase, more so in lands of poverty and scarce capital. With that will increase encroachment on privacy'.<sup>5</sup> However, he was against state planning the basis of which lay in compulsion of any planning and involved freedom of individual. Therefore, top priority had to be given to the preservation of individual freedom and initiative.

It is difficult to make a demarcation between individual good and social good. What is the due proportion between the liberty of each individual and the liberty of all? How can one man enjoy freedom without subtracting from the freedom of another, and how much should each surrender to the other in order to create the 'Greatest Common Measure' for the totality? In one form or another, this is the riddle of the Sphinx which runs through all political theory. And a solution has not yet evolved.

Moreover, it is impossible to define with precision the spheres of personal liberty and collective control, and it has been implied that the demarcation of those spheres may and does vary from age to age. Furthermore, it is unquestionable that in the delicate balance between individual good and social good or moral personality and civic responsibility, there is a constant danger that either the one or the other may be exaggerated.

### *Resistance Against the State*

Lohia permitted individuals the right of resistance against authority. He permitted it wherever and whenever an individual's freedom was in danger; or excessive state interference created an obstacle in the path of the development of individual personality on the one hand and social progress on the other.

This right of resistance against authority creates many problems which remain unsolved. Firstly, it is difficult to draw a line between legitimate and illegitimate state interference in the individual freedom. Secondly, the question arises as to who is competent enough to draw this line, the individual, society, state or government. Thirdly, the right of resistance of every individual may create chaos and anarchy in the society; because someone may misuse the power. Fourthly, in the absence of a clear demarcation between legitimate and illegitimate state interference every individual may claim himself to be right and declare society to be wrong. As a result, the individual and society will both be in constant struggle for the right claim. Therefore, his right of resistance is vague.

### **The Concept of Equality**

The popular meaning of the term equality is that all men are equal and all should be entitled to identical treatment and income. Those who subscribe to this meaning of equality assert that all men are born equal and nature has willed them to remain so. Lohia was against this popular meaning of the term equality. He opined:

The desire for equality in the modern world has become the desire for being similar and not equal. The effort to be equal both in the collective and individual spheres will be corrupted if it simply becomes the desire to be alike.<sup>6</sup>

Lohia said that real freedom was not possible either in capitalism or communism, because capitalism bred inequalities on the one hand and communism killed the spirit of individual



freedom on the other. Therefore, both the systems are inimical to the true spirit of democracy which signifies both liberty and equality. Lohia wanted to establish a democratic-socialist society which would constantly move on the axis of liberty and equality; liberty thus implied equality. Liberty and equality are neither in conflict nor even separate, but are different facets of the same ideal. As Lohia opined:

Freedom and bread are inseparable. At least in Asia, and neither communism nor capitalism can supply these two articles to us ... I would suggest that Asia can be saved from communism only if it is saved from capitalism and feudalism.<sup>7</sup>

The removal of inequality from human society was one of the seven revolutions of Lohia. He pointed out that '... the poorer the country, the greater is the inequality within it'.<sup>8</sup> He further observed that '... conscience dies in lands where the gulf is so wide that the eye prefers to avert its gaze'.<sup>9</sup> Lohia was firm in his thought that capitalist society bred inequality which proved antithetical to freedom. Similarly, he disliked the communistic system which was based on fear; whereas, the capitalist system worked under the temptation of profit. 'Such systems, which depend on temptation and fear for their dynamism and growth, must inevitably breed inequality. Inequality has thus come to be regarded as a part of human nature. Capitalism, when it is not decaying, glories in what it calls the humanity of inequality'.<sup>10</sup>

Lohia was an exponent of socialism. He believed in the system of socialism. He criticised capitalism and communism on the ground that both the systems failed to prepare the soil for the germination of the seeds of liberty and equality evenly. Therefore, Lohia preferred the system of socialism which believed in the equal growth and development of liberty and equality. According to him:

If socialism is to be defined in two words then they are equality and prosperity. I do not know if this definition has been given earlier at any time. If so, I could call it the best definition given so far.<sup>11</sup>

For Lohia, 'Equality and prosperity are twins'.<sup>12</sup> He observed that all parts of the world all were becoming prosperous. Centuries of dirt and filth had accumulated in India. There was only one way left to make this country prosperous and that was the way of equality. 'Here equality is the means and prosperity the end'.<sup>13</sup> He further said that whether the system was capitalist or socialist, industrialization was not possible without capital. In a poor and diseased country like India, capital could be formed only through the way of equality. 'Capitalism cannot perform its own functions here. Capitalism cannot create capital. Prosperity can come only through equality'.<sup>14</sup>

Lohia asserted that liberty and equality were not in conflict or even separate but different facets of the same ideal. However, if by liberty we mean unrestrained freedom for every individual to satisfy his appetite for wealth and power, it will result in degeneration of the social order by concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few to the disadvantage of the many. Great inequalities of wealth make impossible the attainment of freedom for the less fortunate. Those

who are wealthy and control the government use their authority in perpetuating the inequalities. This hampers freedom as men are deprived of the opportunities they need for that adequate self-expression and self-development which goes with freedom. Equality, which aims to put an end to the glaring contrasts in wealth and power, is really the true basis of liberty. Freedom means security and security demands the disappearance of those inequalities that place the weak at the mercy of the strong.

According to Lohia, injustice and inequality were prevalent throughout the world; but the Afro-Asian states were more afflicted than the Euro-American States. He wanted to establish such a socialist society where justice and equality would become the way of life. He has mentioned repeatedly in his writings, the seven types of injustices and inequalities against which revolutions were taking place throughout the world. These revolutions are:

1. For equality between man and woman
2. Against political, economic and spiritual inequality based on skin colour
3. Against inequality of backward and high groups or castes based on long tradition, and for giving special opportunities to the backward
4. Against foreign enslavement and for freedom and democratic rule all over the world
5. For economic equality and planned production and against the existence of an attachment for private capital
6. Against unjust encroachments on private life and for democratic methods
7. Against weapons and for Satyagraha<sup>15</sup>

The removal of these seven types of inequalities and injustices cannot be possible unless people know the true concept of equality. Lohia said the achievement of equality was difficult not only because of the current existence of inequality but also because of certain errors of thought. 'Equality, for instance is not equality in food, which is difficult and unwholesome. An equal portion of food means the equality of prison, a fixed ration. This example should have no meaning beyond showing that the concept of equality must be well understood to bear fruit'.<sup>16</sup>

### *Equality: Abstract and Concrete*

Now the fundamental question arises—what is equality? To Lohia, it was difficult to give an exact definition of equality. Lohia did not follow the academic definition of equality which meant equality of opportunity. He considered and examined equality in many forms and meanings. He interpreted equality in terms of abstract and concrete. The real meaning of equality cannot be understood, unless we know the relationship between abstract and concrete. There are two forms of equality—(i) abstract and (ii) concrete. As Lohia observed:

As an abstract concept and generalisation equality can only mean an atmosphere, an emotion, and perhaps also a wish that all arrangements, political, social, or economic, shall be equal as between one individual and another.<sup>17</sup>

It means that the general and abstract concept of equality has no meaning. It merely signifies an atmosphere, an emotion, a wish, or a dream. Lohia said that this general and abstract equality must be expressed in particular and concrete terms; and only then equality would have meaning to human beings. As he asserts:

The essential point is that equality, unless it is expressed in concrete terms, is an atmosphere, an emotion, a wish, or a dream.<sup>18</sup>

According to Lohia, the ideal appeared in the human mind in two shapes. One was abstract and the other concrete. An abstract ideal had a concrete shape although it remained an ideal still. It happened at times that a general idea failed to get a concrete shape, and then it became meaningless.

He further explained that the abstract ideal related to general desires. Democracy, justice, equality, and the ending of exploitation by man of man were such general ideals. They had powerfully motivated human minds. They were purely abstract and eternal, although the content of these abstractions has been changing from time to time. 'It is only when the ideal appears in a concrete shape that it can influence human action'.<sup>19</sup> It is obvious that an ideal has no meaning unless it is expressed in concrete form. The ideal in its abstract form motivates thought and its concrete form motivates action. Lohia said that both were interdependent. The one cannot survive without the other. As Lohia opined:

Thus the ideal in abstract form motivates thought and its concrete form motivates action. The one cannot live without the other and, if it does it stinks. In order to link the general ideal to the current reality, it must have a concrete image. The abstract must first be translated into be concrete in order to be standard for measuring the current reality.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, a general and abstract equality has no meaning unless it is translated into a particular and concrete equality. As Lohia observed:

Abstract equality, for instance, must continually be brought into relationship with concrete equality, and other generalisations must be treated similarly.<sup>21</sup>

Equality is a generalised concept, universally valid. It must acquire a definite content before being practiced. 'Socialism has tried to put a meaning into it by way of income ceilings, restricted land holdings, and the like'.<sup>22</sup> To Lohia, the general concept of equality was an atmosphere, a wish, a dream, unless it was translated into concrete equality of one type or another with definite meaning, like equality before the law, the equality of food subsidy, a servant possessing a house, children's allowance, unemployment allowance, old age pension and the like. These are all concrete ideas of equality, the welfare state in practice. People talking of a welfare state in India just do not know what it means.<sup>23</sup>

The abstract and the concrete should be so understood in their relationship that connection with reality is not lost, nor are concrete requirements stated in such low terms that the objective ever remains a distant peak. 'Maximum and immediate attainability relevant to the current situation in relationship to the ideal is the touchstone. To realise the ideal of economic equality, state craft requires such a concrete concept as is based on maximum and immediate attainability of the cherished end'.<sup>24</sup> Lohia further opined that the concrete must be relevant to the time and the area. It must try to approximate the general to the maximum possible extent but always in such a fashion that it appeared possible and reasonable.

Thus, equality should be studied in its both forms—abstract and concrete. The abstract equality and the concrete equality are neither identical nor independent but both are interrelated and inter-dependent. Therefore, both should constantly interact and interplay. It is their very nature makes the concept of equality more meaningful, vivid, living, practical and realistic. As Lohia opined:

Mankind has now reached the stage when its mind must naturally recognise as separate the two identities of the abstract and the concrete but most constantly enact their interaction and interplay.<sup>25</sup>

### *Equality: Inward and Outward, Material and Spiritual*

Lohia has used the term equality in four other meanings. Equality is found to be inward and outward as well as spiritual and material. Lohia argued that the feeling of inward equality and outward equality could be developed by spiritual training or refinement of culture. Through constant training, man may acquire a state in which he will both know and see his experience of victory and defeat or pleasure and pain. He will undoubtedly feel the joy or the sorrow, as it is difficult to see how a person who is aware can make himself insensitive to outward happenings. 'Such a man will not practice deceit neither lie nor murder and his soul shall increasingly free itself of fear or pride or urge to exploit'.<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, material equality must mean the outward approximation among nations as well as the inward approximation within the nation. Spiritual equality must mean outward kinship as much as it means inward equanimity. For the purpose of concretization of equality, material equality, spiritual equality, inward equality and outward equality should always go parallel to each other. Lohia was of the view:

Only an integrated concept of these four meanings of equanimity, kinship, material equality within the nation and among nations is worthy to become a supreme aim of life and its purpose.<sup>27</sup>

Theoretically the four meanings of equality are sound and desirable but a question may be raised that the extension of spiritual and inward equality to the whole mankind is impractical,

because, it is beyond the capacity of common people to cultivate themselves the feeling of inward and spiritual equality with the help of spiritual training or refinement of culture. However, Lohia rejected the question and supported his theory:

... for such a tranquillity has ever in the past been possible to those who have prepared themselves for it. Why should it not be possible to all or almost all of mankind?<sup>28</sup>

Keeping in his mind the structure of the Indian society, Lohia advocated preferential opportunity in place of equal opportunity for women, Adivasis, Harijans, *shudras*, and Backwards who constitute ninety percent of the population of India. Indeed, these communities in India are socially, economically, educationally and politically backward. Even nine out of the ten percent of the so called Dvija (high caste) are also backward in all respects. So, according to Lohia, ninety-nine percent population of India needed preferential treatment. And this preferential opportunity demanded, '... the securing of sixty percent of leadership posts in Government, political parties, business and the armed services, by law or by convention, to the backward castes and group namely women, *shudras*, Harijans, Adivasis and the lower castes among religious minorities ...'<sup>29</sup>

However, Lohia wanted to remove economic disparity from the society. Equality was the solution for this problem. Equality did not mean similarity or likeness. It meant that the basic needs of human life had to be fulfilled. Lohia was of the view that total equality was neither possible nor desirable. National wealth could be distributed equally among people. Some measure of inequality is bound to exist. Equality meant approximation of wealth and income. As Lohia opined:

Some measure of inequality is indeed endemic to all people. The total national produce of a country is nowhere evenly divided among its population nor is property equally owned. Among the white people, however, there is a trend towards approximation of wealth and income.<sup>30</sup>

Lohia felt that the state had to provide the minimum standard of civilised life for all its members. He advocated 'basic minimum' for all men. By 'basic minimum' he meant, particularly, an economic minimum necessary for a decent living of the individual. Through economic minimum which he also interpreted as economic equality, he wanted to assure economic security to the individual necessary for his self-realization. Lohia wanted to maintain proportional equality in the fulfilment of the primary needs of life. Minimum food, clothes, housing, medicine and education must be provided to all men of the society. Lohia was very impressed with the civic minimum of European countries. He wanted to restore this civic minimum in India. According to him:

From the point of view of basic essentials of life, namely, minimum food, minimum clothes, and in a sense minimum housing, Europeans have thus been provided a basis of equality within the nation.<sup>31</sup>

For Lohia equality and freedom were inseparable. Freedom is a dream in absence of equality. Therefore, equality is the pre-condition of freedom. Lohia preferred maximum attainable equality between man and man. And this brings equality and freedom both. As he saw it:

We seek to establish social ownership that will strive for a maximum attainable equality between man and man, and will secure bread through freedom and freedom through bread.<sup>32</sup>

### *Equality: Legal, Political and Economic*

Like an academician Lohia also examined different kinds of equality. Firstly, legal equality has been established throughout the world. 'Legal equality is equality before the law. In a law court, the judge is not expected to recognise difference in social status between one individual and another, and applies a single law irrespective of their social situation. The law of the theft, for instance, operates on all men alike. The rich man may in certain situations obtain the benefit of the doubt by employing skilled counsel, although the judge may be highly scrupulous'.<sup>33</sup>

Secondly, 'Once legal equality was established, the phase of political equality came. Political equality means the equality of the adult vote. Until recently the vote was tied up with property and educational qualifications, and the woman's vote is comparatively recent acquisition'.<sup>34</sup>

Thirdly, economic equality is basically related to political equality. Political equality carries no meaning in the absence of economic equality. He views that domestic institutions and political equality will prove ridiculous in absence of economic equality. 'Their parliamentary system gets poisoned with privilege and votes are too dumb or listen to make effective use of their vote'.<sup>35</sup> It is clear from this argument that economic equality is a precondition for political equality.

### *Methods of Equality*

Now the fundamental question arises as to how equality could be realised in different spheres. Lohia recommended three methods—'Compulsion, persuasion and examples are the three time honoured modes of change'.<sup>36</sup> For instance, vegetarianism must under no circumstances go beyond the mode of personal example. Non-smoking and non-drinking can be put into practice by the methods of example and persuasion. The mode of personal example appears to be universal in application, whereas, persuasion has a comparatively smaller scope. A government practices compulsion through the law, and an opposition practices compulsion through civil-disobedience. Personal example must be concerned with precept and practice in one's own life. The example of one man cannot bring equality. Man must make efforts individually and collectively for bringing equality in society. Society is composed of individuals. Any change in the society depends upon the character of people.

### *Measures for the Achievement of Equality*

Lohia recommended an eleven-point programme or measure which would be helpful in bringing equality in Indian society:

1. Primary education of uniform standard type and the expenditure on schools and the salaries of the teacher should be uniform. All privileged schools for primary education should be closed down.
2. Uneconomic holdings should be exempted from taxes and land revenue. It is quite possible that as a result land taxes and land revenue might be replaced by agricultural income tax.
3. A five- to seven-year plan should be drawn up to provide irrigation water to all agricultural land. This water should be provided either free or at such minimum cost or credit that every peasant may use it for his land.
4. English, as a medium, should be removed from all sectors of public life.
5. No person should be allowed to spend more than one thousand rupees per month
6. There should be one class for all passengers in the railways for the coming two decades.
7. For the coming twenty years, all the capacity of the automobile industry should be utilised for the manufacture of buses, tractors, or taxis and the manufacture of cars, for private use must stop.
8. Price fluctuation of any one crop should not exceed more than twenty percent and the selling price of an essential industrial commodity should not be more than one and half times its cost.
9. Sixty percent preferential opportunity should be given to the backward communities, i.e., the Adivasis, harijans, women and the backward castes among the Hindus and non-Hindus. Obviously, this principle of preferential opportunity does not apply to such vocations as require special skill, e.g., surgery, but executive or legislative functions cannot be counted as such
10. Ownership of more than two houses should be nationalised
11. Effective distribution of land and control over its price<sup>37</sup>

### **The Concept of Four-Pillar State**

According to Lohia, human awareness was possible in an atmosphere of liberty. Liberty requires equality and the fulfilment of equality is possible under the state. Lohia agreed with Aristotle that the state was inevitable for the attainment of good life. However his treatment of the state was not academic but realistic and it was based on actual functions which the state performed in society. The state worked for attaining social justice which meant, according to him, the welfare of all the individuals based on equality and freedom.

Now, the fundamental question arises—on what principle should the state be based? Lohia was a bitter critic of principles of capitalism and communism, but he liked the political aims of capitalism—individual freedom, democracy, human rights, constitutional method and world peace; and the economic aims of Marxism or Communism—socialization of all the means of production, abolition of private property and cessation of the oppression and exploitation of man by man. He also preferred the Gandhian ideas of decentralised economy and political system, and non-violent method. However Lohia interpreted these fundamental concepts in a different way and gave them a new colour. As Lohia opined,

I believe that it is silly to be a Gandhian or Marxist and it is equally so to be an anti—Gandhian or anti—Marxist. There are priceless treasures to learn from Gandhi as from Marx, but the learning can only be done when the frame of reference does not derive from an age or a person.<sup>38</sup>

Similarly, Communism basically differs from Socialism. The former believes in stateless society whereas the latter retains state. Lohia beautifully pointed out their difference, ‘Communism is equal to socialism minus democracy, plus centralization, plus civil war, plus Russia’.<sup>39</sup>

### *Democracy and Socialism*

Lohia considered democracy and socialism as the two sides of the same coin. There could be no socialism without democracy. He evolved a theory of limited personality of individual, party, government and state. To quote him, ‘Democracy in all circumstances shall be the sheet-anchor of the ideas and programmers of socialism. Democracy means the inevitable answerability of administration to elected assembly. It also means recognition and respect of the limited personality of individual, party, government and state—four categories, which together constitute the agencies of political action’.<sup>40</sup> He further considered democracy as not a manner of speech in regard to some values generalised beyond meaning, but a guide to action on the basis of certain concrete principles that sought to actualise the democratic ideal. Decentralization of political and economic power is the basic foundation of democracy. To him, ‘... The greatest single quality of democracy in the present age is decentralization and its meaning must be fixed both in terms of defined political power belonging to small units of direct democracy and economic arrangements and technology that would give the working man greater understanding of control over productive process’.<sup>41</sup>

Lohia believed that political democracy remained a wish in the absence of economic democracy. He further argued that democracy was not merely a question of political rights and people’s participation in government. Particularly since the First World War, democracy had come to mean more and more social and economic justice, equal opportunity, industrial democracy.

Democracy and socialism are interdependent. However, different theories of socialism and different pictures of a socialist society have been presented from time to time by socialist thinkers and workers. But all socialists accept certain common principles of socialism, at least in theory. These common principles of socialism are the following—Socialization and modernization



of the means of production, maximum equality, cessation of the exploitation of man by man, abolition of private property, elimination of capitalism, individual freedom, democratic set-up, resistance by peaceful and constitutional methods and world peace.

Lohian socialism was basically meant to bring about changes and improvements in the economic and political fields of the Indian environment. Lohia defined socialism in terms of 'equality' and 'prosperity'. To quote him,

If socialism is to be defined in two words then they are, equality and prosperity. I do not know if this definition has been given earlier at any time. If so, I would call it the best definition given so far. The meaning of socialism is ingrained in these two words: concrete meaning in terms of time and place, and total meaning in terms of ideals.<sup>42</sup>

On the basis of this definition of socialism, Lohia claimed his socialism as distinct from European socialism which had failed to acquire a face of its own, distinct from capitalist democracy and Russian communism. His socialism was new, regenerated and liberated from the traditional stains of socialism. Therefore, it alone would be capable of becoming, even among the least organised groups, a massive and victorious instrument of the liberation of man and masses.

The aims of Lohian socialism are the following:

1. 'Maximum attainable equality and justice tempered by equality
2. A decent standard of living which, while avoiding the double impasse of capitalistic and dialectical materialism, will tend to establish complete harmony between the material and moral needs of man
3. An industrial and agricultural technique and its judicious organization, subjected to man and conducive to his entire physical, intellectual and moral development
4. The decentralization of political and economic power so as to make it easily available to the common man, and restriction of bureaucracy by the encouragement of cooperation in all domains particularly in the domain of production, distribution and consumption of national produce'.<sup>43</sup>

According to Lohia, his concept of democracy and socialism would germinate and flourish under the Four-Pillar state which had proved a contribution in the field of political theory. As Lohia observed,

Democracy can bring warmth to the blood of the common man only when constitutional theory starts practising the state of four limbs, the village, the district, the province, and the centre. Organically covered by the flesh and blood of equalities ..., this constitutional skeleton of the four-pillar state can bring to democracy joyous fulfilment.<sup>44</sup>

Lohia expressed dissatisfaction with the then political administrative systems of India. He argued that the political and administrative institutions were not in tune with the traditional life

of India. And those institutions were based on foreign elements which were detrimental to the growth of a strong and healthy India. Although borrowing has been a common means of social development, no borrowed institution can thrive unless it is properly acclimatised and integrated.

Lohia was critical of the hierarchical principle of the Indian administration, which leaned on the concentration of power. As he observed, 'through various forms of political organization which mankind has hitherto evolved, the hierarchical principle has almost always come on top. Whether in a monarchy, a dictatorship or a democracy, power tends to get concentrated in a few centres and in a few persons and the hierarchy of less and lesser power is then built up'.<sup>45</sup>

The hierarchical principle applied to the Indian administration is against the spirit of democracy and socialism. Under a democratic state, people should get more power and the officers should be allowed to enjoy less power. It is a fact that only a negligible part of the educated middle class and even among them only those directly engaged in political activity, are involved in the working of our democracy. Therefore, the hierarchical base of the administration must be converted into a broad based one. The mere fact that every adult Indian has the right to vote does not make the administration broad-based. The millions of individual and desperate voters are like a heap of particles of sand that can never be a foundation for any structure. The particles must be united to form bricks or encased within concrete moulds to able to act as foundation stones.

Lohia stood for the division of sovereignty at many levels of administration. He rejected the concepts of omnipotent and omniscient state. The state must possess limited powers. The hands of common people must be strengthened. He firmly held the view that only decentralization of powers guaranteed individual freedom and strengthened the base of democracy. Lohia finally concluded,

... the dictatorial or hierarchical principle can never put life into the mass of the people, for they have sunk very low, and are utterly disorganised and are yet very numerous.<sup>46</sup>

### *Federal Structure*

Lohia further criticised the federal structure of the Indian administrative system. He did not reject the principle of federalism, but he wanted to broaden the jurisdiction of federalism. The present federal system sets up two tier states, the centre and the federating units. Lohia disliked the two-pillar structure of the state. He argued that local self governments did not derive their powers from the state constitution, but powers had been conferred on municipalities and rural governments by the Acts of the legislature and parliament. These powers are very limited in nature. Therefore, they neither have legislative powers nor even executive powers in the real sense of the terms. As Lohia opined:

... they are a conferment from top and are not a part of the organic law of any land. They are certainly no legislative powers and not even executive in any full way.<sup>47</sup>

As a result, in such constitutional framework, it is not possible for an ordinary citizen, ... to take an intelligent or effective part in the total affairs of his country.<sup>48</sup>

Local self-government is supposed to be the nursery of democracy. It is the foundation stone of democracy. If we want to make the democratic foundation strong in India, we have to make the local-self governments organic parts of the constitution. They must enjoy legislative and executive powers by the constitution of the land itself, because they are the primary institutions of the country, where common people actively participate in the administration. Lohia contended that sovereignty should be exercised at all levels of administration. The main administrative centres must be empowered with sovereign powers and be free to exercise those powers. Therefore, Lohia stood for the decentralization of political power. To him,

As to the decentralisation of political power, the principle may be laid down straight away as one of the maximum divisible powers to the village or the city consistent with the integrity and unity of the country.<sup>49</sup>

Lohia's intention was to give more powers to villagers, so that they could realise the value of Swaraj. The transfer of powers to villagers may become the stepping stone for the realization of democratic socialism in India. Lohia firmly said,

If it is acknowledged that the individual residing in his village where he can practice democracy of the first grade will be given abundant powers so as to decide his own destiny that principle is accomplished.<sup>50</sup>

### *The Four-Pillar State: The Village, the District, the Province and the Centre*

Now the question arises as to how to solve the problems of the Indian administration? Lohia said that decentralization of powers and active participation of people in administration could be a reality, unless some novelties were introduced. He found the solution for all the problems in changing the present two-tier administration into the Four-Pillar state. Therefore, he gave a new theory to the realm of administration. He discussed his concept of the Four-Pillar state which comprised of the village, the district, the province and the centre with sovereign powers and would be, according to him, created by the constitution itself. All these four limbs of the state would organically function interdependently. The sovereign powers must not reside alone in the centre and federating units but also with districts and villages which were the primary political institutions where a group of men and women lived and worked for the interest of the whole community. To quote Lohia,

Sovereign power must not reside alone in centre and federating units. It must be broken up and diffused over the smallest region where a group of men and women live. The next great advance in constitution making will be when a country frames its constitution on the basis of the four-pillar state, the village, the district, the province and the centre, being four pillars of equal majesty and dignity.<sup>51</sup>

Lohia explained that the Four-Pillar state was obviously not a mere executive arrangement. But all the four limbs of the state would have sovereign powers with their own jurisdiction of legislation and execution. Even the village and the district would have power of making legislation. They would also execute the laws made by the province and the centre. The present local self governments possess only executive and not legislative powers. As Lohia opined, 'The Four-Pillar state in both a legislative and an executive arrangement'.<sup>52</sup>

He further said that the Four-Pillar state provided a structure and a way. This state was a way of life and to all spheres of human activity, for example, production, planning, education, ownership, administration and the like. It would work on the principle of community life. All its limbs would choose their own way of life. The commonality of the state was to be so organised and sovereign power so diffused that each little community in it lived the way of life it chose. But various ways of community life would not have a completely separate existence; rather they joined one another with a sacred thread of common bond. As Lohia observed, 'Through these various ways of life must indeed run a common bond strong enough to hand the numerous communities into a state'.<sup>53</sup>

Lohia warned that '... the Four-Pillar state is not to be confused with the idea of the self-sufficient village'.<sup>54</sup> He remarked that the concept of the self-sufficient village seemed to be fantastic in the present context. The village is facing multiple problems. Human wants are multiplying day by day. Science has conquered nature, time and space. It is absurd to think of a village self-sufficient, when no part of the world can depend on its own resources in this age. Therefore, Lohia concluded that,

... the concept of self-sufficiency had better to be eliminated. The village must stay in close relationship with numerous other villages and also the world at large.<sup>55</sup>

At the same time the concept of divisible political power would have to be treated so elastically that it became capable of continual stretching consistent with the integrity of the country.

Thus, according to Lohia villages and districts would have a close relationship with one another. They would be interdependent and have numerous bonds, economic as well as cultural. And all of them would constitute a single nation, whose territorial integrity, unity and peace were to be maintained perfectly.

The Four-Pillar state would be based on the principle of division of powers. The village, the district, the province and the centre would all derive their functions and powers from the constitution of the land. Lohia enumerated certain functions of the Four-Pillar state. He himself admitted that these functions may not take practical shape but they were adequate pointers of direction and policy. He observed,

I may be permitted to indicate certain illustrations of the Four-Pillar state which may or may not turn out to be valid in practice but which are adequate pointers of direction and policy.<sup>56</sup>

He did not present a comprehensive list of functions of the Four-Pillar state but indicated certain functions which should be performed by the different limbs of the state. According to him, the armed forces of the state may be controlled by the centre, the armed police by the province but all other police may be brought under district and village control. While industries like the railways or iron and steel may be controlled by the centre, the small unit textile industry of the future may be left to district and village ownership and management. While price fixing may be a central subject, the structure of agriculture and the ratio of capital and labour in it may be left to the choice of the district and the village. Several departments through their servants, for example, those for cooperative societies, rural and agricultural development, a substantial part of irrigation, seeds, revenue collecting and the like may be transferred to the village and the district. 'I need not add that a substantial part of state revenues should stay with the village and district'.<sup>57</sup>

Lohia in the Socialist Party's Election Manifesto of 1962 further pointed out certain functions of the Four-Pillar state.

1. One fourth of all governmental and plan expenditure should be through village, district and city panchayats.
2. Police should be subordinate to village, city and district panchayats or any of their agencies.
3. The post of Collector should be abolished and all his functions distributed among various bodies in the district. As far as possible, the principles of election should be applied in administration, instead of nominations.
4. Agriculture, industry and other property, which is nationalised, should as far as possible, be owned and administered by village, city, and district panchayats.
5. Economic decentralization, corresponding to political and administrative decentralization should be brought about through maximum utilization of small machines.<sup>58</sup>

Lohia said that the Four-Pillar state must possess the power of planning. Planning must not be the subject of centre alone. He preferred social ownership to mixed economy.

Lohia's Four-Pillar state rose above the issue of regionalism. He argued that the feeling of provincial narrowness or regionalism may be subdued if the Four-Pillar state instead of the two-tier state would be established, and 'power, including the right to choose its language of primary instruction and commerce, were given to the village community'.<sup>59</sup> The moment the village and the district start to exercise their sovereign powers, many local problems will be automatically solved. The voices of provincial narrowness will come down.

However, Lohia considered the functioning of the Four-Pillar state in the present conditions a Herculean task. Illiteracy, fears, superstitions, castes and selfishness may create many problems on the path of the smooth functioning of the Four-Pillar state. Therefore, in the present situation, this concept may appear fantastic to many in India. However Lohia observed, 'And yet to give him power seems the only way to deliver the people from inertia as well as an administration that is both top heavy and corrupt'.<sup>60</sup> He expressed full faith in the proper functioning

of the Four-Pillar state which would prove a panacea for all ills in the course of time. He father said, '... the only way to purify controls is to leave their administration to the village town and district panchayats and to take them out of the hands of legislators and government servants'.<sup>61</sup>

Under the Panchayati Raj Scheme, the village panchayats, the Panchayat Samitis and the Zila Parishads have been established as rural governments in India. However the powers of these local bodies have been tightened by administrative control and they have become servants of state governments. Village representatives have been demoralised. They act more or less like civil servants.

Lohia found inadequacies in parliamentary democracy and proletarian dictatorship as well and neither was able to prevent concentration of power and tyranny. Lohia firmly expressed the view that both the concentration of power and tyranny could be removed, only if the concept of the Four-Pillar state would be established in India. Lohia concluded:

'By giving power to small communities of men where democracy of the first grade is possible, the four-pillar state ensures effective and intelligent democracy to the common man'.<sup>62</sup>

Lohia has not mentioned the size and population for the creation of a village and a district government. He has merely pointed out the village, the district, the province and the centre, as the four limbs of the four-pillar state. Also, he has not worked out the system of election for the four limbs of the state. He has failed to work out a detailed picture of the four-pillar state.

Similarly, he expected community life under the four-pillar state. All the four limbs of the state exercised sovereign powers. Under such a situation community life, and integrity and unity of the country seem to be doubtful. Mutual disobedience of the four limbs of the state may lead the country to the brink of ruin.

There must be a comprehensive list of functions which should distribute the different functions to the village, the district, the province and the centre under the four-pillar state. Lohia has simply mentioned functions like armed police, armed forces, railway, iron and steel and textile industries. His distribution of functions under the four limbs of the state was not clear and concrete. To quote him, 'No precise list of federal or state or district or village or concurrent subjects can yet be drawn up'.<sup>63</sup> He further said that 'Experience and time and perhaps the next Constituent Assembly of India will make precise allocations'.<sup>64</sup> Indeed the working of the four-pillar state in the absence of a precise list of functions will create many confusions and nuisances.

There is no guarantee that the four-pillar state may prove to be the Messiah in the present situation. If the two-tier system fails in India, the four-tier system may also meet the same fate. Because, as Lord Acton said, power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely, so the sovereign village and district may misuse powers. The system is not in itself bad. Its success or failure depends upon the character of man. Therefore, apart from providing a good administrative system, we should also make efforts to bring about changes in human nature.

Lohia wanted to establish village communities on the models of the ancient period. How the atomised village of today that has no collective will of its own and is completely at the

mercy of selfish and exploitative interest can be integrated into a real self-governing community and made a stable foundation of Indian polity is the most important question of national reconstruction.

Lohia rejected the Western system of democracy as it does not give full scope to the people to participate in the management of their affairs and is based upon an atomised society, the state being made up of an inorganic sum of individuals. This, according to him, was both against the social nature of man and the scientific organization of society. In its place, he pleaded for a model of democracy which was based on an integrated conception of society and allowed the fullest possible scope to the individual to participate in the management of his affairs, without the intermediation of political parties.

Today, the problem is to put man in touch with man, so that they may live together in meaningful, understandable, controllable relationships. Lohia was very much impressed with the community life of the ancient Indian villages and the Greek city-states. Small size, small population, corporate life, self-sufficiency and no opposition between individual and state, were the common features of the ancient villages and the Greek city-states. He wanted to revive and organise his political systems and foundational democratic institutions on the basis of community life. Territorial contiguity of a number of families, while it is the starting point and a most important condition, does not in itself make a community. The present day Indian villages are not proper communities. They were so at one time, but now are mere territorial settlements, life in them being individualistic, rather than communal, mineral rather than organic.

He argued that caste, class, race, religion, politics all these divided men into different, often conflicting groups. But, the community brought them together, united them and harmonised their interests. In the community, agriculture, industry, capital, labour, skill, intelligence are not at loggerheads with one another but are synthesized in the service of the community

Lohia criticized the method of planning in India. Our planning does not begin with the village and the region and go upwards, but originate from the centre, going downwards. This does not help to develop the communities, because they are not given an opportunity to plan for themselves as communities and then to coordinate their plans from level to level.

The four-pillar state stood for community life. Lohia wanted to curtail the unlimited powers of the state. He wants to give real power in the hands of common people rather than party leaders and administrators. The aim of his struggle was to decentralise the economic and political powers both, so that the foundation of democracy can become strong and people can get an opportunity to taste the fruit of *swaraj*.

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## Jayaprakash Narayan: Marxism, Democratic Socialism and Gandhism

*Mahendra Prasad Singh and Himanshu Roy*

Power which is a fundamental ingredient of politics and a ubiquitous social phenomenon evokes different responses from different political actors depending on their personal dispositions and cultural and historical milieus. Among these responses, the one that appears most desirable is represented by the attitude that Gandhi brought to bear on power and, for that matter, politics generally. Jayaprakash Narayan (1902–1979), a posthumous follower of the Mahatma, stands out as the most creative innovator of Gandhian politics, just as Jawaharlal Nehru seems to be the safest bridge between Gandhi and modern science and technology, and Acharya Vinoba Bhave, the most authentic link between Gandhism and normative traditional Hindu humanism.

JP, as he was popularly called, was described in a biographical sketch in 1963 as, ‘India’s foremost dissenter, critic, intellectual nonconformist and fighter of lost causes that never lose their following’.<sup>1</sup> That characterization remained valid until his death. His passionate quest for an ideological identity took him on a voyage from Marxism through democratic socialism to Gandhian socialism and in the process he creatively developed the socialist and Gandhian traditions of thought, grappling with some of the deepest problems of Indian democracy and contemporary civilization.<sup>2</sup> He was probably the most sophisticated advocate of a nonpartisan democracy and a Gandhian constitution for independent India.<sup>3</sup> ‘No other Indian public figure’, wrote Girilal Jain on the morrow of JP’s death, ‘has sought to embody so many intellectual currents and cross-currents in himself as JP, not even the incomparably supple-minded Jawaharlal Nehru. JP was the mirror to 20th century India’.<sup>4</sup>

## Marxism and Democratic Socialism

Essentially, JP's entire philosophy and political praxis can be divided into two broad streams, namely, Democratic socialism and *Sarvodaya*. From the Leninist perspective his earliest stint in politics (1930s) is categorised as the Marxian phase but when it is put to rigorous scrutiny with the benefit of hindsight of history we do not find any fundamental difference between his Marxism and Democratic socialism. However, irrespective of change in nomenclature or in his philosophy that occurred in the 40 years of his political praxis there is a consistency in his outlook on one aspect, i.e., in his approach towards peasantry and in his thoughts about village life. His Marxism or Democratic socialism, besides, was not ahead of radical liberalism. In 1930s or in 40s when Leninism-Stalinism reigned supreme his outlook on economy and politics of India was treated as Marxism or socialism, but as history shows that the radical reforms he had proposed in 1936 or in 1940 for achieving socialism were already abandoned by Marx and Engels in the 19th century on the ground that they were no longer relevant since the development of capitalism had already incorporated them or made them redundant. Numerous prefaces to new editions of the 'Communist Manifesto' abundantly indicate towards this trend. Apart from it, 'The Critique of the Gotha Programme' and 'The Peasant Question in France and Germany' reveal the irrelevance of the demands of peasantry for the cause of socialism that French and German communists had thought to put forward as part of their programme. In the April *Thesis*, however, Lenin made a capitulation and brought the peasantry and their causes back into the socialist fold which Marx and Engels had criticised throughout their lives. The success of Lenin in Russia made his political programmes universal which was accepted as socialism. Lenin, nonetheless, accepted the fact that Russian economy was state monopoly capitalism, and that in the given Russian circumstances the best course for the success of the revolution was to co-opt the peasantry for it. He knew very well that land reforms and other such measures were the tasks of the bourgeois revolution, and in the absence of such fulfilment it had to be completed by the Communists. But the Communists in India accepted Lenin's politico-economic programmes as the development of Marxism without deep critical analysis. JP's Marxism was, more or less, the same though he never joined the CPI and differed with it on many issues. His realization of weaknesses in Lenin's theory came later. His Marxism was essentially an ideology steeped in the Leninist paradigm that he had learnt at Madison, Wisconsin, in the U.S.A. in the company of Jewish and European-born students. It was an ideology of a radical youth leader of '1930s–1940s who was searching for methods and objectives of freedom.

To understand his Marxism and socialism better let us analyse some of the programmes that he enunciated from the platform of the Congress Socialist Party (C.S.P.). In 1936, which forms part of his Marxian phase, in his *Why Socialism?* the following objectives were delineated:<sup>5</sup>

- Transfer of all power to the producing masses
- Development of economic life of the country to be planned and controlled by the state
- Socialization of all key and principal industries, banks, insurance and public utilities, with a view to the progressive socialization of all means of production, distribution and exchange

- State monopoly of foreign trade
- Organization of cooperatives for production, distribution and credit in the unorganised sector of the economy
- Elimination of princes, landlords and all other classes of exploiters without compensation
- Redistribution of land to peasants
- Encouragement and promotion of cooperative farming by the state
- Liquidation of debts of peasants and workers
- Recognition of right to work or maintenance by the state
- Distribution of economic goods based on the principle of 'to everyone according to his need and from everyone according to his capacity'
- Adult franchise on functional basis
- No support or discrimination to any religion by the state
- No recognition of any distinction based on caste and community and no discrimination between sexes.

In 1940, in the Draft Resolution for the Congress session at Ramgarh, he outlined another programme that has been called as his phase of Democratic socialism. These programmes were as follows:<sup>6</sup>

- Guarantee of full individual and civil liberty and religious cultural freedom
- Abolition of all distinction based on birth and privileges
- Guarantees of equal rights to all citizens
- The political and economic organization of the state to be based on the principles of social justice and economic freedom
- All large-scale production to be under collective ownership and control
- Political and economic organization of the state to be conducive to the satisfaction of the rational requirements of all members of the society, material satisfaction need not be the top and sole objective: State to aim at creating conditions for healthy living and the moral and intellectual development of individual
- State to endeavour to promote small-scale production carried on both individual or co-operative effort for the equal benefit of all concerned; and life of the villager should be recognised with a view to making them self-governing and self-sufficient and as large a measure as possible

In 1946, in the article 'My Picture of Socialism', he again emphasised the following features:<sup>7</sup>

1. Cooperative farms run by village panchayats
2. Large-scale industries owned and managed by the community
3. Small-scale industries organised under producers' cooperatives
4. State's role to be limited and to be democratised.

A further perusal of the article leads us to the fact that cooperative farming was to be the first stage of socialist farming. The next stage was 'the collective stage in which no individual proprietary rights in agricultural lands ... are recognised and all lands pertaining to a village, or farming unit are owned and run by village collectives'.<sup>8</sup> Secondly, all these cooperative and collectivization stages were to be brought about through persuasion and minimum force instead of whole-sale repression; and finally, the population thrown out of agriculture as a result of these reformatory measures were to be accommodated 'in industry, particularly industries subsidiary to farming': As far as the large industries were concerned they were to be 'owned and managed by the Federal or Provincial Governments' with representatives of trade unions having 'appropriate voice in the management from the lowest to the highest levels'. Small industries were to be 'organised in to producers' cooperatives who would own and manage their industries'. He further advocated a third type of industrial ownership 'that is municipal or community ownership' in which 'the representative of the workers ... would naturally have an adequate voice in their management'.<sup>9</sup> He also advocated the development of cooperatives and community owned industries because he desired 'to prevent the state from acquiring the sole monopoly in industry and employment'. Thus the three representative writings covering a period of over ten years provide us sufficient insights into his thought process in his socialist phase.

A comparative study of all these programmes elucidates one point starkly, i.e., there is no fundamental difference between the two phases of his political praxis called the Marxian phase and the Democratic socialist phase; rather there is a persistent consistency in his world outlook as well as in the methods of implementing the reforms. The abolition of the Zamindari system and application of land reforms, cooperative farming and collectivization, nationalization of industries, etc., had been his constant mantra. Similarly, demand for decentralization of power or opposition to the 'dictatorship' of the proletariat, espousal of peaceful, non-violent social transition and emphasis on community/peoples' management of agriculture, industries, resources, etc., were his other hallmarks covering the spectrum of politics. Further, he consistently opposed the 'socialist' Russian model, maintained his ideological autonomy and learnt fast from the post-1924 history of Russia.

Apart from all these programmes and praxis, there is another side of his ideology. As said earlier, his approach towards peasantry was looked at from the Leninist prism. Though critical of Stalin's approach towards the implementation of economic and political programmes, he never emerged out of the Leninistic-Stalinistic paradigm of Marxism, never read Marxism critically, independent of this paradigm and remained a prisoner of his time; and when he emerged out of this paradigm in the 1950's it was with the rejection of Marxism itself, thus, throwing the baby with the bath water. Had he read Marx and Engels with an independent mind he would have found in them a thorough and consistent critique of peasantry, who treated peasantry as a section destined to be lost irrevocably, a section on whose tomb the proletariat emerges. The antithetical demands of the peasantry and proletariat, with one asking for private property and capital in land and the other asking for their abolition, made Marx and Engels take the side of the proletariat. It was not for nothing that Marx treated the peasantry as a 'sack of potatoes';

rather, he was very much aware of the revolutionary role played by the English, French and German peasants. But what he differentiated between the revolutionary roles of the peasantry and the proletariat was the historic tasks they were destined to play. While one was the protagonist of the private property with his entire world outlook revolving around a patch of land, the other was the executioner of such kind of social relations and a votary of association of immediate producers; while one represented the past the other represented the future; while one produced Bonaparte, the other threw up Communards. But these fundamental differences were overlooked after Engel's death and what remained intact was the abstract revolutionary role of the peasantry cut off from their nature and historic role. It was Lenin who capitulated on the face of opposition during October 1917 and compromised with the peasantry in contravention to Marx's stand. Since then the peasant question became part of the socialist programme. Thus, what was once the task of the radical bourgeoisie became part of the socialist programme, and their protagonists became Marxists; what was Marxism became infantile disorder. JP's Marxism and Democratic socialism was the part of that socialistic paradigm of the 1930's and 1940's.

## Gandhism

Jayaprakash Narayan was, in varying degrees, dissatisfied or disenchanted not only with the people's democracies under Communist one-party systems and with some non-Western varieties of guided or basic democracies but also with liberal democracies of the West. His disillusionment with Marxism and Bolshevism followed, at the philosophical plane, from his questioning 'if good ends could ever be achieved by bad means'<sup>10</sup> and by his realization that 'materialism as a philosophical outlook could not provide any basis for ethical conduct and any incentive for goodness'.<sup>11</sup>

He was driven in the same major direction by his observations, on a more practical plane, of actual distortions revealing the immense political and economic corruptibility of Communism inherent in the unpredictability of revolutionary means (as the leader no longer remains in control of the revolutionary violence once let loose) and in the authoritarian one-party system. It offers state capitalism as a poor substitute for socialism made worse under the dictatorship of a new class of bureaucratic rulers.

All this led JP to the conclusion '(a) that in a society where it was possible for the people by democratic means to bring about social change it would be counter-revolutionary to resort to violence, and (b) that socialism could not exist, nor be created, in the absence of democratic freedoms'.<sup>12</sup>

Jayaprakash Narayan sympathised with attempts of some Third World leaders, following the post-war rapid collapse of Western-type democratic regimes, to experiment with next concepts of democracy presumably rooted more firmly in indigenous traditions and contemporary realities. 'The setting up of the National Union in the U.A.R. and Basic Democracies in Pakistan', he wrote, 'is some little advance in the promised direction, but these countries are still far from being a democracy of any kind whatever'.<sup>13</sup>

JP seemed to be only less dissatisfied with the Western democracies which sought to combine political liberalism with capitalist economy and the welfare state: ‘There is no doubt that the developed and mature democracies of the West are not so top-heavy and devoid of the support of broad-based infrastructures of various kinds’.<sup>14</sup> But as he sees it, the ‘Western democracy is little more than government by consent’ electorally obtained at one point in time and then in effect putting off popular participation until the next elections.<sup>15</sup> Besides, European liberalism and socialism also fall short of ‘a socialist democracy’. In Britain, for instance, the ‘Welfare State, which is constantly under conservative fire, is a poor substitute for socialism, and that too seems to be in the danger of being converted into the ‘opportunity state’ of Mr. Macmillan’.<sup>16</sup>

Another twin trend in Western democracies that disturbed him was private corporatization and governmental bureaucratization, both leading to centralization: ‘with the growth of science and technology and complex economic system, government is becoming more and more the business of smaller and smaller numbers of people. With the consequent growing concentration of economic and political power in the hands of fewer people—whether they are private citizens or officers of the state—democracy would soon be just a matter of form rather than of substance’.<sup>17</sup>

The alternative offered by JP was *Sarvodaya*—a communitarian utopia promising genuinely participative democracy and real socialism. Socially, *sarvodaya* was to be based not on an exclusive dominant class or group but on an all-inclusive egalitarian commune of citizens.<sup>18</sup> Politically, it sought to establish a truly decentralised democracy that went beyond the democratic elitism of the West and ensured what JP called Panchayati Raj or ‘Swaraj from below’.<sup>19</sup> Economically, *sarvodaya* envisaged a thoroughly decentralised and voluntaristic economic order, going beyond state socialism and comprising, on the one hand, a network of many local and regional small-scale industries plus some large-scale central industries, and, on the other, a large number of communitarian farms collectively owned and managed by entire villages.<sup>20</sup>

Structurally and territorially, the panchayati democracy under the *Sarvodaya* of JPs’ vision, would take an organic institutional form in which the Gram or Nagar Sabha (village or town/mohalla assembly consisting of all adults therein) became the base from which sprung two systems of government going up to higher levels. The first of these was a three-tier local self-government with the Gram Sabha indirectly and consensually electing the Panchayat Samitis (bloc assemblies) and the latter indirectly electing the Zila Parishads (district assemblies). The other set of legislative institutions stemming from the Gram/Nagar Sabha comprised of the Vidhan Sabha (state assembly) and Lok Sabha (national parliament) which were to be elected through a three-step process.

In the first step, each Gram Sabha in a Vidhan Sabha or a Lok Sabha constituency (as the case may be) would elect two delegates to a constituency electoral college called Electoral Council. The delegates were to be elected by a show of hand through repeated balloting and dropping at each ballot the candidate receiving the least vote in the previous ballot until only two names remain.

In the second step, the Electoral Council was convened to select and set up candidates for the constituency concerned. The candidates receiving not less than a minimum specified percentage—say 30 percent—of the Electoral Council votes would be designated candidates for direct mass election.

In the final step the name of candidates selected by the Electoral Council was to be sent out to different Gram Sabha within the constituency. Each Gram Sabha would then separately meet for directly electing the representative. The candidate carrying the majority of Gram Sabhas or alternatively, the majority of aggregated Gram Sabha votes, was declared elected.<sup>21</sup> These governmental structures were to be based on ‘a thorough-going system of political as well as economic decentralization’<sup>22</sup> that went far beyond the ‘federalism-with-a-strong-centre’ philosophy of the Constituent Assembly and the Indian Constitution.

There was little room for political party system as well as for the state in the *Sarvodaya* of JP’s vision: both worked against the free exercise of freedom and sovereignty by the people—the parties by fragmenting the community and by imposing themselves on the masses, and the state by assuming the monopoly of political power (e.g. the bourgeois state), and by threatening to add to it the monopoly of economic power (e.g., the socialist state). Parties were welcome only in their more universalistic reincarnation as voluntary associational groups in the service of the people.<sup>23</sup> As for the state, JP writes: ‘I was, and am not sure if the State would ever wither away completely. But I am sure it is one of the noblest goals of social endeavour to ensure that the power and functions and spheres of the state are reduced as far as possible’.<sup>24</sup>

JP’s is thus a vision of a community of moral and civic citizens in active pursuit of ‘self-government, self-management, mutual cooperation and sharing, equality, freedom, brotherhood’.<sup>25</sup> Voluntary actions, having its roots in the society and individuals constituting it, loomed larger in this reordering of political system and overshadowed the limited state and minimal government.

JP’s greater reliance on *lokniti* (politics of people) and *loksbakti* (power of people) in preference to *rajniti* (power politics) and *rajshakti* (state power) could also be observed in his behaviour as a political and social leader. In 1942, he came forward to lead a spontaneous mass upsurge at a time when the entire top leadership of the Indian National Congress was in jail. In 1954, he cut off his life-long association with party politics to join Acharya Vinoba Bhave’s *Bhoodan* (voluntary land donation for the landless) movement. In 1966-67, he stepped forward during the Bihar famine to lead the organization of a massive relief operation on a voluntarist basis largely outside the usual governmental frameworks.

During the Bihar Movement in the early and mid-1970’s he gave his blessings and leadership to another mass upsurge on the issue of corruption and authoritarianism largely outside the framework of the established party system.<sup>26</sup> It was during this movement that he put forward his ideas of a Gandhian *sampurna kranti* (total revolution), and brought to the fore issues relating to fundamental reforms in the electoral, administrative, economic, social, political, and educational systems of the country with greater salience and urgency than ever since independence.<sup>27</sup>

JP joined this movement, nevertheless, to depend indirectly on pre-existing organizational networks in league with newer social and political forces within a framework of largely *ad hoc* inclusive structures such as *Lok Sangharsha Samiti* and *Chhatra-Yuva Sangharsha Vabini*. Apart from non-party students, the intelligentsia and the nondescript masses contagiously drawn into it, the movement tended to draw structural sustenance mainly from a divided *Sarvodaya* stream and the non-CPI opposition parties ranged against the ruling Congress.<sup>28</sup>



This aspect of the movement, coupled with the fact that it came to be intercepted by the proclamation of internal Emergency, did not allow a long enough political socialization to yield a sizeable corps of young political recruits to make their impact felt on the post-Emergency politics. Even in Bihar where an identifiable small band of young recruits got elected to the Vidhan Sabha in 1977 it was lost in the maize of factional politics in the Janata Party along the lines of the major constituent parties forming the Janata agglomerate as well as along caste lines. This party that the advocate of nonpartisan politics ironically fathered and fostered led the spectacular electoral landslide in 1977 and managed to govern in New Delhi for three years, but did not even survive the terminally ailing JP except as a rump.

Nevertheless, the ideological legacy to the nation bequeathed by him will certainly be more durable and powerful than any organizational legacy could perhaps have been. JP's creative experiments in Gandhian thought and politics had significance beyond India. As Nirmal Verma writes, 'In his endeavour to transcend the deceptions and the iron laws of history he made each of us aware of the innermost laws of our own being. This moral dimension elevated 'Total Revolution' far above all the power-crazed revolutions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. J.P. in his last days was like a poet-revolutionary who had at long last found a form, a content and a living voice for that restless dream which had never ceased to stir within him'.<sup>29</sup>

## Notes and References

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1. Welles Hagen: *After Nehru, Who?* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1963), p.85.
2. This personal odyssey is briefly narrated by JP himself in his *From Socialism to Sarvodaya* (Kashi: Akhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, 1959, 2nd ed., preface date 1957). It clearly shows the seminal influences of Marx and Marxists, of M.N. Roy, of Social Democrats, and of Gandhi and Gandhians on the evolution of JP's thought.  
Perhaps the most comprehensive collection of JP's writings and speeches available through regular publication channels is Jayaprakash Narayan, *Towards Total Revolution Search for an Ideology*, Vol. 1; *Politics in India*, Vol. 2, *India and Her Problems*, Vol.III: *Total Revolution*, Vol. IV (edited by Brahmanand) Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1978. See also Jayaprakash Narayan, *Socialism, Sarvodaya and Democracy* (edited by Bimla Prasad), Bombay: Asia, 1964; Bimal Prasad (ed.), *Jayaprakash Narayan, Selected Works*, five volumes, Manohar, New Delhi; Ajit Battacharjee, *Unfinished Revolution: A Political Biography of Jayaprakash*; Sudhanshu Ranjan, *Jayaprakash Narayan*, NBT, Delhi, 2002; Bimal Prasad, *Jayaprakash Narayan*, Konark, Delhi, 2002.
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5. Quoted in M. N. Thakur. 'Jayaprakash Narayan: An Indian Political Thinker' in *Jigyansa*, Vol.1, No.1, October 1996, p.42.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
7. *Ibid.*

8. Verinder Grover (Ed.). *Jayaprakash Narayan*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1995, p.15.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21.
10. *From Socialism to Sarvodaya*, p.22.
11. *Ibid.*, p.27.
12. *Ibid.*, p.18.
13. *Swaraj for the People*, p.5.
14. *Ibid.*, p.3.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *From Socialism to Sarvodaya*, pp.23–2–3.
17. *Swaraj for the People*, p.3.
18. *From Socialism to Sarvodaya*, pp. 39–41.
19. *Swaraj for the People*, Chap.2.
20. *Ibid.*, Chap. 3, and *From Socialism to Sarvodaya*, pp. 38–39.
21. *Swaraj for the People*, Chaps 2 and 4. This is a partially revised version of the scheme earlier presented in *A Plea for Reconstruction of Indian Polity*, which had advocated a single hierarchical structure with each lower level electing the higher - i.e., the Gram Sabha—Panchayat Samiti-Zila Parishad—Vidhan Sabha-Lok Sabha. The revision was motivated by two main considerations: (1) to discourage parochialism and give the mass public a sense of direct participation in the highest level elections and (2) to minimise chances of electoral corruption, by moneyed interests under indirect system of election with small numbers of electors at each level except the lowest.
22. *Swaraj for the People*, p.4.
23. 'I saw ... how people's rule became in effect party rule; how party rule in turn became the rule of a caucus or coterie; how democracy was reduced to mere casting of votes; how even this right of vote was restricted severely by powerful parties setting up their candidates from whom alone, for all practical purposes, the voters had to make their choice ...' *From Socialism to Sarvodaya*, pp.34–35. See also *Swaraj for the People*, Chaps. 2 and 4.
24. *From Socialism to Sarvodaya*, p.37.
25. *Ibid.*, p.40.
26. See John R. Wood, 'Extra-Parliamentary Opposition in India: An Analysis of Populist Agitations in Gujarat and Bihar', *Pacific Affairs*, Vol.48, No.3 (Fall 1975), pp. 313–334; Ghanshyam Shah, *Protest Movements in Two Indian States: A Study of the Gujarat and Bihar Movements* (Delhi: Ajanta, 1977).
27. See Jayaprakash Narayan, *Total Revolution* (Varanasi: Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, 1975), and Mahendra Prasad Singh, 'Jayaprakash Narayan on Parliamentary Democracy and Electoral Reform in India', *Gandhi Marg (New Delhi)*, Vol.1, No.12 (March 1980), pp.757–64.
28. This aspect of the movement led Romesh Thapar in a contemporary review to remark that if it 'had insulated itself against the activists of the right who saw in it an ideal anti-Indira lever, then at least the way would have been clear for building a dynamic consensus around the core questions, a consensus cutting across party boundaries and ideologies ... But an essentially Gandhian intervention from within the movement of protest to correct the aberrations and to remove the prevailing confusion in perspectives could once again create the possibility of a great cleansing'. Romesh Thapar, 'Salvaging, the Passion' in T.K. Mahadevan (ed). *Jayaprakash Narayan and the Future of Democracy* (New Delhi and Madras: Affiliated East West Press, 1975), pp. 229–30.
29. Nirmal Verma, 'On Heroism in Our Time' (Translated from the Hindi by Suresh Sharma), *Seminar*, No 245 (January 1980), p.75.

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