1.1 INTRODUCTION

Gandhi is one of the great activist-theoreticians of the twentieth century. His writings emerged mainly during the varied process of social, economic and political actions. As Bondurant observed, “One cannot... turn to the writings of Gandhi for a definite statement in political theory. Gandhi was a political actionist and a practical philosopher; he was not a theorist. His writings abound with inconsistencies – one result of his persistent habit of thinking in public. Whatever philosophical formulations he made were inspired by and directed towards solving of immediate problems. The unsophisticated explanations which Gandhi offered for his methods, his objectives, his policy, and creed were part of a program of action. They should not be interpreted in terms either of a theory or of practical master planning” (Bondurant, 1967, p.7). During his entire life, Gandhi wrote three book-length works. The most important, his Autobiography first appeared in a serialised form in one of his Gujarati journals. The other two were Satyagraha in South Africa and the Hind Swaraj (1909). Gandhi himself was conscious of the inadequacies of his writings both at the theoretical and scholar levels. In a Socratic manner, he considered his life as his message and observed:

As a matter of fact, my writings should be cremated with my body. What I have done will endure, not what I have said and written. I have often said that even if all our scriptures perish one mantra of Ishopanishad was enough to declare the essence of Hinduism- but even that one verse will be of no avail if there is no one to live it (cited in Bose and Patwardhan, 1967, p.56).

Dalton observes that Gandhi formed his beliefs much before he arrived in South Africa, evident from his Autobiography in which he mentions his childhood experiences and lessons which helped to crystallise two of his core ideas: truth and non violence. However, South
Africa became “the laboratory of Gandhi’s experiments; it proved an excellent testing ground, since many of the problems which he later found in India occurred there in miniature” (Dalton 1982, p.134). The *Hind Swaraj* (1909) contains the idea that emerged from his experiences in South Africa.

The aim of *Hind Swaraj* was to answer the anarchists with an alternative to violence, derived from Gandhi’s earliest experiments with *Satyagraha*. Equally important is the book’s concern with the concept from which it takes its title: this is Gandhi’s first extensive statement on *swaraj*, and the ideas on it which he sets forth here provide the basis for much of his future thinking on the meaning of freedom. “*Hind Swaraj*, then, is a statement on both the method and the goal of Gandhi’s thought: *Satyagraha* and *Swaraj*” (Ibid, 136).

**Aims and Objectives**

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand

- The background to modern Indian thought
- The intellectual influences that shaped Gandhi’s thought
- Gandhi’s critique of the West and his seeking indigenous roots to explain his views

### 1.2 AUTONOMY OF MODERN INDIAN THOUGHT

Though the Western assessment of the ancient Indian political thought is very discouraging, it is both rich and varied. This tradition is very old beginning with the Vedic period followed by the Upanishads, the *Dharma Shastras*, Buddhist literature, *Manu Smriti*, the *Shanti Parva* of the *Mahabharatha* and the *Arthashastra* schools. This was followed by the advent of Islamic thought from eighth century onwards. The best flowering of Islamic political theory came during the reign of the Mughal Emperor, Akbar the Great. The major challenge to modern political theorising has been its continued search of identity in the fact of the domination of Western thought and culture, which inevitably follows the two hundred years of presence of British imperialism. In sharp contrast to many other areas of the world where imperialism destroyed all traces of indigenous cultures, traditions and even languages, the Indian society reflects continuous debate and dialogue with the West, which makes modern Indian political theory distinctive and autonomous.

This trend begins at the very inception with the writings and actions of Raja Rammohan Roy, who is the first most important political thinker of modern times after India came in contact with Western ideas and institutions. With the establishment of the Asiatic Society in 1844 under the able guidance of William Jones, the dissection of ancient Sanskrit literature begins throwing light on the rich heritage of ancient Indian civilisation. These facts are unknown to the educated Indians and act as a great stimulus in creating a new confidence. This is exemplified in the actions of Rammohan. In fact Rammohan is the first great precursor of commentators like Will Durant who rightly believed in the progress and advance of civilisation as a co-operative enterprise. This enables the modern Indian thinkers to renew and reform their own institutions in light of Western knowledge and experience without renouncing their own cultural tradition and inheritance. The path initiated by Rammohan is followed and elaborated by Kesub Chandra Sen, Dayanand Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda, Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore.

Gandhi represents the culmination of this discourse. He modernises tradition by highlighting the problem of modern industrialised westernised civilisation in the *Hind Swaraj*, considered
to be the most important tract in political theory. His major success as a moderniser of tradition is possible due to the groundwork that the aforesaid earlier thinkers laid down. But the major difference between these earlier thinkers and Gandhi lay in his ability to perform a transformative criticism of many of the ideas that the earlier thinkers dealt with. In this context, two important developments deserve special mention. First, his own assessment of the earlier thinkers and reforms in which he differs considerably from many of his contemporaries. Second, he changes the very context of re-examining the content of modernisation of Hindu society, and provides a dramatically opposite interpretation of the Bhagavad Gita to the one that Tilak popularises. This also leads him to create a new epoch in modern political theorising by developing a theory of praxis, of unity of theory and action. From the limited context of Champaran to the later mass movements, Gandhi inaugurates a totally new kind of political discourse dealing with important concepts like the nature of truth, role of man, and a conception of an ideal state with a constructive programme for the Indian society. However, even during this period which is called the Gandhian era, the autonomy and diversity of modern Indian political theory reflects in the debates that takes place between Gandhi and the Marxists, and the Revolutionary Nationalists and a significant debate between Gandhi and Tagore. The interesting point to note about the divergence of opinion between Gandhi and Tagore is that in spite of their commitment to non-violence and search for truth, they differ in their assessment of the Indian reality and also in their critical dissection of the West.

1.3 INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES ON GANDHI

Gandhi grows to political maturity in the West, which means that his essential experience is the British experience. He exhibits considerable influence of Western thinkers like Ruskin, Thoreau and Tolstoy throughout his life. He regards Socrates as an example to emulate and even translates Plato’s Apology in Gujarati. In basic principles of politics, he indicates a marked preference for anarchism, which essentially belongs to a radical Western tradition. In organisational matters, the Western imprint is clearly discernible in him. In matters of personal conviction like vegetarianism, some western groups and writings clearly influence him. Salt’s A Plea for Vegetarianism, as Woodcock says, ‘is a revelation to Gandhi for it defended in rational terms the teachings transmitted to his half-attentive mind in childhood by means of myth and precept. The dietary exercises he began under Salt’s inspiration were the first of his experiments with truth’.

Gandhi acknowledges Ruskin, Tolstoy and Thoreau as exerting profound intellectual influence on him though Ruskin’s Unto This Last transforms his life. An English friend H.S. L. Polak gives the book to him for him to read while undertaking a 24-hour journey from Johannesburg to Durban in 1904. He summarises his understanding of the book into three principles:

1) That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all.

2) That a lawyer’s work has the same value as the barber’s, inasmuch as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.¹

3) That a life of labour, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman, is the life worth living.²

The first of these I knew. The second I had dimly realized. The third had never occurred to me. Unto This Last made it as clear as daylight for me that the second and third were contained in the first. I arose with the dawn, ready to reduce these principles to practice (Gandhi, 1954, 365).
Gandhi’s Political Thought

Gandhi learns from Ruskin that an unequal social order not linked from realities of labour could not allow for the possibility of non-violence. Like Ruskin, he also believes in restricting wealth and placing tools in the hands of those who could use them. Ruskin’s principles inspires Gandhi to work out the basis of his concept of ‘bread labour’, of making the community organisation responsible for the welfare of the labourer and stress on cooperation rather than competition. These ideas are put into practice during the mill strike in Ahmedabad (Erikson, 1969). Gandhi advocates a concept of minimum living wage and proportionate equality permitting differences among individuals beyond the minimum on the basis of differing needs. Ruskin’s ideas on political economy are the bedrock of the principles of Gandhi’s *ashram* organisations, the Phoenix Farm, an experimental community of Indians and Europeans which also published the *Indian Opinion*, the Tolstoy Farm of 1910 and the Sabarmati Ashram.

Ruskin influenced Gandhi’s conception of soul-force as a substitute for physical force; he was the chief source of Gandhi’s economic ideas; but, above all, he changed Gandhi as a person. ...Thus it was from his reading of Ruskin that Gandhi dated his renunciation of money and professional advancement, his choice of a way of life that led him eventually to call himself a farmer and weaver rather than a lawyer, and his definition of the ideals that his disciples as well as himself should embrace. It was at this time that he adopted the simple life and identified himself with the masses of the poor (McLaughlin, 1974, P.15, 18).

Tolstoy’s faith in love and teachings of the *Sermon on the Mount*, the Bible and the New Testament and Thoreau’s notion of civil disobedience helps Gandhi to delineate his concept of *Satyagraha*. Inspired by Thoreau, Gandhi advocates emancipation of the human being from external bondage, from self-imposed imprisonment which he terms as civilisation for it has diseased the mind and soul of a modern person.

Gandhi is as removed from the Marxist ideal of a socialist, stateless, classless utopia as he is from other Western socialist schools like the Fabian socialists and the Guild socialists. He opposes the Marxists’ deterministic account of society and history, their belief in class polarisation and antagonisms, denial of God and their emphasis on violent revolutionary change. Gandhi not only emphasises gradual non-violent change but also desires to restrict the ambit of revolution and state action. Gandhi upholds private property and that society should recognise the art of creating wealth though he proposes the institution of Trusteeship based on a harmonious relationship between the capitalists and the workers. However, like the Marxists and the Socialists, he desires an egalitarian, just and non-exploitative society.

Gandhi also differs considerably from the liberals. Though he cherishes individual rights and initiatives he is not concerned with maximising freedom. Like Green, he emphasises the social nature of the human individual as “essentially a social being”. The only western parallel to Gandhi may be Rousseau, for like the latter, he too idealises a glorious past but realises that since there is no going back, salvation lies in small independent self-governing, self-sufficient communities. Gandhi describes himself as a philosophical anarchist for “he envisaged the perfect society as anarchical where each individual is a law to himself, living peacefully and with goodwill towards all, controlling all his passion, and living by his own labour. It is a romantic ideal which attracted men like Rousseau and Ruskin and is opposed to the sort of social organisation idealized by Plato in the *Republic*”. He prefers a society where the state would be reduced to its minimalist role. Gandhi’s faith in the inherent goodness of human nature enables him to win over his enemies through persuasion. Hence the Gandhian movements remain entirely open.
1.4 CRITIC OF THE WEST

In spite of being influenced by the West, Gandhi rejects Western civilisation both as a model and as an inspiration. His vision has very little to do with the West. The *Hind Swaraj* is the primer of his political philosophy to which he remains consistently committed. He denounces Western materialism and modern technology like the railways, the telegraph, the telephone and heavy industries. He categorically rejects all the major components of the modern industrial civilisation. It is this severe indictment of the modern society that is significant and has very few parallels. In its uncompromising criticism it compares favourably with that of Rousseau’s *Discourses on Inequality* (1755). Gandhi considers the advent of technology and industrialisation as the basic cause of human misery in modern society. This view crystallises during the process of industrialisation in South Africa. He hails the immense increase in productivity and consequent rise in standards of living in the West but he denies that industrialisation, in its current form, advanced human civilisation and its well-being and happiness. He rejects the Western civilisation for two reasons. First, its basis is extreme inequality and second it dehumanises and de-personalises the individual. Like Rousseau, he rejects modern technology and industrialisation because these lead to misery and inequality. He focuses on this relative fall apparent from the Italian example in the *Hind Swaraj*. In this example he specifically mentions the working class and the common people whose aspirations the ruling class ignore and Mazzini’s Italy that was still in slavery. For Gandhi the content of independence is important for true freedom lay in the freedom of the working class and the poorest. Western technology and its concomitant way of life are alien to Indian traditions. It is also inadequate in fulfilling India’s requirements and hinders any meaningful or real development of the individual person. As such, the ideal state would consist of self-sufficient villages and communities based on truth and non-violence.

Gandhi desires a free India that would not emulate the Western path. This means giving up machinery, modern methods of transportation, modern medicines and machine-spun cloth. Though he modifies some of his ideas subsequently like accepting small-scale industries and those industries where labour is not useful or desirable, he adheres to the overall thrust of his initial arguments as articulated in the *Hind Swaraj*. The rise and modernisation of Japan in the early part of the twentieth century had stirred emotional sentiments in India. Gandhi cites the Japanese example and instructs his Indian readers not to follow the Japanese model. The solution to the Indian problem has to come from within India rather than importing foreign ideas and institutions. Gandhi’s free India is one where the economy and polity would be different from that of the other modern industrialised nations. This is because countries like India with abundant labour and large-scale unemployment and under-employment should restrict the use of machinery. He desires industrialisation that would satisfy wants like food, shelter, health care and basic education. Though conscious of the impersonal and monotonous life that industrialisation entails, he is ready to accept it if it helps to satisfy the basic human requirements.

Gandhi’s attitude to the West differs considerably from other non-Western revolutionaries. Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh, Che Guevara and Frantz Fanon not only rejected the Western political and economic domination but also their traditional ways of life of their own people and especially the religious elements that provided the foundation for the ancient cultures of Asia and Africa, replacing them by Western political forms and by Western technologies’ (Woodcock, 1970, p.12). Fanon’s perception shows some interesting contradictions into the dilemma of Third World revolutionaries. Fanon forcefully pleads for de-colonisation in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) but is utterly contemptuous of the
imperialists. He denounces the Europeans virtually as war criminals. He regards European opulence as scandalous ‘for it has been founded on slavery...and that it comes directly from the soil and from the sub-soil of the underdeveloped world’. Ironically in spite of this severe indictment, Fanon conceives of change only with the indispensable help of the Europeans and by rejecting indigenous ways. Gandhi, on the other hand, wants to keep the windows of his mind open while his feet are firmly entrenched in his own culture. His entire emphasis revolves around the proposition that Indian problems should be solved by indigenous methods and not by Western ideas as these are incompatible. It is this synthetic outlook, retaining the best of the Western traditions and integrating it with indigenous roots of the Indian traditions that make Gandhi unique. There is nothing exclusively Indian about his ideas. He castigates Indians for not reforming outmoded social practices and customs and stresses on the importance of social justice and equity. A free India has to be free from the modern political and economic institutions.

1.5 A SEEKER OF INDIGENOUS ROOTS

Gandhi’s conception of Swaraj is different to the one that is articulated by the Western Marxists, socialists or even the liberals though he assimilates their ideas. He is an ardent individualist like the liberals but his ideal is maximising individual freedom by promoting common good. Philosophically, like the anarchists, his ideal remains a society where the state plays a minimal role but he shuns their stress on revolutionary violence. Like the Marxists and socialists he desires an egalitarian society but opposes their deterministic view of history and human nature. Yet he is certain that reform would have come from within India. He desires, like Burke, to retain India’s ancient heritage and modernising whatever is worth salvaging and useful. He is an anarchist, a liberal, a socialist and a conservative and yet none of these for, he never lost his profoundly revolutionary character (Bondurant, 1967, p.3). He is essentially concerned with contemporary problems and tries to find solutions that are both desirable and feasible.

Gandhi defies classification as the prophet of bourgeois nationalism in India. First, the means that he employed “are such that they will successfully end only if the masses become self-acting towards the latter part of the revolution, and the chances are that if the masses gain success through their fully developed conscious strength, they will also refuse to be exploited in future by anybody who wishes to ride upon their back. Second, Gandhi did not want India to benefit at the expense of any other nation. He considered humanity as one family. Because of this Gandhi transcended bourgeois nationalism” (Bose, 1947, pp.21-22).

This autonomous development of Gandhi’s ideas represents the fullest expression of the indigenous roots of modern Indian political speculation. From Rammohan to Vivekananda, the quest has been for assimilation of the Western ideas and culture with that of the East. In the twentieth century, Tagore and M. N. Roy, along with Gandhi, portray an autonomous evolution of political discourse. All three, rooted in the Western experience, attempt to transcend it by initiating a discourse that is closer to the Indian reality. Tagore denounces the Western cult of nationalism by emphasising universality. Roy’s participatory democracy is an attempt to go beyond both liberal representative democracy and authoritarian centralised communism. Gandhi uses Western concepts and ideals to critically dissect the shortcomings of India but the reconstruction of India is quintessentially Indian. Gandhi provides a comprehensive critique of Western modernity and modernisation by contesting the assumptions and conclusions of a self-confident orientalism, particularly its views about the inferiority of the East and the superiority of the modernity of the West. At the same time he rejects
readings of Hinduism as inherently fatalistic and passive and seeks to recover robust conception of autonomy and action in his tradition.

To analyse Gandhi’s role in Indian transformation realistically one has to take his role as a social critic seriously. His dissection of the causes of disparity in the Indian situation led him to two conclusions: (1) imperialistic exploitation and (2) limitation of the capitalist industrialised civilisation of the west. His solution to this is in “a kind of democracy… where the gulf between the rich and the poor was not so marked, where the evils of the great cities were absent and people lived in contact with the life-giving soil and breathed the pure air of the open spaces” (Nehru, 1965, p.111). His vision of India is one “in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country in whose making they have an effective voice, an India in which there shall be no high class and low class of people, an India in which all communities shall live in perfect harmony”.

1.6 ADMIRATION OF THE BRITISH INSTITUTIONS

The use of the technique of Satyagraha is also an offshoot of Gandhi’s understanding of both British history and character. He was convinced that the redressal of grievances could be expected only when the people demonstrated that they were willing to suffer for getting relief. In this context, he gave the example of the British Suffragists asking the Indians in South Africa to emulate them by developing the capacity to endure suffering. The best of suffering was the yardstick by which the British conceded and Gandhi gave the example of the century long struggle for women in Britain to secure the right to vote. Many years later, he recollected that “an Englishman never respects you till you stand up to him. Then, he begins to like you. He is afraid of nothing physical, but he is mortally afraid of his own conscience, if even you appeal to it and show him to be in the wrong. He does not like to be rebuked for wrong doing at first, but he will think over it, and it will get hold of him and hurt him till he does something to put it right”.

This is reinforced by the fact that though the technique of Satyagraha could be used everywhere and be an alternative to war in resolving conflict, yet he was also categorical, that its most effective use could be against the British. Gandhi wrote in 1904: “Earnestness commands success everywhere. It does so much more in the British Dominions. If the British machinery is slow to move, the genius of the nation being conservative, it is also quick to perceive and recognize earnestness and unity”. He reflected this again in 1907, that the British would concede if the people were willing to sacrifice even their lives for the cause. But they would ignore even the genuine demands, when they were merely verbal. Even in their own country, the British follow the same principles.

Following this general principle of stages of constitutional agitation and open movements, which he followed throughout, he himself admitted that the doctrine of Satyagraha could be invoked only after exhausting other constitutional means of protests. But it is equally true that Gandhi, as a political strategist, was linking it to changing events in Ireland, England and India. He reminded all the time the importance of the South African struggle for India. The Indian National Congress leadership enthusiastically supported the South African struggle of the Indians and till Gandhi’s return to India, it was the one issue that agitated the educated Indian mind. For Gandhi himself, the South African experience taught him two basic lessons that he implemented in India and subsequently (a) united struggle of all irrespective of caste, creed and religion and (b) the sublime importance of open non-violent struggle.
Gandhi’s innate respect for the British sense of justice continued even after his return to India and during the First World War, he recruited soldiers for the British army unconditionally whereas, both Tilak and Jinnah refused to do so without any advancement of the nationalist cause. This confidence which he had in the ultimate British sense of justice was shattered by the horrors of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. However, in spite of this shock and his overall criticism of Western civilisation, and the parliamentary system, he proclaimed in 1921, that his immediate aim was parliamentary swaraj, whereas the rest was for a distant future. His faith in the British sense of fair play was shaken but not his faith about the feasibility of the essential mechanism of the British parliamentary institutions.

Orwell points out that much of Gandhi’s struggles were confined against the British and the latter allowed him to do so and that he could never really grasp the nature of modern totalitarianism. His method would fail in more difficult situations. Orwell’s point is articulated by Mehrotra too when he mentions that “the subjects of the British Empire enjoy many more civil liberties and they have greater scope for the practice of civil disobedience, non cooperation and satyagraha, without being branded and shot as rebels, than the subjects of any other empire in the world, both past and present” (Mehrotra, 1979, p.145). Gandhi has to be analysed from the particular to the general rather than the general to the particular. Woodcock rightly observed that, “It was perhaps of Gandhi’s knowledge of the British and his skillful use of their concepts of decency as levers to move their consciences that made him so much the man for the time in India” (Woodcock, 1971, p.114).

1.7 CONCLUSION

Hegel makes an interesting point when he asserted that the world historic individuals reflect in them the real spirit of the age. Greatness and relevance of great persons, accordingly, have to be judged in the time frame of their lives and circumstances. Gandhi is no exception to the rule. He continues to hold the interest of present historians for his amazing achievement during his own lifetime in convincing the majority of the British population that imperialism and colonialism were morally wrong. Detractors normally overlook this unparalleled achievement when they blame him for many of our ills both during his lifetime and thereafter.

Gandhi’s non-deterministic and skeptical outlook, based on his individualised scientific method of seeking the truth, allowed him to arrive at a larger consensus on the basis of individual judgement. He understood that no society could possibly endure in a good and meaningful way by denying individual freedom. This emphasis on the primacy of the individual led him to reject total state control for he considered it to be a person’s higher moral obligation to promote common rather than aspire for mere political power. His writings as a critic of the modern society would endure just as Rousseau’s have endured for the last three centuries.

Even in matters of practical utility, Gandhi’s dictums remain relevant. His amazing capacity to build an all-Indian organisation, the Indian National Congress, which he sustained for the next three decades since 1920, ought to awaken us to the fact that our major failure in present times is organisational. Gandhi demonstrated that the Indians were capable of matching the British capacity of providing a unified administrative structure. He duplicated the British model of self-identity by indigenous dress, language and accountability and with a democratic process of electioneering in which no single individual became absolutely powerful or indispensable.

George Orwell, writing on Gandhi, points out that Gandhi’s “whole life was sort of
pilgrimage in which every act was significant and that he enriched the world by being alive”. What is revealing about Gandhi is the queer combination of a saint or a near saint with a very competent but shrewd person who could have been a very successful lawyer, administrator or businessman. Orwell does not mention the familiar things associated with Gandhi: home-spun cloth, soul-force, vegetarianism and dismisses these as medieval with little or no relevance in a backward and overpopulated country. Orwell mentions that the British officials liked and admired Gandhi because he could not be blamed for corruption, ambition in the bad sense and for the fact that his actions could not be attributed either to fear or to malice. He had no sense of inferiority and acted with the conviction that men act in good faith and that every single individual with genuine goodness makes it possible to approach every other single person. Gandhi believed in human equality and never thought in terms of race or status. His technique of Satyagraha is a method of defeating the enemy without preaching hatred.

Many of Gandhi’s ideas have found resonance in the West and elsewhere particularly among the peace activists, environmental groups and feminists. His technique of non-violent civil disobedience has many adherents like Martin Luther King Jr., Bertrand Russell, Corazano Aquino, Petra Kelly and Vaclav Havel. Moreover the conduct of a theoretical discourse on the subject has been within the framework that he furnishes. A good example is Rawls’ discussion of the subject in A Theory of Justice (1971). Gandhi makes Indians develop a deep pride in their heritage, customs and traditions, absorbing whatever are worth respecting and to eschew those that retard progress and moral upliftment. He rediscovers the East through the West. By incorporating whatever was worthwhile in the western experience and rooting it with respect for indigenous tradition, Gandhi has been a precursor to the current realisation of the need for universality with due respect to cultural plurality. It is this that makes Gandhi, in the Hegelian sense, a universal man. Bondurant aptly points out that conflicts are inevitable and many of them are violent. But this must not lead to an “unreasoned flight from violence” as the Gandhian experiments teach us.

1.8 SUMMARY

Gandhi is one of the great activist-theoreticians of the twentieth century. His writings emerge mainly during the varied process of social, economic and political actions. He modernises tradition by highlighting the problem of modern industrialised westernised civilisation in the Hind Swaraj, considered to be the most important tract in political theory. His major success as a moderniser of tradition is possible due to the groundwork that the aforesaid earlier thinkers lay down. But the major difference between these earlier thinkers and Gandhi lay in his ability to perform a transformative criticism of many of the ideas that the earlier thinkers dealt with. In spite of being influenced by the West, Gandhi rejects Western civilisation both as a model and as an inspiration. His vision has very little to do with the West. It is this severe indictment of the modern society that is significant and has very few parallels.

1.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. What are the major intellectual influences on Gandhi?
2. Why does Gandhi criticise the West?
3. What are the reasons for Gandhi’s admiration of British institutions?
4. Why is Gandhi described as a seeker of indigenous roots?
SUGGESTED READINGS


Pantham, T and Deutsch, K., (ed), Political Thought in Modern India, New Delhi, Sage, 1986.


(Endnotes)

1 Ruskin’s initial advocacy of equality of wages did not persist for in a foot-note in later editions he admitted that such was not his intention.

2 This emphasis on simple living was premised on the fact that luxury was sinful under the existing conditions.

3 Indian Opinion was launched to establish harmonious cooperation between the Europeans and Indians in South Africa. Initially the paper was published in four languages and later in two to discuss public events and political, economic, ethical and religious ideas.
UNIT 2  GANDHI’S VIEWS ON STATE AND CITIZENSHIP (RAMRAJYA)

Structure

2.1 Introduction
   Aims and Objectives

2.2 Notions of State and Swaraj

2.3 Economic basis of Political Independence

2.4 Constructive Programme

2.5 Citizenship

2.6 Conclusion

2.7 Summary

2.8 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

2.1 INTRODUCTION

It is generally agreed that one of the major consequences of the colonial rule in India is the emergence and consolidation of an overdeveloped state and a relatively underdeveloped society. This distorted development has important implications for class formation and domination in the developing societies. Richard L. Sklar points out in the context of Africa that “class relations, at bottom, are determined by relations of power, not production”. This is in total negation to the well-known Marxist theory of class consolidation on the basis of economic categories. This also means that the classification employed by the Marxists in the advanced capitalistic countries has very little practical relevance in comprehending class-based politics in post-colonial societies.

The enormity of this crucial role of the state in the developing world is reflected by the fact that the modern state is a leviathan in power, wealth and domination with regard to other societal formations, institutions and organisations. This is one major reason for the breakdown of constitutional governments in many parts of the developing world and the consequent absence of constitutionalism, civil liberties and plurality of institutions. During the period when Gandhi led the nationalist struggle in India, the colonial state had reached its zenith following Great Britain’s victory in the First World War. He encountered and reacted against this state for the next three decades. Following his anarchistic leanings and his total rejection of modern industrialised civilisation of the West, he charted a new course for India by restricting the activity of the state and focusing on the grassroots development. His ideal, thereby, was far removed from the various conceptions of state projected in the Western political traditions.

Being an activist, Gandhi was also careful when making predictions and outlining his conception of an ideal state. In 1942, while replying to a query raised by Louis Fischer about the structure and the shape of the Indian society after independence, Gandhi pointed out ‘I admit that the future society of India is largely beyond my grasp’ (cited in Ganguli
Gandhi devoted his energies to analysing the particular situation, innovating and modifying principles, learning from experience rather than attempting to provide a blueprint for an ideal society. His ideal remained an integral part of his vision of a society free of violence and exploitation but beyond this he refused to provide details.

Aims and Objectives

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand

- Gandhi’s notions of state and swaraj
- Gandhi’s explanation of an economic basis of political independence
- His views on constructive programme and citizenship

2.2 NOTIONS OF STATE AND SWARAJ

The state, for Gandhi, represents violence in its concentrated form but is necessary since human beings are social by nature and as such morally incapable of acting in a socially responsible manner. He desires a state that would employ as little violence and coercion as possible and wanted individual actions to be regulated by voluntary efforts as far as possible. Distinguishing between state and society he opposes the notion of absolute state sovereignty in the Austinian sense. He advocates limited state sovereignty for there is an obligation higher than mere politics. His position is strengthened by his faith in individual personality evident from his remark: “If the individual ceases to count, what is left of society”. Given this perception, Gandhi is generally distrustful of any increase in state power for “although while apparently doing good by minimizing exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality, which lies at the root of all progress”. He prefers individual initiative and voluntary efforts. He desires the establishment of a society in which the state exists outside the daily life of the common man. The ideal society would be a decentralised one giving ample scope for self-development. It is akin to the actual reality of British society of the nineteenth century, which he saw and admired.

Gandhi’s belief in the primacy of the individual led him to conceptualise a truly non-violent state composed of self-governing and self-sufficient village communities based on majority rule. It would elect district representatives who, in turn, elect provincial and national representatives. Majority rule would be subject to two constraints: first, the majority could not run roughshod on an issue on which the minority harbours strong views. Second, a human being should not act contrary to the dictates of his conscience since he is essentially a moral person. Therefore everyone has the right to engage in acts of civil disobedience against policies that are contrary to what one considers to be morally right. Political power, for Gandhi, is “the capacity to regulate material life through national representatives. If national life becomes so perfect as to become self-regulated, no representation becomes necessary. There is then a state of enlightened anarchy. In such a state everyone is his own ruler. He rules himself in such manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbour. In the ideal state, therefore, there is no political power because there is no state” (Young India, 2-7-1931).

A non-violent state must aim at the welfare and upliftment of its citizens. In such a state, the police would be social workers ready to use moral persuasion and public opinion to deal with anti-social elements. Crime would be treated as a disease that required understanding and help and not punishment. It would be a state free of exploitation and conflicts between
the labour and capital in industry, between the tenant and landlord in agriculture and between the city and village. These conflicts would be resolved through passive resistance and trusteeship. In such a state, property would also be regarded as evil, for excess of it encourages evils like exploitation, sensual indulgence and contempt for one’s fellow-beings. However, he does not subscribe to forcible appropriation of individual property and proposes a system of Trusteeship. He supports a greater role of the state in economic affairs, which contradicts his otherwise, minimalist views on the state. He defends limitations on the right of inheritance, state ownership of land and heavy industries, nationalisation without compensation and heavy taxes. The concepts of Swaraj, nationalism, socialism, industrialisation, individualism and the state are crucial elements, which would actualise this ideal. Among all these, Swaraj is of special significance.

Swaraj, a word taken from the Vedas in order to replace the ambiguous word ‘independence’ means self-rule and self-control, unlike independence, which means freedom without restraints. Swaraj was self-rule or self-control, and this meant three things: first, freedom was primarily an individual, not a collective quality. Second, it included the conventional civil liberties of the press, speech, association and religion; and third, it distinguished between inner and outer forms of freedom, inner freedom as anchoring and sustaining outer freedom (Dalton, 1982, pp.144-47).

Gandhi uses the term swaraj to mean positive freedom, to participate in the process of politics in every way possible rather than conceive the state as a negative institution that restricts activities to a bare minimum. It does not mean that the state is all-powerful but rather an intimate relationship that ought to exist between the state and its citizens. Swaraj implied participatory democracy.

By Swaraj I mean the government of India by the consent of the people as ascertained by the largest number of adult population, male and female, native born or domiciled, who have contributed by manual labour to the service of the state and who have taken the trouble of having registered their names as voters….Real swaraj will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused. In other words, swaraj is to be obtained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority (Gandhi, 1947, p.14).

Gandhi’s conception is similar to that of Green for both perceive actualisation of individual’s entire potential within a societal framework. Like Green, Gandhi does not glorify the state. ‘For both the aim was to make life morally meaningful for all people, and both viewed the community as held together not by compulsion but by the sense of a common interest of good’ (Bondurant, 1967, p.162).

Gandhi clarifies on the need to bridge the gap between the white and blue-collar workers making manual labour mandatory for every single person. Elaborating on the theory of consent, he proclaims that real ‘swaraj will come not by acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused’. For achieving this, people have to be educated so that they could regulate and control authority. Like Plato, Paine and J.S. Mill, he places enormous importance on education as a precondition to the enjoyment of democratic freedom and ability to fulfill obligations. He identifies what he calls the three pillars of Swaraj: (a) Hindu-Muslim unity, (b) abolition of untouchability and (c) upliftment of Indian villages. Criticising Tilak, he categorically emphasises that social evils are an impediment for Swaraj and therefore underlines the importance of social reforms.
2.3 ECONOMIC BASIS OF POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE

For Gandhi, political independence without economic well-being is meaningless. He is conscious of the danger of continued oppression, even after independence, unless the lot of the common people is improved. For him, exploitation by a fellow Indian is as detestable as the exploitation by the British or any other foreign power. In the Hind Swaraj he explains this by comparing the Italian experience with that of India. Referring to Italian leaders like Victor Emanuel, Cavour and Garibaldi and Mazzini, he observes that for Cavour and Garibaldi, ‘Italy meant the king of Italy and his henchmen’ but for Mazzini, ‘it meant the whole of the Italian people, that is, its agriculturists’. Since Mazzini’s ideal has not been achieved, ‘the Italy of Mazzini still remains in a state of slavery’. The gains of independence are absolutely nominal because ‘the reforms for the sake of which the war was supposed to have been undertaken have not yet been granted. The condition of the people in general still remains the same’. Gandhi applies this understanding to the Indian situation and makes it absolutely clear that just formal independence of India means very little to him. National independence for him is a means to an end, and not an end in itself. Stating his position he writes:

I am sure you do not wish to reproduce such a condition in India. I believe that you want the millions of Indians to be happy not that you want the reins of government in your hands. If that be so, we have to consider only one thing: how can the millions obtain self rule? You will admit that people under several Indian princes are being ground down. The latter mercilessly crush them. Their tyranny is greater than that of the English, and if you want such tyranny in India, then we shall never agree. My patriotism does not teach me that I am to allow people to be crushed under the heel of Indian princes just as much as that of the English. By patriotism I mean the welfare of the whole people, and if I could secure it at the hands of the English, I should bow down my head to them if any Englishman dedicated his life to securing the freedom of India, resisting tyranny and serving the land. I should welcome that Englishman as an Indian (Gandhi, 1938, pp.67-68).

The example of the Indian princes as responsible for the misery and poverty of the Indian masses is of crucial significance. It makes it clear that the welfare of the masses is intimately linked with political independence. Gandhi equates political with economic freedom. The basic necessities should be available to all, irrespective of one’s status: “The swaraj of my dream is the poor man’s swaraj” (Gandhi, 1947, p.17). Self-sufficient villages could best achieve the welfare of the people. This emphasis is because the overwhelming majority of the Indian people live in its seven hundred thousand villages, and no effective solution to the Indian problem could be found unless and until the villages are rejuvenated. Society, for Gandhi, is not to be organised as a pyramid but “as an oceanic circle with the individual at the center, ready to sacrifice for his village, the village for a larger circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals”. The urban proletariat, which is the vanguard for Marx and Engels, has very little place in Gandhi’s thinking, in spite of Gandhi’s early association with the mill workers of Ahmedabad. In the village-based economy and society of India, where any far-reaching, genuine welfare is yet to begin, the urban proletariat (especially before independence) is an insignificant percentage of the have-nots. Moreover, in the Indian context, there is a considerable difference between the city and village life, with an absence of sanitation, education and medical facilities.
CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAMME

Gandhi’s prescription for social progress and transformation is contained in what he describes as the constructive programme. It is conceived as an alternative positive programme for social reorganisation to the one, the orthodox Anarchists offer. In its implementation, Gandhi met with partial success. It gives content to the concept of satyagraha and is framed with the purpose of their applicability within the Indian social and economic milieu. The programme is considered as the key to the attainment of poorna swaraj and consists of the following items: (1) communal harmony, (2) removal of untouchability, (3) prohibition, (4) Khadi, (5) cottage industries, (6) village sanitation, (7) new or basic education—nai talim, (8) adult education, (9) upliftment of women, (10) education in health and hygiene and (11) propagation of national language, Hindustani. Of these, the most important is Khadi.

For Gandhi, hand-spinning and hand-weaving is the salvation to the economic, political and psychological problems of India. He tries to meet the communist critique of the Khaddar programme by emphasising its capacity to organise the community. Decentralisation of industry is crucial for preserving the purity and cohesiveness of domestic life, artistic and creative talents of the individual members and more importantly, ‘people’s sense of freedom, ownership and dignity’. He wants to develop what he considers a khadi mentality by which he means decentralisation of production and distribution of the necessities of life thus ensuring economic and political freedom and reducing the dependence on the state and the government. He is also convinced that spinning would purify the body and soul of the spinners and would lead to spiritual progress.

Another highlight of the Constructive programme is the emphasis on the scheme of basic education by which he means the learning of the three R’s (reading, writing and arithmetic) and acquisition of skill, preferably the traditional family skill. The aim is to make the individual self-supporting by the sale of products of work done by vocational training thus ensuring an assured occupation which would give the students, the material rewards which could, in turn, be diverted towards their further education and self-development. Gandhi also sees it as a practical expression of his belief in the idea of bread-labour, a concept which he borrows from Ruskin.

Gandhi is convinced that education has to be a lifelong process and should not stop with childhood. This is recommended with the view to enrich the minds of the individual, and here Gandhi, like Plato, believes in the human capacity to absorb knowledge lifelong. Moreover, education would have to be imparted in one’s mother tongue as that enables the person to retain and understand what is taught. It would also instill love for one’s mother tongue and pave the way for the development of a common national language, which for Gandhi would be Hindustani. He desires free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of fourteen.

Gandhi also drew attention to the filth and lack of hygienic conditions in the Indian villages by his emphasis on sanitation, clean drainages, well-paved roads and education in basic hygiene. He also drew special attention to the exploited and the underprivileged sections of the Indian society, namely the Harijans and women. He pleaded for the abolition of child marriage, purdah and other customs that kept women in a state of subjugation. Under his stewardship of the freedom movement, women participated in large numbers. Initially, in the 1920s, he wanted women to be confined to their homes and practice swadeshi by working
on the spinning-wheel but subsequently during the civil disobedience campaigns of the 1930s, he allowed them to picket liquor shops besides participating in the salt satyagraha. Women played an important role in many of the humanitarian works that Gandhi undertook like helping the poor, nursing the sick and promoting khadi. He advocated class, caste and gender equality seeing equality and justice as the bedrock of a humane and dignified society.

Through his constructive programme, to which he devoted most of his time and energy, Gandhi tried to link freedom with harmony. Khaddar and the spinning-wheel would bridge the gulf between the small numbers of educated urban elite with the majority of villagers. Similarly Hindustani would be the lingua franca of the nation as it would create one language for the entire nation. For Gandhi, both untouchability and communalism were corrosive poisons. He considered Hindu-Muslim unity as an extension of untouchability, which needed to be fought, as long as it lasted. Within this framework of social harmony Gandhi persisted with attempts to resolve particular social problems. He wanted to reconcile freedom with harmony and deal with the contradictions of caste and religion. Emphasising on compromise and cooperation, he endeavoured to reconcile divergent interests.

2.5 CITIZENSHIP

According to Gandhi all states have the intrinsic potential for oppression and violence, none more so than the modern highly bureaucratic state. His ideal is a state that is bereft of centralised power. His conception of citizenship was based on three cardinal tenets: satya (truth and sincerity), ahimsa (non-violence in thought and deed) and dharma (moral law and duty). According to Gandhi, all states tend to violate satya and ahimsa, which is why he described the state as a soulless machine. He distrusted state as it represented coercive power and hence reposed greater faith in the role of the individual to meet the onslaught of the state. The state represented compulsion, uniformity and violence in a concentrated form which is why his ideal was a non-violent state that would be self-governing and self-sufficient in which the majority rule would prevail with due respect for minority rights.

For Gandhi, the individual citizen is endowed with dharma and is the bearer of moral authority with the right and even the duty to judge the state and its laws, by the standards of dharma, which in turn, combined the essentials of satya and ahimsa. Since the state is a ‘soulless machine’ and the individual is endowed with dharma that encompasses both satya and ahimsa, it is therefore the paramount duty of the individual, endowed with moral authority, to challenge and even disobey the state for “every citizen renders himself responsible for every act of his government. And loyalty to a capricious and corrupt state is a sin, disloyalty a virtue. Civil disobedience becomes a sacred duty when the state becomes lawless or, which is the same thing, corrupt and a citizen who barters with such a state shares its corruption and lawlessness” (Gandhi, 1951, p.150). Describing civil disobedience as a moral right of every individual, he called it a “birthright that cannot be surrendered without losing self respect” (Ibid, p.155). The existence of injustice justifies political resistance and political protest is basically moral. Like Locke and Jefferson, he believed that loyalty to a constitution and its laws need to be reviewed and affirmed once in every generation. He also emphasised on the need for civil disobedients to be respectful of the law as they are law abiding citizens. A satyagrahi cooperates not out of fear of punishment but because cooperation is necessary for common good. Civil disobedience is based on profound respect for law and is resorted to publicly and nonviolently. Gandhi differed from Thoreau in stressing on strict non-violence and it is his conception “that has usually been accepted in recent discussions in civil disobedience”. In more recent times, Rawls defined civil
disobedience as a “public non violent conscientious yet political act contrary to law usually done with the aim of bringing about a change in the law or policies of the government” (Rawls, 1971, p.368).

In 1922, in a written statement submitted to a court of law, Gandhi explained his transformation from being a loyalist of the British Empire to that of a non-cooperator. Listing the deeds and misdeeds of the government, he concluded that the British rule had made Indians helpless, both economically and politically, and that the only solution was non-cooperation. Writing in Young India in 1920 he observed:

Non-cooperation with evil is as much a duty as is cooperation with good. But in the past, non-cooperation only has been deliberately expressed in violence to the evil-doer. I am endeavouring to show to my countrymen that violent non-cooperation only multiplies evil and that evil can only be sustained by violence. Withdrawal or support of evil requires complete abstention from violence.

Until 1914, Gandhi was a believer in the Empire and even wanted Indians to take up arms to defend the Empire. He considered it his duty to enlist Indians in the army on the grounds that there could be no friendship between the brave and the effeminate people; that Indians were cowardly and that if Indians wanted to become free from reproach then we ought to learn the use of arms. Only later on that Gandhi became convinced of the efficacy of non-violence as is clear from his deposition before the Disorder Inquiry Committee which Lord Hunter presided over. Replying to queries from Lord Hunter, Gandhi delineated his method of non-violent satyagraha:

Lord Hunter: “If you were a Governor yourself, what would you say to a movement that was started with the object of breaking those laws which your committee determined?”

Gandhi: That would not be stating the whole case of satyagraha doctrine. If I were in charge of government and brought face to face with a body who, entirely in search of truth, were determined to seek redress from unjust laws without inflicting violence I would welcome it and consider that they were the best constitutionalists, and as Governor, I would take them by my side as advisers who would keep me on the right path.

Lord Hunter: People differ as to the justice or injustice of the particular laws.

Gandhi: That is the main reason why violence is eliminated and a satyagrahi… will fight by inflicting injuries on his person” (cited in Sankar Ghose 1984, p.154).

After Lord Hunter, Gandhi was questioned by Sir Chimanlal Setalvad.

Sir Chimanlal: You said you do not consider yourself a perfect satyagrahi yet. The large masses of people are then even less?

Gandhi: No, I do not consider myself as an extraordinary man…. Forty thousand Indians in South Africa, totally uncultured came to the conclusion that they could be satyagrahis, and if I could take you through those thrilling scenes in the Transvaal you will be surprised to hear (about) the restraint your countrymen in South Africa exhibited” (Ibid).

Clarifying his position further, Gandhi in August 1920 points out that “If India takes up the doctrine of the sword, she may gain momentary victory. Then India will cease to be the pride of my heart…. My life is dedicated to the service of India through the religion of non-violence which I believe to be the root of Hinduism” (Ibid, p.155). Throughout the rest of
his life, he remains steadfast in his belief in non-violent mass action. The doctrine of non-violence and satyagraha are linked to Gandhi’s innate attachment to truth which he describes as truth force. He is conscious of the fact that what truth is or what appears to be the truth at a particular given moment to someone may not be accepted as truth by others. He knows very well that to insist on an absolute truth is both impractical and premature at the present level of human development. “Gandhi never claimed”, remarked Bondurant, “to know truth in any absolute sense and he repeatedly reminded others that man’s inability to know the truth required that he maintain an increasingly open approach to those who differ from him” (Bondurant, 1967, p.19). This is the prime reason for linking satyagraha with non-violence. Accepting that truth is relative, he remarks “Truth is God”. “There are innumerable definitions of God, because His manifestations are innumerable. They overwhelm me with wonder and awe and for a moment stun me. But I worship God as Truth only. I have not yet found Him But I am seeking after Him. I am prepared to sacrifice the things dearest to me in pursuit of this quest. As long as I have not realized this absolute truth, so long, I must hold by the relative truth as I have conceived it. That relative truth must meanwhile be my beacon, my shield and buckler” (cited in Bondurant, Ibid, p.19).

In Gandhi’s ethics, self-suffering occupies an important place, which is different from cowardice, and is to be exercised with caution. The basic difference between self-suffering and violence lies in the fact that whereas violence allows injury to another person, self-suffering is free from any such possibility. This leads Gandhi to distinguish between non-violent mass action and passive resistance. It is not the violence of the weak as he consistently espouses the need for non-violence seeing it as the quality of the brave. Other than self-suffering, there is a need to overcome fear. “Just as one must learn the art of killing in the training for violence, so one must learn the art of dying in the training for non-violence…. The votary of non-violence has to cultivate the capacity for sacrifice of the highest type in order to be free from fear….He who has not overcome all fear cannot practice ahimsa to perfection” (cited in Bondurant, Ibid, p.26).

Gandhi is equally concerned about ensuring equality among all the segments of society and in doing so “he set the tone of Indian social ethical rethinking about the untouchables” (Heater, 1990, p.132). He condemned the practice whereby the untouchables were shunned by the rest and treated as outcastes. He gave them a new name to grant them human dignity by calling them Harijans. Opposing the 1934 Poona Pact, as it recommended separate electorates for the untouchables, Gandhi undertook fast unto death. If the pact was reached then he feared and rightly so the dismemberment of an already divided Hindu society.

Gandhi’s entire purpose is to integrate the depressed classes with the nationalist mainstream economically, socially and culturally with no stigma attached to any Indian because of one’s caste, creed, economic status or religion. In this integrative and equalitarian impulse, Gandhi is uncompromising in his criticism of the higher orthodox Hindus for perpetrating the inhuman caste system while asking the depressed classes also to rise to the occasion and banish bad habits which are obstacles to a larger social acceptance.

Gandhi also spoke of ‘world citizenship’, of ‘the essential unity of God and man for that matter of all lives’ holding that ‘All mankind in essence are alike’. His Advaita doctrine, which he embraces, has certain affinities with Stoicism. Gandhi’s conviction of the need for peace and justice through non-violent thought and action with a world federalist system that would pave way for world government is put into practice by Nehru with his doctrine of
non-alignment. Nehru points out that for enduring peace there is a need for the recognition of the moral law in both national and international relations, and an intrinsic relationship between right means and end.

2.6 CONCLUSION

For Gandhi, ‘the fight for Swaraj means not mere political awakening but an all around awakening- social, educational, moral, economic and political’. He recommended the need to transform the Congress organisation into a Lok Sevak Sangh, a people’s service organisation after India’s independence. His insistence on the need to develop a system of panchayats and his stay in Noakhali, Bihar and his last fast for Hindu-Muslim unity in Delhi indicated his grasp of the complexities of the country and his desire to find solutions. He recognised that such tasks were less exciting and not spectacular but they were important for without achieving the basic unity of trust, confidence, equality and fair play, the formal independence achieved would remain incomplete.

The Indian state, contrary to Gandhi’s vision and prescriptions, is a centralised and overdeveloped state like other post colonial states in the Third world. As a result the state, in spite of its enormity of strength and resources, has not been able to provide a consensual order. Equality and an innovative spirit have also remained a far cry. Far from liberating, the state, as Gandhi rightly pointed out, has made people more subservient. It has widened the gulf between the elite and the masses, the wide gap that exists between ‘India’ and ‘Bharat’ with the former unable to understand the needs, aspirations and language of the latter. It is important to rectify this situation and reduce this overdeveloped state by harmonising it with societal forces and aspirations.

Gandhi provides a framework for a participatory, functional and a development state with maximum inclusion and minimum exclusion. He does not defend the all powerful leviathan and like Thoreau, desired a government that governs the least; not in the sense of having a night watchman state but a fully functional one with rough parity and active citizenry. It is not a politics of withdrawal nor does he lament like Rousseau that people are free once in five years but one in the individuals relate to the larger social unit in the form of oceanic circles without losing one’s identity and without overlooking the welfare of all.

2.7 SUMMARY

The state for Gandhi represents violence in its concentrated form but is necessary since human beings are social by nature. He desires a state that would employ little violence and coercion and wanted individual actions to be regulated by voluntary efforts as far as possible. He advocates limited state sovereignty for there is an obligation higher than mere politics. His position is strengthened by his faith in individual personality. The ideal society would be a decentralised one giving ample scope for self-development. Gandhi uses the term swaraj to mean positive freedom, to participate in the process of politics in every way possible rather than conceive the state as a negative institution that restricts activities to a bare minimum. Swaraj implied participatory democracy. For Gandhi, political independence without economic well-being is meaningless. Gandhi’s prescription for social progress and transformation is contained in what he describes as the constructive programme. The state is a ‘soulless machine’ and the individual is endowed with dharma that encompasses both satya and ahimsa. It is therefore the paramount duty of the individual, endowed with moral authority, to challenge and even disobey the state. Gandhi also spoke of ‘world citizenship’,
of ‘the essential unity of God and man for that matter of all lives’ holding that ‘All mankind in essence are alike’.

### 2.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Explain Gandhi’s views on the state and swaraj.

2. What is the relationship between economic and political independence in Gandhi’s thought?

3. Describe the role of constructive programme in Gandhi’s philosophy.

4. Critically assess Gandhi’s views on citizenship.

### SUGGESTED READINGS


Pantham, T and Deutsch, K., (ed), Political Thought in Modern India, New Delhi, Sage, 1986.


3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the modern Indian political discourse, the sharp contrast between the urbanised west and the poverty-stricken villages of India had been a constant reminder that both western imperialism and its exploitative nature has kept multitudes of Indian people living in the Indian villages in total servitude and destitution. The Indian situation is comparable to the miserable conditions of the peasantry under the Czarist regime and with Gandhi’s intimate knowledge of Tolstoy’s concerns and writings he was well acquainted with the pathetic conditions of the peasantry of Czarist Russia. In the early twentieth century, in the background of the rise of Japan and its psychological impact on a section of the Indian intelligentsia and its nationalist leaders, Gandhi, in the *Hind Swaraj* (1909) categorically rules out the applicability of that model in the Indian condition.

Famine was a regular feature during the British colonial rule and in this situation the utmost necessity of rural reconstruction became an important component of the nationalist discourse in the wake of the *swadeshi* movement in Bengal at the time of the Partition of Bengal. Rabindranath Tagore wrote an important essay entitled *Swadeshi Samaj* (1904) in which there was an appeal for self-help in reconstructing the villages and solve the acute water shortage from which it suffers perennially. At this time there were lot of projections of parallel nationalist self-supportive, educational, industrial and cooperative enterprises to alleviate the miseries of the rural poor. However, none of these attempts had a comprehensive plan of an alternative development strategy for rural reconstruction and to reduce the gulf between the cities and the villages. Gandhi provided a philosophy of a village centred life which he described as the *gram swaraj*.

Aims and Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to understand:

- Gandhi’s concept of Gram Swaraj
- Gandhi’s critique of industrialisation
- Gandhi’s criticism of Machinery
3.2 CITY AND VILLAGE

Within the larger framework of Gandhi’s concern for majority alleviation he put the idea of the *gram swaraj* at the very centre of his social, political and economic philosophy. Since the overwhelming majority of Indians live in villages, Gandhi’s primary concern is to concentrate on this important segment and provide a blueprint by which the face of rural India would drastically change for the better. The cities, remarks Gandhi, do not represent India. They are alien to it. He considers the cities as artificial, facilitating the exploitation by the imperialist powers; of sharing the plunder of the villages with the imperialist powers. “I regard the growth of cities as an evil thing. Unfortunate for mankind and the world, unfortunate for England and unfortunate for India. The British have exploited India through its cities. The latter have exploited the villages. The blood of the villages is the cement with which the edifice of the cities is built” (cited in Ganguli, 1973, pp.184-85)

Writing in 1921, he points out that the cities are “brokers and commission agents for the big houses of Europe, America and Japan. The cities have cooperated with the latter in the bleeding process that has gone on for 200 years” (cited in Ganguli, Ibid, p.184). He further laments that

Little do town-dwellers know how the semi-starved masses of India are slowly sinking to lifelessness. Little do they know that their miserable comfort represents the brokerage they get for the work they do for the foreign exploiter, that the profits and the brokerage are sucked from the masses. Little do they realise that the government established by law in British India is carried on for this exploitation of the masses…. I have no doubt whatsoever that both England and town-dwellers in India will have to answer, if there is a God above for this crime against humanity which is perhaps unequalled in history (cited in Ganguli, ibid, pp.184-85).

Gandhi provides an alternative of total rural reconstruction and rebuilding in the process of which the entire Indian situation would change. He identifies the survival of the Indian nation with that of the meaningful survival of the villages reviving the traditional ways and means of the rural life which have degenerated because of the superstitious beliefs and neglect of this aspect by western imperialism. He is conscious of the enormous gap that exists between the villages and the cities in education, culture, medicine, recreation and employment opportunities. The gulf increases and Gandhi wants to stop this process and allow the village to grow and prosper. Even though he is very critical of the cities, he never wants to eliminate them. He wants to reform them and place them in a natural setting. Furthermore, though Gandhi does not provide for concrete picture of the city’s structure, he makes three general suggestions: (1) “the blood that is inflating the arteries of the cities run once again the blood vessels of the villages”. (2) The cities did not need to send its people back to the village, rather “they should re-adjust their lives so as to cease to sponge upon the poor village folk and make to the latter what reparation is possible, even at this late hour, by helping to resuscitate their ruined economy” and (iii) “in my picture of the rural economy the cities would take their natural place and do not appear as unnatural, congested sports or boils on the body politics, as they are today” (cited in Ganguli, Ibid, pp.184-75).

Understanding the importance of the dynamics of power, Gandhi begins his argument pleading for the empowerment of the small village communities which would derive sustenance with cottage industries that would provide the economic bases of the rural society. Emphasising the darker side of industrialisation which devastates the rural life and uproots thousands of people from their natural habitat, the cottage industries would provide the economic basis
of a small community which is in a position to manage and to enhance the quality of life and happiness as Gandhi is convinced that the fulfilment and happiness of people is manifested when they live in small communities rather than in larger urbanised rootless communities.

Gandhi wants the development of a new partnership between the villages and the cities, a vision that Marx and Engels too had. He does not want prosperity in the cities at the expense of the village, where the majority of the Indian population live. The villages are as important as the cities, if not more. His views on industrialisation and modern technology might help us to understand his extraordinary emphasis on the need for regenerating village life.

3.3 GRAM SWARAJ

Gandhi is a virulent critic of all models of western industrialisation as though they produce material goods but are alien to our moral values. The village panchayat system and the village republic could create both a participatory model of democracy and would also allow an escape route to avoid the perils of western industrialisation. Gram Swaraj will be the essential framework of this alternative model with the promotion of self-sufficiency in providing the material conditions essential for fulfilling the needs of the individual and enhance the elements of self-respect and pride in oneself. Gandhi is conscious that the present day conditions of the villages are far from the ideal that he desires and it is because of this consciousness that he argues for a reformed rural setting where truth and non-violence would co-exist in a situation of harmony and promotion and practice of rural virtues of cooperation and performance of duties. His close associate, J. C. Kumarappa coins the term ‘villagism’, which Gandhi gladly accepts as an essential framework of realising rural swaraj. Gandhi desires a complete economic revival of India with satya and ahimsa as its foundation and the credit for preparing a blueprint along these lines goes to Kumarappa.

The framework for the village swaraj is provided in two books of Kumarappa: Why the village movement: A plea for village centred economic order and Capitalism, socialism and villagism. The first book is considered as the first normative statement of Gandhian economics and could be regarded as the manifesto of Gandhi’s economic vision. Kumarappa is of the view that as economic autonomy for the individual is essential for freedom and that as majority of Indians live in rural areas, the village economy has to be the basis of India’s social well-being. In the rapid process of industrialisation and urbanisation it is the countryside that suffers the most. He observes that “there can be no industrialisation without predation” and that agriculture was and is the greatest among all the occupations. Writing about the impact of industry and agriculture on the natural world, Kumarappa states:

In case of agricultural civilisation, the system ordained by nature is not interfered with to any great extent. If there is a variation at all, it follows a natural mutation. The agriculturalist only aids nature or intensifies in a short time what takes places in nature in a long period…. Under the economic system of the industrial society… we find variations from nature are very violent in that a large supply of goods is produced irrespective of demand, and then the demand is artificially created for goods by means of clever advertisements.

Kumarappa is against use of chemical fertilizers and desires the use of organic manure as a way of ‘Economy of Permanence’ as against the man-made ‘Economy of Transience’. He strongly favours the use of night soil as manure thereby converting human waste into wealth and in overcoming the prejudices of caste. He criticises the British for their poor maintenance
of irrigation tanks and urges the conservation of ground water. He also favours small industry as a means of resource preservation. He argues that we should make Mother Nature our great teacher and never do anything that is contrary to her ways, for if we do that we will be annihilated sooner or later. “Water from the sea rises as vapour and falls on land in refreshing showers and returns back to the sea again ... A nation that forgets or ignores this fundamental process in forming its institutions will disintegrate”. Kumarappa recognises the decay and regeneration in the ‘cycle of life’ as a fundamental process in which all creatures cooperate. Violence results if “this cycle is broken at any stage, at any time, consciously or unconsciously”. He supports an economy that is close to the natural order as that is deeply moral with well defined rights and ethical obligations on every participant and contributes to the welfare of all. Crucial to Kumarappa’s conception of an ideal society is the understanding that the economic freedom holds the key to individual’s autonomy and that economic freedom forms the basis for political and social freedom. A non-violent social organisation is predicated on providing complete autonomy for every individual. The key to individual autonomy lies in the nature and purpose of work; if work unleashes the creative energies in the human being it would lead to happiness. He also realised centralisation as the primary road block to individual autonomy and freedom.

Gandhi clarifies that swaraj is self-rule and self-restraint grounded in the moral autonomy of the individual. He sees an intimate link between swaraj and swadeshi or self-reliance. “Swaraj for me means freedom for the meanest of my countrymen. I am not interested in freeing India merely from the English yoke. I am bent upon freeing India from any yoke whatsoever. I have no desire to exchange ‘king log’ for ‘king stork’… there is no freedom for India so long as one man, no matter how highly placed he may be, holds in the hollow of his hands the life, property and honour of millions of human beings. It is an artificial, unnatural and uncivilized institution. The end of it is an essential preliminary of Swaraj”.

3.4 CRITIQUE OF INDUSTRIALISATION

In the Hind Swaraj, Gandhi severely criticises modern technology and the ill-effects of modern industrialisation so much that he does not compromise with any of its forms. The basic cause of human misery and the ‘sin’ of modern civilisation is the advent of technology and industrialisation. This view apparently takes shape during his formative years with his direct contact with the English process of modern industrialisation and his experiences in South Africa. Charles Dickens, Karl Marx, Thomas Hill Green and the Fabian socialists describe the horrors of the English capitalist industrial society. Towards the end of the 19th century, while Gandhi was still in England, factory legislations and enlargement of franchise ameliorated many of the evils of industrialisation. But they only diminished and did not eliminate the major effects of industrialisation. Gandhi could easily grasp the dark side of industrialisation.

In the early 20th century, many thinkers started to emphasise that modern industrial civilisation was not an unmixed blessing. The expressionist movement in philosophy and art were clamouring against the miseries of the emerging industrial giants. Philosophers like Bertrand Russell shared this anxiety. Eliot expressed it best in the following lines:

We are the hollowmen,
We are the hollowmen;
Leaning together,
Headpiece filled with straw, Alas!
This revolt against the industrial revolution is represented in India by Tagore’s conception of freedom and Gandhi’s denunciation of the West. Gandhi does not deny the immense rise in productivity and the consequent rise in the standard of living in the West. He does, however, deny the claim that industrialisation, in its current form, advanced human civilisation by promoting happiness and well-being among common people. He concedes that, because of industrialisation, in certain spheres like housing, the people have begun to live better as compared to earlier times. These advances are hailed as an advancement of civilisation, promoting ‘bodily happiness’. Earlier, people wore skins and used spears as weapons. But, now, they wore a wide range of clothing and used firearms. If people in other parts of the world accepted the modern European practices, “they should have achieved civilisation. Furthermore, technology had enormously enhanced man’s productive power and his capacity to accumulate wealth. These are also signs of civilisation; but, there was also another side to the picture now, self destruction” (Gandhi, 1938, pp.35-37).

Gandhi’s indignation at the consequences of industrialisation is apparent. With a remarkable affinity to Marx’s criticism of Adam Smith, Gandhi rejects the claims of the advancement as the present economic order is based on inequality. Gandhi, like Marx, also points out to the relative fall under the present industrial system. In spite of improved productive capacity, inequality persists and the workers live on subsistence wages. The prescription for eradicating inequality is the abolition of industrial civilisation. He found human salvation in a return to nature. The hidden meaning of the *Hind Swaraj* is the need for the freedom of the working class and the common people. This becomes evident from the Italian example. Gandhi clearly states that Mazzini’s Italy is still in slavery, for it does not cater to the needs and aspirations of the ordinary people. Political independence by itself is irrelevant unless there is improvement and elevation in the lives of the ordinary people the poor, the underprivileged and the toiling masses. Dalton states that:

The substance of the view of civilisation advanced in *Hind Swaraj* remained intact throughout Gandhi’s life and deeply affected his conception of the nature of the good society. At its worst, this view manifests itself in a negative suspicion of the West and a highly provincial world outlook. At its best, it moulded a theory of the good society suited to the Indian situation; a theory of social order of small communities, each seeking attainment of individual freedom and social equality through mutual cooperation and respect. This was his vision of *Sarvodaya*, the ‘Welfare of All’: the pattern of an Indian society that had indeed achieved *Swaraj*.

Gandhi’s economic point of view, as Gyan Chand points out, like his political and social viewpoints, “was and is an integral part of Gandhi’s whole philosophy of life; and it can be fully understood and duly appreciated only if this basic fact is borne in mind”. This perspective broadens the whole concept of economic life and includes:

1. The primary importance of man in production, distribution and exchange. In other words, the primary purpose of the economy is the well-being, growth and development of man.

2. Specially, this principle applies to the use of machinery in the production process. “Machinery for man and not man for machinery has to be the cardinal principle of mechanised production”.

3. From the preceding point of view, industrialisation involving mass production, centralisation of initiative, power, authority and policy formulation is undesirable and is to be reduced to the barest minimum.
(4) A logical consequence of this is that decentralisation of production is to be carried to the maximum possible extent.

(5) “Small communities of producers means economic and social democracy, reduction of inequalities within a very limited range and decentralized initiative”.

(6) These changes have far reaching implications and can only be brought about with radical changes in society.

The radical changes need a social transformation that would be non-violent through mass awakening, widely diffused social awareness and the use of the people’s power for fundamental social transformation. This awakening and awareness would be based on a vision of a society based on justice, equality and freedom. The goal of economic equality is what unites Gandhi with the socialists but where they depart is with regard to the means of reaching that goal. For the socialists, the basis of economic equality is the abolition of private property and the social ownership of the means of production. Gandhi desires economic equality but without wanting to abolish private property. He expects the rich to act as trustees of the entire society. Since they would act neither for private gain nor for profit, there would be differences in the amount of wealth, but there would be no differences in services and lifestyles. Private ownership would continue for Gandhi, except in large-scale industries, it would be imbued with public purpose. The development of social spirit and socialist consciousness are the two cardinal principles of Gandhi’s concept of trusteeship. The deeper meaning of his concept of trusteeship is akin to the Weberian notion of puritan ethics, which does not decry the increase in production but prohibited conscious consumption. It has a Calvinistic overtone and is beneficial to societies like ours where wide disparities are an eyesore and exist without any effective social sanction and control.

Gandhi acknowledges the existence of social conflict and different conflicting class interests but he believes that such conflicts would be resolved by non-violent mass action. He alludes to the existence of conflict in three sectors: (1) conflict of labour and capital in industry; (2) conflict of tenant and landlord in agriculture and (3) conflict of village and city. He is confident that these conflicts could be resolved through trusteeship and passive resistance with help of non-violence without class war. Gandhi rejects the idea of revolutionary seizure of state power and stresses on the transformation of relationship through peaceful transfer of power. While Marx rejects capitalism but not industrialisation, Gandhi wants to restrict industrialisation.

### 3.5 CRITIQUE OF MACHINERY

Gandhi is keen to limit and not eradicate machinery. His views on machinery and modern industry are derived from the influence that John Ruskin (1819-1900) had on him. He supports mechanisation, which would help the individual and not encroach upon individuality. He clarifies about the misconceptions to his opposition to machines.

“How can I be when I know that even this body is a most delicate piece of machinery? The spinning wheel is a machine; a little toothpick is a machine. What I object to is the craze for machinery, not machinery as such. The craze is for what they call labour-saving machinery. Men go on ‘saving labour’ till thousands are without work and thrown on the open streets to die of starvation. I want to save time and labour, not for fraction of mankind but for all. I want concentration of wealth, not in the hands of a few, but in the hands of all. Today, machinery merely helps a few to ride on the backs of millions. The impetus
behind it all is not the philanthropy to save labour, but greed. It is against this constitution of things that I am fighting with all my might. The supreme consideration is man. The machine should not tend to atrophy the limits of man. For instance, I would make intelligent exceptions. Take the case of the singer’s sewing machinery. It is one of the few useful things ever invented, and there is a romance about the device itself.”

Gandhi supports those machines that are necessary to satisfy the basic human needs. He also feels that industries should be socially owned by which he means welfare of society. He wants limited industrialisation to satisfy limited wants such as food production, shelter, health care and basic education. He also points out the impersonal and monotonous life that industrialisation entails. But he is ready to accept it if it helps satisfy the basic human requirements and if it is socially controlled. He is aware of the enormous differences among countries and points out that the choice of technique depends on circumstances. Countries like India with abundant labour and large-scale unemployment and underemployment should restrict the use of machinery.

Gandhi’s antagonism to the use of machinery and industrialisation set him apart not only from earlier Indian thinkers like Ranade and Gokhale but also among some of his contemporaries like Jawaharlal Nehru. Gandhi rejects mechanised industrialisation on moral and economic grounds. He considers machines as sins of modern civilisation. He dislikes the migration of people from villages to cities in search of jobs, low wages and poor working conditions of workers and unemployment. He laments about the under-utilisation of available labour in view of the seasonal nature of agriculture which depends heavily on monsoons. He points out that machines displace human or animal labour, instead of merely supplementing it or increasing its efficiency. Unlike human labour there are no physical limits to the growth and expansion of machines. Gandhi’s case against machines is “because they deprive men of their employment and render them jobless. I oppose them not because they are machines but because they create unemployment… If one machine does the work of a hundred men, then where are we to employ those hundred men”?

Gandhi points out that the aggregate demand for labour is given and that as a result of specialisation in the production process, workers have highly specific skills and cannot be employed elsewhere in the economy even if there arises an opportunity for employment. In general, he rejects machines because it displaces human labour and is disturbed by the fact that with the proliferation of highly mechanised capital intensive industries in a country like India with high population, it would lead to large scale unemployment with damaging social effects. Large scale mechanisation also leads to concentration of production and distribution in few hands and that would result in concentration of economic power.

Gandhi stressed on self-reliance through labour for all citizens of future India and he is categorical that winning and maintenance of freedom is impossible without such work discipline. It is for this reason that the spinning-wheel takes pride of place in this campaign, as he believes that it provides the best means through which the poor could earn a supplementary income or save money by producing their own cloth. Spinning-wheel, for Gandhi, epitomises the spirit of self-reliance.

According to Gandhi, the cause of poverty is the covetousness of the rich and the exploitation of the needy by the greedy. Incomes would have to be redistributed for raising the output and fulfilment of the basic needs of the masses; this would depend a lot on limiting the wants of the rich. If the masses are prepared to reject the evils of capital
accumulation, “they would strive to attain a more just distribution of the products of labour. Under the new outlook multiplicity of material wants will not be the aim of the life, the aim will be rather their restriction consistently with comfort. We shall cease to think of getting what we can, but we shall decline to receive what all cannot get”. To get rid of poverty there is a need for a revolutionary change in prevailing attitudes to consumption and to wealth in affluent societies as well as in the poorer countries which are caught up in the ‘revolution of rising expectations’.

Gandhi’s Swaraj is far removed from the Marxist ideal of a socialist stateless, classless utopia. Like the Marxists and the socialists, he desires an egalitarian society but opposes their deterministic view of history and human nature, and their espousal of violent revolutionary changes. Like Marx, he accepts social conflict but does not think that violence is adequate to resolve it. He admits that violence has helped in bringing about political liberty in certain cases but it “has always brought the form and not the substance of freedom” for “the results of violent revolution are always liable to be lost by violent counter revolution”. For Gandhi, commitment to non-violence is total but it is the non-violence of the brave. A non-violent revolutionary does not advocate a revolutionary seizure of state power but a transformation of relationships culminating in a peaceful transfer of power.

Gandhi, like Marx, accepts that contemporary situation is full of conflict but differs from Marx in focusing on the conflict between the city and the village. Marx’s philosophy is essentially urban-oriented as he dismisses village culture as an ‘idiocy’. Gandhi contends that India lives in its villages and that city culture is not only exploitative but also unequal. Gandhi, unlike Marx, rejects the notion of class struggle, class polarisation and antagonisms. He admits his attraction to the Marxist ideal but expressed doubts about the means to achieve it. He also, unlike Marx, rejects large-scale industrialisation and common ownership of property. Gandhi accepts, like Aristotle, that property is necessary and acknowledges the talent in those individuals who have the ability to create wealth but insists that this wealth be used for common good. Gandhi proposes the Trusteeship system to ensure harmony between the property owners and the non-propertied. Like Marx, he is conscious of the notion of relative fall. Under the present industrial system, despite enormous and improved productive capacity, inequality not only persists but has also increased. In this sense, he accepts Marx’s criticism of Adam Smith for ignoring social nature of our needs. However, while Marx only rejects industrial capitalism, Gandhi rejects Western civilisation along with its attendant features like mechanisation and industrialisation as it is based on extreme inequality and it dehumanises the human being. Like the Marxists and the socialists, Gandhi desires an egalitarian, just and non-exploitative society.

If we differentiate between the transient and the permanent, the local and the perennial, the essential Gandhi emerges in a different perspective bringing out the similarities between Gandhi and Marx. There is an agreement on basic issues though their methods of reaching the ideal differ. Both accept the imperfection of the modern society since it is based on conflict and inequality. Both dislike mechanical interpretation and emphasise the dynamic role of the human being in bringing about the necessary transformation in society. Both are confident of human capacity to transcend the present stage of irrational existence and reach a higher stage based on harmony and fulfilment of individual needs.

The only Western parallel to Gandhi is Rousseau, for like Rousseau, he too idealises a glorious past but realises that since there is no going back, salvation lies in small, independent, self-governing and self-sufficient communities. Gandhi’s ideal is an “anarchist society where each individual is a law to himself, living peacefully and with goodwill towards all, controlling
all his passions and living by his own labour”. The Indian Marxists underrated Gandhi’s social criticisms and his resolve to bring about a better and equitable social order.

### 3.6 CONCLUSION

Gandhi is a severe critic of contemporary society and is conscious of its divisions, structural fallacies and many inadequacies. He emphasises the human factor in any kind of revolutionary transformation as he desires the elimination of misery and conflict. He provides a framework for resolving conflicts and for building a social, political and economic order based on consensus. Both his commitment to non-violence and his own initiatives in resolving conflicts between the different segments were with the aim of establishing a non-exploitative, equal and just order. He sought to transform by relying on moral persuasion and pressure on the property and the advantaged. The idea of moral coercion lay at the heart of non-violent satyagraha. Rabindranath Tagore, like Gandhi, is conscious of the acute differences and conflicts in the Indian society but believes that it is society and not politics that has to be the primary focus.

The distinctiveness of Gandhi’s outlook is that he points to the gap that exists between the village and the city and that the gulf would increase in the coming future. His desire is to narrow the gap and create a framework for the village to grow and prosper without destroying the city. He desires their reform so that a new partnership could evolve between the village and the city. He also points out to the differences among countries. Countries like India with abundant labour and, unemployment and underemployment ought to restrict the use of machinery. On both these scores, the Gandhi’s blueprint is of immense importance to us. The prosperity of the village is the key to create a new balanced India, for checking the uncontrollable migration to cities that are bursting in its seams and not in a position to offer the means for decent and dignified life and also ensuring a balance between agriculture and industry.

### 3.7 SUMMARY

Gandhi’s concern for majority alleviation makes him place the idea of the gram swaraj at the very centre of his social, political and economic philosophy. Since the overwhelming majority of Indians live in villages, Gandhi’s primary concern is to concentrate on this important segment and provide a blueprint by which the face of rural India would drastically change for the better. He considers the cities as artificial, facilitating the exploitation by the imperialist powers; of sharing the plunder of the villages with the imperialist powers. He identifies the survival of the Indian nation with that of the meaningful survival of the villages reviving the traditional ways and means of the rural life which have degenerated because of the superstitious beliefs and neglect of this aspect by western imperialism. Even though he is very critical of the cities, he never wants to eliminate them. He wants to reform them and place them in a natural setting.

### 3.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. How does Gandhi distinguish the village from the city?
2. Describe Gandhi’s conception of ‘Gram Swaraj’.
3. Discuss Gandhi’s criticism of industrialisation.
4. What are Gandhi’s criticisms of machines?
SUGGESTED READINGS


Hardiman, D., Gandhi: In His Time and Ours, Delhi, Permanent Press, 2003.


Pantham, T, and Deutsch, K., (ed), Political Thought in Modern India, New Delhi, Sage, 1986.


(Endnotes)

Ruskin violently attacked capitalism for it distorted affections and responsibility in social relationships. He did not think socialism would remedy.
UNIT 4       GANDHI’S CONCEPT OF NATIONALISM

Structure

4.1 Introduction
   Aims and Objectives

4.2 India as a nation

4.3 Assessment of the Congress and the British Political Institutions and Practices

4.4 Self -Rule: need to bridge the gap between the elite and the masses

4.5 Conclusion

4.6 Summary

4.7 Terminal Questions
   Suggested Readings

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The modern Indian political discourse, which begins with Rammohun Roy, had distinctly
a social connotation which only transformed itself into a political one after the establishment
of the Indian National Congress in 1885. The philosophy of early Indian nationalism focused
more on the social rather than on the political because of the deep social cleavages and the
unevenness in which the modern notion like a nation looked far fetched. For instance,
Rammohun talks of continued Indian subordination and freedom from the British after 150
years. After Rammohun we find a larger assertion in the context of an assertion of an Indian
identity, yet, like Surendranath Bannerjee, the general proposition was that India is not yet
a nation but a nation in making.

At this time, during the last quarter of the 19th century, there was a crystallisation of the
philosophy of cultural nationalism manifested mainly in Dayananda Saraswati and Swami
Vivekananda. Dayananda talks of a glorious Indian past declaring the Vedas to be the epic
source of knowledge for the whole of humankind but within this revivalist philosophy, he is
also conscious of the degeneration and the need for reform and creation of a new Indian
identity. In this formulation there is a reflection of a great deal of British impact when he
characterises the British as being superior as they exude confidence in their dress, language
and culture. Most importantly the British honour the idea of contract in their personal
relations. In the context of contemporary India under colonial subjugation, he wants a
cultural awakening and integration preaching equality as the core of the Indian tradition and
propagating swadeshi and Hindustani as the lingua franca of the country. Dayananda’s
general argument is to prove the point that the Indians are in no way inferior to the British
and within the framework of a revivalist past, it is quite possible to envisage a better future
of India as a nation. Vivekananda, articulating another important dimension of a dialectical
co-relationship, finds the western civilisation and the Indian civilisation being only partially
complete because the West is deficient in spirituality whereas India lacks a tradition of
modern education and scientific enquiry.

By the time Gandhi entered the political arena in India via his long and fruitful experiments
in truth in South Africa, the debate between the Moderates and the Extremists was virtually
over and the debate over the primacy of the social or of the political was resolved. By this time, with the widespread influence of the reform movements and the nationalist struggle that had exerted on the Indian mind many of the European conceptions and articulations; these became an integral part of the nationalist discourse with the Mahatma becoming the representative and unifying force. He dismisses the idea that the attributes of a nation in India are of a recent origin and especially due to the imprint of British colonialism. Following the spirit of earlier cultural nationalism, he traces back to the ancient Indian heritage to demonstrate that the idea of the Indian nation not only in its rudimentary form but also in the context of certain fulfilment existed much before either the idea of nationalism or the nation-state originated in the West. That the great places of pilgrimage spread all over India and the saints who, by their acts of sacrifice and perseverance, ceased to be local or regional and became national was an enough indication that India was a nation much before the British rule.

**Aims and Objectives**

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand:

- Gandhi’s perception of India as a nation
- Gandhi’s assessment of British political institutions and practices
- Gandhi’s concept of self-rule and how it should bridge the gap between the elite and the masses

### 4.2 INDIA AS A NATION

Gandhi rejects the popular perception that ‘India has become a nation under the British rule’ and disputes the claim of those who argue that India is a nation after the British introduced western ideas and to the changes brought about by the modern means of communication such as the railways and the telegraph. This view, he dismisses, is the British interpretation of Indian history and points out in the *Hind Swaraj* (1909) “I hold this to be mistake. The English have taught us that we were not one nation before and that it will require centuries before we become one nation. This is without foundations. We were one nation before they came to India. One thought inspired us. Our mode of life was the same. It was because we were one nation that we were able to establish one kingdom. Subsequently, they divided us” (p.46).

Gandhi’s claim that India is nation is based on two assumptions: the first is that ancient Indian civilisation has a capacity to accommodate diversity and plurality and the second is that in the ancient India, the acharyas, in establishing certain places of pilgrimage, laid the basis for the evolution of an all India consciousness. The Ancient civilisation of India was predominantly Hindu in character but it was open to non-Hindu values and ideas. Gandhi highlights the accommodative capacity of India to fuse new ideas and values with its ancient civilisation over several centuries. As for the second assertion, Gandhi points out that pilgrim centres like Haridwar in the North and Rameshwaram in the South and Jagannath in the East were established not merely for religious benefit but “to create and sustain a sense of common identity among Indians scattered over an immense territory...they saw that India was one undivided land so made by nature. They, therefore, argued that it must be one nation. Arguing thus, they established holy places in various parts of India, and fired the people with an idea of nationality in a manner unknown in other parts of the world”.

According to Gandhi, India’s strength lies in the unity amidst its diversity. He acknowledges the existence of many languages and dialects and insists that all provincial languages of Sanskrit and Dravidian stock should be replaced by Devanagari. Until one script is formalised, Hindustani could be used as the lingua franca with the option of either Persian or Nagari characters and “when the hearts of two meet, the two forms of the same language will be fused together, and we shall have a resultant of the two, containing as many Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic or other words as may be necessary for its full growth and full expression”.

Writing about India as the home to many religions, Gandhi says “India cannot cease to be one nation because people belonging to different religions live in it. The introduction of foreigners does not necessarily destroy the nation, they merge in it. A country is one nation only when such a condition obtains in it. The country must have a faculty for assimilation. India has ever been such a country. In reality, there are many religions as there are individuals; but those who are conscious of the spirit of nationality do not interfere with one another’s religion. If they do, they are not fit to be considered a nation. If the Hindus believe that India should be peopled only by Hindus, they are living in dream-land. The Hindus, the Mahomedans, the Parsis and the Christians, who have made India their country, are fellow countrymen, and they will have to live in unity, if only for their own interest. In no part of the world are one nationality and one religious synonymous terms, nor has it ever been so in India”.

To the question posed by the Reader in the Hind Swaraj as to whether the “introduction of Mahomedanism not unmade the nation? Indian civilisation may have supplied a basis for a common identity in the pre-Islamic period; but now we have Mahomedans, Parsis and Christians. Our very proverbs prove it. The Muslims turn to the West for worship, and the Hindus to the East; the Muslims kill cows, the Hindus worship them. The Muslims do not believe in ahimsa, while the Hindus adhere to it. We thus meet with differences at every stop. How can India be one nation?” Gandhi is aware of the factual differences between the Hindus and Muslims but does not consider these differences serious enough to prevent the emergence of composite nationalism. He does not see the presence of Muslims, Parsis, Sikhs and Christians as a challenge to Indian civilisation but as an opportunity to allow for accommodation. Furthermore, he also underlines that religion as a sect ought not be the basis of nationality: India cannot cease to be one nation because people belonging to different religions live in it. The introduction of foreigners does not necessarily destroy the nation”.

On the question of language Gandhi rejects the Macaulay’s concept of the role of English language in India; the primacy desired of the mother-tongue or what the Hind Swaraj calls provincial language and the desirability of using Hindustani as the lingua franca of India. In a letter to Lord Ampthill, Gandhi declares: “I no longer believe as I used to in Lord Macaulay as a benefactor through his Minute on education”. In the Hind Swaraj Gandhi writes “the foundation that Macaulay laid of education has enslaved us”. Subsequently, he accuses the English-knowing Indians for having enslaved India and says “the curse of the nation will rest not upon the English but upon us”. He rejects Macaulay’s thesis that Sanskrit and Persian have no foundational value for the Indian civilisation in the future and that English should replace them and become the new foundation language of modern India. If the English language is given this cultural role it is tantamount to committing national suicide. Indians, who look upon English language as the foundation of the new Indian culture, are enslaving and not liberating India. He rejects Macaulay’s perception of English as the foundation of Indian civilisation but acknowledges the practical role played by English in ensuring the needs of scientific education and inter-provincial communication.
Gandhi insists that the mother-tongue has to be the primary basis of the cultural life of each ‘province’ while he realises that English has to be used to bring about the further growth of the mother-tongue. In the *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi says unequivocally that “we have to improve all our languages. What subjects we should learn through them not be elaborated here. Those English books which are valuable we should translate into the various Indian languages”. He also provides another insight that English should be the language of scientific education and the mother-tongue as the language of ethical education. Gandhi is stressing on how there exists a divide between the English speaking elite and the masses who speak their respective mother-tongues in India and how this divide results in social differentiation and a feeling of superiority among the elite and inferiority among the masses. It is this nefarious tendency of the new Indian elite that he is criticising and not the knowledge of the English language as such. He is aware of its benefits in the areas of communication and scientific progress and stresses on the need to place English within the framework of Indian nationalism. He insists on the need to improve all Indian languages.

Gandhi opts for Hindi with the option of writing it in Devanagari or Persian script as the *lingua franca* for India and emphasises that ‘every cultured Indian will know in addition to his own provincial language; if a Hindu, Sanskrit; if a Mahommedan, Arabic; if a Parsee, Persian, all Hindi. Some Hindus should know Arabic and Persian; some Mahommedans and Parsees, Sanskrit. Several Northerners and Westerners should learn Tamil’.

Gandhi consistently advocated States based on language. In 1918, when a proposal for the linguistic re-distribution of India was defeated in the Imperial Legislature, Gandhi wrote to the person who proposed the move: “Your idea is excellent but there is no possibility of its being carried out in the present atmosphere”. Three years later he told the Home Rule League that “to ensure speedy attention to people’s needs and development of every component part of the nation”, they should “strive to bring about a linguistic division of India”. Congress committees were created based on mother-tongue and that gave a tremendous encouragement to the national movement. Gandhi is confident that Indian nationalism has a golden opportunity to teach something new to the world, namely the model of a functioning multi-lingual and multi-religious nation.

Gandhi repeatedly stressed, like Rammohun and Vivekananda, on religious pluralism and on the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world. He earnestly pleads with his followers to ‘remember that his own religion is the truest to every man even if it stands low in the scales of philosophical comparison’. His encounter with the missionaries in South Africa played a crucial part in the development of his ideas. Their willingness to discuss religious issues with Gandhi makes him realise the importance of religion and makes him see the positive and negative side to their teachings. On the positive side, he adopts the evangelical outlook that God guides people and shares their belief that organisations like the Church and other voluntary associations should become instruments for reforming society and alleviating human miseries. However, he could not reconcile to their narrow view that one particular religion alone could be true and considers this as their most serious limitation. He rejects religious conversion as an ethical failure to think that it is the duty of any religion to remove persons from another religion is a violation of the integrity of family and community relationships.
4.3 ASSESSMENT OF THE CONGRESS AND THE BRITISH POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND PRACTICES

In the *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi makes an assessment of the Indian National Congress from its inception till 1909. Chapters 1-3 and part of Chapter 20 is devoted to this subject. To the Reader’s assertion that the young in India are indifferent to the Congress as they think of it as an instrument for perpetuating British rule and the need to abandon the constitutional mode of agitation, and to adopt violence, Gandhi points out that despite its inadequacies, the Congress was the first institution that has “enthused us with the idea of nationality”. It has brought together Indians from different parts of India and has insisted that the “Nation should control revenue and expenditure” and “has always desired self government after the Canadian model” and has given us “a foretaste of Home Rule”. It would be improper to be dismissive of the Congress as that would “retard the fulfilment” of the final object of attaining true swaraj.

Gandhi pays tribute to Dadabhai Naoroji as the “Father of the Nation” and the “author of Nationalism and that his drain theory has taught us how the “English had sucked our life blood. Gokhale’s embrace of poverty is out of his sense of patriotism and Tyabji ‘through the Congress, sowed the seed of Home Rule’. He insists that “a nation that is desirous of securing Home Rule cannot afford to despise its ancestors”. Gandhi also endorses the role played by Hume and Wedderburn in the rise and development of Congress nationalism and does not see anything inconsistent if the Indians and British could work together and nourish Indian nationalism. He acknowledges that “many Englishmen desire Home Rule for India”. The British who have made India their home deserve fair treatment which the Extremists and the Revolutionary nationalists deny. Gandhi also dismisses in the *Hind Swaraj*, the extremists as retrograde and irresponsible and terms the anarchists and the terrorists as a lunatic fringe of the Indian political scene. Rejecting both these two positions he supports the programme, ideals and the methods of the moderate elements in the Congress in India.

Gandhi established the Natal Indian Congress modelled after the Indian National Congress in South Africa and followed strictly the well known British practice of ‘prayer, petition and protest’. In the footsteps of the early liberals like Rammohun, Gokhale and Surendranath Bannerjee, Gandhi acknowledges that the British connection with India is providential and that Indians are actually “proud to be under the British crown because they think that England will prove India’s deliverer”. Gandhi, like the early liberals, had total faith in the British love of justice and fair play’ and the British constitutional practice of equality before law applies not just to British citizens but for all. Racial discrimination is ‘Un British’ and does not have the sanction of the British constitutional practice. He differentiates between the localisms of the British bureaucracy in India from the larger British constitutional practice. He idolises the British constitution as it guarantees individual freedom and racial equality. He desires that India graduate to equal partnership with the Empire and by helping the British, India could qualify for swarajya or self-rule.

During his stint in South Africa, Gandhi tried to remind the British that racial discrimination is a violation of the letter and spirit of the British constitution. His technique of Satyagraha is also an offshoot of his understanding of both British history and character. Convinced that redress of grievances could be expected only when people demonstrate their willingness to suffer to getting relief underlines his philosophy of satyagraha. Taking a leaf from the British Suffragists, he asks the Indians in South Africa to emulate them by developing a capacity
to endure suffering. Gandhi points out to the century-long struggle laced with suffering and sacrifice that the British women waged to secure the right to vote and which eventually compelled the British government to concede to the demand of the Suffragists. Many years later, he recollects that “an Englishman never respects you till you stand up to him. Then, he begins to like you. He is afraid of nothing physical, but he is mortally afraid of his own conscience, if even you appeal to it and show him to be in the wrong. He does not like to be rebuked for wrong doing at first, but he will think over it, and it will get hold of him and hurt him till he does something to put it right”.

Gandhi is categorical that the technique of *Satyagraha* is most effective if used against the British though it could be used everywhere and be an alternative to war in resolving conflict. Writing in 1904, he observes “Earnestness commands success everywhere. It does so much more in the British Dominions. If the British machinery is slow to move, the genius of the nation being conservative, it is also quick to perceive and recognize earnestness and unity”. Reflecting on this again in 1907, he points out that the British would concede if the people are willing to sacrifice even their lives for the cause. But they would ignore even the genuine demands, when they are merely verbal. Even in their own country the British follow the same principles. South Africa also teaches him two other basic lessons which he implements in India and they are: (a) united struggle of all irrespective of caste, creed and religion and (b) the sublime importance of open non-violent struggle.

Gandhi’s innate respect for the British sense of justice continued even after his return to India and, during the First World War, he recruited soldiers for the British army unconditionally whereas, both Tilak and Jinnah refused to do so without any advancement of the nationalist cause. This confidence which he had in the ultimate British sense of justice was shattered by the horrors of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. However, in spite of this shock and his overall criticism of Western civilisation, and the parliamentary system, he proclaimed in 1921, that his immediate aim was parliamentary *swaraj*, whereas the rest was for a distant future. His faith in the British sense of fair play was shaken but not his faith about the feasibility of the essential mechanism of the British parliamentary institutions.

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### 4.4 SELF-RULE: NEED TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN THE ELITE AND THE MASSES

For Gandhi, Nationalism meant self-rule in which the whole community and not just the elite would be free and active; in which soul force and not brute force is the basis of public order and in which national interest is the supreme ethical criterion of state action. He rejects the proposition that a government by national elite is beneficial simply because it is a government by the national elite as evident from his virulent criticism of the Indian princes whose tyranny is worse than that of the British. Reminding the Reader in the *Hind Swaraj*, he points out “you will admit that the people under several Indian princes are being ground down. The latter mercilessly crush them. Their tyranny is greater than that of the English”. Similarly he rejects the violent methods of Revolutionary nationalists by criticism of Madan Lal Dhinnga and says ‘those who will rise to power by murder will certainly not make the nation happy’. He insists that the soul force is more effective than brute force and cites the example of Tulsidas’ message of *daya* (compassion) as the true ultimate basis of *dharma*. He is pragmatic enough to understand that state violence cannot be completely eliminated but suggests that whatever violence the state may have to exercise must be exercised in the interest of the people as a whole, and not just in the interest of the national elite and that too, strictly within the parameters of *daya*. He stresses on the right balance between *daya*
and national interest. The error of modern nationalism is its separation which is why the elite act in a manner that is detrimental to the masses.

In defining a nation, Gandhi advances the real meaning of swaraj as mental condition and an external condition. As mental condition it means: (1) inner liberation from the temptations of greed and power which modern civilisation offers; (2) freedom from hatred towards the national ‘enemy’, the British and (3) of active love for the Indian masses. Swaraj as external condition is (1) political independence from alien domination and (2) of life-long dedication to the task of improving the material conditions of poverty and caste oppression of the Indian people.

Swaraj is not replacing the English sahibs with Indian ‘brown’ sahibs as that is tantamount to ‘English rule without the Englishman; of wanting the tiger’s nature but not the tiger; of making India English and when that happens it will be called not Hindustan but Englishstan’. He reminds of Mazzini’s vision of freedom which involves the whole of Italian people different from that of Garibaldi and his associates of merely driving the Austrians by force of arms. Gandhi says “I am sure you do not wish to reproduce such a condition (as that of modern Italy) in India…. I believe that you want the millions of Indians to be happy, not that you want the reins of Government in your hands”.

Swaraj is not merely getting rid of the British but also the fascination for modern civilisation which teaches the Indian elite to oppress the Indian people. The Hind Swaraj proposes nineteen points in the last chapter that involves the moral transformation of the Indian elite and addresses it to the professional classes- the doctors, lawyers, scientists, administrators, politicians and business executives- to become instruments of service to the nation first and aspiring for money or status as secondary. The pursuit of artha or money has to be within the framework of dharma which means adopting machinery for national development that is conducive to the health of the body and soul, the well-being of the weak and the poor and not just the wealthy and the powerful. Gandhi’s stress on Khadi symbolises this requirement. Swaraj means self-reform, constitutional reforms and economic reforms. His commitment to truth as he sees it teaches him to appreciate the beauty of compromise which he underlines as the essence of satyagraha. There is close link between swaraj and satyagraha as the latter is the key to the realisation of the former. The former is self-rule and the latter is the way in which the individual, through voluntary self-sacrifice may gain control over himself. Extended into the political realm, it strengthens the individual soul force as he offers civil disobedience against the government. Stressing on ends and means, Gandhi insists that the lofty goal of swaraj is attained only if there is the purest of means.

Gandhi’s ideal with the village as the basis of swaraj underlines the message of self-reliance and self-sufficiency. The ideal village should produce its own food and cloth; should have reserve for its cattle, playgrounds for adults and children, its own theatre, school and water works. Each activity in it will be carried on cooperative basis. “Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus every village will be a republic or Panchayat having full powers... self sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world”.

In 1931, Gandhi outlined the nature of legislative organisation for the Indian nation in his speech at the Second Round Table Conference as follows: ‘each village would elect its own representatives to form an electorate for further election to the central or the federal legislature. It would be analogous to the pattern for the constitution of the All India Congress Committee where the villages elect their own little committees and these in turn
would elect the taluk committees, followed by district councils which elect provincial councils. These would finally send their members to the central legislature. Only the villages could be practitioners of swadeshi; the villagers earn their bread labour and lead simple lives in the absence of machinery, doctors, railways and lawyers, and markets selling consumer goods’.

Tagore criticises Gandhi’s directives regarding them to be medieval. The emphasis on simplicity would retard economic development, as the narrow form of swadeshi would result in restrictive provincial attitude, isolationism and provide unnecessary hostility in the rest of the world. He does not agree with Gandhi’s assertion that 80% of the Indian people were peasants and that for six months in a year they did not have meaningful work. It is neither wise that the middle class spend their free time spinning the yarn. He questions the desirability of the spinning-wheel. Tagore is convinced that Gandhi’s plans would lead to India’s isolation preventing western knowledge and advancement from reaching India. In response to these charges, Gandhi replied that Indian nationalism is not exclusive, nor aggressive, nor destructive. It is health-giving, religious and therefore humanitarian. He defends the use of spinning-wheel as that is the only way to ‘realise’ the essential and living oneness of interest among India’s myriads. Its purposes are to symbolise ‘sacrifice for the whole nation’. Regarding narrow provincialism and the dangers of this kind of nationalism, Gandhi says: “I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown off my feet by any”. Gandhi does not regard his patriotism to be exclusive: ‘it is calculated not to hurt any other nation but to benefit all in the true sense of the word. India’s freedom as conceived by me can never be a menace to the world”. Gandhi sees nation as consisting of individual human components and not, as Dalton states it, “as a transcendent entity, possessed of a soul and a form of freedom of its own. He thinks of swaraj first in terms of the individual and then in terms of society. He says ‘swaraj of the people means the sum total of the swaraj (self-rule) of individuals. He also stresses on social reform for attaining swaraj and foremost among the aims of social reform are what he calls the three pillars of swaraj: Hindu-Muslim unity, the abolition of untouchability and the uplift of India’s villages.

4.5 CONCLUSION

Jayantanuja Bandhopadhyaya identifies six ideals of Indian nationalism and these are: (1) anti-imperialism (2) anti-racism (3) Asianism (4) internationalism (5) non-violence and (6) democracy. These ideals found their fullest exposition under Gandhi’s leadership. It is the strength of these ideals that prevented the international communist movement from making any significant headway in India between the Russian Revolution of 1917 and Independence of India in 1947. The two most important ideological points of Indian nationalism are anti-imperialism and democracy and for most, non-violence a tactic rather than a policy. Anti-imperialism remains the fundamental aim of Indian nationalism.

The Marxists by accusing Gandhi of being bourgeois overlooked his role as a social critic and his protest against existing inequalities and the constructive programmes aimed at eliminating existing social evils. For Gandhi the causes of disparities in the Indian society are due to imperialistic exploitation and the limitation of the capitalist industrialised civilisation of the West. By concentrating on the political aspects of his personality, the Marxists missed the critic Gandhi, who felt deeply the acute disparities in the Indian society and tried to resolve them in his own way. Nirmal Kumar Bose argues that Gandhi defies classification as the prophet of bourgeois nationalism in India. First, the means that Gandhi employed are
such that they will lead successfully to the end only if the masses become self-acting towards the latter part of the revolution. And the chances are that if the masses gain success through their fully developed conscious strength, they will also refuse to be exploited in future by anybody who wishes to ride upon their back. Second, Gandhi did not want India to benefit at the expense of any other nation. He considered humanity as one family. Therefore, according to Bose, Gandhi transcended bourgeois nationalism.

Gandhi, like Vivekananda and Aurobindo, accepts the proposition that it is in the nature of man to struggle for self-realisation or spiritual freedom. This is the highest aim of the individual and how he attains the conquest of his self is the key to success. Gandhi also stresses that political independence by itself is incomplete unless accompanied by a moral or spiritual transformation of the individual in society. Not only does Gandhi insist on moral progress but also in the elimination of slave mentality. Equally important is the social reform, with the help of constructive programme, to realising the three pillars of swaraj and thus establishes close link between freedom and social harmony.

4.6 SUMMARY

Gandhi rejects the popular perception that ‘India has become a nation under the British rule’ and disputes the claim of those who argue that India is a nation after the British introduced western ideas and to the changes brought about by modern means of communication such as the railways and the telegraph. His claim that India is nation is based on two assumptions of an all India consciousness. He insists on the need to encourage Indian languages and developing Hindustani as the lingua franca and the mother-tongue has to be the primary basis of the cultural life of each ‘province’. Gandhi pleads for religious pluralism and allowing every religion to freely profess and practice what they consider as truth. Gandhi also dismisses in the Hind Swaraj, the extremists as retrograde and irresponsible and terms the anarchists and the terrorists as a lunatic fringe of the Indian political scene. Rejecting both these two positions he supports the programme, ideals and the methods of the moderate elements in the Congress in India. For Gandhi, Nationalism means self-rule in which the whole community is involved and not just the elite. Gandhi insisted on moral progress and the elimination of slave mentality. Equally important is social reform with the help of constructive programme to realising swaraj and thus establishes close link between freedom and social harmony.

4.7 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1) How does Gandhi perceive India as a nation?

2) What is Gandhi’s assessment of the Indian National Congress?

3) Why did Gandhi admire the British political institutions and practices?

4) What does Gandhi mean by self-rule?

5) Why does Gandhi insist that there is a need to bridge the gap between the elite and the masses to bring about self-rule?

SUGGESTED READINGS


Pantham, T and Deutsch, K., (ed), Political Thought in Modern India, New Delhi, Sage, 1986.


5.1 INTRODUCTION

The discourse on rights is linked with the rise of liberal individualism. The language of rights permeates and dominates all walks of modern political, social and economic life. In defining the proper relationship between the individual and the state, the philosophical defence of rights have assumed unparalleled importance in the modern political discourse exemplified in the philosophies of Rawls and Dworkin, the proponents of rights-based liberalism. The other streams including the Communitarianism do not emphasise on rights; yet individual theorists like MacIntyre and Walzer accord importance to individual rights. There is a general belief that rights secure liberty by protecting the individual against the state and other persons, even a majority, gives a person the shield against arbitrariness and tyranny. It safeguards the individual’s private sphere ensuring that neither the state nor others can interfere without justification. Embedded in the concept of right is the acceptance of ideas of personal autonomy, individuality, liberty and human equality and, any denial or discrimination would have to have sufficient reasons. The concept is quintessentially anti-statist in nature, also the basis of Gandhi’s perceptions and philosophy.

Aims and Objectives

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand

- Gandhi’s concept of rights and duties
- His concepts of individualism and autonomy
- Gandhi’s vision of the individual’s role in Satyagraha
5.2 GANDHI’S INDIVIDUALISM

Gandhi’s suspicion of the modern state apparatus, his denial of the all-powerful state, his description of the state as a soulless machine and the supreme importance that he accords to the individual makes him an individualist par excellence. Iyer considers Gandhi as “one of the most revolutionary of individualists and one of the most individualistic of revolutionaries in world history”. Writing in 1924, Gandhi declares that ‘the individual is the one supreme consideration’ and held on this belief right till the end of his life. He writes:

If the individual ceases to count, what is left of society? Individual freedom alone can make a man voluntarily surrender himself completely to the service of society. If it is wrested from him, he becomes an automaton and society is ruined. No society can possibly be built on a denial of individual freedom. It is contrary to the very nature of man. Just as a man will not grow horns or a tail, so will he not exist as a man if he has no mind of his own. In reality even those who do not believe in the liberty of the individual believe in their own.

Gandhi also does not lose sight of the fact that the individual is essentially a social being and in this sense his individualism is like that of T.H. Green. He is critical of unbridled individualism and considers it as unsuitable for social progress.

Unrestricted individualism is the law of the beast of the jungle. We have learnt to strike the mean between individual freedom and social restraint. Willing submission to social restraint for the sake of the well being of the whole society, enriches both the individual and the society of which he is a member.

Gandhi views society as an aggregate of individuals and that a society is incomplete if it does not cater to individual’s self-development. The individual, for him, is not only a social person but also a moral one. Individual initiative enhances human dignity and also provides for a mechanism for resolving conflicts in a non-violent manner. He underlines the importance of common good without denying the pivotal role for the individual. He considers the individual as the bearer of moral authority vested with the moral law and duty (dharma) to judge the state and its laws, by the standards of truth (satya) and non-violence (ahimsa). His faith in the individual as the basis of a modern society is strengthened by his notion of relative truth.

Gandhi considers truth and God as inter-dependent and acknowledges the need to go beyond ‘God is Truth’ to ‘Truth is God’. “In ‘God is Truth’, is, certainly does not mean ‘equal to’ nor does it mean, ‘is truthful’. Truth is not an attribute of God, but He is That. He is nothing if He is not That. Truth in Sanskrit means Is. Therefore Truth is implied in Is. God is nothing else is. Therefore the more truthful we are, the nearer we are to God. We are only to the extent that we are truthful” (Gandhi, 1949, p.29). In view of the concept of relative truth and recognising the need for establishing some standard and that is human needs, Gandhi recommends non-violence (ahimsa) as truth differs from person to person and describes satyagraha as ‘soul force’.

5.3 CONCEPT OF AUTONOMY

Gandhi’s individualism is embedded in his notion of autonomy and is derived from his extensive view of power which he locates in the state, economy and society and in each individual. Within this framework he insists that everyone can and should take charge of his life. Accepting human dignity and worth as intrinsic goods, he is severe in his indictment of
colonialism and untouchability and interestingly, sees the seeds of degeneration that undermines and suppresses human dignity within Indian traditions. He emphasises that India got subjugated because of its moribund and repressive practices and stresses on the need for reforming the Indian society and in particular, Hinduism, by highlighting some of its inequities and discriminatory practices towards women, the lower castes and the untouchables. According to Gandhi, individuals make and remake their lives through their choices and action. The highest duty for Gandhi is to act morally, regardless of the consequences. The moral way to proceed is through non-violence. Since each person knows best about his moral project and the means to realise it in action, each one ought to be free from both domination and violence.

Gandhi’s autonomous person is also a social person, never apart from the community to which he belongs and therefore he expects everyone to be concerned not only about their self-governance but also the autonomy of others. This, in a nutshell, is the meaning of ‘swaraj’ or self-rule, a vision of India ruled by Indians with concern for the poorest, the destitute and the most vulnerable. Self-rule not only means end of British colonialism but also an end of other forms of domination such as untouchability and modernisation. ‘Swaraj’, for Gandhi, is when Indians learn to rule themselves, individually and collectively. It means self-control and self-rule. Like Green, Gandhi seeks to “make life morally meaningful for all people and both viewed the community as held together not by compulsion but by the sense of a common interest or good”. The individual has a soul while the state is a soulless machine “which can never be weaned from violence to which it owes its existence”. The individual has the moral authority as he consistently pursues satya and ahimsa and hence his description of the individual as possessing a soul while the state is soulless. He accepts the state if it uses minimum of violence but the fear is always that the state may use too much violence against those who differ from it. His concern with the consequences of excessive centralisation of power makes him concede only a minimal role to the state. Decentralisation of power ensures greater chance for the collective pursuit of satya and ahimsa. He admits that state ownership is preferable to private ownership involving the exploitation of the masses, but in general he considers the violence of private ownership as less injurious than the violence of the state. In an enlightened anarchy ‘everyone is his own ruler’. In an ideal state, there is no political power because there is no state. As this ideal is not realisable, he prefers a minimal state, like Thoreau, namely that government is best which governs the least. Gandhi limits the ambit of the state and focuses on the civil society and the role of the individual within it.

“I look upon an increase in the power of the state with the greatest fear, because, although while apparently doing good by minimizing exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality, which lies at the root of all progress.”

5.4 INDIVIDUAL AND SATYAGRAHA

According to Gandhi, as all states violate satya and ahimsa, “every citizen renders himself responsible for every act of his government. And loyalty to a capricious and corrupt state is a sin, disloyalty a virtue. Civil disobedience becomes a sacred duty when the state becomes lawless or, which is the same thing, corrupt, and a citizen who barters with such a state shares its corruption and lawlessness”. Satyagraha is the moral right of every individual, a ‘birthright that cannot be surrendered without losing self respect’. Gandhi describes satyagrahi as ‘real constitutionalist’ on the grounds that disobedience to evil laws is a moral duty and in disobeying and accepting punishment, he obeys a higher law. The
existence of injustice justifies political resistance and political protest is basically moral. “To put down civil disobedience is to imprison conscience. Civil disobedience can only lead to strength and purity”. The state, for Gandhi, has no right to dehumanise or suppress the individual. “It is the inherent right of a subject to refuse or assist a government that will not listen to him”. The individual citizen has the responsibility to uphold satya and practise ahimsa which cannot be relinquished or abdicated. Gandhi also accepts that a majority could be wrong and stresses on the fact that an individual, at all times, must have the power to veto over state action. A citizen, as stated by Antigone¹, must have the right to judge the state on the basis of higher law and like Socrates² must willingly accept the consequences of challenging the laws of the state. This is all the more necessary, according to Gandhi, as modern day states, including representative democracies augment greater power and violence and ignore truth. Like Locke and Jefferson, he believes that loyalty to a constitution and its laws need to be reviewed and affirmed once in every generation. He accepts the Lockean principle that political authority has be judged and questioned, and, if necessary disobeyed.

Satyagraha demonstrates an intricate relationship between means and ends through a philosophy of action. In its approach to conflict, Gandhi does not seek a compromise but a synthesis, as a satyagrahi never yields his position which he regards as truth but he is prepared to accept the opponent’s position, if it is true. By sacrificing one’s position he does not make any concessions to the opponent but only to a mutually agreeable adjustment. Both parties are satisfied without either feeling triumphant or defeated as both do not compromise in course of the resolution of the conflict.

Satyagraha, for Gandhi, is based on a profound respect for law and is resorted to non-violently and publicly. The Satyagrahi willingly accepts full penalties, including the rigours of jail discipline as resistance is respectful and restrained, undertaken by law-abiding citizens. Gandhi insists that ‘disobedience without civility, discipline, discrimination and non violence is certain destruction’. A satyagrahi accepts personal responsibility publicly. He must inform the concerned government official(s) about the time and place of the act, the reason(s) for protest and if possible, the law that would be disobeyed.

A satyagrahi cooperates not out of fear of punishment but because cooperation is essential for the common good. Satyagraha is resistance without any acrimony or hatred or injury to the opponent. A satyagrahi also suffers the consequences of resistance. As a person he owes it to himself to suffer, if necessary for his conscience and as a citizen, it is his duty to suffer the consequences of his conscientious disobedience to the laws of the state. A satyagrahi invites suffering upon himself and does not seek mercy. The following rules have to be followed in satyagraha: (1) self-reliance at all times; (2) Initiative in the hands of the satyagrahis; (3) Propagation of the objective, strategy and tactics of the campaign, (4) Reduction of demands to a minimum consistent with Truth, (5) Progressive advancement of the movement through steps and stages- direct action only when all other efforts to achieve an honourable settlement have been exhausted, (6) Examination of weakness within the satyagraha group- no sign of impatience, discouragement or breakdown of non-violent attitude, (7) Persistent search for avenues of cooperation with the adversary on honourable terms by winning over the opponent by helping him. There must be sincerity to achieve an agreement with rather than triumph over the adversary (8) Refusal to surrender essentials in negotiation and there must be no compromise on basic principles and (9) Insistence on full agreement on fundamentals before accepting a settlement.

Gandhi suggests on the need to follow these steps in a satyagraha: (1) Negotiation and arbitration, (2) preparation of the group for direct action- exercise in self-discipline, (3)
agitation – demonstration such as mass meetings, parades, slogan-shouting, (4) issuing of an ultimatum, (5) economic boycott and forms of strike- picketing, dharna, non-violent labour strike and general strike (6) non-cooperation, (7) civil disobedience, (8) usurping of the functions of government and should step 8 fail then resort to the last one, namely establishment of a parallel government by securing greatest possible cooperation from the public.

In 1930, Gandhi laid down a code of discipline that satyagrahis would have to adhere to: (1) harbour no anger but suffer the anger of the opponent, refuse to return the assaults of the opponent; (2) do not submit to any order given in anger, even though severe punishment is threatened for disobeying; (3) refrain from insults; (4) protect opponents from insult or attack, even at the risk of life; (5) do not resist arrest nor the attachment of property, unless holding property as a trustee; (6) refuse to surrender any property held in trust at the risk of life; (7) if taken prisoner, behave in any exemplary manner; (8) as a member of a satyagraha unit, obey the order of satyagraha leaders and resign from the unit in the event of serious disagreement and (9) do not expect guarantees for maintenance of the dependants.

For Gandhi satyagraha incorporates civil disobedience though it went beyond the pressure tactics associated with strikes and demonstrations to include moral, social and political reform (Dalton, 1982, p.148). Satyagraha, unlike civil disobedience, is resistance without acrimony or hatred or injury to the opponent. ‘Satyagraha’, for him, is both a ‘mode of action and a method of enquiry’ (Bondurant, 1958, v). Satya is derived from the Sanskrit word sat, ‘being’, and means both truth and essence. For Gandhi, it means the continuous search of truth and also a means of resolving conflict by which a person comes to know himself and the process of his evolution. The idea of openness is embodied in satyagraha. Actions based on pre-conceived notions and marked by violence are characterised as duragraha and is similar to the forms of passive resistance.

Passive resistance may be offered side by side with the use of arms. Satyagraha and brute force, being each a negation of the other, can never go together. In passive resistance there is always present an idea of harassing the other party and there is a simultaneous readiness to undergo any hardships entailed upon us by such activity; while in Satyagraha there is not the remotest idea of injuring the opponent. Satyagraha postulates the conquest of the adversary by suffering in one’s own person (Gandhi, 1928, p.179).

Satyagraha is coined during the movement of Indian resistance in South Africa to the ‘Asiatic Law Amendment Ordinance’ introduced into the Transvaal Legislative Council in 1906. At first, Gandhi called the movement passive resistance but realised that a new principle had crystallised as the movement unfolded. He then announced through the pages of his new newspaper, Indian Opinion, a prize for the best name to describe the movement. One competitor suggested ‘sadagraha’ meaning firmness in a good cause. Subsequently it was changed to satyagraha, “a force which is born of Truth and Love or non violence” and gave up the phrase ‘passive resistance’3. Iyer interprets it as following:

“Gandhi’s analysis of civil disobedience conflated two separate notions –the natural right, the universal obligation of every human being to act according to his conscience in opposition, if necessary, to any external authority or restraint, and secondly, the duty of the citizen to qualify himself by obedience to the laws of the state to exercise on rare occasions his obligation to violate an unjust law or challenge an unjust system, and to accept willingly the consequences of his disobedience as determined by the legal sanctions of the state”.

Gandhi’s perceptions were determined by the British colonial traditions and the faith he had in the “British love of justice and fair play”, mainly because of the British constitutional
practice of equality before law, not only of the British citizens, but for all. He idolised the British constitution because it guarantees both individual freedom and racial equality. Until the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, he was a loyalist of the Empire and was convinced that helping the Empire would qualify for swarajya, i.e. self-rule. His understanding of the British history and character led him to the use of the technique of Satyagraha. He opined that grievances could be redressed only if people demonstrate their willingness to suffer to get relief and cited the example of the British Suffragists for Indians in South Africa to emulate.

5.5 SATYAGRAHA AND SWARAJ

Satyagraha is inextricably linked with his notion of swaraj or self-rule or self-restraint. Swaraj would be attained through the method of satyagraha in which the individual through voluntary self-sacrifice and suffering achieves self-control, in other words self-discipline. For Gandhi, swaraj is attained when there is social unity in three major areas of the Indian society: among the untouchables and the various castes, between the Hindus and Muslims and narrowing the gap between the city and villages, the former urban, westernised and educated and the latter rural and illiterate. To be of service for the betterment of the ordinary people, an idea that Gandhi derived from Vivekananda, Tolstoy, ‘Sermon on the Mount’ and numerous texts and saints of the Indian tradition, is the quintessence of swaraj. Swaraj means “all around awakening-social, educational, moral, economic and political” (Young India, 26-8-1926, II, p.1231). Merely replacing British rulers with their Indian counterparts is Englishstan and not Hindustan, an “English rule without the Englishman, the tiger’s nature, but not the tiger” (1997, ch. IV).

By Swaraj I mean the government of India by the consent of the people asascertained by the largest number of adult population, male or female, native born or domiciled, who have contributed by manual labour to the services of the state and who have taken the trouble of having registered their names as voters…. Real Swaraj will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused. In other words, swaraj is to be obtained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority (Gandhi, 1947, p.14).

Gandhi makes welfare of the masses, with fulfilment of their basic needs as basis of economic freedom, thus reflecting the inspiration that he derives from Ruskin. The India of My Dreams, as Gandhi envisioned, is the swaraj of the poor person. A truly non-violent state would be composed of self-governing and self-sufficient small cohesive village communities in which the majority would rule with due consideration to the rights of the minorities. It would be a participatory democracy whereby citizens have the positive freedom to “participate in the process of politics in every possible way, restricting its activities to the bare minimum,… it did not mean that the state was all-powerful, rather an intimate relationship should exist between the state and all its citizens”. Satyagraha is the glue that cements on one hand his ideal of enlightened anarchy and common good and on the other hand his ideals of individual autonomy and moral self-determinism. Like Thoreau, Gandhi stresses on the supremacy of the individual conscience against all claims of the state.

5.6 RIGHTS AND DUTIES

The crux of Satyagraha, for Gandhi, is in deciphering what one’s duty is. Gandhi speaks of rights in the context of duties and that is his distinctiveness; he considers ‘real rights as a result of performance of duty’ meaning, that all rights to be deserved and preserved as
Rights and Duties

Rights is derived from duties which are performed well. Rights cannot be divorced from duties and that rights have to be exercised in the interests of all. The concept of duty, for Gandhi, is derived from the idea of dispassionate action which the Bhagavad Gita advocates. Unless one’s action is performed with a degree of detachment one would not be free from the anxiety of its future consequences. He contends “if we are sure of the ‘purity’ of the means we employ, we shall be led on by the faith, before which any fear and trembling melt away”. Non-attachment does not mean lack of clarity about the ends one desires to achieve. For Gandhi, the important thing is to get the people to do what they ought to do without offering inducements or threats or theological sanctions.

Interestingly, Gandhi accepts the core idea of right-based individualism, the dominant paradigm in contemporary political theory, namely human equality and moral worth of every person but rights are coalesced with the idea of duties, assigning individuals with responsibilities to lead a moral life and devote to the good of their community. He also supports the basic rights of those at the margins of society, namely women, untouchables and the vulnerable, who have been objects of domination and humiliation. According to him, Freedom is not being left alone but the freedom to cultivate love and service which he describes as the best feature of human nature. He champions equal rights for women and the right of everyone to make the choices they desire. He rejects ascriptive properties such as gender, class, birth, caste, education or nationality that can justify unequal treatment and disqualify some as moral agents.

For Gandhi any discourse of rights would have to focus on how persons are treated. He pays attention to the role of institutions or the way resources affect choices available for individuals, an aspect which most theorists on autonomy, with the exception of Raz, ignore. Another difference between Gandhi and conventional theories of autonomy is that for Gandhi, individuals are equal members of a harmonious and interdependent cosmos rather than abstracted selves. It is only through an association with others based on mutual respect and cooperation that persons become complete or achieve good. The community ought to be one that is open and tolerant of diverse conceptions of good and that its institutional practices do not hinder the pursuit of their good by ordinary persons. Gandhi considers duties as primary and considers the duty to act morally regardless of the consequences as the highest.

5.7 RIGHTS OF WOMEN

Gandhi speaks of equal rights for women. He wanted women and men to be complimentary to one another and insists that women and men differ but their differences cannot be the basis of women’s subjugation and oppression. He wanted marriage to be one of partnership between two equals. He censured women if they imitated men and appealed to women to get out of their habits of pleasing men. Writing in 1927, in an address to women in Ceylon, now Sri Lanka, Gandhi remarks:

What is it that makes a woman deck herself more than a man? I am told by feminine friends that she does so for pleasing man. Well, I tell you, if you want to play your part in the world’s affairs, you must refuse to deck yourself for pleasing man. If I was born a woman, I would rise in rebellion against the pretensions on the part of man that woman is born to be his plaything.

Gandhi sees the primary tasks of a woman in being a mother and a householder. Additionally a woman, according to Gandhi, is the repository of spiritual and moral values and a teacher
to man. A woman is the embodiment of suffering and sacrifice and it is for this reason that he considers her to be the best messenger of peace and non-violence. A woman is inherently more peaceful than a man. On these grounds he recommends separate education for women and men as women would make better soldiers than men in non-violent struggles. He credits his wife Kasturba and the black women in South Africa for helping him to evolve the technique of satyagraha. He considers the nature of women as being conducive to non-violent satyagraha based on dharma.

…woman is the incarnation of ahimsa. Ahimsa means infinite love, which again means infinite capacity for suffering. Who but woman, the mother of man, shows this capacity in the largest measure? She shows it as she is the infant and feeds it during the nine months and derives joy in the suffering involved…. Let her transfer that love to the whole of humanity, let her forget that she ever was or can be the object of man’s lust. And she will occupy her proud position by the side of man as his mother, maker and silent leader. It is given to her to teach the art of peace to the warring world thirsting for that nectar. She can become the leader in satyagraha which does not require the learning that books give but does require the stout heart that comes from suffering and faith.

Gandhi’s credit lay in the fact that under his stewardship women participated in large numbers in the nationalist struggle. Initially, in the 1920s he confined them to their homes and made them take up the spinning-wheel. Subsequently he allowed them picket liquor shops as he knew majority of women suffered at the hands of drunkard husbands. At the peak of the civil disobedience movement in the 1930s, he allowed them to join the salt satyagraha. Women played an important role in many of the humanitarian works that Gandhi undertook such as helping the poor, nursing, promoting khadi, spinning and weaving.

5.8 CONCLUSION

The distinctiveness about Gandhi’s formulation is not only the acceptance of rights as central to individual well-being but also stressing on the performance of duties. He considers the two as inter-twined and that the realisation of one without the other is not possible as both pave the way for the fulfilment of common good. The underlying assumption of Gandhi to which he remains steadfast is the idea that the individual is a social person and that the essence of individuality is social self. The emphasis on duties emanates from his quest for building a humane society and conflict(s) would be resolved non-violently through adherence to truth or satyagraha. Duty, for Gandhi, is disinterested action which is performed without much attention to the result and one which morally conforms to the order of the Universe. Rights and duties lead to common good which is the basis of swaraj- self-rule, self-restraint, self-discipline and voluntary self-sacrifice and this in turn is based in the notion of individual autonomy and moral self-determinism. Gandhi, as a philosophical anarchist, stresses on individual claims against that of the state, with the aim that the individual armed with dharma or the moral law is the best to judge authority, take corrective steps if necessary through acts of satyagraha, and bring about common good with which his good is inextricably linked.

5.9 SUMMARY

Gandhi is unique in theorising about rights within the framework of duties. Rights cannot be divorced from duties and that rights have to be exercised in the interests of all. The concept of duty is derived from the idea of dispassionate action which the Bhagavad Gita
advocates. Unless one’s action is performed with a degree of detachment one would not be free from the anxiety of its future consequences. Interestingly, Gandhi accepts the core idea of right-based individualism, the dominant paradigm in contemporary political theory, namely human equality and moral worth of every person but rights are coalesced with the idea of duties, assigning individuals with responsibilities to lead a moral life and devote to the good of their community. Accepting human dignity and worth as intrinsic goods, he is severe in his indictment of colonialism and untouchability and interestingly, sees the seeds of degeneration that undermines and suppresses human dignity within Indian traditions. Gandhi expects everyone to be concerned not only about their self-governance but also the autonomy of others. This, in a nutshell, is the meaning of ‘swaraj’ or self-rule, a vision of India ruled by Indians with concern for the poorest, the destitute and the most vulnerable.

5.10 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Explain Gandhi’s concept of individual autonomy.

2. What is the role of the Individual in Satyagraha?

3. What is the link between Satyagraha and Swaraj?

4. Explain Gandhi’s views on rights and duties.

SUGGESTED READINGS


Pantham, T and Deutsch, K., (ed), Political Thought in Modern India, New Delhi, Sage, 1986.


(Endnotes)

Antigone is torn between two loyalties, that of her religion which commands her to bury the body of her brother while that of the state commands that his body be left unburied and unmourned, to be eaten by dogs and vultures. She obeys her conscience on the grounds that no ruler, however powerful, has the right to demand acts contrary to divinely ordained norms.

2 A general reading of the Crito, a dialogue about the trial and death of Socrates, reveals that civil disobedience requires fulfillment of certain conditions. Its underlying assumption being the imperative obedience to the city, if one is reasonably satisfied with its laws. For Socrates, the entitlement of the state to obedience is because it confers benefits. Anticipating Locke, he argues that Athenian citizens ought to obey the laws of their city since they have freely consented to do so and obedience to the state is for three reasons: gratitude, consent and morality. He does not acknowledge any limits to an individual’s duty. He does not consider the fact that person(s) accept benefits with certain assumptions and in the hope of certain reasonable expectations. If these are not fulfilled then obedience to the state is no longer tenable, though breaking or defying the law may undermine and eventually destroy the state, a proposition that is valid if the state is just. In case there are unjust laws, it is better to rectify it and make the state stronger and just. Socrates and Crito never discuss the justification of disobedience but rather the reasons for citizens’ obedience to a city. Their answer is that is anybody remains in the city willingly, that demonstrates his readiness to comply with its laws. Disobedience is only permissible if vocalized by a superior authority; in that case, the latter’s command overrides that of the city.

3 Passive resistance is used first by Bipin Chandra Pal (1858-1932) and became a part of the lexicon of his compatriots - Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) and Aurobindo Ghosh -within the extremist movement.
6.1 Introduction
Aims and Objectives

6.2 Conflict and its Resolution

6.3 Purity of Means and Ends

6.4 Ahimsa as the Means to Realise Swaraj

6.5 Conclusion

6.6 Summary

6.7 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

6.1 INTRODUCTION

One of the major concerns of Gandhi’s discourse on the relationship between ends and means flows from its centrality of his entire edifice which means that it is not merely a question of an instrument. An interesting postulate of social action is the ultimate elimination of conflict which means eliminating the factors that create a conflict situation. Since, in the process of resolution of conflict, there is neither a winner nor a loser as in the case of a war or a settlement arrived at by use of brutal force, this framework provides the blueprint for lasting peace. This also means that peace is intrinsically linked to non-violent action and a commitment of resolution of conflict only by peaceful means. As such, non-violence ceases to be a negative concept and has a positive dimension in the context of peaceful evolution of society. This leads to the exposition of the emergence of a compassionate individual which tries to bridge the gulf between two important factors: compassion and non-violence. This synthesis eliminates any need for revolutionary violence and creates a situation of continuous co-relationship between means and ends. Bringing the question of morality and ethics as the core to understand the importance of this crucial relationship between a particular activity, to lead to a particular redress ultimately has a larger ramification in the context of the universal ethical content of any such local act. This also means that the moral force by itself will make it totally redundant the issue of a conflict between ends and means as the unfoldment of the non-violent mass struggle will itself lead to the logical culmination of reaching a larger ethical point. Gandhi’s experiments with truth in itself is an indication of this kind of an activity which is conducive to the larger framework of an ethical code. This also leads to another interesting innovation in Gandhi with his doctrine of relative truth and suspicion of any kind of determinism. For him non-violence is a method and not merely a rule book or prescription. This was a deliberate act on the part of Gandhi because when he was requested to prepare a manual of non-violence being a guide to action he refused as he laid emphasis on the primacy of the method being a technique in its rudimentary and tentative sense and could not be reduced to a doctrine or a set of rules. It is because of the initiation of a major change in the mechanism of resolution of conflict from wars to non-violent resolutions he was categorical that the ethical content can never be diluted.
Aims and Objectives

After reading this unit, you would be able to:

- Understand the meaning of the concept of ends and means.
- Discuss how Ahimsa can be a tool towards Swaraj.
- Examine Gandhi’s views on the importance of ends and means.

6.2 CONFLICT AND ITS RESOLUTION

The concept of ends-means relationship is the core of Gandhi’s social philosophy and conflict resolution. For Gandhi, means and ends are inextricably linked that ends justifies the means and that “an end which requires unjust means is not a just end”. In the *Hind Swaraj* (1909) the Editor tells the Reader, who argues in favour of the forcible overthrow of the British rule in India: “Your belief that there is no connection between the means and the end is a great mistake. Through that mistake even men who have been considered religious have committed grievous crimes. Your reasoning is the same as saying that we can get a rose through planting a noxious weed. If I want to cross the ocean, I can do so only by means of a vessel; if I were to use a cart for that purpose, both the cart and I would soon find the bottom…. The means may be likened to a seed, the end of a tree; and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree. I am not likely to obtain the result flowing from the worship of God by laying myself prostrate before Satan…. We reap exactly as we sow”. Impure means would result in impure end. Justice could not be secured through unjust means; freedom could not be obtained through unfair means and peace could not be realised by war. Gandhi also stresses on the close link between the notions of right and duty; to insist on one and forget the other is a redundant argument.

Gandhi rejects the idea that ends justify the means, a notion which Kautilya and Machiavelli endorsed in the context of self-preservation and of the *raison d’etat*. To restrict the choice of means on grounds of expediency rather than principle would be unacceptable to Gandhi. Any means is fine for the attainment of power, which in turn is employed for higher ends, is an argument which Machiavelli espouses but what Machiavelli forgets is that attainment and maintenance of power becomes an end in itself.

Marxism too is not rigid on the notion of ends and means as it rejects supra-historic morality and categorical imperatives, both religious and secular. Engels and Lenin justify the use of any means to realise the desired end. In his pamphlet *Socialism and War*, Lenin points out that the Marxists differ from the pacifists and anarchists in their belief that the justification of each war must be seen individually in relation to its historical role and its consequences. Means could be justified with reference to the historical end it serves. Trotsky, unlike Engels and Lenin, emphasises on the dialectical interdependence of means and ends and underlines that the means chosen are those that are likely to lead to human liberation. For Trotsky, ends do not justify the means but that means could be justified only by its end, which for him, is the increase of the power of man over nature and the end of the power of one over the other. For Gandhi, the end is *satya* or truth which requires no justification and the means- *ahimsa* or non-violence must be justified not only with reference to the end but also in itself. Every act must be justified with reference to *satya* and *ahimsa*. 
6.3 PURITY OF ENDS AND MEANS

Iyer notes that Gandhi not only completely rejects the dichotomy which is established between ends and means but also insists on the use of right and/or moral means to the extent that they, rather than the ends provide the standard of reference. The relationship between means and ends is not a technical one but an ethical one, one that involves choice which requires an initial decision about the desired end and the obligatory acceptance of whatever steps are necessary to secure it or most likely to do so. He constantly emphasises that evil means could never lead to good ends. Noble and good ends could never be attained by evil and/or immoral means. Guided by his belief in the law of *Karma* he underlines the organic interdependence between means and ends. He also stresses on the fact that individuals have control over the means but not over the end.

Gandhi’s conception of ends and means ought to be also understood in the context of his insistence that all of us are bearers of relative truth and none can stake a claim to know absolute truth or *sat*. As bearers of relative truth we know our version and that *satya* or truth would appear differently to different people, in the same manner as the five blind persons who held to different parts of an elephant; each knew his version but far removed from the totality of reality. If there are disagreements about ends it is because human beings are creatures of relative truth. The concept of relative truth and the factual have a common concern for truth that led Gandhi to insist on *ahimsa* or non-violence towards one another. A seeker of truth or *satya* is a practitioner of non-violence or *ahimsa*. Iyer also observes that Gandhi’s “concept of *satya*, with *ahimsa* as the means, determined his doctrine of *satyagraha* or active resistance to authority, while the concept of *ahimsa*, with *satya* as the common end, enabled him to formulate his doctrine of *sarvodaya* or non violent socialism”. Iyer’s further explanation deserves to be quoted as follows: Writing an introduction to Ruskin’s *Unto This Last* Gandhi states that “the *polis* is nothing more or less than the domain in which all men are free to gain skill in the art of action and learn how to exemplify *satya* and *ahimsa*; the means in which both the individual quest could be furthered and social virtues displayed among the masses of citizens in a climate of tolerance and civility; a morally progressive society in which neither the State nor any social organisation is allowed to flout with impunity the sacred principle that every man is entitled to his relative truth and no one can claim the right to coerce another, to treat him as a means to his own end” (cited in Iyer, Ibid, p.371).

Gandhi’s view on the close link between means and ends is also influenced by the idea of dispassionate action which the *Bhagavad Gita* advocates. Unless one’s action is performed with a degree of detachment one would not be free from the anxiety of its future consequences. He contends “if we are sure of the ‘purity’ of the means we employ, we shall be led on by the faith, before which any fear and trembling melt away”. Non-attachment does not mean lack of clarity about the ends one desires to achieve.

6.4 AHIMSA AS THE MEANS TO REALISE SWARAJ

Gandhi places the end of *swaraj* and points out that its realisation would depend on the adoption of the right means. He insists on the need to focus on the selection of means keeping in view only a broad image and a sense of direction regarding the end, the attainment of *swaraj*. Like Aldous Huxley, Gandhi believes that a corrupt means does not fail to corrupt the end. Like Tolstoy, Gandhi observes that once violence is injected into non-violence, the latter would become superfluous and cease to be a guide for life.
Regarding the means of non-violence, Gandhi says ‘if we seek it first everything else shall be added unto us’. Both are convinced that with non-violence it is possible to overwhelm all governments resting on violence, all wars and all coercive institutions, as non-violence works as a dynamic force. Gene Sharp identifies 125 methods of non-violent action and classifies them into three categories: non-violent protest, non-cooperation and non-violent intervention. “Non violent resistance and direct action”, according to Sharp, “refers to those methods of resistance and direct action without physical violence in which members of the non violent group perform either: (1) acts of omission that is, they refuse to perform acts which they usually perform, and are expected by custom, or are required by law or regulation to perform; or (2) acts of commission- that is, they insist on performing acts which they usually do not perform, or not expected by custom to perform, or are forbidden by law or regulation from performing, or (3) both”. These methods are extra-constitutional as they do not rely upon established procedures of the state for achieving their objectives.

Gandhi considers non-violence as an all-pervasive and eternal Principle “applicable to every situation in life without any exception’. The practice of non-violence requires moral discipline that would control passions and emotions. Non-violence consists in allowing others the ‘maximum of convenience at the maximum of inconvenience’ to the self and therefore a satyagrahi must be ready to embrace self-suffering and self-effacement. Gandhi pleads for voluntary poverty, voluntary simplicity and voluntary suffering as that would free the soul from the bondage of the material body. He insists that real endurance comes from physical discipline and suffering. He stresses on voluntary poverty and set a personal example as he endeavoured to identify himself with the most vulnerable, marginalised and the poorest. He considers it as necessary for fostering the welfare of the soul and the happiness of the mass of people. He regards voluntary poverty as a moral and patriotic duty. Voluntary simplicity is needed to minimise the greed that exists among human beings and sees greed as the ‘root of most of the major political problems. Voluntary suffering would purify the soul and intellect. There are no limits to non-violence”.

Like Newman, Gandhi insists that one step is enough for him. He insists that if rightful means are used, the attainment of the end is assured and he considers non-violence as opposed to violence as the rightful means to winning India’s freedom. He prefers non-violence to violence and violence to non-violent act born of cowardice which he regards as negative violence. Mere absence of force is not non-violence. He regarded violence as the outcome of weakness, moral impotence and intolerance to views and opinions of others. He considers non-violence as a value and that society must actively seek elimination of conflict. Peace is possible only with non-violence. This implies that non-violence has no instrumental value as it has a positive content, namely a non-acquisitive, non-exploitative and an egalitarian society. For Gandhi, non-violence represents heightened compassion. It is the bridge between means and ends; as a means it prepares the way for the realisation of non-violence as a comprehensive end that ends all conflict.

Gandhi is concerned with the ethical purity of means. He contrasts between his conception of non-violent resistance and pacifism. Merely not offering to perform military service is not enough. It is superficial and different from non-cooperation with the system which supports the state. This proves that Gandhi is not interested in symbolic protest or an action which is purely transitory without resolving the basic question of the basis of the state which is intrinsically linked with coercive powers. Gandhi, as a philosophical anarchist, is sceptical of the very existence of the state as a repressive apparatus. He is looking not merely at the philosophy of resistance of a localised and sporadic nature but rather he wants a more lasting framework to emerge on building a non-violent model of resistance and social
change. A state can be effectively demilitarised by non-payment of taxes than pacifist courting of imprisonment. The latter would be effective if it is done on a mass basis. He considers non-violence as the most active force, as the ‘supreme law’, ‘omnipotent’, ‘infinite and synonymous with God’. Non-violence as means affects and elevates the end. He rejects passive resistance as a policy as it hides weakness and potential violence is not the right means to achieve the desired end. He opposes supine helplessness involved in non-resistance to evil.

This position is of fundamental nature in understanding Gandhi’s conception as being committed to a large majoritarian perception of social change he knew that its success is linked to the adherence of its principles by the active participants who, by their acts of sacrifice, courage and determination, would become the role models to motivate others to join the emancipatory collectivist stand. He knew the task itself was a stupendous one and reflected on it in 1922 when violence erupted during a mass civil disobedience which he was spearheading at that time. Even the towering presence of the Mahatma proved insufficient to control the violent elements. He was well aware of the fact that the cyclical order of violence leading to more violence had to be contained and was categorical in his assertion that “civil disobedience is never followed by anarchy. Criminal disobedience can lead to it. Every state puts down criminal disobedience with force. It perishes, if it does not. But to put down civil disobedience is an attempt to imprison conscience”. This motivated Gandhi to move away from his large-scale mobilisation of people terming it as a ‘Himalayan blunder’ and advised that in a situation like this, “aggressive civil disobedience should be confined to the vindication of the right of free speech and right of free association”.

For Gandhi, the important thing is to get the people to do what they ought to do without offering inducements or threats or theological sanctions. Human beings acquire moral precepts only by acting on it or reflecting on it through their actions. “A person often becomes what he believes himself to be. A man who broods on evil is as bad as a man who does evil if he is not worse…. He who is not prepared to order his life in unquestioning obedience to the laws of morality cannot be said to be a man in the full sense of the word”. At the same time Gandhi also believes in the indomitable nature of the human spirit and that no person could be made to do something against one’s will. For a person to become irresistible and for his actions to have all-pervasive influence it is important that a person reduces himself to a zero.

Writing in 1947, Gandhi says: “passive resistance as a policy is the second best alternative. At least it minimises loss of life, disruption and demoralisation when it is an unequal battle. At least it limits the chain reaction of violence and preserves the humane character of society as a concept and as an assumption”. He is categorical that non-violence can succeed only when (a) the participants practice non-violence strictly; otherwise the combination of violence and non-violence, even tactically speaking fails, because the entire weight of repression comes down on everyone, in the name of averting anarchy; (b) repression and suffering alienate an increasing number of people who join the group of non-violent resisters; (c) the methods of non-violent action are chosen in such a way that the economic or civil disruption caused by it do not alienate large numbers of people from non-violent action.

Alinsky\(^3\) points that the Mahatma’s “use of passive resistance in India presents a striking example of the selection of means”. As an activist the most important consideration for Gandhi is the means that are available. Asserting that “if he (Gandhi) had the guns he might well have used them” he quotes from Gandhi’s autobiography My Experiments with Truth to prove his point. Giving the example from Punjab, Gandhi writes “as I proceeded further
and further with my enquiry into the atrocities that had been committed on the people, I came across tales of government tyranny and the arbitrary despotism of its officers such as I was hardly prepared for, and they filled me with deep pain. What surprised me then, and what still continues to fill me with surprise was the fact that the province that had furnished the largest number of soldiers to the British government during the war, should have taken all the brutal excesses lying down". The other example is Gandhi’s severe indictment of the British to what he considered “the four fold disaster of our country”. This included compulsory disarmament which “spiritually… has made us unmanly and the presence of an alien army of occupation, employed with deadly effect to crush in us the spirit of resistance, had made us think we cannot look after ourselves or put up a defence against foreign aggression or even defend our homes and families”.

Gandhi was merely making an assessment of the Indian situation and in this there was a great deal of affinity between his views with the other nationalist leaders. The many reasons that were given included general weakness, non-availability of arms and general submissiveness which Gandhi mentions in the *Hind Swaraj* (1909). Nehru describes the Hindus of that period as “a demoralized, timid, and hopeless mass bullied and crushed by every dominant interest and incapable of resistance”. Gandhi himself charged the British for making the Indians unmanly. As such, Alinsky argues that “if Gandhi had the guns form violent resistance and the people to use them this means would not have been unreservedly rejected as the world would like to think”.

To reinforce his argument, Alinsky quotes Nehru after India’s independence. When Nehru had to use military power in Kashmir against Pakistan, he had lot of worries about the possible opposition from the Mahatma but he did not and Nehru wrote that “it strengthened my view, that Gandhi could be adaptable”. In fact Gandhi himself acknowledged that majority of his followers accepted his leadership and principles more out of convenience rather than conviction. However, all great leaders invoke higher moral principles because “all effective actions require the passport of morality”. This also means that the end must be expressed in a generalised manner like liberty, equality and fraternity. But the fact remains that in the context of means and ends there are no well laid out universal principles about the means and ends, but only an analysis of the important dictum that a particular end justifies a particular means.

Alinsky quotes from Orwell to justify his claim that Gandhi’s method of non-violent mass action was time and country-specific and has no chance of succeeding in totalitarian regimes. This view is endorsed by Mandela. However, what Alinsky ignores is the fact that for Gandhi, the non-violent mass action was a substitute for war for ending human conflict. Gandhi never perceived a conflict-free world but only envisaged a world where the conflict between the haves and the have-nots would be resolved much more amicably than at the present. His favourite example was the British Suffragists who, through a protracted struggle for more than a century, achieved universal adult suffrage in Britain which slowly changed the elite view of democracy being a bad thing till the nineteenth century to becoming good in the twentieth century. Gandhi, through his life’s work, was trying to demonstrate that a co-relationship between the means and ends may be achieved at a distant future. As a practical idealist, he reminded the world that he was a believer in the maxim of one step at a time.

Alinsky misses this larger framework of Gandhi which will always remain the ideal type, whereas, all other considerations of particular means for particular ends will be locally and
narrowly based, reflecting aberrations and fault lines, rather than moving towards an optimistic and also realistic framework of resolving conflicts anywhere in the world peacefully.

6.5 CONCLUSION

Gandhi sees the relationship between ends and means as between a seed and the tree and consistently underlines the close and intimate link between the two. The end lies in the means just as the tree is within the seed. He regards ‘means and end as convertible terms in my philosophy of life. We have always control over the means but not over the end’. Means are everything. Gandhi does not segregate means and ends and insists that in all spheres of life, including politics, we reap exactly as we sow.

Gandhi also emphasises that for achieving one’s ends there is a need for dispassionate action and a degree of detachment. If the means employed are pure then the fear and anxiety about the result would evaporate. Unconcern about the result does not mean lack of clarity about the end. While the cause has to be just and clear, so must the means and also the recognition that impure means would lead to impure ends; truth cannot be attained through untruthful means; justice cannot be secured through unjust measures; freedom cannot be obtained through tyrannical methods, socialism cannot be realised through enmity and coercion and war cannot lead to enduring peace. Gandhi categorically rejects the notion of ends justify the means and asserts that moral means is an end in itself because virtue is its own reward.

For means to be pure, Gandhi also insists that the human soul has to be devoid of all impurities and for attaining purity he recommends fasting and prayer. Gandhi stresses on the purity of means as he finds God in the whole world. He chooses non-violence and satyagraha as the means for realising swaraj and categorically rules out its realisation through bloodshed and violence. He desires a social transformation through change in the character of individuals. In 1942 Gandhi reminded that ‘country’s will to freedom must not be paralysed by the ‘dread of violence’. I am convinced that we are living today in a state of ordered anarchy…. This should go…. I should like to believe, that 20 years of continuous effort at educating India along the lines of non violence will not have gone in vain and the people will evolve order out of chaos’. Gandhi is the lone voice among the social and political thinkers to firmly reject the rigid dichotomy between the ends and means and in his extreme preoccupation with the means, to the extent that they, rather than the ends become the benchmark for judging action.

6.6 SUMMARY

A major concern of Gandhi’s discourse on the relationship between ends and means flows from its centrality of his entire edifice which means that it is not merely a question of an instrument. An interesting postulate of social action is the ultimate elimination of conflict which means eliminating the factors that create a conflict situation. Since in the process of the resolution of conflict, there is neither a winner nor a loser as in the case of a war or a settlement arrived at by use of brutal force, this framework provides the blueprint for lasting peace. This also means that peace is intrinsically linked to non-violent action and a commitment of resolution of conflict only by peaceful means. As such, non-violence ceases to be a negative concept and has a positive dimension in the context of peaceful evolution of society. For Gandhi, means and ends are inextricably linked. Gandhi’s conception of ends and means ought to be understood also in the context of his insistence that all of us are
bearers of relative truth and none can stake a claim to know the absolute truth. Gandhi places the end of swaraj and points out that its realisation would depend on the adoption of the right means, the adoption of ahimsa. Gandhi considers non-violence as an all-pervasive and eternal principle and the practice of non-violence requires moral discipline that would control passions and emotions. He emphasises self-suffering and moral discipline to become a non-violent satyagrahi and recommends voluntary poverty, voluntary simplicity and voluntary suffering as the key to attain this moral discipline. He also stresses on purity of means for realising the end.

6.7 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. How does Gandhi understand conflict and what are the means to resolve conflict?
2. Why does Gandhi insist on purity of means for realising the end?
3. What is the link between ahimsa and swaraj?

SUGGESTED READINGS


Pantham, T, and Deutsch, K., (ed), Political Thought in Modern India, New Delhi, Sage, 1986.


Means and Ends

(Endnotes)

1 Lenin writes in the pamphlet: There have been many wars in history which, notwithstanding all the horrors, cruelties, miseries and tortures, inevitably connected with every war, had a progressive character, i.e. they served in the development of mankind, aiding in the destruction of extremely pernicious and reactionary institutions… or helping to remove the most barbarous despotism in Europe.

2 “…not all means are permissible. When we say that the end justifies the means then for us the conclusion follows that the great revolutionary end spurns those bad means and ways which set one part of the working class against other parts, or attempt to make the masses happy without their participation, or lower the faith of the masses in themselves and their organisation, replacing it by the worship of the leaders”.

3 Saul D. Alinsky (1909-72), a social activist of the United States organised the poor and the underprivileged as citizens, to get their social and political rights, mainly in and around Chicago to begin with, and then spreading the movement to the rest of the US and was jailed many times during his long years of struggle, analyses the problems of the relationship between ends and means both from a pragmatic and strategic terms. He links it to the resources available and the various choices one has in a given situation. In this choice the important consideration is the achievability and the cost involved and the question of means arises in the context of if it could be pursued successfully. In the context of means and ends, Alinksy is flexible enough to argue that the process of life and social strife is complicated, corrupt and violent and in this context, a practical revolutionary is to ask the question as to what particular kind of means will bring about salvation in a particular situation. To discuss the entire ethics of means and ends without linking it to real life experience would be sterile. Such discussants are by and large onlookers and are not faced with the actual organisational problems of real action. Their debate centres around a hypothetical and non existent situation and the entire end result that “the means-and-end moralists, are non doers always wind up on their ends without any means”. The ethics of the means normally leads to a situation where such moralists stand with the haves and not with the have-nots. Alinksy places them along with the allies of the haves. Remarking succinctly, he says “the most unethical of all means is the non use of any means”. On the basis of this action oriented philosophy, Alinsky provides a number of rules to resolve the apparent conflict between the ethics of ends and means. One important consideration is one’s involvement and interest and also the presence and absence of the debater from the scene of action. The second depends on the political position of all those who sit on judgement. The example that he provides in the context of the supporters and opponents of Nazi resistance and whether they were selfless or patriotic or courageous persons depended on which side of the conflict they were. The third rule in a war situation, where the end virtually justifies any means and here he argues that the Geneva conventions of treatment of prisoners or nuclear weapons are observed only because there is probability of retaliation. The fourth aspect that judgement made must be in the context of the time of the event and the action required is elasticity, as flexibility is one of the basic requirements of decision making at a particular time of crisis. Alinsky gives the example of Lincoln’s suspension of Habeas Corpus which meant defying a directive of the Chief Justice of the United States and the illegal use of military commissions to try civilians, which was in total variance, to what Lincoln did in a similar situation earlier on where he categorically said laws must be religiously observed. Another example is of Jefferson who was critical of Washington for basing his policies only on national self interest instead of world interest. But when he assumed the office of the President his policies were solely decided on national interest. The fifth rule is where there is a large number of means available in that situation use the method which is the most effective. The cardinal principle here is “ethics is doing what is best for the most”. The sixth rule revolves around the importance of the desired end and less is the importance of such an end more one can debate about the ethical dimensions of means. Seventh, is related to the possibility of success and failure as Alinsky remarks the judgement of history leans heavily on the outcome of success or failure. It spells the difference between the traitor and the patriotic hero. There can be no such thing as a successful traitor or if succeeds, he becomes the founding father. The eighth rule of the ethics of means and ends depends on the situation of timing of imminent defeat or imminent victory. Morality or immorality depends on circumstances as “from the beginning of time killing has always been regarded as justifiable if committed in self defence”. The ninth rule is effective means are normally considered unethical by the opponents. The tenth rule depends on the means at one’s disposal and one’s capacity to present it in as much moralistic terms as possible. For an activist, the most important consideration is the means that are available for reaching a particular goal. The question is not what weapon to use, but what is the most appropriate means available for action?
UNIT 7 LIBERTY AND EQUALITY

Structure

7.1 Introduction
    Aims and Objectives

7.2 Individual Freedom and Swaraj

7.3 Individual Conscience and Freedom

7.4 Equality as an All-Pervasive Value

7.5 Economic Equality

7.6 Racial and Caste Equality

7.7 Conclusion

7.8 Summary

7.9 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Gandhi described himself as a practical idealist, yet there is a larger projection of an ideal world based on human equality and freedom. His philosophy begins with the expression of deep love and respect for the neighbour which is the basis of concealing a universal association of free individuals superseding the artificial barriers of race, creed, wealth, power, class and nation. All these form the basis of his doctrine of universal brotherhood as any of these categories which tries to extract or dominate is a form of gross injustice and such a situation of exploitation can only be maintained by force. In such a situation there is a continuous process of hatred, suspicion and fear of losing on the part of the possessed in the hand of the dispossessed who are the overwhelming majority of the humankind. For Gandhi, a good society could be attained if it could realise liberty, equality and fraternity through non-violent means. This is the lesson, he observed to the Indian princes in 1942 that Europe has learnt from the French Revolution of 1789. Gandhi distinguishes between the fuller moral connotation of freedom and the narrower conception of individual or national freedom while analysing swaraj or self-rule. Asked to explain the meaning of purna swaraj in 1931, he says:

The root meaning of swaraj is self rule. Swaraj may, therefore be rendered as disciplined rule from within and purna means “complete”. “Independence” has no such limitation. Independence may mean licence to do as you like. Swaraj is positive. Independence is negative. Purna Swaraj does not exclude association with any nation, much less with England. But it can only mean association for mutual benefit and at will. Thus there are countries which are said to be independent but which have no Purna Swaraj e.g. Nepal. The word Swaraj is a sacred word, a vedic word, meaning self rule and self restraint, and not freedom from all restraint which “independence” often means.

Swaraj or self-rule is the core of freedom and is the crux of real home rule. Just as with Vivekananda and Aurobindo, for Gandhi, right conduct is right form of civilisation. Freedom
is not to be left alone but one that will enable the individual to cultivate love and service. Individual and society are complementary and a society, where citizens are not free cannot be a good society. He does not agree with the liberal conception, according to Terchek, in two ways: how people are treated and how are individual choices and capacity to make choices affected by the institutional practices and asymmetrical distribution of power. The more mature Gandhi, observes Dalton, establishes the link between non-violence and the preservation of liberty seeing the former as the bedrock of freedom. Yet in his commitment to non-violence he does not sacrifice the social and political freedom of the individual: “…to make mistakes as a freeman… is better than being in bondage in order to avoid them (for) the mind of a man who remains good under compulsion cannot improve, in fact it worsens. And when compulsion is removed, all the defects well up to the surface with even greater force” (Harijan 29th September 1946).

Aims and Objectives

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand:

- Gandhi’s thoughts on the concepts of liberty and equality
- Gandhi’s notion of individual freedom and swaraj
- Gandhi’s concept of economic, racial and caste equality.

7.2 INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM AND SWARAJ

Gandhi rejects the notion of unbridled individualism and stresses on the notion of the individual as a social self. Within this framework he analyses freedom as not being left alone or to abdicate moral obligation towards others who are equally entitled to freedom for themselves. A free person can choose to enter into any association with others but cannot simply cut off from others. This is true of nations also. Gandhi’s equation of freedom with self-rule is to underline the intrinsic link between freedom and obligation to others and to oneself, without abandoning the voluntary basis of freedom. Self-rule means voluntary internalisation of one’s obligations towards others and that a free person and a nation cannot be selfish and isolationist.

Gandhi emphasises on the voluntary nature of freedom as a human being by nature is an autonomous moral agent having the capacity for choices and freedom to experiment. The individual that Gandhi has in mind is the social self and like Green, he too argues that it is the freedom which the individual enjoys that makes possible for the survival and the continuance of society. Gandhi writes, “Individual freedom alone can make a man voluntarily surrender himself completely to the service of society. If it is wrested from him, he becomes an automaton and society is ruined. No society can possibly be built on a denial of individual freedom. It is contrary to the very nature of man. Just as man will not grow horns or a tail so he will not exist as man if he has no mind of his own. In reality even those who do not believe in the liberty of the individual believe in their own”. For Gandhi, freedom is rooted in human nature and is to be claimed as part of self-awareness earned through self-effort; conversely, any external threat to human freedom arises not from circumstances outside one’s control but by recognising our weaknesses in the first place. Self-purification is therefore integral to the concept of swaraj as that gives us strength and capacity to translate the abstract notion of freedom into a practical reality in society and politics.
Gandhi wrote extensively on national freedom and self-rule but these were applicable to the individual as well. He considers the individual to be the bedrock of swaraj and that “swaraj of a people means the sum total of the swaraj (self-rule) of individuals; government over self is the truest swaraj, it is synonymous with moksha or salvation. He considers individual swaraj as logically and conceptually prior to the notion of collective or national swaraj. He also clarifies that “self-government means continuous effort to be independent of government control whether it is foreign government or whether it is national. Swaraj government will be a sorry affair if people look up to it for regulation of every detail of life”.

Gandhi’s conception of swaraj includes four aspects: Truth, Non-violence, political and economic independence. Swaraj would be incomplete without realisation of each, since each, for Gandhi, is interwoven with all. His conception of swaraj makes the same distinction between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ forms of freedom which Vivekananda and Aurobindo conceive of. Vivekananda’s distinction involves a relegation of political freedom and national independence to a subsidiary position. But as the struggle for national independence gathers momentum merely relying on ‘inner’ freedom does not seem enough. Aurobindo’s identification of national with spiritual freedom takes on an extreme form of religious nationalism which threatens individual liberty, which he subsequently abandons. Gandhi never espouses this view of freedom as he consistently emphasises on the supreme importance of a supra-political form of freedom which very few Indian leaders concur with. Dalton observes that, Swaraj, for Gandhi, means acquiring inner freedom which means that Indians gain sovereignty over themselves and over their nation.

Swaraj would become a reality only if people have the capacity to regulate and control authority. Real swaraj, for Gandhi “will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused…. Swaraj for me means freedom for the meanest of my countrymen. I am not interested in freeing India merely from the English yoke. I am bent upon freeing India from any yoke whatsoever. I have no desire to exchange ‘king log’ for ‘king stork’.” Elaborating further he points out “there is no freedom for India so long as one man, no matter how highly placed he may be, holds the hollow of his hands the life, property and honour of millions of human beings. It is an artificial, unnatural and uncivilized institution. The end of it is an essential preliminary to swaraj”.

Gandhi does not consider good government as better than self-government as there is a connection between individual and national self-rule. The evolution of the nation and its component parts, the individuals are inter-twined; one cannot advance without the other. Individual self-rule is included in swaraj. Self awareness, self-discipline and self-respect are key components of swaraj. Fundamental to swaraj is the essence of freedom which is more important than the social, political and economic liberty. Swaraj “is infinitely greater than and includes independence”.

“Let there be no mistake about my conception of Swaraj. It is complete independence of alien control and complete economic independence. So, at one end you have political independence; at the other, economic. It has two other ends. One of them is moral and social, the corresponding end is Dharma, i.e. religion is the highest sense of the term. It includes Hinduism, Islam, Christianity etc., but is superior to them all. You may recognize it by the name of Truth, not the honesty of experience, but the living Truth that pervades everything and will survive all destruction and all transformation. Moral and social uplift may be recognized by the term as we are used to, i.e. Non-violence. Let us call this square of Swaraj, which will be out of shape if any of its angles is untrue. We cannot achieve this
7.3 INDIVIDUAL CONSCIENCE AND FREEDOM

A person is truly free if he listens to his conscience or the inner voice, the only tyrant that one would accept. He advises every individual to weigh his circumstances in the court of conscience according to the criteria of satya and ahimsa and the obligation of sarvodaya. This would redefine radically both the means and the ends of action providing the basis of fundamental reform of society. He advises political workers to engage wholeheartedly in the Constructive Programme and bread labour and to sacrifice their comforts in the service of the poorest of the poor.

Gandhi links his views on conscience with his arguments for satyagraha. “When people cease to think for themselves and have everything regulated for them, it becomes necessary at times to assert the right of individuals to act in defiance of public opinion or law, which is another name for public opinion. When individuals so act, they claim to have acted in obedience to conscience”. He expects the satyagrahi to be honest to their deepest convictions and ready to suffer on behalf of their commitments. Gandhi goes on to argue that those who witness the suffering will be prompted by their conscience and be converted. A satyagrahi, when he sacrifices and voluntarily suffers, appeals not only to the reason but also the heart of others and this brings people on the same moral plane.

Like Thoreau, Gandhi does not consider the government to be important in the day-to-day activities of the individual. The disinterest and lack of enthusiasm towards the government that is found in perceptions of both Thoreau and Gandhi is because of their belief that all states, including the democratic ones, are the embodiment of force and physical strength, concerned with functions related to law and order, and protection of property. Laws, policies and associations are essentially coercive, stifling and hindering individuality and spontaneity. Thoreau sees law as a form of control and is not different from any kind of coercion and observes that ‘the law will never make men free. It is men who have got to make law free’.

Thoreau had insisted that persons with conscience should disassociate from the state as that enabled them to lead lives untainted by the evils which the state sponsors and promotes. The government is incompetent to control the diabolical forces that it releases among individuals. It is for this reason that he suggests withdrawal and reliance on one’s inner resources. Thoreau perceives individual conscience as inseparable from common standards and humane sensibilities and since the conscience is above the state, it is the true criterion of what is politically just and right. It is important that individuals perceive themselves first as individuals and only then as citizens or subjects. Conscience, which for him is the inner voice and the ‘genius’, as an exclusive and purely personal thing, is expressed through acts of civil disobedience. Conscience, for Thoreau is secular, the ability to do what one thinks to be right. However, his notion of morality and politics is subjective and anti-legalistic as he does not acknowledge the existence of general principles or universal standards of right, including the Bible and the constitution. For Thoreau, conscience has three implications for politics: first it becomes clear as to why does not restrict conscientious action to non-violence and passive disobedience, as conscience may demand more than non complicity or withdrawal. He does not rule out the use of violence and force if conscience demands. In fact, he views conflict as the gist of life itself and any action that flows from one’s
convictions is good and it is for this reason, that violence is necessary. Second, intolerance is the crux of a militant conscience. Belief in one's convictions makes tolerance impossible. Third, in light of his anti-institutionalism he contends that solitary action rather than collective ones as good (Rosenblum, 1981, pp.101-03).

Gandhi differs from Thoreau and is more like Green, when he links individual actions to public interest or *sarvodaya* though he is certain that the dictates of individual conscience, if genuine, would culminate in conduct that would arouse and appeal to the conscience of others. Moreover, his emphasis on *ahimsa* as the means to be used in the vindication of *satya* makes him believe that resistance to injustice, properly conducted, could not lead to general anarchy. He regards *satya* and *ahimsa* as universal principles with an inseparable link between them. The omnipresence of truth and non-violence is derived from another basic foundation of his theoretical edifice, that human beings are amenable to moral persuasion. The individual, a moral and a social person, follows the paths of truth and non-violence since it is the best possible way of leading a good and satisfactory life. It enhances human dignity, relative equality and human perfectibility, as it allows for individual initiative and recognition and provides a mechanism for resolving conflicts in the complex modern world. It is the logical culmination of democratic principles based on active citizen's participation and civility leading to self-realisation, self-awareness and responsibility.

The individual, for Gandhi, is the bearer of moral authority and has therefore, the right and the duty to judge the state and its laws by the standards of *dharma* which in turn is based on *satya* and *ahimsa*. The individual can challenge and even disobey the state, as all states violate *satya* and *ahimsa*. Gandhi, like Raz, places considerable emphasis on autonomy as he pays attention to the role of institutions or the way resources affect choices that are available to the individual. But he differs from conventional theories of autonomy as he emphasises on duties along with rights and considers duty to act morally regardless of the consequences as the highest. Another difference is the stress on individuals as equal members of a harmonious and interdependent cosmos rather than as abstracted selves. Persons achieve good and become complete only in association with others based on mutual respect and cooperation. Such a community ought to be open and pluralistic. It would have to be tolerant of diverse conceptions of good and ensure that its institutional practices do not become obstacles to the ordinary persons' pursuit of their good. The gist of tolerance is the belief that differences can be resolved through reason and not by force and this belief is based on the faith that ultimately truth prevails. Tolerance allows for co-existence of competing forms of partisanship while civility enables the transcendence of partisanship for the pursuit of common good. As Iyer says, “Tolerance and civility both point out to the limitations of human powers, the folly of dogmatism and the futility of violence, the common search for truth by equal citizens in the service of common good. They provide the basis of respect for the inalienable freedom and the fundamental equality of all citizens united in their concern for truth and peace”.

### 7.4 EQUALITY AS AN ALL-PERVASIVE VALUE

The crux of freedom, for Gandhi, is not being unrestrained or unhindered but to cultivate love and service as these are the quintessence of human nature. Freedom is worthwhile as long as it fulfils basic needs in dignity. Gandhi pleads for both freedom and equality of status which he thinks would make it possible for the establishment of a universal community of free persons. Those who accept such a community would have to overcome the artificial barriers of race and creed, wealth and power, class and nation. If one segment augments
for itself at the expense of others it would be adopting an undemocratic method and would have to use arms to defend the injustice that it perpetrates. The possessing class would always be in fear of dispossession and the oppressed would be storing up resentment. Gandhi laid emphasis on equal claim that every individual is entitled to by birth and he also acknowledges that in spite of many setbacks, the human civilisation has enhanced the philosophy of oneness and that is how we see that the ideals of justice, equality and freedom have been accepted by the major philosophies and social movements. This is also a reflection of the growing consciousness of being human which had to fight continuously a process which tried to retard them from this noble mission.

Gandhi’s talisman of keeping the face of the poorest in mind while making policies and in undertaking any social reform is with the concern to bring the marginalised and the most vulnerable into the mainstream of politics and society. He champions the basic rights of the untouchables and women, as they have been objects of domination and humiliation. He rejects ascriptive properties such as gender, class, birth, caste, education or nationality that can justify unequal treatment and disqualify some as moral agents.

I believe implicitly that all men are born equal. All… have the same sort as any other. And it is because I believe in this inherent equality of men that I fight the doctrine of superiority… that I delight in calling myself a scavenger, a spinner, a weaver, a farmer and a labourer…. I consider that it is unmanly for any person to claim superiority over a fellow human being…. He who claims superiority at once forfeits his claim to be called a man. That is my opinion.

For Gandhi, equality logically follows from non-violence; non-violence entails non-exploitation and non-exploitation is impossible without equality and thus equality and non-violence are interdependent. In Gandhi’s perception, freedom and equality are also inter-related; without social and economic equality, there cannot be freedom and without freedom, there can be no social and economic equality. Thus, in Gandhi’s thought, freedom, equality and non-violence mutually depend on one another and together constitute justice, which is the basis of good society.

### 7.5 ECONOMIC EQUALITY

Of all the dimensions of equality, Gandhi focuses most on economic equality and sees economic equality as the basis of non-violence and freedom. He considers economic equality “as the master key to non-violent independence. Working for economic equality means abolishing the eternal conflict between capital and labour. It means the levelling down of the few rich in whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation’s wealth on the one hand and the levelling up of the semi-starved naked millions on the other. A non-violent system of government is clearly an impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists. The contrast between the palaces of New Delhi and the miserable hovels of the poor labouring class nearby cannot last one day in a free India in which the poor will enjoy the same power as the richest in the land”.

According to Gandhi, violence stems from inequality, the wide gap that exists between the possessing and the non-violence and unless the root cause of violence is weeded out through non-violent means, one cannot rule out the possibility of violent revolution. In Gandhi’s ideal society there would be absolute equality of incomes for all types of work and for all individuals. Believing in the concept of bread labour and dignity of work, Gandhi insists that same amount of work in any occupation ought to be rewarded by the same
amount of wages. Echoing Ruskin, Gandhi observes that “if India is to live any exemplary life of independence which would be the envy of the world, all the \textit{bhagis}, doctors, lawyers, teachers, merchants and others would get the same wages for an honest day’s work”.

Gandhi knew that such an ideal would not be realisable in the foreseeable future but that does not justify the gross inequalities that existed in the contemporary human society nor is the argument that some need more than others is acceptable. He points out “let no one try to justify the glaring difference between the classes and the masses, the prince and the pauper, by saying that the former need the more….The contrast between the rich and the poor today is a painful sight. The poor villages…produce the food and go hungry. They produce milk and their children have to go without it”.

Gandhi clarifies equal distribution as his ideal and till that is realised he would like to settle for work for equitable distribution as that would not only ensure elimination of gross disparities in income but also allow every member of the society to receive enough goods and services to meet his basic requirements and enjoy a certain minimum standard of living. “The real implication of equal distribution is that each man shall have the wherewithal to supply all his natural needs and no more….To bring this ideal into being the entire social order has got to be reconstructed. A society based on Non-violence cannot nurture any other ideal”.

Gandhi considers accumulation of wealth as immoral which is why he proposes trusteeship. To achieve equitable distribution he proposes four specific measures: (a) Bread Labour or manual labour which for Gandhi would remove exploitation. “If all worked for their bread, distinctions of rank would be obliterated; the rich would still be there, but they would deem themselves only trustees of their property, and would use it mainly in the public interest”. Bread labour would reduce not only economic inequality but also social inequality and in the Indian context, it would undermine caste-based inequalities. Bread labour ensures that none would be rich and poor; high or low and touchable and untouchable. (b) Voluntary renunciation, a value that Gandhi reiterates from the \textit{Isopanishad} of not coveting the possessions of others and not accumulating beyond one’s basic needs. Personal wants ought to be kept to the barest minimum keeping in mind the poverty of one’s fellow human beings and try for a new mode of life. (c) \textit{Satyagraha} to resolve industrial and agricultural disputes as legitimate and the proposal of trusteeship to resolve the conflict between labour and capital with the core idea of non-appropriation by owners. He writes, “If, however, in spite of the utmost efforts the rich do not become guardians of the poor in the true sense of the term and the latter are more and more crushed and die of hunger, what is to be done? In trying to find the solution to this riddle I have lighted on non-violent non-cooperation and civil disobedience as the right and infallible means. The rich cannot accumulate wealth without the cooperation of the poor in society….If this knowledge were to penetrate to and spread amongst the poor, they would become strong and would learn how to free themselves by means of non-violence from the crushing inequalities which have brought them to the verge of starvation”. (d) Governmental Action is necessary to ensure that every work receives a minimum or living wage. Gandhi insists that his ideal would have to be realised through non-violent measures, through moral process of transformation involving individuals and keeping the role of the state to its minimum. This is what separates the Gandhian ideal from the Marxists and socialists, who too emphasise on equality as a moral ideal but while the Marxists advocate violent transformation, the socialists insist on a democratic transformation. Gandhi categorically rejects the Marxist ideal of the dictatorship of proletariat as a means of securing social and economic justice for the poor.
7.6 RACIAL AND CASTE EQUALITY

Gandhi was well aware of the contemporary situation, the savage brutality of the Nazi’s treatment of the Jews and was saddened by the expression of racialism anywhere in the world. What puzzled him was that even in democracies, racialism is a fact of life both in the British Empire and the United States. His initiation to politics was his first hand acquaintance of racialism in South Africa and what disturbed him the most was that both the Church and the state approved the basic denial of equality to non-European races. For him, any form of inequality based on race and colour was unreasonable and immoral and to fight for the redress of such illegitimate inequality and to restore one’s own dignity and honour, he began his satyagraha movements in South Africa.

Gandhi was a great believer in the principles of democratic equality and the British constitution providing equality and justice to all and could not accept this serious violation when it came to involve the Indians in South Africa. When he arrived in India he was struck by the inequalities from which the Indian society suffered and took a vow to get rid of all stark inequalities. Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan considers that one of the greatest contributions of Gandhi is the removal of untouchability. Gandhi went to the extent of declaring “if I have to be reborn I should wish to be born as an untouchable so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings and the affronts levelled at them in order that I may endeavour to free myself and them from that miserable condition”. Though Gandhi called himself a sanatani Hindu, he was one of the severest critics of the curse of untouchability and any other form of inequality that was practised in the name of religion, caste, race or nation. He did not spare even the Indian princes and was very critical of the condition of the poor in their states. He was equally critical of the Permanent Settlement Act and the landlords and cautioned them hoping that “they will realise before it is too late that their safety and survival are bound up with the rapid introduction of responsible government which even the paramount power with all its strength was obliged to concede to the provinces”.

One of the severest criticisms that Gandhi levelled against the British occupation of India was that it has led to extreme oppression of the poor, pointing out the earlier periods of plentiful situations; he castigated the British for keeping majority of the population in a situation of abject poverty and a system that is totally inhuman. As Gandhi himself says, “the semi starved millions scattered throughout the seven hundred thousand villages dotted over a surface of nineteen hundred miles broad” and added that it is a painful phenomenon that “those villages through no fault of their own have nearly six months in a year are idle upon their hands”. This, he contrasts with the situation before the advent of the British, which was self-sufficient, with no shortage of food and clothing. He blamed the British East India Company for ruining the supplementary village industry for this situation and as a remedial measure proposed the regeneration of the villages through the Constructive Programmes with due emphasis on cottage industries. Gandhi was equally conscious that the problems of thickly populated underdeveloped colonial situations like India cannot have the same solution as the sparsely populated industrialised western countries. It is because of such an understanding that Gandhi discounted capital intensive production mechanism and pleaded for the revival of the village economies that were labour-intensive production as these would guarantee meaningful employment to our teeming millions. One of his close associates, J.C. Kumarappa, worked out the details of his plans.
7.7 CONCLUSION

Gandhi puts the consciousness of enjoying freedom as the very cornerstone of human history and accepts temporary setbacks which is led by the perpetrators of inequality and exploitation but always had the confidence of the human ability to overcome them. In a way, this is a dialectical understanding of the historical evolution as he gives important examples from history like serfs becoming freemen; no more burning of heretics and the privileges of the nobility is under increased threat; slaves are becoming equal citizens and the rich are becoming apologetic for their wealth; Mightiest of empires are understanding the necessities of peace and we find the dreamers dreaming about unity of the entire humankind as increasing all the time. He is critical and cautioning of the obstacles to this cherished path by the lust of the powerful, the lies and the hypocrisies that go by blindly following the diktats of arrogant racialism and nationalism, but again here his optimism is demonstrated when he talks of the inevitable march of democracy and increasing awareness that give the poorest of the poor the essential right to food, sunshine in their houses and hope, dignity and beauty in their existence equal to others. This optimism of Gandhi allows him to transcend the immediate setbacks and retreat towards equality and freedom and keep the torch alive as the servant of entire humanity.

7.8 SUMMARY

Gandhi rejects the notion of unbridled individualism and stresses on the notion of the individual as a social self. Within this framework he analyses freedom as not being left alone or to abdicate moral obligation towards others who are equally entitled to freedom for themselves. A free person can choose to enter into any association with others but cannot simply cut off from others. This is true of nations also. Gandhi’s equation of freedom with self-rule is to underline the intrinsic link between freedom and obligation to others and to oneself, without abandoning the voluntary basis of freedom. Self-rule means voluntary internalisation of one’s obligations towards others and that a free person and a nation cannot be selfish and isolationist. He considers the individual to be the bedrock of swaraj. The individual, for Gandhi, is the bearer of moral authority and has therefore, the right and the duty to judge the state and its laws by the standards of dharma which in turn is based on satya and ahimsa. The individual can challenge and even disobey the state, as all states violate satya and ahimsa.

Gandhi pleads for both freedom and equality of status which he thinks would make it possible for the establishment of a universal community of free persons. Gandhi’s talisman of keeping the face of the poorest in mind while making policies and in undertaking any social reform is with the concern to bring the marginalised and the most vulnerable into the mainstream of politics and society. Of all the dimensions of equality, Gandhi focuses most on economic equality and views it as the basis of non-violence and freedom.

7.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1) What is the link between individual freedom and swaraj according to Gandhi?
2) Explain how individual conscience is the basis of freedom.
3) Why does Gandhi consider equality as an all-pervasive value?
4) Why is economic equality important and how does Gandhi propose to achieve it?
5) Explain Gandhi’s views on racial and caste equality.
SUGGESTED READINGS


Pantham, T, and Deutsch, K., (ed), Political Thought in Modern India, New Delhi, Sage, 1986.


UNIT 8   POWER AND AUTHORITY

Structure

8.1 Introduction
   Aims and Objectives

8.2 Spiritualising Political life and Political Institutions

8.3 Concept of Power

8.4 Concept of Truth as Authority and Individual Conscience

8.5 State, Obligation and Civil Disobedience

8.6 Authority in Anarchist Society

8.7 Conclusion

8.8 Summary

8.9 Terminal Questions
   Suggested Readings

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Gandhi’s views on power and conflict resolution puts him apart from all the other major theories developed in contemporary times. His serious reservations about the desirability of what constitutes the major components of modern civilisation allows him to transcend known categories of power and enables him to develop a conceptual framework which is in total variance from the other dominant views. The starting point of his view can be traced back to the Indian roots of *maya* or illusion and *moha* or delusion. Gandhi uses these two categories as being symptomatic of modern civilisation because within this neither an individual human salvation nor a collective well-being can be conceived. One can only think in terms of an idealised world of harmony and bliss if an alternative thought process can be conceived and popularised. Modern civilisation, according to Gandhi, is not conducive to reaching higher end of life as it perpetuates false consciousness and encourages the pursuit of materialistic ends. However, Gandhi is also aware of the fact that it is practically impossible to go back to the golden past. Nor can one do away with all the facets of the modern civilisation by a quick violent intervention. The satanic nature of the modern civilisation pervades the entire evolution of Gandhi’s formulation of power and authority in a reformed political order. The major characteristics of the degradation of the modern civilisation are discovered in the soullessness of the entire political process which inevitably makes the entire state system corrupt and irresponsible to the genuine needs of the people.

In such an order, all the major political institutions become merely instruments for pursuing power, to enhance one’s own authority and acquire ownership of property. As a philosophical anarchist, the essential nature of the state as striving for more concentration of power and egoism is writ large in Gandhi’s entire philosophy. He concedes the point that the pursuit of power is an endemic human desire but he was equally careful on emphasising the countervailing and more effective role of moral values which may create a new category of power which will be in consonance with individual fulfilment and a humane collective face.
Aims and Objectives

After reading this unit, you would be able to understand:

- Gandhi’s intention behind spiritualising politics.
- Gandhi’s concept of power
- His concept of making truth as authority.
- His concept of Authority in an Anarchic society.

8.2 SPIRITUALISING POLITICAL LIFE AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

Iyer rightly observed that, Gandhi challenges the conventional view of the nature and sphere of politics, widens the concept of power and undermines the distinction between private and public morals, religious values and political norms, and ethical principles and political expediency. In 1915, he declares that his aim was “to spiritualise” political life and political institutions. He underlines the importance of religion to politics observing that politics-divorced from religion- is completely meaningless. Politics is a part of individual’s being and cannot be separated from the rest of life, in particular the deepest things of life. Gandhi approaches politics in a religious spirit: “I could not be leading a religious life unless I identified myself with the whole of mankind and that I could not do unless I took part in politics. The whole gamut of man’s activities today constitutes an indivisible whole….I do not know any religion apart from activity. It provides a moral basis to all other activities without which life would be a maze of sound and fury signifying nothing”.

Gandhi insists on the need to look at political work within the framework of social and moral progress as power resides in the people and not in legislative assemblies. He dismisses disparagingly power politics as irrelevant and insists that “political power is not an end but one of the means of enabling people to better their condition in every department of life”. Like Huxley, not only does he distinguish between power politics and goodness of power but also does not see power politics as being co-extensive with the whole of life and the entire gamut of human activity in society. Politics divorced from religious values is a cynical game of power played according to its own immoral rules under the guise of morality. When Gandhi stresses on religion as the bedrock of politics what he means are religious values that are common to all religions rather than any kind of sectarianism. It means a belief in the “ordered moral government of the universe” as “when morality incarnates itself in a living man it becomes religion, because it binds, it holds, it sustains him in the hour of trial”. True religion and true politics is concerned primarily with human life and action and both must have a common basis in a common morality determined by a common set of values. Gandhi, however, rejects the idea of state religion even if a country has only one religion. Sectarian religion is purely personal and has no place in politics. “A society or a group which depends partly or wholly on state aid for the existence of religion does not deserve or have any religion worth the name. In reality, there are “as many religions as there are individuals”.

Gandhi rejects the attempts to compartmentalise human life as that leads to segregation of politics from religion. “Politics, like religion, is ever concerned with the happiness of the toiling masses, a means to the realisation of the highest realizable in life”. Echoing the sentiments of Aristotle and Gramsci, Gandhi considers public life as the arena for bringing
Gandhi's Political Thought

out the highest spiritual qualities of an individual. “Politics is art of doing on the largest scale what is right, and, as an affair of principle, it touches the eternal interests and religious sentiments”. Politics is not the art of capturing, holding and managing governmental power but the art of transforming social relations in terms of justice; “a non-violent revolution is not a programme of ‘seizure of power’, but it is a programme of transformation of relationships”.

8.3 CONCEPT OF POWER

Gandhi identifies two kinds of power: one which is obtained by the fear of punishment and the other by acts of love. He points out in 1947 that “by abjuring power and by devoting ourselves to pure and selfless service of voters, we can guide and influence them. It would give us far more real power than we shall have by going into the government. But a stage may come, when the people themselves feel and say that they want us and no one else to wield the power…. It is my firm view that we should keep altogether aloof from power politics and its contagion. To set our own house in order is the first indispensable requisite, if we want to influence political power…to regard adult suffrage as a means for the capture of political power, would be to put it to a corrupt use….Today, politics has become corrupt….The greater our inner purity, the greater shall be our hold on the people, without any effort on our part”.

Stressing on the close link between religion and politics, Gandhi suspects politics as understood in the ordinary sense as power over the lives of the people that is vested in governments and is sought by legislatures. He rejects the notion of power for one’s selfish gains and motives devoid of public good. Power for Gandhi, like Rousseau, lies in being an actively engaged citizen with a capacity of public involvement and political participation rather than being a passive acquiescent subject. If individuals recognise the power in their hands and use it constructively to bring out sarvodaya or good of all through non-violent means against injustice and repression of the state, then the monopolistic nature of state power could be reduced undermining morally and materially its coercive authority. This would ensure purification of politics which can be achieved through constructive programmes. Power based on coercion and hierarchy only ensures spiritual poverty of the society. Society ought to be changed through the efforts of morally evolved persons; if not, it would be diseased. Gandhi asserts the primacy of social power and political power and insists that social and political power is co-extensive. Politics has to be subordinated to morals; of doing the right thing and readily suffer for one’s beliefs or to withdraw into oneself to find a basis for action. There is no justification for abdication of one’s responsibility or a passive resort to continued inaction. Gandhi sees a close link between firm and pure intentions and the capacity for effective choices and decisions on the basis of what is considered right and necessary. Gandhi rejects the view that politics is intrinsically sinful or inherently moral or that it is essentially pragmatic with some utilitarian or prudential justification. For Gandhi, politics is inherently impure and is never ideal but could be purified by repudiating the distinction between the public and the private, political and personal morality. Impure politics, for Gandhi, is power seeking that hinders the relationships between individuals. A leader must seek acceptance and maintain it not just through reasoning with the people but by identifying with their dreams, activities and sufferings. The life of a leader ought to be one of continued sacrifice of the self for the immediate service of his fellow beings. A leader must never hold office or occupy any formal position of power.

Gandhi points out that while it is natural for those in authority to use force but if those who obey the commands of the government also decide to express their will by physical force
then it would become impossible for sanity. Individual citizens have the alternative of using ‘soul force’ which they should and to disregard non-violence is the surest way to destruction. He stresses on the need to make a conscious choice between coercion and peaceful conversion and stakes his preference for the latter as it is enduring: “True democracy or the Swaraj of the masses can never come through untruthful and violent means, for the simple reason that the natural corollary to their use would be to remove all opposition through the suppression or extermination of the antagonists. That does not make for individual freedom. Individual freedom can have the fullest play only under a regime of unadulterated ahimsa”.

Non-violence must be the means to influence power politics and a non-violent state would be the one based on the will of the people with no infringement on just rights, without exploitation and without inequality, namely the disparity between the rich and the poor, and the privileged and the underprivileged. Inequality exists as long as private property exists as that leads to sentiments of possession. Only through a detached attitude towards property, an attitude that possessions ought to service the needs of others can a non-violent society succeed. Differences must be settled through reason and not by force in the belief that truth would be ultimately vindicated and that is the essence of tolerance. Competing ideas could be transcended with the help of civility in the hope of reaching common good and that ensures respect for the inalienable freedom and the fundamental equality of all citizens. Dogmatism conceals one’s fallibility preventing the expression of a sense of human solidarity.

Exploitation could be reduced if individuals are allowed to freely develop their moral capacities and not depend on the state. Increase in the power of the state is the greatest fear that Gandhi has, “because, although while apparently doing good by minimizing exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality, which lies at the root of all progress”. For Gandhi, if there is greater decentralisation of power in any society, then there are greater the chances for the collective pursuit of truth or satya through non-violence or ahimsa among individual citizens. For citizens to accept the authority of the state and render obligation depends on the extent to which the laws and the policies of the state are just and non-repressive respectively. Gandhi categorically asserts that “a government is an instrument of service only in so far as it is based upon the will and consent of the people. It is an instrument of oppression where it enforces submission at the point of the bayonet”. While all states misuse power, it is the citizen(s) whoever retains his moral authority which is why a citizen can never afford to allow his conscience to become silent. He insists that a citizen is responsible for the acts of the government, even if these acts are of minimal nature. Citizens are collectively responsible for the acts of the government and for the very nature of the state.

8.4 CONCEPT OF TRUTH AS AUTHORITY AND INDIVIDUAL CONSCIENCE

For Gandhi, authority is to be understood with reference to satya, which he considers as the supreme value in ethics, politics and religion, as the raison d’être of all existence, as it is ‘philosopher’s stone’, the sole talisman available to mortal human beings. It is the highest of human ends, all important and all inclusive principle surpassing all other values and leading eventually to emancipation. This belief is an underlying axiom of Indian tradition and is common to Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. For Gandhi, morality is the basis of all things and truth is the quintessence of morality. Satya is derived from Sat which implies that truth alone exists and everything else is an illusion.
The concept of truth as elaborated by Gandhi affirms the moral autonomy and authority of the individual as an active agent and performer in political and social life. He writes: I would reject all authority if it is in conflict with sober reason or the dictates of the heart. Authority sustains and ennobles the weak when it is the handiwork of reason but it degrades them when it supplants reason sanctified by the still small voice within”. Once the quest for truth becomes universal, individuals begin to enjoy real freedom and the need for authority diminishes. The individual, in Gandhi’s scheme, turns inward not to abandon his political and social responsibilities but to arm himself in his struggle against external authority. He needs the moral courage and spiritual equilibrium to become inward while remaining amidst society and fight untruth: “In the attitude of silence the soul finds the path in a clearer light and what is elusive and deceptive resolves itself into crystal clearness. Our life is a long and arduous quest for Truth, and the soul requires inward restfulness to attain its full height”.

The individual is the votary of satya and ahimsa and has the moral authority to judge and if necessary, oppose the authority of the state, as all states violate satya and ahimsa. For Gandhi, ahimsa or non-coercion is essential in order to accord respect to the human being and that minimal coercion is a necessary evil to secure the larger good thus establishing superiority of ahimsa over himsa. Gandhi insists on the need for more and more people to affirm the value of ahimsa not as an elusive ideal or a pious hope but as a widely relevant principle of social action. Fear breeds force but if more and people become fearless then force would become redundant. Gandhi points out that it is because of this commitment to ahimsa that has made us question the retributive theory of punishment and forms of himsa like capital punishment, duelling, slavery, torture, collective retaliation or revenge, acts of aggression by states, preventive wars, cruelty to animals, flogging and corporal punishment, which were seen as respectable at one time. Gandhi’s attitude towards ahimsa was that of an absolutist as he declares “a votary of ahimsa cannot subscribe to the utilitarian formula. He will strive for the greatest good of all and die in the attempt to realise the ideal. He will therefore be willing to die so that others may live…. The absolutists sphere of destruction will always be the narrowest possible. The utilitarian’s has no limit”. Gandhi was convinced that the masses could be trained in the acts of non-violence and he consistently insists that ahimsa is the power of the stronger and not of the weak; that it requires greater physical and mental courage to be non-violent. Strength comes from the indomitable will and not physical power. Ahimsa needs the cultivation of self-control. For the success of non-violent mass action Gandhi relied on a small band of committed, intelligent and honest persons who have an abiding faith in non-violence as they would ensure the non-violent atmosphere required for the working of civil disobedience in accord with ahimsa.

Gandhi aims for social and political transformation by relying on satya, ahimsa and dharma. Resistance to unjust authority armed with the power of truth and to resolve conflicts, to bring change to non-violent action are central to his plank. Through the doctrine of Satyagraha, Gandhi shows how a person of conscience could engage in heroic action with the intention of vindicating truth and freedom against tyranny and injustice. By appealing to dharma or the moral law, Gandhi challenges the conventional notion of authority, law and obligation through self-suffering and sacrifice. There is no external authority which is higher than satya either in religious or the political sphere and no political or social action can be given legitimacy superior to ahimsa. Iyer points out that, “Like Proudhon, Gandhi visualizes the establishment of a new system of moral sanctions in society, based on universal harmony in nature”. By that yardstick, Gandhi is critical of modern civilisation as it is unjust, coercive, untrue and exploitative.
Gandhi defends the action of the individual citizen who challenges the might of the centralised bureaucratic state on the basis of dharma, satya and ahimsa. The state, for Gandhi, represents violence in a concentrated and organised form and is described as a ‘soulless machine’; it can never be weaned away from violence and force as these are the bases of its existence. The individual has a soul. People normally take for granted the legalised coercion of the state as the state has too much violence which it could use against those who differ from it. Gandhi’s fear of the centralised state makes him emphasise on a minimal role for the state. He admits that the state ownership is preferable to individual ownership but concedes that the latter’s violence is less injurious than that of the state. However, he supports minimal state ownership on unavoidable grounds.

8.5 STATE, OBLIGATION AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Gandhi desires a society without the state but being the practical idealist that he is, he supports a minimal state. In a state of enlightened anarchy everyone is his own ruler, ruling in a manner without obstructing others. There would be no political power as there would be no state. In the absence of this ideal, Thoreau’s maxim of that “government is best which governs the least” is the next possible option. According to Gandhi, human beings have the capacity for developing their moral capacities to such an extent that exploitation could be reduced to the minimum which is why he states that he “looks upon an increase in the power of the State with the greatest fear, because, although while apparently doing good by minimizing exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality, which lies at the root of all progress”.

The relation between the state and citizens follows from Gandhi’s exaltation of satya and ahimsa as ultimate values on which individual and social morality must be based. The citizens’ pursuit of satya and ahimsa makes them morally superior to the state, the former with soul while the latter is soulless. Since social progress is towards furthering satya and ahimsa, the coercive role of the state would be weakened. This process could also be achieved with greater decentralisation of power in any society.

The citizens’ obligation to accept the authority of the state would depend on its just laws and non-repressive policies. A government is an instrument of service if it is based on the will and consent of the people. It is citizens’ obligation that distinguishes a democratic from an authoritarian state though Gandhi views all states as soulless machines. A citizen’s responsibility is greater under a democratic regime as citizens would have to safeguard against authority becoming corrupt and farcical. In every state there is a possibility of abuse of power and it is the citizens vested with superior moral authority who should not lose their conscience or lose their distrust of state authority. Gandhi makes it the responsibility of every citizen for every act of the government.

It is the citizen who ought to decide whether to show active loyalty or total opposition to the state, to resist none or few of its laws as the citizen is endowed with satya and ahimsa. The citizen cannot relinquish a portion of this responsibility in the name of a social contract or legal sovereignty or tacit consent or the rule of law or similar notions that are implicit in democratic constitutionalism. According to Gandhi, for the sake of peace there can be no unconditional consent, even if secured under majority rule nor can the limits of state action be established in advance in a manner that will automatically secure the citizen his natural rights. Gandhi distrusts the institutional safeguards in societies with many factions and class conflict, as the majority could be wrong. The individual alone, for Gandhi, is a moral...
person which no state or institution could ever become. A citizen could appeal to eternal unwritten laws against the laws of human beings and of states and the commandments of religion, but like Socrates accept the consequences for challenging the laws of the states.

Gandhi rejects the idea and institution of the state based on two anarchistic arguments: the state represents an authority that poses a threat to the liberty of the individual and the state represents violence in an organised form. Classical anarchism as articulated by Proudhon, Stirner, Bakunin and the early Kropotkin supports revolutionary violence to put an end to the organised violence represented by the state. Gandhi insists on non-violent resistance as the only means to end the tyranny of the state and desires a purely non-violent society based on voluntary organisations as the alternative to the state. He is convinced that once society becomes truly non-violent, true anarchy would be established, as non-violence is possible only in an anarchistic society. In 1940 Gandhi categorically stated that “the ideally non-violent state will be an ordered anarchy”.

Not only are states undesirable but even parliaments are as these are ineffectual and can do only when there is an outside pressure. Gandhi is critical of the parliamentary system of government in the *Hind Swaraj* (1909), as the members of parliament ‘are hypocritical and selfish’; indifferent to matters of serious concern and engage in endless talk. “Members vote for their party without a thought. Their so-called discipline binds them to it. If any member, by way of exception gives an independent vote, he is considered a renegade. The Prime Minister is more concerned about his power than about the welfare of the Parliament. His energy is concentrated upon securing the success of his party. His care is not always that Parliament shall do right. Prime Ministers are known to have made Parliament do things merely for party advantage…. If they are to be considered honest because they do not take what are generally known as bribes, let them be so considered, but they are open to subtler influence. In order to gain their ends, they certainly bribe people with honour. I do not hesitate to say that they have neither real honesty nor a living conscience”. Through his criticisms of the British parliament, Gandhi tries to show, according to Bandyopadhyaya (1969), that even the best of the parliaments are not the ideal substitute for anarchy.

## 8.6 AUTHORITY IN ANARCHIST SOCIETY

Regarding the nature of the ideal society under anarchy Gandhi does not offer a clear answer. He is unconcerned about preparing the blueprint for the future because he insists that the future end would depend on the means that are adopted at present, and that a purely mental construction is quite meaningless but offers few pointers.

Indian independence must begin at the bottom. Thus every village will be a republic or panchayat, having full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs, even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world. It will be trained and prepared to perish in the attempt to defend itself against any onslaught from without. Thus ultimately, it is the individual who is the unit. But this does not exclude dependence on the willing help from neighbours or from the world. It will be free and voluntary play of mutual forces…. In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But will be an oceanic circle, whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance, but ever number, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.
The social basis of the ideal society would be Varna system which is a qualitative and functional division but without its humiliation, feeling of high and low, and indignities, and guaranteeing each, fruits of one’s labour. The economic basis, the relationship between labour and capital in both agricultural and industrial sectors will be a harmonised one reconciling freedom, equality and non-violence through the system of Trusteeship. There would be no need for armed forces or the police. Defence from external aggression would be organised non-violently in two stages. In the first stage, people would offer satyagraha at the frontier in the form of an unarmed human wall, but if this failed to stop the aggressor, occupation of the country would be resisted by complete non-cooperation. If the entire population refuses to cooperate with the invading army even risking its personal safety, it would be impossible, according to Gandhi, for the foreign army and administrative personnel to maintain themselves in the occupied territory. The same principle applies to internal security as well. Police would be like a body of reformers than a coercive agency of the state.

Gandhi later diluted his rigorous opposition to parliaments. In 1937, he points out that today’s legislatures, unlike that of the past, are composed of representatives of people and that people must be taught how to stand up effectively against the government. Members of the legislature ought to render service to the people, undertake constructive social work and ensure the passage of right legislations. He clarifies that he does not want to destroy the legislatures but “destroy the system which they are created to work”. In the late 1930s, Gandhi also moved away from minimal role of the state in the economy to state ownership of key industries as it would provide employment to large number of people. The state would look after secular welfare, health, communications, foreign relations, currency and own land as cooperative farming by the peasants subject to state ownership of land is something that he toyed with but never really developed in full detail. Gandhi also insists that the state must eschew physical violence. He supports the idea of a decentralised, non-industrial, non-violent, self-sufficient and self-reliant free society; village swaraj would advance the cause of individual freedom.

8.7 CONCLUSION

Gandhi theorised about the nature of power and authority keeping in mind his commitment and preference to anarchist ideals of how to ensure wider diffusion of power to realise justice in society. His essential distrust of power and authority led him to articulate an alternative which he called enlightened anarchy. Gandhi insists on the need to anchor power and authority in the supreme values of satya, ahimsa and dharma to ensure that politics ultimately is service of all people in general and the underprivileged and the marginalised in particular. The distinctiveness of Gandhi lay in the fact that he desires social and political transformation through non-violent means. He also provides a vision of his ideal and at the same time accepts alterations to this ideal on grounds of feasibility.

The activist theoretician that Gandhi was, he is categorical that it would be futile to theorise about the future and expects the ongoing movements to yield the desired end, constantly reminding of the intimate relationship between ends and means. Gandhi also consistently reminds of the corruption that centralised power results in and underlines the need for the devolution of power to the grassroots. Rejecting modern civilisation and its stress on industries and technology as highly unequal and violent, Gandhi offers an alternative that would maximise self-reliance and self-sufficiency of ordinary persons. Gandhi stresses that devolution of power is the key to a better and fuller democracy. Gandhi’s vision had its
critics. A major critic was Rabindranath Tagore who points out that a civilisation which is predominantly based on villages cannot advance the cause of individuals as the village-centric life revolves around the community. Offering an alternative to what Tagore offers, Gandhi argues from the standpoint of a philosophic anarchist who seeks to defend the freedom of the individual against the authority of the state and social tyranny which is why he focuses on decentralisation. He clarifies that the “outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle, but will give strength to all within and will derive its own strength from it”. Gandhi reminds of the mutual dependence of the individual and the next larger group on a voluntary basis stating that no individual is an island and that the individual is the social self. His consistent emphasis that it is the individual and not the state with the moral authority to question and judge injustice and repression and to bring about desired changes through non-violent means is the framework within which he defends the supremacy of the individual.

8.8 SUMMARY

Gandhi’s views on power and conflict resolution put him apart from all other major theories developed in the contemporary times. His serious reservations about the desirability of what constitutes the major components of modern civilisation allows him to transcend known categories of power and enables him to develop a conceptual framework which is in total variance from the other dominant views. Modern civilisation, according to Gandhi, is not conducive to reaching a higher end of life as it perpetuates false consciousness and encourages the pursuit of materialistic ends. He dismisses disparagingly power politics as irrelevant and insists that “political power is not an end but one of the means of enabling people to better their condition in every department of life”. True religion and true politics is concerned primarily with human life and action and both must have a common basis in a common morality determined by a common set of values. Gandhi, however, rejects the idea of state religion even if a country has only one religion. Power, as Gandhi says, lies in being an actively engaged citizen with a capacity of public involvement and political participation rather than being a passive acquiescent subject. Gandhi rejects the idea and institution of the state based on two anarchistic arguments: the state represents an authority that poses a threat to the liberty of the individual and the state represents violence in an organised form. He supports the idea of a decentralised, non-industrial, non-violent, self-sufficient and self-reliant free society, in essence, a village swaraj that would advance the cause of individual freedom.

8.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Why does Gandhi stress on the need to spiritualise political life and political institutions?
2. Explain Gandhi’s concept of power.
3. Why does Gandhi consider Truth as Authority?
4. Explain Gandhi’s concept of state and obligation.
5. What is the role of authority in the anarchist society?
SUGGESTED READINGS


Pantham, T, and Deutsch, K., (ed), Political Thought in Modern India, New Delhi, Sage, 1986.


UNIT 9  GANDHI’S VIEWS ON COLONIALISM AND IMPERIALISM

Structure

9.1 Introduction
   Aims and Objectives

9.2 Impact of Colonialism and Imperialism on State and Citizens

9.3 Impact on Socio-Economic Life

9.4 Modern Civilisation

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9.1 INTRODUCTION

Colonialism and imperialism have been important influences in the shaping and articulation of political thinking of most, if not all, of the modern Indian political thinkers, including Gandhi. The exceptionally long years of colonial rule in India had been able to mould the thinking process of Indian leaders in both positive and negative ways. As a result, while they were able to get newer insights and perspectives in conceptualising and evaluating the values and systems of life, it also showed them the ugly face of the immoral, debasing and illegitimate character of colonialism and imperialism that presumably led to moral and material decline in the historically glorious traditions and life-styles of the people. Positively, for instance, British colonialism in India afforded the Indian leaders an opportunity to travel and reside in Britain that exposed them to the liberal traditions of democratic governance in that country with a fairly large amount of freedom and independence enjoyed by the citizens of that country within a framework of rule of law. Furthermore, the deep influences of English language, literature, culture and ways of life convinced the Indians of certain plausible aspects of modernisation and westernisation that catapulted Britain in the category of most progressive and prosperous countries in the world. The legal training of many of Indians in the English system of rule of law led them to appreciate and clamour for the enjoyment of loftier ideals of a civilised life such as liberty, equality, fraternity, democracy, tolerance, peaceful methods of resolving conflicts in society, appreciation for merit, respect for human dignity and individuality of an individual, constitutional limits of the functioning of a government in the Indian scheme of things as well. But negatively, the march of colonialism and imperialism in India also revealed to the Indians the inherent fallacies of the liberal traditions when it comes to offer the same kind of concessions and privileges to the other people, naked exploitation of the economic resources of the colonies, driving social and political frictions in a society for the longevity of colonial rule, use of excessive violence to unnerve the people asking for their due from the government and lack of a moral and legitimate authority of the colonial rulers to rule over any part of the country. In a nutshell, the colonial experiences in India provided the Indians an opportunity to explore the inherent fallacies of the notion of colonialism and nationalism so that they are able to offer an insightful critique of a theory that was able to subjugate a large part of the world for many
more years. The views of Mahatma Gandhi, in this context, appear most authentic and empirically tested given his leadership of the Indian National Movement on the one hand, and his brush with the colonial mindset in his early days in South Africa, on the other. The unit, therefore, seeks to explore Gandhi’s views on colonialism and imperialism as they were conceptualised and practised in the form of the British colonialism in India.

Aims and Objectives

This Unit will enable you to understand

- The impact of colonialism and imperialism on state and citizens
- Its impact on socio-economic life and
- Gandhi’s non-violent struggle against colonialism

9.2 IMPACT OF COLONIALISM AND IMPERIALISM ON STATE AND CITIZENS

Gandhi viewed colonialism and imperialism as the predating tendencies in the morally corrupt and economically insatiable countries of the world that seek to fulfill such desires of theirs through the mechanism of colonialism and imperialism. Hence, in the course of the industrial revolution, when the availability of raw materials and the provision of fairly large market to consume the surplus production in the factories became a teasing problem, they found a golden opportunity in the ideology of imperialism and started colonising various parts of the world. What furthered their pursuits of colonialism in a more vigorous and speedy manner was lack of moral and humanist considerations in their scheme of thought which would have restrained them from infringing into the rights and domains of other people. Gradually, a feeling developed in the colonising countries to take their control over the colonies, not just an ephemeral issue. Rather, they thought of devising ways and means that could have provided sustenance to their forcible rule in the alien territories a longer duration. Therefore, from their erstwhile economic enterprise of sourcing raw materials from these countries and flooding their markets with the finished products produced in their factories, the colonial powers sought to irretrievably alter the value systems of the colonies. As a result, almost all the aspects of life of people in the colonies-social, economic, political, cultural, language, literature, educational and even assessment of their own values and ideals- were subjected to a well-designed sinister plan of alteration in such a way that they increasingly get alienated with whatever they claim to be their native feature of life and replace it with the given ones drawn on the colonial calculations. Colonialism and imperialism, thus, seek to cut the native people from their roots and mould their ways in the typical colonial value system so that they start emulating the colonial ways of life. This would gradually rob them of their indigenous and respectful ideals and values of life and convert them into just a blind follower of the artificially planted habits, institutions, values and ideals of the colonial country. Hence, to Gandhi, colonialism happens to be an ideology that not only dispossesses the native people of their material possessions but also their moral and spiritual self.

The modus operandi of the colonialism in altering and replacing the value systems of the native people with that of the colonial ones was arguably novel. In the course of their interactions with the native people, they clandestinely sought to undermine the vitality and significance of the beliefs, values, habits and practices of the people by not only pointing
out their leaner sides but also making a selective comparison of such things with the things prevalent in the colonial country. Such a hostile and motivated comparison was sought to be done on the basis of taking as rational and scientific what existed in the colonial country. For instance, while comparing the food habits of two distinct sets of people, they would take the criterion of the habits as existing in the colonial country and brand that most scientific and rational. As the major portion of Indian population happened to be vegetarian in their food habits, the British would take their food habits of non-vegetarian food as scientific and rational and would seek to convince the Indians of the futility and limits of their food habits. Already a submissive and subjugated lot, the native people very quickly tended to accept the value systems of the colonial powers as the ideal one to be followed. In this format, most of the aberrations in the Indian social, economic, political, familial, cultural and daily life styles were introduced by the British to make Indians the ‘desi’ Englishmen. Gandhi opposed such tendencies on the part of the colonial rulers not because it brought about mechanical change in the value systems and lifestyles of the people but because this would render the people morally unsustainable and spiritually dislocated given their loss of faith in their personality and the sinister designs of the colonisers not give them an identity under their value system and lifestyle. Gandhi charged colonialism with the moral corruption and spiritual degeneration of the native people and societies with a view to further the sinful interests of the colonialism and imperialism. He also, at the same time, pointed out that the goal of any national movement, therefore, should not have been confined to waging a relentless negative battle of driving the colonial forces out of the country. Rather, it should go to the extent of bringing about a positive reorientation in the outlook of the people by undertaking constructive programmes and moral and spiritual regeneration of the masses and societies.

Gandhi was fiercely critical of the British colonialism for supplanting the native systems of government in India with the abstract and legalistic notions of modern government rooted in narrowly rationalist conception of Indian society. Traditionally, in the Indian system of government, society was always accorded a prior position in comparison to the state structures as reflected in the apparatus of the king. But in the course of the colonial rule in the country, the British sought to replace the society and people-centred system of government with an autonomous and abstract state standing over and beyond the purview of society. Such a structure of government was marked by two distinct features that distinguished it from the native Indian system of government. One, it reversed the order of society-state relations in such a way that instead of society having precedence over the lives of the people as in the previous times, it now gave precedence to the state in conducting and regulating the affairs of the lives of people. The root cause behind such a reordering of society-state relations was the desire of the colonial rulers to fundamentally alter the values and ideals of the life of people. But as in the existing system that was the domain of society and they could not control the societal forces, hence, they devised an alternative course of action. Given their control over the state and governmental apparatus, they needed the state to be the custodian of social life of the people as a result of which in due course of time, they would alter the societal conventions and norms in regulating the collective behaviour of the people. Two, even in the reordered scheme of things, state’s interactions with the society was limited to bare minimum and, even that too, in a very formal manner. The reasons for this mechanism might be located in the apprehension of the British that greater interactions between the state and society would lessen the fear of the state power in the minds and psyche of the societal forces that may produce problems in controlling the societal passions at later stage. Moreover, by introducing the element of formal contacts between the state and society, the colonial masters sought to ingrain the
legalistic orientation in the mutual interactions of various components of community life in the colonies. Gandhi was quite distressed at finding a sinister long term plan of the colonialism in altering the basic norms of social and communal interactions amongst various peoples and organisations in the society.

9.3 IMPACT ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC LIFE

The colonial agenda of fragmenting and distorting the fundamental institutions of government and social interactions did not stop at just seeking to replace native ones with the imported ones from the colonial country. To Gandhi, indeed, the colonisers would have found it difficult to rule over the vast tract of land with a massive population unless they were aware of the underlying customs, traditions, values, numbers of people, their rituals, habits, social structures, geography and modes of social interactions. Therefore, in their scheme of things, the next item appeared to gather adequate information and clues regarding their socio-economic, political and cultural life so that they could have been suitably modified in order to gain the colonial upper hand in the management of the people. A mammoth exercise was, therefore, started to collect, classify, organise, codify and interpret the massive amount of data and information on the various people of the country. However, such an exercise was conducted by the British with two remarkable characteristics. One, in collecting, classifying, organising, codifying, analysing and interpreting data and information, the colonial officials took into account only those principles and categories that made sense to them. In other words, those customs, traditions, values and norms of social interactions could not find place in the British scheme of things that did not appear comprehensible to them. The vast diversity of people and cultural mass of the country was oversimplified and categorised into just a few broader categories. In this process, they rejected a number of variables informing the socio-cultural and economic life of the people if they did not conform to their notions of justice and rationality. Two, and more significantly, the availability of sufficient data with the colonial officers motivated them to devise certain schemes and policies that would prove very harmful to the interests of the native people but would serve the interest of the colonial powers both in the long as well as short run. For instance, the policy of divide and rule was introduced by the British in India only when they came to know the dynamics of Muslim population and their socio-economic and politico-cultural life. Similarly, the flaring up of the caste issues in the Indian socio-political discourses began with its political uses and misuses at the hands of the colonial government in the course of pitting one set of people against the others. Such tactics of the colonialism were seriously castigated by Gandhi.

9.4 MODERN CIVILISATION

Gandhi attributed the rise of European imperialism as a natural expression of the inherent impulse of aggressiveness and exploitation underlying the heart of modern civilisation. To Gandhi, the very structure of modern civilisation revolved round the idea of exploitation of one’s fellow human beings by others. The dynamics of market economy had been so that in commercial transactions no moral or ethical considerations should have been allowed to have crept in as such considerations would compromise with the commercial viability of an enterprise and would ultimately result in the closure of the activity. Moreover, under the schemes of the modern civilisation, all economic activities must be conducted in a highly rational manner in which emotions, sentiments, passions, human values and non-commercial considerations should be kept aside. Only then, an economic venture would turn out to be a viable activity. However, what was found objectionable in such a conceptualisation of
economic activity was the loss of human values and considerations in conducting the enterprise. Hence, in such a scenario, exploitation of one person by another was considered perfectly all right. More and more jobs were being done by people even at the subsistence wages. Attempts were made to minimise the earnings of the labourers by cutting back their pay and other packages. Even beyond factories, the behaviour of the consumers were also sought to be manipulated in making them desire for things that they really might not need and the production of such things that they might need was either curtailed or hoarded and black-marketed in order to jack the prices to ensure exorbitant profits for the producers and the traders. The only basis of social recognition and political weight of an individual in society was considered to be his economic worth. As a result, the poor and the dispossessed felt alienated with the socio-economic and political activities of the life. Taking advantage of such precarious situations, the nexus of politicians-industrialists and bureaucracy were able to monopolise the power structure of the society. Such a configuration of power structure ultimately became the norm of the social conduct in modern civilisation in which the poor, deprived, marginalised and other peripheral sections of society found themselves totally out of reckoning for the decision-making processes of the government. Thus, it turned out to be a system of moral bankruptcy and spiritual demise of the individuals.

Colonialism was also subjected to severe indictment by Gandhi on the basis of his notion of indivisible humanity. The basic underlying idea behind his notion of indivisible humanity was that humanity could not be viewed in atomistic and compartmentalised perspective wherein one person remained aloof and unattached with the situations of other persons. In other words, Gandhi suggested that the entire mass of humanity was so intertwined with each other that one individual stood in relative position with another in which the attitudes, behaviour, perspective and convictions of one impact on the life and thought of another. Gandhi used this analogy to evolve an argument criticising all the systems of oppression and exploitation prevalent in various parts of the world in different incarnations. For instance, talking of the white treatment with the blacks in South Africa, he noted that by such immoral and unethical treatment with the blacks, even the white people also damage their own capacity for critical self-reflection and impartial self-assessment, and falling victim to moral conceits, morbid fears and irrational obsessions. Applying the same argument in the case of colonialism, he underlined that Colonial rulers met the same fate. They could not dismiss their subjects as effeminate and childlike without thinking of themselves as hyper-masculine and unemotional adults, a self-image to which they could not conform without distorting and impoverishing their potential. In misrepresenting their subjects, they misrepresented themselves as well and fell into their own traps. They also took home the attitudes, habits, and styles of government acquired abroad, and corrupted their own society. Colonialism did promote their material interests, but only at the expense of their larger and infinitely more important moral and spiritual interests. Since human well being was indivisible, a system of oppression had no winners, only losers, and it was in the interest of all involved to end it (Parekh, 1997, p.53). Gandhi, thus, noted that the baggage of colonialism would not only distort the vision and behaviour of the subject masses but also spill over to the supposedly immune colonial masters and their families and societies. He, therefore, argued that it would be in the fitness of things for all concerned to end the system and processes of exploitation and moral debasement of the people even in the colonies as its by-products would not leave anybody involved in the activity untouched from sharing the gains and losses of the acts of suppression.
9.5 GANDHI’S NON-VIOLENT STRUGGLE AGAINST COLONIALISM

The theoretical perspective of Gandhi on colonialism and imperialism got its reflection in his practical taking on the mighty British colonial administration as part of his leadership of the Indian National Movement. However, Gandhi was convinced from the very beginning that morally belittling strategies and tactics of the colonial rulers would not be able to sustain themselves in the face of moral courage of conviction shown by the Indian masses. Hence, in order to match the brute force of the British colonialism, Gandhi did not suggest the strategy of taking up arms to his fellow countrymen. Rather, he entered into detailed and heated arguments with some of his compatriots who believed in the strategy of armed struggle in order to liberate the country from the yoke of British imperialism. Though Gandhi was appreciative of the courage and objectives with which the revolutionary sections of the Indian society was thinking of taking up cudgels against the British rule, he was doubly sure of the futility of such a move given the far superior preparedness of the British forces in taking on any violent protest to the British rule in India. Even Gandhi was apprehensive that such a strategy of armed struggle against the British rule would have been liked by the colonial rulers as they could have justified their excessive use of force and violence in meeting the challenge of the revolutionaries in the name of defending themselves from the onslaught of the armed band of revolutionaries. However, such mechanism of the British colonialism was very well understood by Gandhi who thought of evolving an alternative strategy to beat the colonial forces in their own game of moral turpitude. Consequently, instead of falling in the trap of the British colonialism, he refined his strategy of non-violent struggle that he had already successfully tested in his sojourn to South Africa. Gandhi very well knew that the British forces in India could not suppress the unarmed masses of the country staging peaceful protest to seek the departure of British colonialism from India. However, he appeared apprehensive of the capabilities of the masses to undertake long spells of peaceful protest given their restiveness in case of non-responsiveness of the British rulers. Thus, besides mobilising the masses to undertake peaceful protest against the British rule, Gandhi was also trying to train the mass of Indians in the art of peaceful and non-violent protest so that the moral bankruptcy of the colonial authorities could have been exposed without earning their ire in terms of repression and imprisonment of the innocent people.

Gandhi’s theoretical formulations on truth and non-violence were put to final test in the course of the long drawn nationalist struggle of the country. Strategically, Gandhi did not begin his forays in the nationalist movement of India by calling upon the masses to rise against the British rule in one go. He first tried to demonstrate the power and technique of his strategy of non-violent struggle by undertaking fast and peaceful protest against certain acts of the British government such as the oppression of the planters in the Champaran region of Bihar, industrial unrest in Ahmedabad, Rowlatt Act and the Jallianwala massacre of the innocent people. Though such individual acts of protest and peaceful opposition to the British rule produced a mixed bag of results in terms of partial fulfillment of demands put forward by Gandhi in these cases, they, nevertheless, convinced Gandhi and the Indian masses as well in the capabilities of each other in starting and carrying out the peaceful methods of protest against the British rule. Subsequently, the first major pan-Indian protest movement against the British rule in the mode of non-violent protest began in 1920 in the name of the Non-cooperation movement. This was the first movement in which the masses of the countryside as well as the well-educated and well-off sections of the people from
towns and cities joined hands together to launch a formidable battle against the British rule in India without taking laws in their own hands. In the early phases, the movement went on quite perfectly and as per the plan. But an unpleasant incident took place in 1922 at Chauri Chaura, in eastern Uttar Pradesh, in which a mob of non-cooperation activists set on fire a police post in which about two dozens of policemen were charred to death. This incident shook the psyche of the Mahatma who immediately called off the movement on the plea that it had distracted from the defined course of action and by killing the policemen the people had violated the pledge to be non-violent and peaceful in the course of the movement. However, more than the compromise with the philosophy of non-violence, what appeared to have played a critical role in persuading Gandhi to call off the movement in such a quick manner was the fear of ensuing British repression on the innocent masses in various parts of the country. Thus, the first experiment of Gandhi in mass mobilisation on the basis of the doctrine of non-violence met with a sudden withdrawal as he found the people still unprepared to embark upon a long and sustained struggle in the format of non-violence based on the moral force of the satyagrahis.

In the subsequent years, the march of national movement in India, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, turned out to be a war of nerves between the moral force and soul-force driven non-violent methods of taking on the British rule on the one hand, and the naked display of brute force on the part of the British colonial administration, on the other. For instance, in the times of the civil disobedience movement, the participants in the national movement were instructed to evolve a strategy of harming the interests of the British government without taking recourse to violent methods of venting their ire against the government. Hence, salt emerged as the central figure of the protest movement as it was considered to harm the commercial interest of the British government without coming into conflict with it. The long drawn movement almost exhausted the people without any silver lining visible in the Indian firmament. So, Gandhi had to console his fellow participants in the national movement that in order to defeat the designs of a colonial power, they needed to be patient and prepared for a long drawn battle. He was sure that the British government could not hold on for longer durations in the face of the strident national movement for independence going on in the country. But it would not come so soon as well. Hence, in order to sustain the zeal of the national volunteers, Gandhi suggested the idea of constructive programmes to keep them engaged with some activity on the one hand, and remind the British government that certain aspects like education etc. would now be taken into the hands of the common people themselves. Afterwards, the final act of national movement, under the Gandhian leadership, came in 1942 in the form of the Quit India movement, in which the exasperation of Gandhi as well as the common freedom fighter in the country with reticence of the British government was quite obvious. Therefore, while Gandhi gave the call for do or die for the common freedom fighters, the immediate arrest of the senior leaders of the national movement by the British government, gave the people ample opportunity to take the law into their own hands. But Gandhi’s conviction with the virtues of Satyagraha and non-violence remained steadfast and the activities during the Indian National Movement could not be construed as any dilution of Gandhi’s faith in the veracity of Satyagraha and non-violence as viable strategies to win independence for the country.

9.6 SUMMARY

An analysis of Gandhi’s views on colonialism and imperialism reveals two interrelated aspects of his critique for the same. First, Gandhi conceptualised the ideology of colonialism
and imperialism as off shoots of the modern western civilisation that itself could not withstand the critical scrutiny of Gandhi. Gandhi was quite convinced that the material basis of the modern western civilisation would never yield space to a moralist and ethical philosophy of life that would have deterred the western countries from embarking on the path of colonialism and imperialism. Moreover, he noted that unbridled quest for money and other material possessions of these countries motivate them to forego all norms of civilised and humanist conduct so much so that they did not feel hesitant in subjecting their own people to the same kind of conduct as they would have done the colonial subjects in terms of economic activities and charging a price for everything done to them. Gandhi was not surprised when the colonial masters were willing to let loose a reign of terror on the hapless masses of the colonies even if they raised even the slightest of murmur against the British rule in India. Second, in Gandhi’s perspective of life, moral and ethical considerations carried much weight in comparison to the material and physical considerations that acted as the basic motivating factor in ideologies such as colonialism and imperialism. What pained Gandhi more was the unavoidable impact that colonialism and imperialism had on the moral and ethical standing of the people in society. To Gandhi, long years of colonial rule in a country would have led to moral and spiritual decadence in the society whose regeneration would have been a difficult task in hand for the leaders of the colony in the post-independence times. Thus, to Gandhi, colonialism and imperialism were the bane of humanity, not just the people of the colonies only.

9.7 TERMINAL QUESTIONS


2. What impact does colonialism and imperialism have on the state and its citizens?

3. Discuss at length Gandhi’s non-violent struggle against colonialism.

SUGGESTED READINGS


6. Rattan, R., Gandhi’s Concept of Political Obligation, Minerva Associates, Delhi, 1972

7. Parekh, Bhikhu., Gandhi’s Political Philosophy, A Critical Examination, Ajanta Publications, Delhi, 1995
UNIT 10  GANDHI’S VIEWS ON LIBERALISM AND CONSTITUTIONALISM

Structure

10.1 Introduction
   Aims and Objectives

10.2 Understanding Liberalism and Constitutionalism

10.3 Gandhi and Core Concepts of Liberalism and Constitutionalism

10.4 Constitutionalism

10.5 An Overview

10.6 Summary

10.7 Terminal Questions
   Suggested Readings

10.1 INTRODUCTION

As a political thinker, the articulation of the political discourses of Mahatma Gandhi appears to be unconventional. Adopting a rational and critical perspective in viewing the dominant ideological formulations of his times, Gandhi set on to scrutinise the theoretical propositions of such ideologies on the basis of his own understanding and convictions on the diverse issues of life. Given the punch line of the Gandhian thought and action as nothing but an incessant quest for truth, it was obvious for Gandhi to be receptive to all sorts of ideologies, customs, traditions and ways of life in order to look for an iota of truth in them that he could imbibe. However, such received ideas and ideologies were put on ruthless scrutiny on the criterion evolved by Gandhi on the basis of his own convictions rooted in his experiences. Thus, as Bhikhu Parekh points out, rootedness and openness are the two central ideas that may be taken as critical in grasping the views of Gandhi on numerous ideologies and systems of life in the world. And, in order to express his appreciation for the two, Gandhi famously declared that his house was protected by walls, but its windows were open to allow winds from all directions to blow through it and to enable him to breathe fresh air at his own pace and in his own way (Parekh, 1999, p.26) The political thought of Gandhi, therefore, appears to be product of a complex process of dialectics between rootedness and openness.

Aims and Objectives

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand

- The meaning of the concepts Liberalism and Constitutionalism
- Gandhi’s views on Liberalism and Constitutionalism
In analysing Gandhi’s views on liberalism and constitutionalism, the theoretical framework of rootedness and openness, as evolved by Bhikhu Parekh, appears to be quite useful. It represents the two broad spectrums in which the Gandhian thought on basic postulates of the ideology of liberalism and constitutionalism was articulated. However, this cannot be said to be true in case of other prominent political ideologies on which the views of Mahatma have been articulated in other sections of the book. For instance, the Gandhian views on fascism could not be articulated in the format of rootedness and openness given the absence of a direct exposure of Gandhi to the theory and practice of the ideology of fascism. But in case of liberalism and constitutionalism, the format of rootedness and openness applies to a great extent because the life and times of Gandhi was spent, more or less, in the colonial ambience which was conditioned primarily, if not totally, by the perspectives of liberalism and constitutionalism as understood and practised in the parent colonial country i.e. Britain. Hence, while the run of liberalism and constitutionalism appeared to have provided the perspective of openness, Gandhi’s own experiences and childhood baptism in the traditional Hindu religious and moral philosophy provided the perspective of rootedness in the evolution of the Gandhian thought. Therefore, in course of the evolution of his thought, Gandhi did not outrightly reject the ideals and values of liberalism and constitutionalism as alien and unworthy of emulation. Rather, he allowed the permeation of the core components of liberalism and constitutionalism in his thought process that were put to critical scrutiny by Gandhi on the basis of his own understanding of the values and ideals forming core of these ideologies. Eventually, therefore, what emerged out of the churning taking place in the mind of Gandhi may arguably be taken to be his views on liberalism and constitutionalism. This Unit attempts to elucidate the views of Gandhi on the dominant and interrelated ideologies of liberalism and constitutionalism as explained in the numerous writings and speeches of the Mahatma.

As a thinker, Gandhi’s thought process was influenced by a number of factors ranging from his early religious upbringing, views of the thinkers and authors such as John Ruskin, Henry David Thoreau and Leo Tolstoy to his experiences of life both in South Africa and India. At the same time, he was also greatly influenced by the basic precepts of Christianity including the self-suffering of Jesus Christ, in addition to the views and ideas of a great number of thinkers, both Indian as well as foreign. However, before allowing these influences to mould his mind and heart to greater depth, Gandhi put the foundational aspects of these influences to critical scrutiny and evaluated the utility of such ideas in his quest for truth. Hence, the basic premises around which the intellectual discourses and explorations of Gandhi revolved appeared to be his search for truth. Whateoever he found to be helpful in sustaining and furthering his unending search for truth, he adopted that to make it an inalienable part of his thought process irrespective of its source or ideological overtones. Gandhi’s thought process, therefore, it may be argued, was moulded by his passion for experiments with truth in which he received, examined, modified and eventually accepted numerous heterogeneous ideas and principles provided it helped in his pursuit of seeking truth at any and all costs.

Before venturing to elucidate and examine Gandhi’s views on liberalism and constitutionalism, it would be pertinent to discuss in brief the meaning and essence of the ideology of liberalism and constitutionalism. Conceptually, liberalism as a political philosophy refers to that stream of thought that developed in Europe in the aftermath of the breakdown of the
feudal order with the onset of a capitalist or market economy in its place. Drawing on the writings of numerous thinkers writing over many centuries, the core concern of liberalism appears to provide an intellectual justification for the capitalist society. Taking individual as the central element in the liberal social order, it seeks to limit the authority of government within the norms of positional formulations, in addition to safeguarding the basic liberties and rights of the people. The extension of the liberal argument in the political sphere led to the birth of democratic societies marked by periodic elections to elect the government through the active participation of the people. The core concerns of liberalism, despite having a number of varieties, may be taken to consist of the individual, freedom, reason, justice, toleration and diversity. Intimately interrelated with the ideology of liberalism, constitutionalism, as a philosophy, refers to a set of political values and aspirations that reflect the desire to protect liberty through the establishment of internal and external checks on government power. It is typically expressed in support for constitutional provisions that establish this goal, notably a codified constitution, a bill of rights, separation of powers, bicameralism and federalism or decentralization (Heywood, 2003, p.41) Ideologically, liberalism and constitutionalism stand in a symbiotic relationship with each other.

10.3 GANDHI AND CORE CONCEPTS OF LIBERALISM AND CONSTITUTIONALISM

Liberalism as an ideology is marked by a number of core concepts that reflect the basic values and ideals represented by it. Brought up in somewhat liberal atmosphere, it would have been natural for Gandhi to have imbibed certain liberal values and ideals. But the uniqueness of Gandhian thought process was that he did not imbibe the liberal value system without putting them to severe scrutiny in accordance with his own convictions and value system. In this process, he sometimes transcended the limits set by the liberal philosophy on certain aspects of life and modified the idea to a great extent to make that congruent with his own values and ideals. Gandhi went for only those ideas of liberalism that he found worth imbibing and modified the others to the extent needed to make that consistent with his own understanding and appreciation of those aspects of life. This section provides a brief discussion of the nature of some of these core concepts and the views of Gandhi on them.

Individual at the Core: The basic premise on which the entire structure of liberal ideology is constructed appears to be the idea of individual. In fact, this has been the starting point for the genesis and development of the liberal philosophy as in its opposition to the decaying feudal order, the liberals argued for the primacy of individuals in society whose interests must be protected by way of constitutional government. However, different variants of liberalism have viewed the nature and place of individuals in society differently, ranging from isolated atoms to that of the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them to further that of individuals being responsible participants in social activities and ready to partake their possessions for the welfare of the masses. Though the liberal perception of individuals as the central feature of any social formation was agreed upon by Gandhi, his idea of individuals differed from the liberal perception in two fundamental ways. One, Gandhi had firm belief in the notion that individuals, despite having an independent standing of their own in society, need to be congruent with the dynamics of social life. While they could retain their personal volitions intact in order to carry out self-purification measures, they need to be part and parcel of the social system and shoulder the responsibilities coming in its wake for the sake of the well-being of others. Two, Gandhi did not subscribe to the
view of some liberals that certain natural rights of the individuals such as the right to property should be zealously protected to its maximum length in order to provide for ample opportunities to the individuals to develop their self to the maximum possible. Gandhi was a believer in the notion of ‘everyone according to his need, and to nobody according to his greed’. Gandhi, therefore, despite standing by the notion of individuals being prime component of social life, did not go too far in protecting his individual possessions even at the cost of the other individuals in society. Such an articulation of the nature of individuals in society appears to be in consonance with the Indian value system of balancing the status of individuals with the dynamics of the social needs.

**Notion of Freedom:** In liberal philosophy, the next in order of priority after individual comes the idea of freedom. Given the changing nature of liberal ideology, freedom has been perceived by different liberals differently. The negative liberals conceptualised freedom in terms of absence of restraints under which the individuals were supposed to do anything and everything if they deem fit that doing so would enhance their individual developments. However, positive liberals theorised the concept of freedom in a more restricted manner by arguing for reasonable restrictions being put on the enjoyment of freedom to the extent of protecting the interests of fellow individuals and community as well. But Gandhi’s conceptualisation of freedom offered an altogether new perspective drastically different from the liberal understanding. In other words, while liberals defined freedom in terms of functional independence of an individual in relation to society, Gandhi conceptualised freedom of an individual in relation to oneself. He pointed out that the enjoyment of true freedom lies in being true to oneself, living by one’s own volition, obeying the commandments of one’s own self and listening to the inner voice of one’s own heart. It represents a thorough introspection within oneself to find out the true nature, inherent possibilities and limits of one’s self and thereby deciding the course of action of one’s life. Hence, Gandhi argues that freedom lies in living a life of one’s own volition designed after serious thought being given to one’s personality, orientations and limits within which one’s forays in life can be made.

**Equality:** Having radically altered the liberal vision of freedom, Gandhi did not accept the idea of equality as defined in the liberal lexicon. To liberals, equality lies in the availability of equal opportunities and conditions of life for all under equal circumstances in which everybody would seek to choose amongst the various options available to him or her. But Gandhi found such an understanding of the concept of equality quite restraining and unreflective of the essence of true equality as needed both for the individuals as well as society. He outrightly rejected the liberals' argument that the concept of equality is comparative, contractual, competitive and individualistic. Instead, Gandhi argued for the interdependent nature of human society in which one person was seen to be dependent upon others for the fullest enjoyment of one’s self given the cooperative mutuality of most of the ventures of life. To Gandhi, equality lies in the right of every individual having full access to his or her community’s social, economic, political, cultural, moral and other developmental resources with a view to develop his or her potential to the full without being constrained by unavailability of such facilities. Gandhi was vehemently opposed to the abstract conceptualisation of equality as the opportunity to develop one’s self in accordance with his inherent nature. He noted that equality can be realistically realised only in terms of the concrete resources available to individuals as part of his or her community life the enjoyment of which could have afforded the person avenues to develop his life in the desired direction and to the highest level. Hence, Gandhi’s views on equality appear to be a break from the liberal conception which defines equality in terms of equal opportunities in abstract sense without reference to the material resources of the community.
Rationality: Gandhi had an argument with regard to the ideology of liberalism on the issue of rationality as well. Given the rise of liberalism in the wake of rational and critical thinking embedded in Enlightenment, rationality emerged to be the core concept of liberal philosophy calling for rational thinking permeating all aspects of life. The value of rationality was so much emphasised that it became a sort of dogma in the liberal philosophy. However, Gandhi did take the value of rationality at its face value and offered an alternative non-rationalist notion of rationality. As Bhikhu Parekh argued, “[A]lthough, he took a rather narrow view of reason, he rightly argued that it was not the only valuable or even the highest human faculty. This enabled him to cherish and champion faculties, modes of cognition, forms of knowledge and styles of reasoning and discourse that are often devalued in a narrowly positivist world-view, and to create a theoretical and moral space for traditions, intuitions, collective wisdom and feelings” (Parekh, 1997, p.118). Gandhi, thus, afforded ample space for one’s sentiments, emotions, customs, traditions and experiences of life to derive one’s rationality in contrast to the straight-jacketed idea of rationality propounded by the liberal theorists. Moreover, Gandhi’s conviction was that each culture, civilisation, religion and morality carried their own belief systems and taboos, therefore, it was natural for different people to have a varying vision of what constitutes right or wrong for that particular society. Rationality, to Gandhi, therefore, cannot be an absolute idea whose understanding can be appreciated in a positivist mode. It must be allowed to be a flexible notion whose operationalisation would depend on the particular context in which it was conceptualised depending upon the particular beliefs, traditions, cultures and value systems prevailing in that society and at that time.

Rights and Duties: The concepts of right and duty also underwent subtle transformations at the hands of Gandhi in the course of their articulation. Undoubtedly, the idea of right has been a cardinal principle of liberal philosophy as it was this notion based upon which the whole body of thought arguing for limits on the power of state in the middle ages was called for by the early liberal philosophers. The notions such as natural right to life, liberty and property, apart from the slogan of liberty, equality and fraternity emerged to be the war cry of liberals in their opposition to the feudal order prevailing in Europe in the medieval times. Though over the years, the idea of ‘right’ underwent various reformulations, its centrality as the core concern of liberalism still remains intact. But in Gandhi’s view, the liberal notion of right is faulty even after its moderation at the hands of the positive liberals. To Gandhi, right cannot be understood in absolute and isolated terms. Despite giving due weightage to the right as the core possession of the human beings, he argued for the balancing of rights with the concomitant duties that need to be an alienable part of the discourses on right. He argued that right can be enjoyed in a socially meaningful and responsible manner only if it is packaged along with the idea of duty. Indeed, it was the submission of Gandhi that right need not be desired but deserved by the individuals in which case it would be enjoyed by him or her in a socially useful manner. He refuted the tendency amongst certain people to crave for right without being ready to shoulder the concomitant duty coming with it. To Gandhi, such a lop-sided view of the idea of right would put unmitigated pressure on social relations as a result of which the fine balance of social interactions amongst various people could be disturbed.

On the issue of toleration also, there appears to be discord between the standard liberal view and the views of Gandhi. Keeping in view the centrality of toleration as the key element of liberal philosophy, at times, liberalism has been defined as a political ideology in which there appear infinite possibilities of resolving competing conflicts amongst various sections of society in an amicable and tolerant manner. In other words, unlike Marxism that
believes in the irreconcilability of class interests in society as articulated in terms of the interests of workers and capitalists, liberals believe that there are no competing interests in society that cannot be reconciled. They argue for the toleration of interests of each other even to the extent of compromising on the basic amenities of others. But Gandhi’s appreciation of the liberal concept of toleration was limited only to the extent of its acceptance of peaceful methods of settling disputes in society. Gandhi did not favour the essence of the liberal concept of toleration as he noticed that such an understanding was maligned by an iota of bargaining and adjustment even without convincing one’s mind and heart of the virtue of such a deal. Alternatively, Gandhi suggested that the idea of toleration should be elevated to the level of goodwill amongst the competing parties so that once they agree to surrender some part of their belongings for the sake of peace and order, they need not repent for that in their mind or heart. To Gandhi, toleration should not be accepted in terms of some kind of deal struck to arrive at some conclusion through which though peace is maintained, but both the parties remain unsatisfied. Such a status would sooner or later result in the re-emergence of the dispute. Hence, Gandhi argues for the conversion of the idea of toleration into the positive value of goodwill in which both the interests are accommodative of each other’s wishes in a cordial manner having a lasting solution for the problem.

**Concept of Justice**: Like liberalism, Gandhi was also a firm believer in the value of justice as an ideal for civilised life. But he was apprehensive that the liberal overemphasis on the ideal had converted the operational part of the concept into a legalistic, competitive, dogmatic and narrowly redistributive notion of jurisprudence. Thus, instead of becoming a virtue whose operationalisation should have been at the level of inculcation of sense of justice amongst the common people, it has turned out to be merely a legalistic idea whose administration has become domain of the judicial system of a country. Gandhi was very clear that the concept of justice must be elevated to the level of a moral virtue whose proper realisation must be at the level of ingraining in the minds of the people the value of respect and responsibility for each other. Gandhi did not believe that justice in society can be established through the mechanism of state apparatus as it would be too ephemeral and superficial to have lasting and deep impact in the minds of the people. Such a notion of justice would in fact become a game of one-upmanship given the competitive nature of the idea. In such a scenario, the availability of justice would become a privilege of the lawyers who would decide as to what side of justice needs to be given to the party. In other words, the lawyers with their exclusive right to argue the cases in the court of laws would decide as to what justice was and what was not. Hence, Gandhi presented the alternative of conceptualising justice in terms of a notion whose vitality would be grounded in the larger values of human fellowship and solidarity as reflected in their daily behaviour of life.

Gandhi was appreciative of the liberal notion of citizenship as it entailed a distinct space for the people of a country with accompanying rights and duties in public sphere of their existence. However, Gandhi did not agree with the narrow and lop-sided understanding of the idea of citizenship in the liberal scholarship. He pointed out that the two fundamental flaws with the liberal idea of citizenship are its restrictive connotation and overemphasis on political dimension. In other words, Gandhi was apprehensive of the fact that a narrow definition of the idea of citizenship might create an unwarranted differentiation amongst the different people living in a country. The issue of others would become so prominent in the militant sections of society that the social cohesion might be in danger. Instead of having a legal notion of citizenship, Gandhi stood for social citizenship in a country in order to give each citizen ample opportunity to participate in the socio-economic and political processes of community life. Similarly, Gandhi was also not comfortable with the understanding of the
concept of citizenship in predominantly political sense as that would have jeopardised the basic essence of the concept of citizenship. Therefore, Gandhi suggested that conceptually the idea of citizenship need to be grounded in the holistic comprehension of the life of people encompassing not only political domain in terms of participation in political processes but also over-spilling in other domains of life as well. Such domains would necessarily consist of the personal virtues like self-discipline, social responsibilities such as concern for others, and moral dimensions like not only caring for the well-being of self but also understanding the needs and aspirations of other people as well.

10.4 CONSTITUTIONALISM

Besides the core value systems of liberalism, the views of Gandhi on various dimensions of constitutionalism also deserve proper attention. Undoubtedly, Gandhi was a believer in the liberal democratic constitutional system of government rooted in the active participation of the common people in the affairs of the state. But Gandhi, in his long though indirect experiences of the working of the British democratic system and its key components such as Parliament, was convinced of the numerous fallacies dogging the system. For instance, Gandhi was fiercely opposed to the conversion of constitutional government in a kind of ritual in which the periodic elections would produce a body which might have been unrepresentative of the views of the people. To Gandhi, such kinds of governments would have become democratic only in name as the absence of active participation of people in the political processes would devoid such a government the much desired legitimacy and would not reach out to the pulse of the common people. Thus, Gandhi was opposed to reducing the idea of constitutional government into a mere formality without substantive representation of the opinion of the people in the electoral process. Moreover, Gandhi also did not support notion of the British parliamentary system that the body is supreme to take any decision concerning any matter of British society and its people. Gandhi had famously branded the British parliament as nothing more than a prostitute who was ever ready to serve different masters depending on the exigencies of time. Thus, Gandhi was opposing the technical incarnation of the British parliament as he thought that being representative body of the British people, the parliament must also carry the moral weight of safeguarding both the material and moral interests of its electors. Alternatively, Gandhi wished the British parliament to act as the conscience-keeper of the masses in Britain.

The Gandhian conception of the idea of constitutionalism appeared to go beyond the instrumental value of the concept to provide it an ethical and moral value in order to become the vehicle of an orderly and public-spirited government in the true sense of the term. Gandhi never accepted the narrow understanding of the concept of constitutionalism as a form of government governed by the provisions of a constitution. To him, such kind of ideas did not differentiate between totalitarian and democratic forms of government as a constitution could exist in both the systems. In fact, in present times, no country in the world could have been found to be functioning without having some sort of legal document which might have been described as its constitution. Hence, reducing constitutionalism to mere existence of a constitution was a kind of mockery of the whole idea of constitutionalism for Gandhi. Taking a broader view of the idea of constitutionalism, Gandhi, therefore, argued for conceptualising constitutionalism in such a way that it truly reflects the basic ethos and essence of constitutionalism in letter and spirit. Such a conception of constitutionalism would have been possible only in case of focusing upon two critical components of the notion. One, the technical aspects of constitutionalism such as a codified constitution, a bill of rights, separation of powers, bicameral nature of legislature, decentralisation of powers, proper
functioning of the doctrine of checks and balances and efficient functioning of various organs of government must be in place in order to avoid any kind of misbalance in the proper functioning of the constitutionally ordained bodies and institutions. Two, and more importantly to Gandhi, the theory of constitutionalism must be operationalised in such a form that the various institutions of government should feel morally motivated to remain within limits in discharging their duties and the norms of constitutionalism be embedded as a high moral order in society. Thus, to Gandhi, the theory and practice of constitutionalism could never be evaluated in terms of technicalities of the matter. Rather, it needs to be assessed keeping in mind the operational dynamics in which the moral force behind the proper functioning of various institutions and organs of government need to be emphasised.

10.5 AN OVERVIEW

In conclusion, an exploration in Gandhi’s views on liberalism and constitutionalism appears to be a study in examining and retrofitting the moral foundations behind the legalistic orientations in the key concepts of the ideology. Given the upbringing of Gandhi in the liberal political order as prevailed in Britain, it was natural for Gandhi to have a first hand experience of the theory as well as practice of the ideology of liberalism and constitutionalism. However Gandhi’s religious and moralistic influences, as evident in most of his formulations, could not reconcile with the predominantly legalistic overtones in the main body of liberal philosophy. Therefore, the main thrust of Gandhi’s views on liberalism and constitutionalism have been nothing more than a critique of the theory for lacking a moral vision behind its key concepts on the one hand, and refurbishing its fundamental foundations with moral justification, on the other. But such an assertion may appear superficial if one looks at the basic dichotomy behind the understanding of liberalism by Gandhi and by the proponents of the theory itself. Historically, the rise and growth of liberal political philosophy in Europe was preceded by the dismantling of the decaying feudal economic order and its gradual replacement by the incipient capitalism. It was realised at that time that capitalism might not be able to be a viable economic order in place of feudalism unless it was not backed by intellectual explanations of its numerous operational principles. Thus, it was in this background that liberalism emerged as a solid philosophy to intellectually explain and justify the fundamental tenets of the capitalist system. Thus, it was obvious that liberalism found itself more as a philosophy of capitalist class to protect their class interests rather than aiming at bringing about a moral regeneration amongst the masses. As a result, the basic concepts of liberalism looked more like providing a legalistic, contractual, competitive, bargaining and serving class interests. Even the sense of accommodation in the doctrines of liberalism was prevalent only that much which was needed to keep the socio-economic and political order intact without putting it at risk of greater and sudden upheavals. Such one sided and seemingly self-driven postulates of liberalism could not convince Gandhi who was a moralist to the hilt and who gave predominance to ethical foundations of a theory over and above its legalistic or mechanical components.

10.6 SUMMARY

Gandhi provided some sort of improvisation in the theory of liberalism keeping in view the moralist imperatives of the ideology. But it must be pointed out that Gandhi’s brush with liberalism did not end just there. He also tried to detect the problem of over-abstraction in many key components of the theory of liberalism. For instance, the notion of justice as articulated in the domain of liberal theory appeared quite over-abstracted to Gandhi. He
found that the whole idea of justice was philosophised in such a way that its operationalisation could not be brought on the ground and the presence or absence of just order in society was assessed with reference to its existence either in the court of law or in the structuring of institutions of governance in a country. Hence, Gandhi criticised such an abstract notion of justice and called for the operation of justice in terms of deep rooting it in larger values of human fellowship and solidarity. Gandhi tried to enrich the ideology of liberalism and constitutionalism by imbuing them with ethical and moral perspectives.

### 10.7 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. What do you understand by Liberalism and Constitutionalism?
2. Write a note on Gandhi’s views on Constitutionalism.
3. Write short notes on:
   - Concept of Justice
   - Notion of Freedom

### SUGGESTED READINGS

5. Bidyut Chakrabarty and Rajendra Kumar Pandey, Modern Indian Political Thought: Text and Context, Sage, New Delhi, 2009.
7. Lewis, MD., Maker of Model India, D.C Heath, New York, 1965
UNIT 11  FASCISM

Structure

11.1 Introduction
   Aims and Objectives

11.2 Understanding Fascism

11.3 Gandhi on Fascism

11.4 Ultra-Nationalism

11.5 Towards a Totalitarian State

11.6 Corporatism

11.7 Fascism and Racialism

11.8 Summary

11.9 Terminal Questions
   Suggested Readings

11.1 INTRODUCTION

As profound political philosophies advocating distinct ways of life for the people, Gandhism and fascism stand poles apart despite having their evolution and growth situated in the circumstances prevailing in the first half of the twentieth century. Arguably, the intellectual roots of both the philosophies also appear to be common because they seemingly emerged as a reaction to modernity and its concomitant values and ideals that eventually became the hallmark of civilised life in the Anglo-Saxon countries. As Andrew Heywood argues, ‘[I]ndeed, fascism emerged very much as a revolt against modernity, against the ideas and values of the Enlightenment and the political creeds that it spawned’ (Heywood, 2003, p.214). Similarly, the foundational roots of Gandhism can also be traced to the classic Hind Swaraj and subsequent writings that Gandhi authored to provide a critique of the modern civilisation as manifested in Western Europe and based on the ideals and values emerging in the wake of Enlightenment in Europe. What is, however, interesting is the fact that the commonality between the two philosophies end just on the points of their time of birth and intellectual influences rooted in modernity in reaction to which they came into being. Afterwards, the two become so antithetical to each other, both in theory and practice, that any study in comparing the two would inevitably become a study in enumerating the unbridgeable contradictions underpinning the basic tenets of the two philosophies.

Aims and Objectives

This Unit will enable you to understand

- Gandhi’s views on Fascism
- Concept of Ultra-nationalism
- The relation between fascism and racialism.
11.2 UNDERSTANDING FASCISM

Before beginning the exercise of articulating Gandhi’s views on fascism which Gandhi sometimes also referred to as Hitlerism given its highhanded implementation by Hitler in Germany, it would be pertinent to understand the context in which Gandhi was prompted to comment on certain aspects of theory and practice of fascism. Undoubtedly, Gandhi was not a political commentator who would have written a commentary on the contemporary political philosophies having strong influences on the course of events of that particular period of time. Nor would Gandhi have conducted an exercise in evaluating the various ideologies in order to pick one of them as the best ideology to become the basis of conducting and moulding the broad contours of nationalist movement and the nature of future Indian polity. Thus, Gandhi’s encounter with the ideology of fascism was an incidental episode in the thought process of the Mahatma. In other words, during the Second World War, Gandhi keenly observed the unfolding sequence of events in the progress of war and commented on certain aspects of the ongoing events in the war if he felt strongly about that event. One such event happened to be the German invasion on the Soviet Union in 1941 at the peak of the war. This incident, besides changing the nature and dimensions of the war, brought about a sea change in the perception of the Indian nationalists regarding the nature of war. Majority, if not all, of them, including Gandhi, started perceiving the war not as an imperialist war fought amongst the big colonial powers to redraw the boundaries of the colonies but as a ‘people’s war’ whereby the basic values and ideas of humanity appeared to be at stake. Consequently, it was obvious for them to articulate their opinion and make efforts to defame and ensure the defeat of the fascist and Nazi forces involved in the war. While the Communist elements of the nationalist movement diverted their efforts from anti-British activities to support the British war efforts to ensure the defeat of Axis powers, Gandhi refrained from doing so. Instead, in order to express his strong opinion against the fascist and Nazi forces, he wrote a few letters to Hitler and published a number of articles in his journal *Harijan* on the proceedings of the Second World War that appeared quite insightful in conceptualising Gandhi’s ideas on fascism. In these letters, he not only condemned the ulterior motives of the fascist and Nazi forces in waging the war against the liberal democratic societies but also pointed out the fundamental and incontrovertible fallacies underpinning the core values of the philosophy of fascism. This Unit seeks to articulate the ideas of Gandhi on the philosophy of Fascism and Nazism, in the mode of derivative discourse based upon two sources. First, reading between the lines of the letters written by Gandhi to Hitler and his articles in *Harijan*, certain specific and pointed ideas of Gandhi on various dimensions of the philosophy of fascism could be easily discerned. Second, by juxtaposing the views of Gandhi on various other philosophies and virtues of civilised life vis-à-vis the core beliefs and principles of fascism, a derivative discussion in exploring the views of Gandhi on fascism could also be made with a fair degree of authenticity. In other words, the Unit attempts to provide a Gandhian critique of the ideology of fascism and Nazism as practised in the countries like Italy and Germany in the times of the Second World War under the leadership of Mussolini and Hitler respectively.

11.3 GANDHI ON FASCISM

As explained earlier, it was never a concern of Gandhi to undertake an intellectual examination of the basic elements of Fascism or, for that matter, any political philosophy, given his preoccupation with evolving and practising a suitable method of peaceful struggle against the British rule in India. However, the worldview presented by Gandhi through his numerous
writings and speeches, provide a perfect lens to discern and examine the basic elements of the fascism in order to articulate the views of Gandhi on fascism.

**Anti-Rationalism:** Anti-rationalism constitutes a cardinal principle of fascism. Conceptually, anti-rationalism may be understood as the anti-thesis of the entire intellectual framework evolved in the wake of Enlightenment. It seeks absolute negation of the ideas such as ‘universal reason, natural goodness and inevitable progress’ that appear to provide foundational basis of the modern civilised life. As against this, rejecting the values and ideals of Enlightenment, fascism puts premium on the seemingly irrational variables such as the soul, emotions and instincts. It refutes the claim that rationality and universal reason would do any good to humanity because they ingrain the element of division amongst the people. It called for anti-intellectualism as intellectual explorations by the common people are likely to distort the vision of the community regarding what is good for society and state. Hence, the favourite slogans of fascism are ‘Action, not talk’ and ‘Inactivity is death’ which exhort the people for action in place of abstract contemplation and hollow reasoning rooted in idle minds in society. Moreover, by negating the idea of universal reason, fascism sought to embed its basic elements in particular history, culture and the notion of organic community that lay at the root of emergence of narrow nationalism and sinister ideas of racial superiority amongst the followers of fascist ideology.

The anti-rationalist stance of fascism does not apparently come into total conflict with the views of Gandhi because he himself was a great critique of the idea of absolute rationality and extreme intellectualism. Being a believer in the innate virtues and instincts emanating from the human soul and emotions, Gandhi criticised the idea of rationality and intellectualism to the extent that they refuse to recognise the inherent goodness in these faculties of human personality. In fact, the whole edifice of the Satyagraha of Gandhi was built upon what he calls the ‘soul force.’ As he argued, ‘I have come to this fundamental conclusion that if you want something really important to be done, you must not merely satisfy the reason, you must move the heart also’ (CWMG, xlvi, p.189). But the Gandhian conception of anti-rationality acts as a critique of the fascist anti-rationality, at least, on three grounds. First, Gandhi believed in the virtues of soul, heart and emotions in a universalistic sense of the terms and did not seek a selective application of appeal to subjective faculties in order to serve a selfish purpose. As against this, argued Heywood, ‘[W]hat is distinctive about fascism is not its appeal to non-rational drives and emotions, but rather the specific range of beliefs and values through which it attempts to engage the emotions and generate political activism’ (Heywood, 2003, p.219). Second, the anti-rationality of fascism got reflection in its total rejection of almost everything that could have been taken to be benchmark of modern liberal societies. In other words, the core of non-rationality of fascism lied in deconstructing and demolishing the established order in society instead of presenting a constructive overview of an alternative vision of socio-political order. Unlike this, Gandhi’s non-rationality was essentially constructive as it aimed at arousing the soul force of the human beings to create an alternative worldview in which the both head and heart co-exist in a symbiotic relationship. To Gandhi, the real and universal happiness in society could be ensured only by conjoining both the rational and emotional components of human life which seems to be deficient in the Western societies with the former outweighing the latter. Finally, the fascist disbelief in universal reason sowed the seeds of parochial and exclusivist perception of one’s culture, history and organic community life. As a result, the narrow and pernicious ideas of racial superiority, ultra-nationalism and clamour for expanding one’s geographical space became part of the fascist lexicon. Disapproving such a conception, the Gandhian belief in universal reason was the foundation stone on which he built up his theory
of universal truth and Satyagraha. To Gandhi, the inherent unity and inclusiveness amongst the people in various countries of the world need to be the focal point of any conceptualisation of a global order. Indeed, Gandhi was highly critical of the German genocide of the Jews in the name of social purging of Germany.

A core belief of fascism is argued to be its conception of constant struggle in society in order to weed out the undeserving and unsustainable elements of society. In other words, the fascism believed that only fittest and deserving people would have a rightful place in society and the rest of the humanity be prepared to perish in due course of time sooner than later. For instance, Hitler quite often used to announce that ‘victory is to the strong and the weak must go to the wall.’ In their infatuation with struggle, the fascists afforded war a place of prominence in the discourses on human behaviour by raising slogans like ‘war is to men what maternity is to women’ and branding war as ‘an unalterable law of the whole of life.’ So, going by this unwavering belief of fascism in the virtues of unending struggle and war, it was not surprising for the forces having belief in fascist ideology to push the humanity into the vortex of war in 1939. But to Gandhi, such a view of human life and social dynamics would have been nothing than playing with fire. He never subscribed to the nihilist ideas of struggle and war as the eternal truths of life that remain unavoidable. Gandhi was a believer in the natural tendency and virtue of the human being to live in peace without any unprovoked orientation for struggle or war. Arguing for peaceful co-existence of various people irrespective of their outwardly differentiations in terms of race, language, religion, sex or place of residence, he called for the resolution of any dispute or disagreement through the use of soul-force embedded in self-suffering rather than the force of gun or sword. As he pointed out, ‘…if you want something really important to be done, you must not merely satisfy the reason, you must move the heart also. The appeal of reason is more to the head, but the penetration of the heart comes from suffering. It opens up the inner understanding in man. Suffering is the badge of the human race, not the sword.’ Further, in his writings published during the proceedings of the Second World War, Gandhi was very critical of the war, branding it as the result of the inherent contradictions and rivalry amongst the imperialist and colonial countries of Europe. He argued for the end of colonial and imperialist aspirations amongst the various countries and immediate liberation of the colonies in all parts of the world. Thus, the core beliefs of fascism in the virtues of unending struggle and war as an instrument of reordering the things in the world never stood the scrutiny of Gandhi’s views on war and peace.

Leadership: Another crucial element of fascism appears to be its over-emphasis on the role of leadership in leading the masses towards rechristening the society on the lines of the fascist ideology. Moreover, the nature of leadership in fascist framework is overwhelmingly elitist and unabashedly patriarchal. Such characteristics of fascism are reflected in the oft-repeated rhetoric of its proponents. For instance, while formulating the slogan ‘victory to the strong and the weak must go to the wall’, Hitler, in a way, was underlining the basic features of the fascist leadership that needs to be strong on all counts including physical, mental, social, economic and behavioural. Similarly, Mussolini’s assertion that ‘war is to men what maternity is to women’ is reflective of the firm conviction of the fascist ideology that the domain of women is confined to only delivering babies and take care of the domestic affairs of the family. So, in fascist formulations, the exalted position of leadership in society must be confined to the echelons of elite and men only to the total exclusion of the plebeian and women. Such an outlook towards social and political issues was taken to its logical conclusion with the consolidation of the principles that all the powers and authority emanates from the personality of the leader and that leader can do no wrong in any eventuality. Such
a perception of leadership was never approved by Gandhi. Being a believer in participative enterprise, Gandhi was always prone to give equal, if not more, weightage to the views and role play of the followers. Moreover, to Gandhi, the sustenance of any movement or expedition predominantly depends on the resilience of the common people participating in the movement. Women always constituted the key component of each and every movement pioneered by Gandhi in the course of Indian National Movement. Above all, adequate democratic space was afforded by Gandhi to all to air their views on the issues and problems noticed with the ideas and strategy of the leader. Hence, Gandhi’s views on leadership and its characteristics appear to be in stark contrast with the core concerns of fascism on the issue.

**Place for Socialism?** Arguably, the dynamics of political expediency inspired the proponents of fascism to adopt the ideology of socialism as an instrument of regulating the economic life of the people in society. In other words, in fascist lexicon, the ideology of socialism was foisted as a kind of deceptive measure aimed at giving an impression in the minds of the common people that the government was regulating the economic affairs in a very strict manner in order to ensure the alleviation of their economic miseries. But in reality, the bogey of socialism was raised with the twin purposes of securing the unflinching support of the socialist and communist elements in society for the cause of fascism, and unleashing a reign of terror on the capitalist elements in society who were opposing the fascism as the ruling ideology in Italy and Germany. Thus, socialism was adopted as a part of the fascist game plan to consolidate the hold of fascism over the various sections of society in the name of bringing about a noble economic restructuring of society in accordance with the principles of socialism. In this context, it would be interesting to discern the views of Gandhi both on the ideology of socialism per se and the fascist appropriation of the socialist philosophy for their sinister gains. Though Gandhi was not a doctrinaire socialist in the sense other Indian nationalists such as Nehru and Bose were, Gandhi, nonetheless, stood for the cause of the socio-economic upliftment of the common people through various concerted efforts and measures rooted even in the ideology of socialism. So, socialism as an ideology might not be appealing for Gandhi but it was all right if used as a policy of ameliorating the socio-economic conditions of the people. But Gandhi would have been very critical of the misappropriation of the ideology of socialism for sinister advantages in the ideology of fascism.

11.4 ULTRA-NATIONALISM

The penchant of fascism for ultra-nationalism could also not stand the critique of Gandhi for such kind of chauvinistic and expansionist overtones in any ideology. Indeed, the very birth of the philosophy of fascism may partly be traced to its exploitation of the nationalist sentiments of the people in Italy in the aftermath of the First World War when the territorial aspirations of that country were not fulfilled at the Paris Peace Conference. Subsequently, as an ideology, fascism seeks to thrive on the feeling of perceived superiority of the race that occupies the geographical entity called a nation. More importantly, the vicious conceptualisation of nationalism in fascist discourse is based on a strong disrespect for distinctive cultures or national traditions of other people usually branding them as inferior in comparison to the culture or national tradition of the fascist country. Hence, the ultra nationalism of fascism aims to attain the twin goals of national regeneration on the one hand, and adoption of belligerent policies of animosity and discord with its neighbours. As Heywood points out, ‘[A]ll fascist movements therefore highlight the moral bankruptcy and cultural decadence of modern society, but proclaim the possibility of rejuvenation, offering
the image of the nation ‘rising phoenix-like from the ashes.’ The most objectionable logic of national regeneration in fascism is necessarily ‘the assertion of power over other nations through expansionism, war and conquest.’ But these formulations of fascism would have fallen flat in the face of pacifist and cosmopolitan nature of Gandhi’s ideas of nationalism. To Gandhi, nationalism needs to be understood in terms of independence, self-respect and dignity of a nation as part of the broader comity of other nations. National regeneration essentially entails inner-purification and development of a country. Hence, Gandhi would vehemently criticise the fascist ideology for fomenting the emotions of war, conquest and expansionism in the name of ‘integral nationalism.’

11.5 TOWARDS A TOTALITARIAN STATE

The fascist philosophy argues for the establishment of a totalitarian state encompassing within itself almost all aspects of human life in society leaving no room for independent functioning for the individuals. Such an idea was represented by the fascist dictum: ‘Everything for the state; nothing against the state; nothing outside the state.’ In fascist ideology, the idea of totalitarian state may be taken to portray two interrelated implications: one, it leads to the creation of a typical fascist state in which the human personality is moulded in a unique shape resulting in the emergence of what is called as the ‘fascist man.’ The basic characteristic of such a fascist man is his unflinching loyalty and support to the leader in an infinite manner in which he is ready to dissolve his personality into the personality of the leader for whose cause he would even prepare to lay his life. Two, as a result, such a conceptualisation of man in fascist state ‘violates the liberal idea of a distinction between the state and civil society. An unmediated relationship between the leader and his people implies active participation and total commitment on the part of citizens; in effect, the politicization of the masses.’ Hence, in the fascist formulation, the idea of totalitarian state occupies the central position which would not have been proper in Gandhi’s view. Gandhi, as a liberal thinker, believed in the minimum space for the functioning of state so that the people at large would get maximum possible operational sphere for the fullest development of their personality. He not only stood for the clear cut distinction between the public and private spheres of the social interactions amongst various institutions of government, but also paid more weightage to the private sphere of the individuals at the cost of the authoritarian sphere of the state. Gandhi’s views, thus, on the nature of state in fascism would have been totally incompatible as Gandhi would never allow the state to monopolise the personality of an individual for the cause of the leader.

11.6 CORPORATISM

In the economic sphere of life, fascism is marked by its emphasis on what is described as ‘corporatism’ to evolve a distinct economic system to regulate the economic life of the people in the fascist society. Conceptually, in fascist discourse, corporatism stands for a typical economic system distinct from both free market economic system as well as the socialist one. It argues for an economic system in which the labour and the capital are not taken to be antithetical to each other; rather, they are supposed to co-exist with each other in a state of spiritually and organically unified whole. Keeping in view the demands of the fascist state and society, corporatism exhorts both the labour and capital to underplay the class dynamics in society and join hands together to produce in order to meet the economic needs of the people. Thus, the idea of corporatism seeks to minimise the class character of society and puts the burden of mediating the class relations between the labour and
capital on the state. In turn, the state ensures that the sectional interests in society are surrendered in favour of the national interest which becomes paramount in the fascist framework of life. In practice, however, the idea of corporatism gets transformed into the complete control of all economic activities in society by the state to the extent of even robbing people of their economic possessions to meet their minimum needs of life. Though, the idea of corporatism might appear near to the Gandhian idea of trusteeship in which Gandhi seeks to manage the economic activities and resources of society in the form of a trust managed by the private individuals, it differs from the latter in the sense of its total subordination of individual interests to the interests of the state. Hence, Gandhi would always criticise the monopolisation of the economic activities of people in the hands of state with a view to further the totalitarian pursuits of state to penetrate and control each and every sphere of human life in society.

11.7 FASCISM AND RACIALISM

The operationalisation of fascist ideology in various countries produced a number of modifications of the original formulations of the fascist philosophy as propounded by Italian leader Mussolini. One such modification appears to be the element of racialism that became very prominent in the operationalisation of the theory in Germany but was almost absent in its articulation in Italy. In other words, while racialism was not perceived to be a crucial element of the ideology of fascism when it was theorised and practised in Italy, it became one of the most critical components of the fascist philosophy as practised in Germany. Theoretically, the notion of racialism is based on the belief that there exist plausible distinctions amongst the human beings in different parts of the world on the basis of the biological or genetic differentiations amongst them. Such racial differentiations may be taken to be the basis of arriving at political or social conclusions to formulate the policy of a state or individuals towards others. This understanding of racialism was adopted by Hitler as his state policy to pronounce the racial superiority of the German race calling them as Aryan or superior race in comparison to others, and more particularly the Jews. As a result, he not only waged the war against a number of countries but also carried out massive genocide of the Jews in Germany. This was taken very strongly by Gandhi who wrote long letters to Hitler bringing out the fallacies of his assumptions of racial superiority and his crimes against humanity by butchering innocent Jews in the name of social purging of Germany. Thus, Gandhi came down heavily upon Hitlerism and called for unified and concerted efforts to defeat the forces unleashed by Hitler or supporting what he called Hitlerism. However, Gandhi was clear that ‘Hitlerism will never be defeated by counter-Hitlerism. It can only breed superior Hitlerism raised to ninth degree. What is going on before our eyes is a demonstration of the futility of violence as also of Hitlerism’ (Jack, 1956, p.337). Hence, Gandhi suggested the use of soul-force to counter the onslaught of Hitlerism on the Jews. He called upon the Jews in Germany to go for self-sufferings in the face of imminent death in the gas chambers at the hands of the Nazi officials. He suggested that such a self-suffering would definitely appeal to the soul of the Nazi officials as well as Hitler as a result of which he would be persuaded to stop his cruelty upon the innocent people. However, a number of Jews wrote in reply to Gandhi pointing out the seeming futility of soul-force before Hitler as he would never allow anybody to undergo self-suffering for long enough duration to have any discernible and fruitful impact on the emotions and sentiments of Hitler as a result of which he would have been persuaded to abandon his massacre of the innocent Jews in Germany.
Religion: A basic incompatibility between the perceptions of fascism and Gandhi appears to be obvious on the issue of religion. Fascism, owing to its varying understanding and operationalisation in different countries, could not claim a uniform understanding of the role of religion in the society. Hence, one strand of fascism believes in the futility of religion and religious organisations such as church because they could emerge as an alternative centre of power in state and claim allegiance of the people in the name of the supreme authority of God. But some other fascists regarded religion as some kind of loose instrument in the hands of the state to instill order and loyalty amongst the people. In fact, they go to the extent of using religious style of language in provoking the need for sacrifice, redemption and spiritual virtue to consolidate the supremacy of state in regulating the affairs of the society. Moreover, the religious discourses were also used to demean and attack materialism, consumerism and hedonism as having potential to corrupt the moral basis of society as a result of which the fascist state would not be able to aspire for attaining the nationalist aspirations of the people. Such an immoral and selfish perception of religion was totally unacceptable to Gandhi who was very particular in presenting religion as a personal matter of the individuals. To Gandhi, religion provides the basis of moral character of society and in the absence of religion, the moral regeneration of society would be well nigh impossible. He argued for purity of religious perceptions as any sort of motives in conceptualising religion would make it prone to be misused at the hands of the unscrupulous elements of society. Hence, Gandhi would not only negate the fascist understanding of religion but also call for its restoration in society as part of the personal domain of the people through which they could aspire for their moral emancipation in the wake of the fascist impurities introduced in society by the rulers.

11.8 SUMMARY

In conclusion, it may be argued that Gandhi’s encounter with the philosophy of fascism was only incidental. Consequently, it was not possible for him to study and provide a reasoned and detailed analysis of the whole philosophy of fascism as described and practised by the leaders such as Mussolini and Hitler. The operational part of fascism came to the knowledge of Gandhi during the course of events during the Second World War. Given Gandhi’s perceptive monitoring of the unfolding situations during the war, he was strongly drawn into the theory and practice of fascism in the wake of the German attack on Soviet Union in 1941 and the series of atrocities, including massacre being committed against the Jews in Germany. As a result, he wrote a few letters and series of articles in his journal to articulate his understanding and feelings on the theoretical and practical aspects of fascism. In these writings, he not only criticised the fallacious convictions of fascism regarding the human nature, personality of individuals and the various dimensions of socio-economic and political life of people in the fascist state but also craved for suggesting ways and means to meet the challenges presented by the naked run of fascism in the world. In this context, it is interesting to note that Gandhi’s response to the challenges posed by fascism remained embedded in his basic formulations of Satyagraha and peaceful protest. Therefore, he argued that the spree of violence, war and atrocities unleashed by fascism and Hitlerism on the innocent people and countries of the world could not be countered by equal degree of violence, war and atrocities. Instead, the method of Satyagraha and self-suffering needed to be practised to arouse the soul-force of the fascist forces in order to bring about a change of heart in them. However, the suggestion of Gandhi was not taken positively by the Jews given the typical circumstances prevailing in Germany under Hitler. As a Jewish activist pointed out to Gandhi, ‘a Jewish Gandhi in Germany, should one arise, could function for
about five minutes and would be promptly taken to the guillotine.’ But Gandhi stuck to his stand and argued that if the death was so imminent at the hands of Hitler, the Jewish people could undertake self-suffering by choosing the manner of their death which would have shaken Hitler from his slumber. Thus, despite apparent typicality of the situations prevailing in Germany in the wake of fascism and Hitlerism, Gandhi’s comments and suggestions on the various dimensions of the problem provided meaningful insight to construct a derivative discourse for illustrating Gandhi’s views on fascism and Hitlerism.

### 11.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. What do you understand by Fascism?
2. What were the views of Gandhi on Fascism?
3. Examine the crucial link between fascism and racialism.

### SUGGESTED READINGS

7. Arendt, Hannah., The Origins of Totalitarianism, Cleveland, 1962

(Footnotes)

1 Though at the levels of both theoretical perspectives and practical manifestations, fascism and Nazism cannot be taken to be identical, for the sake of clarity and consistency, the Nazism has been understood as similar to fascism in so far as the views of Gandhi on that particular school of thought is concerned. For the finer points of distinction between fascism and Nazism, see Andrew Heywood, Political Ideologies (Third Edition), Palgrave, Houndmills, 2003, p. 236.

2 The understanding of the basic elements of Fascism for purposes of this chapter is drawn primarily on, Andrew Heywood, Political Ideologies (Third Edition), Palgrave, Houndmills, 2003, pp. 214-239.
UNIT 12  GANDHI’S VIEWS ON SOCIALISM AND COMMUNISM

Structure
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   Aims and Objectives
12.2  Gandhi’s Critique of Socialism and Communism
12.3  Social Transformation
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12.1  INTRODUCTION

In the realm of modern Indian political thought, numerous ideologies and philosophies have been able to influence the thinking of the Indian thinkers to a great extent. Amongst such ideologies, the socialism and communism stand out prominently. In fact, there was a time when a whole generation of prominent Indian thinkers, a few exceptions notwithstanding, took socialism and communism as the principal determining factor of their philosophical contemplations. For instance, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose, Acharya Narendra Deva, Ram Manohar Lohia, Jayaprakash Narayan, M.N. Roy and many others took the ideology of socialism and communism as the starting point of their socio-political thought. In the process of conceptualising and articulating their socio-political thoughts, while many of them discarded the ideology of socialism and communism as not conducive to the needs and circumstances of the countries like India, many of them, particularly Nehru tried to modify the ideology to suit the requirements of the country. Subsequently, India was chartered on a course of development that was supposed to establish a socialist pattern of society in the country. However, Gandhi was one of the few exceptions of the leaders who could never imbibe the philosophy of socialism and communism as the guiding ideology of their socio-political thought. But this does not mean that Gandhi was not able to appreciate the remarkable features of the socialism and communism particularly their concern for the virtues like equality and fulfillment of the basic needs of the people. What appears remarkable in his views on socialism and communism is the fact that despite appreciating the underlying humanist orientations of these philosophies, he was convinced with the concomitant methodology of achieving the noble objectives inherent in them. Therefore, at the times when the political thinking in the country appeared poised for a critical debate on the plausibility of adopting the socialist ends and means to steer the post-independent India on the course of development, Gandhi offered quite insightful critiques of the totalitarian
tendencies inherent in these philosophies. He argued that the essence of socialism and communism, no doubt, lies in the economic emancipation of the people but the problem lies with its total neglect of the moral dimensions of the human life on the one hand, and almost totally unacceptable means of attaining the objective of establishing a socialist society through violent means, on the other. This Unit, thus, attempts to provide a critical understanding of Gandhi’s views on socialism and communism as political ideologies. It needs to be clarified that despite having certain subtle differences, this Unit takes socialism and communism as somewhat similar ideology based on the philosophical formulations of various thinkers the most prominent of which is Karl Marx.

Aims and Objectives

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand

- The meaning of socialism and communism
- Gandhi’s critique of these ideologies
- The mode of social transformation, redistribution of power and politics, economic life etc. propounded by these ideologies.

12.2 GANDHI’S CRITIQUE OF SOCIALISM AND COMMUNISM

While articulating Gandhi’s views on socialism and communism, it is important to point out that Gandhi criticised them at the levels of both as a political philosophy as well as an economic strategy to reorder the economic contours of a society. What Gandhi found appreciable in socialism and communism was their concern for the masses in terms of making provisions for fulfillment of the basic needs of the people. But beyond that, Gandhi happens to be a staunch critic of socialism and communism. That is why, despite having declared Nehru as his political heir, he quite often entered into fierce debate with Nehru on the merits of socialism as an appropriate ideology to pattern the future course of activities of the country on the same. Indeed, most, if not all, of the major socio-economic, political, religious and moral formulations of socialism and communism appeared antithetical to the ideological orientations of Gandhi. Given the basis of Gandhi’s socio-economic, political and religious ideas in the moral emancipation of the masses, it was quite natural that they ran counter to the formulations of socialism and communism as they seek to ensure socio-economic emancipation of the people. For instance, while the notion of equality of Gandhi was apparently the provision of equal ethical and moral independence to all in order to secure the development of their soul and spirit, it was the primary concern of the socialism and communism to afford economic and material equality to all in such a way that the basic needs of each individual in society could be fulfilled. Thus, in Gandhi, the basic unit of analysis and theorisation appears to be the individual whose moral emancipation would presumably lead to the moral upliftment of the society as a whole. But in the socialist discourse, community appears as the unit of social reorganisation as a result of which the individual identity and existence evaporates into its submergence with the community as a whole. As such, a collectivist conceptualisation of the individual and his or her role in society would have been unacceptable to Gandhi; it was thus natural that Gandhi emerged as one of the staunchest critics of the theory and practice of socialism and communism in various parts of the world.
As a political philosophy, socialism and communism earned the critique of Gandhi right from their conceptualisation of the nature of men to their ideal of establishing a classless and stateless society. Gandhi criticised them, like his critique of liberalism, for devaluing the basic essence of human personality by taking it as essentially selfish and driven by motivated pursuits for material gains in society. In a way, Gandhi discredited the entire philosophy of historical materialism of socialism as it was thought to draw its sustenance from a fallacious notion of human beings. Conceptually, socialism and communism sought to explain the evolution of human civilisation over the centuries with the formulation of historical materialism. These philosophies apparently tried to establish that the basic pursuits of each and every human being in society are to gain material resources and physical comforts. However, the departure of human life from the state of nature to that of man-made system led to the creation of two distinct classes in society: the haves and have nots. Moreover, in accordance with the changing nature of relations between the haves and have nots, the nature of socio-economic relations also underwent subtle transformations as well, whose latest incarnation could be seen in the form of the capitalism. The underlying argument of this classic Marxist formulation was that human nature was inherently materialistic and selfish which led to the perpetuation of the exploitation of one class of people at the hands of other. But given the moralist and religious overtones of Gandhian thought, it would have been obvious that Gandhi would have rejected such a description of human nature. He argued that taking human being as fundamentally selfish and materialist was a patently wrong preposition that would have produced equally wrong conclusions. Therefore, in place of Marxist characterisation of human being as selfish and materialist, Gandhi argued for the selfless and spiritual nature of human personality. He firmly believed that human beings inherently carried a positive orientation rooted in his or her spiritual outlook to life as a result of which material considerations had only limited role to play in determining the course of the human life. Thus, to seek plausible and lasting solutions to the difficulties being faced by the human beings in present times, it was important that the positive moralist and spiritual instincts of human personality needed to be invoked.

12.3 SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

An interrelated argument of the philosophy of socialism and communism on the issue of social transformation relates to the violent method of doing so. In other words, in Marxist discourse, the transformation of capitalist order into socialist one and eventually a classless and stateless society would be marked by the violent methods of protest that the have nots would take recourse to in ousting the capitalists from the hegemonic positions in society. Thus, class-struggle emerged as the focal point of communist ideology which argued for a violent revolution as the plausible methodology of bringing about communist revolution in the capitalist societies. This formulation of communism came in sharp conflict with the ultimate virtue of Gandhian philosophy, for example, ahimsa or non-violence. Coming down heavily on the communists for being so fond of violence and bloodshed, Gandhi argued that such an approach in solving a problem could never bring a long lasting and morally appropriate transformation in society. To him, the only plausible method of transforming the state of things in society or to bring about a change of heart in an individual, the recourse should be taken only to the soul-force whose infallibility was a question of supreme faith for Gandhi.

Gandhi was not even convinced with the peaceful methods of socio-economic reconstruction in the socialist countries. For instance, Gandhi was quite opposed to the strategy of socio-economic development adopted in the Soviet Union under the leadership of Stalin. His
distaste for regimented nature of life in society in which each and every activity of the common people would be decided by the state apparatus was very obvious. Moreover, even if such a system of socio-economic life leads to relative peace and tranquility in society and results in bumper production of goods and services, that would not be acceptable to Gandhi. The fundamental flaw with such a system was the negation of moral right of the individuals to carry out the basic chores of their life as per their own volitions. Therefore, to Gandhi, the Soviet model of socio-economic and political life, though peaceful, was morally demeaning and devaluing the dignity of human personality as the coercive methods of getting them to do the things that they might not have done otherwise robbed that system of its moral strength. As a result, it suffered from the same kind of moral bankruptcy that the capitalist system of life would have suffered.

Having criticised the composition of power element in communist societies, Gandhi argued for conceptualisation and operationalisation of such a model of socio-economic and political mobilisation in society that could have achieved the desired results without compromising with the personal freedom and moral high pedestal of the people. In this regard, his ideas on the art of non-violence and its operationalisation in the Indian circumstances appeared quite relevant. By opting for a non-violent method of mobilising the masses to rise against the illegal, illegitimate, immoral and unacceptable colonial rule in the country, Gandhi called upon the moral courage of a defeated and relegated mass of people. As a result, when the massive upsurge of people started erupting on the streets and by-lanes of the countryside, without any coercive or material provocations, the mighty colonial rulers could not just hold on and they had to bow before the moral convictions of the people that the British rule in India was morally undesirable. To Gandhi, the communist path of violent and immoral methods of bringing about change in society would not have been morally acceptable and practically long-lasting.

The communist formulation of dividing the society into two mutually opposing classes of haves and have notes came in for strong denouncement by Gandhi. He argued that the material bases in terms of possessing or not possessing property in society could not become the sound criterion of classifying people. To him, the non-ownership of the means of production could never be the sure basis for someone to become a true socialist. Alternatively, he suggested that even the richest person in society could also become socialist provided he is not attached with his material possessions in such a way that that becomes prejudicial to the larger interests of the common people in society. Therefore, to Gandhi, the appropriate way to assess the socialist credentials of an individual was not to look at his material and physical possessions but to test his orientations towards truth, non-violence, morality, equality and sense of care towards others.

### 12.4 REDISTRIBUTION OF POWER

The socialist concern for redistribution of power and resources in society was also shared by Gandhi. He supported the argument of the socialists that socio-economic and political interactions between individuals in society should be marked by the sense of equality and mutual respect for each other. However, Gandhi differed with the socialists in so far as the ways and means of realising the ideal of equality and mutual respect for each other was concerned. The socialists were of the firm belief that the holders of power and privileges in society would neither be ready to relinquish their possessions so easily nor so quickly. Therefore, their favoured course of action appeared to be the violent methods of forcible capture of the privileges and possessions of the capitalists on the one hand, and their torture
and eventual massacre in case of protest and revenge, on the other. The essence of the socialist philosophy lied in taking the capitalists and other well off sections of society as inherently static and unresponsive and, thus, only violent and coercive methods would serve the purpose of removing them from their seats of power and possessions. But Gandhi refused to accept either the socialist perception regarding the nature and attitude of the capitalist class nor was he supportive, even an inch, of the idea of using violent and coercive methods of getting rid of their power, possessions and even personality. In contrast, Gandhi suggested that nobody is inherently good or bad. The nature and attitude of an individual was determined by his or her social upbringing and worldly environment. Yet, the soul of every individual is pious and prone to listen to the moral urgings of the other individuals in society. Therefore, instead of taking somebody’s bad nature and ill attitude for granted, efforts must be made to appeal to the soul of that individual so that his moral and spiritual longings could have been aroused. Once an individual listens to his or her moral urges, the apparent stubbornness starts melting away gradually and that person gets ready to partake with his or her belongings including power and possessions in such a way that socio-economic and political systems are redrawn to serve the common interests of the society.

Gandhi was also critical of the use of socialism as a fashionable dogma by a few individuals to show their false concern for the poor and downtrodden sections of the society. He once chided a group of students who came across him portraying themselves as icons of socialism despite being opulently rich and enjoying all sorts of amenities and comforts including hiring poor people as slaves to serve them in their daily chores or activities. He took exception to the duality of intellectual profession and practical manifestation of socialism in those students and called upon them to be true to their moral and spiritual character and convictions. Only then, can they could become true socialists.

To Gandhi, the epicentre of socialist activities must be the daridranarayana (poorest of the poor) or the most suppressed and miserable person in society. Unless socialism is informed by such humanitarian concerns for the daridranarayana, it would not be able to become an all encompassing philosophy promising a happy and satisfying life for the people. He was sure that if communism sought to present itself only as an economic ideology sans other aspects, particularly moral dimensions of social conduct, it would prove to be sterile. Instead, he pointed out that in his conception, socialism, and for that matter any other philosophy of life needed to be imbued with love and care for the daridranarayana along with the efforts for providing a distinct identity for such people in the social interactions. Socialism, for Gandhi, would be more a code of moral conduct in society rather than an economic ideology or a political philosophy aimed at eliminating the capitalist system from the world.

### 12.5 Dictatorship of the Proletariat

In the political scheme of things under socialism, the idea of dictatorship of the proletariat appeared to be a formidable concept. But to Gandhi, the whole notion of dictatorship of proletariat seemed to be a contrast of the terms. While on the one hand, the focus of socialism had overwhelmingly been on the issues of social and economic democracy with its major thrust on the eradication of the class and other sorts of distinctions in society, how could have it thought of any kind of dictatorship, on the other. In other words, the very purpose of liberating people from the exploitative tentacles of capitalism would have been defeated with the establishment of dictatorship, even of proletariat, because that would again create wedges in society amongst the rulers and ruled classes of the people. Moreover,
Gandhi noted that the whole concept of dictatorship smacked of moral degeneration of both rulers and the ruled as neither of them should either think of or appreciate the idea of establishing any kind of dictatorship in society as doing so would complicate the problems of moral rejuvenation in societal interactions amongst various groups of people.

The fallacy of the idea of dictatorship of proletariat and the moral bankruptcy of the resultant socio-economic and political system of such a society was also strongly emphasised by Gandhi. He did not agree with the conviction of the socialists that the dictatorship would be that of proletariat given the typical dynamics of state and government in modern times. Even if it was a proletariat dictatorship, the social cleavages amongst the various groups of people would be obvious as no government could have accommodated each and every interest in the power sharing of the state. Moreover, the size of governmental organisation and the increasingly specialised nature of conducting the businesses of government would necessitate the gradual transfer of reigns of running the government from the hands of the proletariat into the hands of the specialised and elitist bureaucratic clique. In due course of time, this clique would join hands with other exclusivist formations such as army and big industrial land business magnates to evolve a typical ruling echelon that would enjoy all the powers of government and run the business of government to serve their interests instead of the interests of the masses. And, all such immoral and illegitimate misdeeds would be carried out in the name of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The moral discomfiture of the notion of dictatorship of proletariat also became distinct to Gandhi because of the legitimacy and legality accorded to the cult of violence in the socialist philosophy. In other words, Gandhi believed that by sanctioning the use of violence and eulogising the revolutionary methods of transforming the existing social order, socialism had automatically put itself in relative disadvantage as any superior force could have crushed it without even an iota of repentance on its part. What, however, appeared more alarming to Gandhi was the probability of reliance on violence as the only plausible means of resolving the conflicts in society even under the dictatorship of proletariat that might eventually lead to the spiralling of violence and moral turpitude becoming the norm of the day. Such a state of affairs appeared more dangerous given the dictum that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Therefore, in such a scenario, as there would be no check to balance the use of powers in the hands of the dictators working under the garb of proletariat class, it would be a distinct possibility that truth and morality would become the first casualty of the predating tactics of the self-serving proletariats.

Even the post-revolution socialist idea of a proletariat society was not appealing to Gandhi as he found that quite lop-sided and one-dimensional. To Gandhi, the socialist philosophy could not rise above its overbearing preoccupation with the economic aspects of the life of people. Its materialistic interpretation of history so much blurred the vision of even the future dispensation of the life of people that they remained confined to banishing the capitalist class in society and its replacement with the proletariat class as the ruling class. Moreover, in the socialist state, the people would be asked to collectively work in the farms and factories in such a way that they produce bumper number of things for state which, in turn, would take care of their basic economic and materialistic needs. In such a conceptualisation of human life, Gandhi found a hidden agenda of the socialist power holders to shield away from the people all other aspects of social conduct so that their ruling cycle moved on continuously.

As against this, Gandhi perceived the dynamics of human life consisting of a variety of aspects in the nature of social, economic, political, cultural, religious and moral, amongst
others. He felt that all these aspects have their own unique place in providing a fulsome meaning and definition to the life of people. Even a slight absence or even compromise with any of these aspects would invariably lead to lopsidedness in the overall system of life in society. Therefore, Gandhi argued that a mere fulfilling of the basic economic and material necessities of life of people would never be able to provide them the propitious conditions to develop their self to the fullest possible degree given the inadequacy of circumstances for the same. Rather, excess engagement of the people with the economic, material, production-oriented and entrepreneurial activities would eventually reduce them to be mere cog in the machine of the socialist production. That would produce some sort of debilitating tendencies amongst the people as a result of which they would not be able to look beyond their factories, industries and workshops to the formidable detriment of not only their self but also the variegated and multidimensional nature of the personality of their dependents and family members.

12.6 POLITICS, RELIGION AND ECONOMICS

12.6.1 Politics
Some significant aspects of socialist life that came on the radar of Gandhi’s critical examination appeared to be the politics and religion. To Gandhi, politics was not a means of appropriating power and wielding authority over the other unwilling mass of people. To him, politics was an instrument of mass mobilisation, service, concern, participation and moral regeneration of the moribund majority of people. Moreover, it would give the people an option to branch out of their stipulated economic and materialistic life as was found in the socialist countries. At the same time, it ingrained in the people a sense of self-respect, dignity and value for the noble principles of equality, justice, fraternity etc. But, by negating the importance of politics in society, the socialist societies do great injustice to their people. They not only made them a subservient group of atomistic entities, but also their sense of perceiving the moral goodness or just and unjust in social relations got blunted as a result of which there did not exist any critique of the wrongdoings of the rulers. Moreover, the positive energies of the society remained unutilised for the purposes of moral and spiritual regeneration of the people.

12.6.2 Religion
Another point of discord between Gandhi and socialists existed on the issue of place of religion in society. While Gandhi took religion as the basic force to ingrain the sense of morality, spirituality and self-regulation for the people in society, the socialists labelled religion as the opium of the masses on the ground that it intoxicated them to be blind to the exploitation and oppressions perpetrated on them by the forces of capitalism and other vested interests of society. Therefore, in almost all the socialist countries, the public practice and propagation of religion and religious sermons were prohibited in order to dissuade the people to be religious and spiritual. This irked Gandhi to the extent of chiding the socialists as unaware of the positive potentialities of religion in bringing about formidable transformations in both individual as well as public conduct of the people in society. He convincingly argued that the ways and means of moral and spiritual emancipation of the people could have been taught only through the religious and moralist discourses as that would lead to the development of the sense of self-regulation amongst the people. Gandhi asked for free and voluntary invocation of religious and moralist teaching and preaching in society so that human beings could attain spiritual salvation through self-regulation and service and care for other distressed and miserable people in their neighbourhood.
12.6.3 Economics

Though Gandhi was appreciative of the insightful diagnosis of the socio-economic ills plaguing people in the capitalist society, he was not convinced of the capabilities of the alternative socialist model of economic life to eradicate those ills and ensure moral regeneration of the society. As an economic system, Gandhi discovered a number of malaise of the socialist economy as it existed in the socialist countries such as the Soviet Union. It was materialist and consumerist in its orientation and did not represent a higher civilisation. Although it encouraged sharing and cooperation, it imposed these by force and did little to develop the moral energies of its citizens. It insisted on uniformity and ignored the demands of individual swabhava. Since it invested the state with both economic and political power, its statism posed the gravest threat to human dignity and self-respect. Above all, communism was established and continued by means of massive violence with all its attendant evils (Parekh, 1997, p.95). Thus, Gandhi presented a comprehensive critique of the economic system envisaged by socialism to be the ideal model able to cure all the ills of the toiling masses.

12.7 AN OVERVIEW

The abovementioned arguments of Gandhi on socialism and communism may seem to portray Gandhi as the bitterest critique of the philosophy that became the reference point of socio-economic reconstruction of a number of countries in the world. However, it must be pointed out that Gandhi was not criticising socialism and communism from any parochial or partisan perspectives. The Gandhian views on socialism and communism were premised on the basic framework that Gandhi evolved, stood by and practised throughout his life in both India and abroad. This perspective was to take individuals as the starting and ending point of reference in any social discourse aimed at ameliorating their conditions of life. Moreover, more than socio-economic, political, cultural or civilisational perspectives, Gandhi was a believer in moralistic and spiritual perspective of life in which he tended to evaluate the activities and products of life in terms of their contribution in the moral and spiritual upliftment and regeneration of soul force amongst the common people. Since, such considerations found little, if any, space in the socialist and communist discourses, it was natural that Gandhi refused to accept them as plausible alternatives to the prevailing exploitative liberal-capitalist model of life.

Consequently, various theoreticians and practitioners of socialism and communism in India who were able to appreciate the Gandhian stand point in critiquing the theory and practice of socialism did not find any partisan or vested interest in his points of view. They, in fact, commended the views and role of Gandhi in mobilising the masses in India to rise and fight against the capitalist colonial system by taking the strength of their moral courage and spiritual force of their personalities. For instance, articulating his views on life and works of Gandhi, Hiren Mukherjee, a stalwart amongst Indian communists, wrote: “Not for a thousand years or more has India resounded to any name so much as Gandhi’s. He strode the Indian earth like a gentle Colossus. None else not even Rabindranath Tagore or the great figures of modern China has represented in his life and works as Gandhi has done uniquely, the spirit, schizophrenic and sublime, of New Asia indeed Gandhi is greater by far than Gandhism. The ism was always rather inchoate, largely self-contradictory and in its indifference to the modern context of life, something of a fallacy. Yet of all our heroes in recent Indian history, this frail little man was the tallest” (Quoted in Ghosh, 1984, pp.171-72). Likewise, another pioneer of the communist movement in India, E.M.S. Namboodiripad
was also appreciative of the concerns of values with which Gandhi identified himself and his love, affection and care for the poor and downtrodden of the society despite being critical to the ideology of socialism and communism. As he wrote, “Moral values like truth, non-violence, renunciation of the pleasures of life etc., political ideals such as freedom, democracy, peace etc., social objectives such as abolition of caste distinctions, emancipation of women, unity of all religious groups and communities, etc., these were indivisible parts of his life and teachings” (Quoted in Ghosh, 1984, p.172). These illustrative appreciations of Gandhi at the hands of the diehard communist leaders in the post-independent India showed the veracity of points raised by Gandhi in dealing with the issues of socio-economic, political, cultural and moral life of the people in different societies and under different ideological baggages. Though Gandhi’s views on socialism and communism might not be appealing to the sympathisers of these ideologies, there would not be any dispute on the perspective and vision with which Gandhi offered his critique of mainstream strands of the philosophy of socialism and communism.

12.8 SUMMARY

Gandhi’s views on socialism and communism provide a moralist critique of a philosophy rooted in excessive concern for materialism and physical aspects of life. In offering his views on socialism and communism, Gandhi acted neither as a liberal philosopher nor an agent of capitalist class to denounce the fundamental assumptions of the ideology of socialism and communism. Rather, as a devout humanist, deeply embedded in his unending concern for the comprehensive and all round, more particularly moral, development of the individuals, Gandhi could not accept the one-dimensional conceptualisation of human personality in the socialist and communist discourses. Moreover, he appeared extremely pained at the blatant support of the socialists and communists to the use of naked force in attaining the pious goal of ending the centuries of capitalist exploitation and subjugation of the people. Therefore, he offered the alternative that not only the ends, but also the means need to be equally pious and proper in order to have a morally liberating results of any humanist pursuit. It was due to this apparently disinterested passion of Gandhi for moral and material liberation of the individuals that silenced even his critics and supporters of the ideologies that he criticised from labeling any charge of being partisan or serving any vested interest, in the main, in his staunch critique of the theory and practice of socialism and communism in various parts of the world.

12.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Discuss at length Gandhi’s critique of socialism and communism.

2. Examine the concepts of social transformation and redistribution of power in the scheme of socialism.

3. What do you understand by the dictatorship of the proletariat? Substantiate your arguments.

SUGGESTED READINGS


UNIT 13  GANDHI ON STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

Structure
13.1  Introduction
   Aims and Objectives
13.2  Conflict and Violence
13.3  Direct and Indirect Violence
13.4  Structural Violence
13.5  Cultural Violence
13.6  Gandhi on Structural Violence
13.7  Preventing Structural Violence
13.8  Summary
13.9  Terminal Questions
   Suggested Readings

13.1  INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi’s life and work embodies a unique vision of peace and non-violent activism. He not only abhorred wars and killings under any guise but also addressed the insidious ramifications of indirect violence embedded in the societal structures and cultures. His absolute disavowal of violence amid gravest of provocation makes him the most inveterate proponent of non-violent methods to achieve peace. Peace, he insisted, can only be brought about by the peaceful means. Unsurprisingly, the Gandhian vision led to multiple streams of thinking and action research in contemporary peace and conflict studies. In this Unit, we would take a closer look at some of his ideas, which exemplify his notion of peacebuilding as well, provide range of pedagogical tools to detangle peace studies and conflict analysis. One of the most significant Gandhian insights that has given a new dimension to our understanding of conflict and violence analysis is the notion of Structural Violence which continues to inspire new thinking in the area.

Gandhi took a comprehensive view of violence and expanded its scope to include oppressive structures, which erode and damage human dignity and prevent human beings from achieving their full potentials. He included untouchability, racialism, communalism and gender-based discrimination as acts of violence against humanity. The deprivation and impoverishment for him were ready markers of an unjust and violent social order. Conceptualised as ‘Structural Violence’, this indirect type of violence has been conceptualised lately by the Norwegian scholar Johan Galtung - a pioneer of peace studies. However, it is in the Gandhian thoughts that one finds a quintessential elaboration of structural violence – a fact admitted readily by Galtung himself. The Unit deals at length with Galtung’s interpretation.

Aims and Objectives

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand

- The anatomy of violence- both direct and indirect
- The notion of structural violence
- The importance of these concepts to understand the central ethos of Gandhi’s vision of peace and non-violent activism.


13.2 CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE

What is violence? Is it different from conflict? These queries preface any discussion on the subject. There is an obvious overlap between the two concepts as conflicts have a propensity to evoke violence. But as such these are two different phenomena. Conflict per se refers to competing social interests or differences or incompatibilities. They can be both functional and dysfunctional. Some conflicts can even spell a positive influence for social change and progress. In fact conflicts, in their different stages, offer ample opportunity to be managed peacefully through a negotiated settlement. Marx saw conflict not only as a matter to be resolved, but also as a driving force of change to new relationships. Gandhi also welcomed conflicts as an opportunity to know and negotiate with one’s opponent. Gandhi was emphatic that the generic causes of conflict need to be addressed for its long-term solution.

On the other hand, violence in common parlance stands for war or collective killing, and bloodshed committed by a persona or collectively. Such direct violence is an instantly recognizable form of violence, which creates victims of conflict through death, injury and psychological damage. Violence has been justified on various grounds including at times, for bringing peace and security. But Gandhi never approved of the use of violence under any circumstances. So he said: ‘I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent.’

13.3 VIOLENCE DIRECT AND INDIRECT

Violence- both direct and indirect- is among the leading causes of death for people aged 15-44 years worldwide, accounting for about 14% of deaths among male and 7% of deaths among female in that age group. Since it is so pervasive, violence is often seen as an inevitable part of the human conditions. In popular imagination violence and human aggression seem to run in the human blood. However many scientific studies have discounted this biological linkage. The Seville Statement signed by 22 leading scientists in 1994 has demonstrated that peacefulness is as much intrinsic to human physiology as is the possibility of his acting otherwise.

The following typology of violence is an easy way to show the intend and contend of violence, and its ramifications. What is noteworthy is that both at personal and structural level one can see the same process, causation and expression. Violence undertaken by an actor (person) intentionally or unintentionally falls in the category of direct violence and when such physical or psychological violence is felt due to a structure in a manifest or latent manner, then it is called an indirect violence.

![Figure 1. A Typology of Violence](image-url)
As compared to indirect violence, the direct violence is easy to describe. It involves wars, mass killings and other episodes of bloodshed. But if we consider the indirect forms of violence then the loss is unimaginable. By a World Health Organisation estimate, such violence results in more than 1.5 million people being killed each year, and many more suffer non-fatal injuries and chronic, noninjury health consequences, and interpersonal violence (domestic violence, child maltreatment, elder abuse and sexual violence. See URL: www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention).

While Gandhi always remained concerned with wars and organised killings and nuclear weapons, he also warned us of those hidden forms of violence, which are more insidious than any other form of direct violence. The Gandhian emphasis on everyday violence ingrained in the very structure of the society paved the way for new thinking in this area. Gandhi defined violence as anything which would impede the individual from self-realisation, whether by his progress, or by keeping him at a moral standstill. Therefore, the violence of the ‘evil-doer’ includes its effects in setting the ‘evil-doer’ back himself; violence can be self-inflicted, and not just inflicted upon others.

Following the Gandhi’s lead, Johan Galtung created a violence typology based on a broader understanding of violence. Violence, according to Galtung, is “the avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs or, to put it in more general terms, the impairment of human life, which lowers the actual degree to which someone is able to meet their needs below that which would otherwise be possible.” Thus in its expanded scope, violence includes not only the intentional use of physical damage but also its threat which might result in injury, death, psychological harm and also in various forms of maldevelopment, deprivation and disempowerment. Such comprehensive vision of violence corresponds closely to Gandhi’s own understanding of violence.

### 13.4 STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

While the content of structural violence was well amplified by Gandhi in his writings, Johan Galtung, a peace researcher, developed pedagogy around the concept of structural violence which is not inflicted physically on another but is hidden in structures.

Indirect violence, according to Galtung, includes both Structural and Cultural violence. He defined it as a violence that does not hurt or kill through fists or guns or nuclear bombs, but through social structures that produce poverty, death and enormous suffering. Structural violence may be politically repressive, and exploitative; it occurs when the social order directly or indirectly causes human suffering and death. When people starve, for example, even though there’s enough food for everyone, the distribution system is creating structural violence. However, the direct violence is noticed quickly as it injures or kills people instantly and dramatically often resulting in early remedial response.

Galtung argues that violence is built into unequal, unjust and unrepresentative social structures, which produce social groups who have low incomes, low education, low health, and low life expectancy. The human and social costs of this kind of silent, indirect violence are often higher than those of direct physical harm. Such systemic violence denies the larger population from meeting their basic human needs.

Racialism and untouchability are two stark instances of such structural violence. In both cases the societal, political and economic structures are employed to oppress and exploit the victims of structural violence. Spread of poverty and underdevelopment also inflict the
humanity with worst kind of violence. Petra Kelly, the founder of the German Green Party, wrote in 1984:

A third of the 2,000 million people in the developing countries are starving or suffering from malnutrition. Twenty-five per cent of their children die before their fifth birthday [...] Less than 10 per cent of the 15 million children who died this year had been vaccinated against the six most common and dangerous children’s diseases. Vaccinating every child costs £3 per child. But not doing so costs us five million lives a year. These are classic examples of structural violence.

The episodes of structural violence are less perceptible as they remain embedded in the exploitative, hunger and illness-producing structures. Disempowered and marginalised people suffer and die in silence due to structured inequities - local, regional or may be global. It is easy to correlate the inaccessibility of health care and life-saving systems to unequal and unfair distribution of society’s resources.

There is of course a two-way relation between the structural violence and direct violence. The structured inequalities easily ignite organised armed conflict. Those who are chronically oppressed resort to direct violence, often to seek remedial measures. Most of the ethnic conflicts of recent past were either ignited or exacerbated by the continued disparities and deprivations. Be it Northern Ireland or Sri Lanka or Rwanda – one finds that unabated structural disparities provided justifications for the violent conflict.

The enormous resources consumed by armament and militarisation denies a large chunk of population from meeting their basic human needs for adequate food, health care, and education. The nexus between market forces, arms production and politicians ensure that precious resources in poor countries first go to the buying of arms rather than to alleviate the misery of teeming millions suffering from poverty, hunger and marginalisation.

The UNDP Report of 1998 estimated the annual cost to achieve universal access to a number of basic social services in all developing countries: $9 billion would provide water and sanitation for all; $12 billion would cover reproductive health for all women; $13 billion would give every person on Earth basic health and nutrition; and $6 billion would provide basic education for all. These social and health expenditures are just a fraction of the annual military budget for the United States alone.

Clearly, the unchecked growth of militarism in the world is the single most constraining factor in helping out people in the situation of human insecurity. This has led to a rising discontent in the impoverished and deprived youth in the developing and the less developed countries against the rich, powerful, and the imposing West making them an easy prey to the siren song of extremism.

The globalisation, with its differential character, is further promoting powerful multinational conglomerates that derive huge profits off under-paid labourers in developing countries. The result is horrific structural violence to workers who toil under brutal conditions. It also produces a monoculture, in which people throughout the world learn that the good life consists of convenience products, western dress, and western values of individuality and consumerism. The invisibility of injustice to labourers in the global market economy parallels the invisibility of injustice to indigenous people.
13.5 CULTURAL VIOLENCE

The structural violence enforces the powerlessness of its victims, entrenched in the psyche of the society. Galtung, in course, supplemented the notion of structural violence to include the concept of cultural violence. According to him, Cultural Violence describes the ideologies, convictions, traditions and systems of legitimation, through which direct or structural violence is made possible, justified and legitimised.

Violence can be cultural, which occurs when beliefs are used to justify either direct or structural violence. For example, when a person justifies the deaths of starving people by blaming them for their situation (called blaming the victim), that person is engaging in cultural violence. The earlier discussion on structural violence has shown the faultlines in the cultural traditions that permit and even rationalise the violence in its structural forms. In India the notion of *Karma* assumes that the victims of social inequity must, in some way, deserve their plight. But certainly it is easy to see that young children do not deserve to be victims of structural violence.

Infact the structural inequities, in course, become a part of a powerful cultural mechanism which then legitimises the continuation of such subtle violence. Discriminating cultural and religious beliefs, rituals, art, language and ideologies are constructed to carry on the structural inequities and oppression in a routine manner. Whether it is the theorem of a superior race (Herrenvolk) or the notion of untouchability – all are products of such cultural violence. The theory of cultural violence corresponds closely to the two basic points in Gandhism, the doctrines of unity of life and of unity of means and ends.

13.6 GANDHI ON STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

Gandhi’s comprehensive approach to non-violence has a close bearing on the contemporary discourse on peace and conflict. Many researchers find his ideas as important to understand the concept of structural violence. Johan Galtung, by his own admission, learned the basics of structural violence through an exploration of Gandhian philosophy during his time at the Gandhian Institute of Studies in Varanasi in 1969. He labelled Gandhi as a ‘structuralist’ for establishing the distinction between a person and a structure.

Through Gandhian lenses, Galtung saw how violence is built into social structures, and not into the persons. Gandhi intuitively understood the violence perpetrated by oppressive social structures and political institutions. He was unequivocal in saying that the evil was in the structure, not in the person who carried out his obligations. Elsewhere he said that ‘the essence of nonviolence technique is that it seeks to liquidate antagonisms but not the antagonists themselves.’

Gandhi justifiably found the colonialism as a quintessential case of structural violence. Colonialism, according to Gandhi, was thus an oppressive structure and so was the caste system within which people acquired their consciousness and performed their assigned duties and roles. In Gandhi’s schema, an evil is an offshoot of the social structure. For Gandhi, economics that is destructive of the moral well-being of any individual or nation is immoral, and a political structure bereft of religion and morality cannot bring about the dignity, inner freedom and justice of the citizens. Thus Gandhi highly disapproved of capitalism, not the capitalist; racialism, not the white men; and modern civilisation, not the Western people living in it.
Aware of the systemic imperatives of oppression, Gandhi stated emphatically that the sheer replacement of colonial white regime by brown rulers would not bring any succour to the suffering masses. He was apprehensive that the new rulers would still follow the same objectives, principles and commitment of the ‘so called’ modern (western) civilisation, which according to him, is founded on the premise of a ruthless competition and unbridled individualism. He said:

Unrestricted individualism is the law of the beast of the jungle. We have learnt to strike the mean between individual freedom and social restraint. Willing submission to social restraint for the sake of the well being of the whole society, enriches both the individual and the society of which one is a member (Harijan, May 27, 1939.

In his foundational oeuvre, ‘Hind Swaraj’, he severely condemned the ‘modern civilisation’ which corrodes the dignity and the soul of human beings. According to Gandhi, the unbridled quest of human consumption, wants, and addiction to technological solutions, would further divide the society and inflict psychological damage to the underprivileged sections of the society. Gandhi found the practices of modern civilisation ruthless and aggressive which puts a premium on ambitious, competitive, tough men whose only mission is to maximise their wealth and power. The blind pursuance of modernity tends to undermine the shared bonds of a true community and indulges in structural violence often in tandem with an oppressive state.

13.7 PREVENTING STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

Gandhi wanted to demolish such norms and institutions that justify discrimination, exploitation and dehumanisation. No wonder that his notion of non-violent activism far exceeds the narrow understanding of violence confined to direct injuries and bloodshed. In fact Gandhi’s Ahimsa focused as much on the system-generated structural violence as on actor-oriented direct violence.

The Gandhian vision on structural violence has found greater relevance in recent times. While the episodes of direct violence between the states have diminished, there is an unprecedented surge of civilian violence – people killing their fellow beings and violence perpetrated by the state against its own citizens. The violence against the weaker sections has also increased whether it is against the women or against other ethnic, caste or communities. In India the growth of naxalism is often attributed to the long drawn exploitation, oppression and dehumanisation of the tribals in a systemic manner.

Gandhi did not approve of the modern territorial state as a panacea to end the structural violence for the same reasons he discounted the modern civilisation. His ideal of social organisation was the family which could encompass the whole world (vasudhaiva kutumbakam). Gandhi’s non-violent activism was based on a social order in which there is no dehumanisation and each one is treated with dignity in the spirit of shared humanity. In his ideal society, free from structural violence, he visualised that people would be content to fulfill their basic human needs and would not hanker for more. In a much-cited speech he said:

If I take anything that I do not need for my immediate use, and keep it, I thieve it from somebody else. I venture to suggest that it is the fundamental law of nature, without exception, that Nature produces enough for our wants from day to day, and if only everybody took enough for himself and nothing more, there would be no pauperism in this
world, there would be no dying of starvation in this world. But so long as we have got this inequality, so long we are thieving.1

Clearly then Gandhi highlighted the norm of shared responsibility and accorded the community of ensuring the fulfillment of each one’s basic human needs. He chided those who craved for the surplus at the cost of depriving others of meeting their basic human needs.

As mentioned earlier, Gandhi feared that colonialism not only engages in political and economic exploitation but also fabricates a cultural mindset conducive to subjugate its targets. He apprehended that the philosophical and moral worldview of the colonisers would persist despite India achieving its independence.

Gandhi’s epic treatise ‘Hind Swaraj’ is in fact a critique of structures and cultures that persist in Structural Violence. He wanted new structures and norms to replace the colonial legacy in independent India and doubted how the elite seeped in the western culture can do so. He was opposed to the usurping and abusing of political power by a few authorities. He instead called for the capacity-building of the masses so that a truly representative democracy could emerge.

Unless there is a total shift in the way we look at the concept of progress and development, India will witness greater intensity of structural and cultural violence. To rid India from the structural and cultural violence, the Gandhian precepts of Swaraj and Swadeshi offered ways to liberate our people from systemic violence. Realising that structural violence is ingrained in the profit-seeking capitalist world, Gandhi’s non-violent social order entailed limiting the consumption as well as such new technology, which promotes exploitation, inequity, centralisation of power and authority.

Gandhi had an innate sympathy for the poor and deprived. He believed that capitalism is an economic order and had roots of all exploitation. The relentless pursuit of profit led to discrimination, oppression and exploitation. There is always enough in this world to meet the basic human needs of its people. The misery of poverty and deprivation arise because of the possessive individual who thrives on the labour put in by others. Only if people could take from the system only as much as they need, then there will be an end to misery and violence that it entails. ‘In this country of semi-starvation of millions and inefficient nutrition,’ Gandhi said, “the wearing of jewelry is an offense to the eyes.”

Gandhi therefore talked about self-sufficient village and indigenous mode of development. Gandhi visualised the philosophy of Sarvodaya to usher in economic equity reaching down to the last and the least without ruthless compulsion and violence. His answer to structural violence was thus Ahimsa and Sarvodaya. While Ahimsa would heal, Sarvodaya would spell the sense of unity, a ‘oneness’ among all without any distinction, high and low, rich and poor, strong and weak, even the good and the bad.

### 13.7.1 Untouchability as Violence

Gandhi found untouchability as the blatant case of structural violence and a worst crime against humanity. The question of eliminating untouchability to him was more critical than even the quest of political independence. So he wrote in ‘Young India’ as early as in 1921 that “Swaraj is a meaningless term if we desire to keep a fifth of India under perpetual subjection… Inhuman ourselves we may not plead before the Throne for the deliverance from the inhumanity of others.” Again in 1928 Gandhi declared untouchability as an
“inhuman boycott of human beings” and thought that its removal was a prerequisite for the attainment of home-rule.

Gandhi not only reclaimed the dignity of untouchables by renaming them as Harijans - ‘God’s children’ but also integrated them in his personal life and work. He himself started cleaning the public toilets along with the Harijans to set an example.

Gandhi was highly grieved not only among Hindu untouchables, but also among Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and all other different religions about the caste system and found it to be a social evil, but untouchability to him was a sin.

Gandhi worked relentlessly to elevate the social status of the untouchables in India. He wanted penance for crimes of discrimination that have been perpetuated for thousands of years as he wanted society to work hard to relocate the untouchables on an equal footing with the other members of society.

Gandhi went on a fast until death after the proclamation of the elections based on communal identity in 1935. He could not tolerate the non-accommodation of the untouchables within the fold of the Hindu community. Gandhi was instrumental to a great degree to make the Indians conscious of the evils of untouchability. In an attempt to persuade the orthodox Hindus to wipe out the “blight of untouchability”, Gandhi undertook fast in the summer of 1933 for three weeks. To him his battle against untouchability related to the larger question of unity communities.

13.7.2 Modern Education

Gandhi often referred to the hardheartedness of the educated and lamented that the modern education does not teach compassion or empathy for the poor and the disempowered. He reflected on the insensate pedagogy of western-inspired education which is wholly inadequate to understand the misery of those who are subjected to a systemic or structural violence. For instance, he scoffs at model building and other economic analysis which has no feel of the real world of poor people and reduces poor people into a series of numbers and abstractions. In all this, the meaning of ‘poverty’ itself never gets interrogated.

13.8 SUMMARY

The concept of Structural violence expands the scope of violence from inflicting direct physical damage to a range of situations which disallows humans to attain their full potentials in terms of actual somatic and mental realisation. By bringing out this indirect and subtle nature of violence, Gandhi brings on board the misery of teeming millions who suffer in silence inflicted by the oppressive structures. Gandhi was upfront in declaring that any division in society would lead to inequality and which in turn would lead to violence. He also emphasised that poverty and deprivation are the most widespread manifestations of structural violence. And unless these exploitative structures are dismantled, there would be no sustainable peace.

This conceptual expansion has endowed peace and conflict studies greater insights into the generic causes of violent conflicts. Many recent initiatives like human development and human security have highlighted the core issues of Structural Violence. Thus human security is defined as freedom from fear and freedom from want, which include safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease and repressions, and protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life.
The responsibility of eliminating structural violence eventually rests on the concerted efforts to promote political and economic institutions which consider the fulfillment of basic human needs as their primary goal. Many imperatives, which according to Gandhi, violated human dignity are now being attended within the ambit of human security and human development including increasing poverty reduction programmes, support for women’s education, health, and family welfare; sustained efforts to use forests, water, and soils which support rural economies; and measures to ensure effective citizenship.

Gandhi also spells out the ways to mitigate structural violence. While his vision of *Ahimsa* heals, the human governance as conceived in *Swaraj* alleviates and eventually eliminates its effects. He calls for deep reforms in the way we define and organise development and governance. Gandhi was skeptic about the state’s intention and capacity to deal with core issues of structural violence and exhorted the civil society to take the lead in understanding and eliminating the curse of oppressive structures. Gandhi was also emphatic that it is only by redressing the malefic effects of structural violence which impact the majority of people that India could grow as a healthy and happy nation.

### 13.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. What is Violence? How is it different from Conflict?
2. Differentiate between Direct and Indirect Violence.
3. Define Structural Violence. What are its main features?
4. How did Gandhi inspire the thinking on Structural Violence?
5. How, according to Gandhi, can Structural Violence impact poor and powerless?
5. Give some examples of Structural Violence.

### SUGGESTED READINGS


Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Publications Division, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi (various volumes)


Cortright, David., Gandhi and Beyond: Nonviolence for an Age of Terrorism, Paradigm Publisher, Boulder Co., 2006.

(Endnotes)

1Speech on “Ashram Vows” at Y.M.C.A., Madras’, Indian Review (February 1916).
UNIT 14  SATYAGRAHA AS A MEANS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Structure

14.1  Introduction
   Aims and Objectives

14.2  Meaning of Conflict Resolution

14.3  Meaning of Satyagraha

14.4  Gandhi and Satyagraha

14.5  Techniques of Satyagraha

14.6  Satyagraha as a Tool of Conflict Resolution

14.7  Satyagraha in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century

14.8  Summary

14.9  Terminal Questions
   Suggested Readings

14.1  INTRODUCTION

During his stay in England, where he had been to study law, Gandhi was influenced by Christian moral precepts like the \textit{Sermon on the Mount} and the idea of civil disobedience of Henry David Thoreau. He was also influenced by Edward Carpenter’s critique of modern industrial civilisation and Leo Tolstoy’s views on non-violence, where the two were much in agreement. Gandhi advocated and emphasised nonviolent direct action because India had had a strong tradition of Ahimsa. Ahimsa had been a central principle in both Jainism and Buddhism. The notion of Ahimsa was based on the tenet of unity of all life, which was a key feature of Hinduism as well. All these cultural and spiritual ideas had been a major influence on Gandhi. These influences were instrumental in the formation and development of Satyagraha- the most systematic and developed mode of nonviolent action and conflict resolution.

Aims and Objectives

This Unit would enable you to understand

- The meaning and techniques of Satyagraha;
- The application of Satyagraha as a tool of conflict resolution; and
- The relevance and applicability of Satyagraha in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century.

14.2  MEANING OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The term ‘conflict’ has a range of applications. It ranges from the individual person who tries to allocate scarce resources (e.g., time and money) to competing ends between individuals and groups to two nations/states pursuing the same value, for instance, world hegemony.
There are several mechanisms for dealing with conflicts across all levels – interpersonal disputes to international armed engagements. These processes make use of a variety of problem-solving methods to resolve incompatibilities in needs and interests; they also embrace overlapping methods and activities. However, variations in both the methods used and outcomes achieved characterise the differences between conflict resolution and other processes, such as conflict prevention, conflict management, and conflict settlement.

Conflict resolution generally refers to a process for ending disputes. It is a nonviolent process that comprises a range of approaches and tools, such as those of negotiation, mediation and facilitation, to resolve conflicts, to promote mutually acceptable agreements and to build new and lasting relationships between hostile groups.

Conflict resolution is rooted in a normative framework that sees conflict as a normal part of human interactions. A successful conflict resolution process is one that is productive and maximises the potential for positive change at both the personal and structural level. The resolution strand sees conflict as essentially a subjective phenomenon that focuses on subjective relationships between parties by emphasising on improving communication and by facilitating the development of trust and cooperation. Resolution must, therefore, involve analysis and reconstruction of perceptions of beliefs about, and attitudes towards, the other side.

Conflict resolution emphasises on participatory processes and integrative solutions that will be controlled by parties and can be self-enforced. Typical aspects of the conflict resolution process include getting both sides to listen to each other, providing opportunities for parties to meet each side’s needs, and finding the means to address both sides’ interests to reach a mutually satisfactory outcome.

The term “parties” is defined broadly. This includes people directly impacted by the conflict, or those who could be impacted by potential solutions (referred to as stakeholders). Narrow definitions of parties, limited to decision-makers or power-brokers, are insufficient because they ignore parties who can block decisions or who, if excluded, may choose to wage their own round of the conflict.

Getting to resolution also requires the use of participatory processes in which parties have both voice and vote. Third parties may help facilitate a process, but parties should maintain control over both the development and selection of viable solutions. Conflicts may be settled or regulated when powerful third parties dictate or enforce solutions, but this seldom results in eliminating the causal factors. Conflict resolution also requires addressing the deep-rooted causes of the conflict. Processes that address symptoms rather than underlying causes may temporally manage a conflict, but they do not result in resolution. Although there can be significant trade-offs in the agreement, these must not sacrifice the key issues and needs. The final criterion for achieving the resolution of a conflict is building of integrative solutions. Both parties must have at least some, if not all, of their underlying needs and interests satisfied.

14.3 MEANING OF SATYAGRAHA

Satyagraha is a compound word that consists of two words- Satya and Agraha. The word Satya “is derived from sat, which means being, abiding, right, wise, self-existent essence, as anything really is, as anything ought to be.” Satya does not simply mean truth or veracity. It has a variety of connotations such as real, sincere, existent, pure, good, effectual, and valid. Satya, thus as derived from the root sat, was taken by Gandhi to mean that “nothing
exists in reality except Truth, everything else is illusion.” Truth, for Gandhi, was a higher law that was just. The word Agraha is derived from the root grah which means “to seize or to grasp, to get hold of, to grapple with”. Literally, these refer to the “insistence on Truth” or “holding on to Truth”.

Satyagraha combines the concepts of firm and truth to mean, factually, “standing firm for truth” or “a relentless search for truth and a determination to reach truth.” In March 1921, Gandhi declared that Satyagraha is literally holding on to Truth and it means, therefore, “truth-force or soul-force.” To hold on to the truth, it is essential to first discover the truth. Thus Satyagraha is an active technique of action in a conflict situation which consists of a search for the truth and a struggle for its vindication. In simple terms, the Gandhian method of conflict resolution is known as Satyagraha. Satyagraha, however, has been variously translated as ‘passive resistance’, ‘nonviolent resistance’, ‘nonviolent direct action’, ‘nonviolent action’, and even ‘militant nonviolence’. For the resolution of conflict, Satyagraha resorts to institutional means (e.g. petitions, courts etc.) if possible, or to non-institutional means (e.g. protests, demonstrations, sit-ins, strikes, civil disobedience etc) if necessary.

### 14.4 Gandhi and Satyagraha

Gandhi had a holistic vision of human life that could be lived only morally. This morality permeated all aspects of his life- the individual, political and social. Satyagraha is Gandhi’s technique of nonviolent activism. However, for Gandhi it was not only a method of conducting conflict but also a way of life, of living in Truth, a birth-right as well as duty. It was not just a political technique but a complete programme of existence, which included proper food, dress, vegetarianism, celibacy and sanitation among others. Gandhi used the technique of Satyagraha to bring about social and political change.

In elaborating his theory of Satyagraha, Gandhi placed heavy emphasis on the fundamental unity of the universe. He viewed human beings as basically ‘good’ and endowed with divine powers. True Satyagraha can ignite the divine spark which will awaken the conscience of the opponent leading to his moral persuasion. However, this is possible only when the satyagrahi confronts the opponent with non-violence by conviction (Satyagraha) rather than non-violence by expediency (Passive Resistance). This is the distinction that Gandhi made between what he calls the ‘nonviolence of the strong’ (Satyagraha) and ‘nonviolence of the weak’ (Passive Resistance). The latter did not exclude the use of physical force of violence to gain one’s end. Satyagraha, on the other hand, was a weapon of the strong and excluded the use of violence in every form.

The principle of self-suffering is central to the Gandhian conception of non-violence and thus to his approach to conflict. In Young India, Gandhi wrote on August 11, 1920, ‘Satyagraha is self-suffering and not inflicting violence on others.’ It is essential for the satyagrahi to be willing to suffer the violence of others without inflicting ‘himsa’ (violence) either by word or deed and suffering in return. This will not only result in less loss of life but will also be morally enriching for humanity as a whole. Elaborating further on this point, S. Shridharani said in 1962 that suffering by protesting citizens would influence the entire atmosphere within which the conflict takes place:

‘The basic assumption of Satyagraha (is) that self-sacrifice releases psychological and physical energies which influence the sufferer’s surroundings and contemporaries.’

The satyagrahi must endure self-suffering for a just cause. S/he must do so without hatred
toward anybody and in the belief that the opponent can be converted to seeing the truth by touching his or her conscience. The perpetrator of violence generally makes a life-or-death judgment on the assumption that s/he has knowledge of the truth. However, writing in *Young India* on 23 March 1921, Gandhi had said that Satyagraha excluded the usage of violence because no one is capable of knowing the absolute truth and is, therefore, not competent to punish.

Self-suffering has to occur in the appropriate context and thus Gandhi warned the satyagrahi from treating the opponent roughly by compelling them to inflict punishment as this would “drag down” the satyagrahi too. The satyagrahi must show “exemplary self-restraint” regardless of provocation and repression, “even at the risk of being charged with cowardice.” Thus, Satyagraha was essentially a self-purification process which sought to inspire a sense of justice in the adversaries by subjecting the “self” or the “spirit” in the human body to suffering. This made spirituality central to the idea of Satyagraha. Gandhi constantly strived to bring justness even in the British policies and legislations. For him, these political acts were spiritual too, for they uplifted the human spirit of every person offering Satyagraha.

Gandhi saw an inherent relationship between just demands and the absence of violence. Satyagraha can be successful only if the demands are right and just; if the demands are unjust, Satyagraha cannot succeed. Moreover, if the demands were unjust, the cause could still be weakened or it could be lost by resorting to untruth, violence or coercion.

A real grievance is a fundamental prerequisite for Satyagraha. The satyagrahi is required to openly and civilly break a law because it is unjust and obedience to it is dishonourable. However, s/he must be willing to submit to any penalty for this course of action.

One of Gandhi’s soft used tactics was to undergo fasts to compel his opponents to act quickly or else have his death on their hands. By doing so Gandhi committed himself to a course of action while the responsibility for his life rested with the opponent. Thus, the opponent was compelled to choose not just issues and their ‘pay-offs’, but also life or death for Gandhi (and obviously being a well known and widely respected man, the opponent could not risk Gandhi’s death). This affected the opponent’s pay-offs. However, Gandhi once said, ‘You cannot fast against a tyrant.’ This is so for the simple reason that the tyrant “will act from his own principles, deducing his actions from them and not from changes in pay-offs.” Moreover, Gandhi could not put his death in the hands of an opponent who is a tyrant “because to him Gandhi’s death and its consequences would mean nothing.”

Therefore, for Gandhi, even a few protestors of sufficient ‘purity’ could guarantee success of the Satyagraha movement. What actually mattered in such circumstances was the firmness of the satyagrahi.

Certain characteristics or components are necessary for the success of Satyagraha. First and foremost, the Satyagraha movement must have a large popular base. In 1906, he said in a mass meeting in Johannesburg:

“… I can boldly declare and with certainty that so long as there is even a handful of men true to their pledge, there can be only one end to the struggle – and that is victory.”

Second, the movement should comprise of true believers. Gandhi’s Satyagraha had its origin in several sources, one of which was Hinduism. Hindu texts such as the Vedas and the Bhagavad Gita contained notions of non-violence and sacrifice. Satyagraha hence had a religious origin and this not only gave it credibility but also attracted “a large popular
following of true believers by connecting the tactics with the religion of the masses.” Thirdly, the Satyagraha movement must act as a single player. Unity of will is necessary along with firmness in principles and composition. This would require not only ‘pure’ and steadfast satyagrahis but also a dynamic and charismatic leader like Gandhi. Lastly, personal purity of the satyagrahi—chastity, poverty, autonomy and disinterestedness are imperative.

Gandhi recognised the fact that violence does not entail only bodily or physical harm to the opponent. He therefore wrote in Harijan on April 13, 1940, ‘There is surely often more violence in burning a man’s property than doing him physical injury’. Thus Satyagraha tactics like boycotts, sit-downs, marches, and other non-cooperation measures could end up inflicting property damage even to innocent third parties. Moreover, tactics employed in Satyagraha movements could even result in massive lawlessness and violence. Gandhi was well aware that nonviolent resistance could have disastrous consequences as is evident from the following passage he wrote in Harijan on 8 July 1939:

“This narrative clearly shows that the atmosphere is surcharged with violence. I hope it also shows that non-violent mass movement is an impossibility unless the atmosphere is radically changed. To blind one’s eyes to the events happening around us is to court disaster... If any mass movement is undertaken at the present moment in the name of nonviolence, it will resolve itself into violence largely unorganized ...”

The campaign to secure basic human rights for Indian labourers in South Africa in 1906 was Gandhi’s first experiment with Satyagraha. This was the first time that the term Satyagraha was used by Gandhi. This Satyagraha campaign was directed against a bill which imposed a £3 tax on indentured Indian labourers by the Transvaal government, which demanded the registration and fingerprinting of all Indian residents. The bill required ex-indentured Indians to leave for India on the termination of the indenture (agreement) or enter into further indenture. For Gandhi, the bill was intended to make people continue to live as slaves or force them back to the country from which they had come, only to avoid starvation. Describing the tax as a “blood tax,” he argued for civil disobedience against the bill.

In India, the events in Champaran, the Ahmedabad Mill incident, the agitation against the Rowlatt Act of 1919, and the Civil Disobedience Movement highlighted the practice of Satyagraha as a means to voice protest against the tyranny of laws. The agitation against the Rowlatt Act was the first occasion in which Gandhi experimented nationally with the philosophy of Satyagraha. The Rowlatt Act extended wartime powers and sought to restrict civil rights by providing for a system of special courts, arbitrary arrest and detention without trial for a period of two years. This was deeply resented by Indians. Gandhi then proposed a practicable form of protest, which initially involved volunteers courting arrest by public sale of prohibited items but later took the form of a nationwide strike. There were peaceful but massive strikes in different parts of the country and the British found it difficult to control them.

From 1920 to 1922, Gandhi directed a Non-Cooperation Movement. He believed that the continuation of British rule was based on the cooperation of Indians and therefore the thrust of the present movement was to oust the British by withdrawing the cooperation of Indians. The Movement included non-cooperation activities such as resignation from the army and bureaucracy and the boycott of foreign cloth, elections, law courts, and government schools. It had a remarkable impact on the masses. However, Gandhi withdrew the Movement in 1922, when a mob led by Congress volunteers killed twenty-two Indian police constables. On the other hand, the British also retaliated with force and ruthlessness—indiscriminate
arrests, torture and special tribunals. Nevertheless, Gandhi was unmoved in his faith in abstention from violence and reaffirmed his commitment to non-violence being a core tenet of Satyagraha.

Gandhi started the civil disobedience campaign when Congress’s demand for dominion status was rejected by the British. The tax on salt was chosen by Gandhi as symbolising colonial injustice. He led a march to Dandi on the Gujarat seacoast, drawing massive crowds on the way to protest against a law that gave the British a monopoly on the production of salt. The British government arrested Gandhi but the protests continued with thousands going to jail. These protests were met with brutal reactions on the part of the British authorities, which further created mass support for Gandhi’s cause. This was exactly what Gandhian Satyagraha intended to achieve.

Gandhi reiterated his conviction in Satyagraha towards the end of his life. He wrote in Harijan in 1946 that Satyagraha is a law of universal significance as well as “a process of educating public opinion such that it covers all the elements in the society and, in the end makes itself irresistible. Violence interrupts the process and prolongs the real revolution of the whole structure.”

14.5 TECHNIQUES OF SATYAGRAHA

During his life, Gandhi gave much thought to the tactics as well as modes of Satyagraha. Satyagraha can be practised by several methods such as fasts, cessation of work, protests, and public demonstrations and can be used by people, either singularly or jointly, to resist unjust laws. Gandhi’s Satyagraha varied from small labour strikes to nonviolent demonstrations to secure better sanitary conditions for entire cities.

Describing the various methods or techniques of Satyagraha, Raghavan N. Iyer wrote in 1973:

“The methods of satyagraha may be broadly classified into four categories: purificatory, penitential devices; forms of non-cooperation; methods of civil disobedience; the Constructive Programme.”

There is an overlap in theory as well as practice between the four categories. All four can be employed by individuals, groups or mass movements in the political as well as social sphere. Moreover, the elements of truth, justice, morality, non-violence, and self-suffering are common to all the four categories.

The purificatory, penitential devices include pledges, prayers and fasts. “The pledge is a solemn public declaration of one or more satyagrahis that he or they will abstain from, or perform certain acts to combat untruth (in themselves or others) or recognized injustices.” Prayers involved “the invocation of “soul-force” or of external spiritual agencies as an act of “purification and self-surrender.” A pledge could take the form of a prayer or a prayer could precede pledge-taking. Besides, short duration fasts could be undertaken “for the purpose of atonement or introspective meditation over a specific issue.”

Non-cooperation means renunciation of the benefits of a system with which we are associated. It involves voluntary suffering in the process of resisting evil. Forms of non-cooperation include harta, boycott, strikes, fasting unto death, and hijrat. Hartal is a temporary strike with advance notice about its duration. It involves “closing down of shops
and businesses and sometimes the halting of the work of administration.” Boycott of public institutions such as government schools, colleges and law courts is intended to protest against or even paralyse an unjust political system. It can also be employed against a particular institution indulging in corrupt or discriminatory practices. Strikes are declared with the aim of redressing a wrong so as to cease to take part in the wrong and enable the wrong-doer to see the folly of continuing the wrong. Fasting is to be undertaken voluntarily and it should have no trace of coercion over others; fasting unto death is a Gandhian weapon for self-purification and atonement of sins. Hijrat is voluntary migration or temporary withdrawal out of the boundaries of a State. Gandhi advocated it to the peasants of Bardoli in 1928. However, by 1931 he changed his mind and did not consider it to be a necessary part of the purest form of Satyagraha.

Civil disobedience consists in defying and disobeying laws that are unjust. It is an act of civility since it is opposed to all forms of violent and uncivilised behaviour. Methods of civil disobedience constitute picketing, marches, non-payment of taxes and deliberate defiance of a specific law. Gandhi considered the non-payment of taxes as one of the quickest methods of overthrowing a government; however, it should not be undertaken without the necessary discipline.

Gandhi stressed on the Constructive Programme and saw it as the most novel mode of Satyagraha. He wanted the satyagrahis to engage in silent, active, constructive work of reform and social service. Taking over of the government machinery was just “a shadow” for Gandhi; it was only through the “Constructive Programme that a system of nonviolent self-rule could emerge,” and a new social order could be built. The Constructive Programme involved “working toward communal unity, the removal of untouchability, a program of adult education and village improvement, peasant uplift and the development of nonviolent labor unions, economic and social equality, decentralized economic production and distribution through the promotion of cottage and small-scale industries, and the abolition of various social evils.” A couple of days before his death, Gandhi emphasised that political freedom was meaningless to the individual citizen without the attainment of economic, social and moral freedom.

14.6 SATYAGRAHA AS A TOOL OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

In 1992, Galtung, a pioneer in the field of peace and conflict studies, summarised Gandhi’s conflict norms, which are a part of the integrative approach to conflict resolution as well. The first norm is that one should act in conflicts, define the conflict well and have a positive approach to conflict. Gandhi thus sees conflict as a positive thing, as an opportunity to transform the self and the society. Secondly, one should act nonviolently in conflicts and act in a goal-consistent manner. Further one should not cooperate with evil; neither polarise the situation nor escalate the conflict. Gandhi’s statement reflected these norms, for he wrote in Young India on 8 August 1929, “A satyagrahi must never forget the distinction between evil and the evil-doer.” Finally, conflicts should be solved by insisting on essentials (rather than non-essentials) or principles or basic human needs; one should admit mistakes and be aware that one may be wrong; be generous with opponents and most of all aim for conversion rather than coercion. On 25 March 1939, Gandhi wrote in Harijan, “The Satyagrahi’s object is to convert, not to coerce, the wrong-doer.” In conflict situations, Gandhi advocates the adherence to non-violence in thought, word and deed. The goal here is to reach the truth by undergoing self-suffering.
In 2001, Thomas Weber enlisted the following propositions as key aspects for those wanting to work with conflict through the method of Gandhian Satyagraha. First, humiliation or provocation of opponents will lead to violence. Secondly, a would-be satyagrahi is less likely to have a violent attitude if he or she is clear about the essential elements of the case and the purpose of the conflict. Next, opponents should be provided with a full understanding or information about one’s case and conduct. Additionally, common interests between opponents should be clearly formulated and cooperation should be established on this basis. Besides, opponents should not be judged harder than the self- one must show love towards them. Further, opponents must be trusted. In addition, the likelihood of converting the opponent decreases if one is unwilling to compromise on non-essentials. However, in 1928 Gandhi said that one should be prepared to “make large concessions on all points except where a principle is involved.” Thus the satyagrahi should be willing to negotiate a settlement which does not compromise basic principles. Next, personal sincerity can further the conversion of an opponent. Then, if one wants to convince an opponent of sincerity, the best way to do so is to make sacrifices for the given cause. Finally, one should not exploit a position of weakness in an opponent or take advantage of an opponent’s weak moments.

The above propositions of Gandhian Satyagraha are in tandem with the essentials of the field of conflict resolution that aims to achieve win-win solutions. In fact the Gandhian Satyagraha goes beyond the process of conflict resolution to conflict transformation as it advocates integration at a deeper level and the transformation of the self and the other. Satyagraha entails the process of achievement of self-realisation and the unity of existence, for human beings are interrelated with each other.

Gandhian Satyagraha and conflict resolution seem to disagree on some issues. One such issue is the usage of third-party intervention. Conflict resolution involves the usage of problem-solving methods and third-party intervention tools such as negotiation and mediation. Gandhi opined that third party intervention should generally be rejected. He saw conflict as a medium through which the parties could develop a higher degree of awareness of themselves as well as of the other party and third-party intervention would rob the opponents of this opportunity. Moreover, resolution was just one of the desired outcomes of conflict; establishment of a new social structure and ‘higher level of self-purification in both actors’ or ‘conversion’ was much more desirable. Besides, the discovery of the Self is the most important task of life in Gandhian thought. However, this cannot happen if parties go for third-party intervention instead of being responsible for the disputing process. Additionally, Gandhi wanted the negotiation process to be a bilateral one, where the two parties are the decision-makers.

The modern conflict resolution process also stresses on a bilateral approach in negotiation and mediation for it gives the parties the opportunity to maintain control over both the development and selection of viable solutions. So ultimately the parties are the decision-makers. Besides, it emphasises on improving communication and developing trust and cooperation. This would then involve analysis and reconstruction of beliefs about, and attitudes towards, the other side. Change in attitudes would lead to change in behaviour- in Gandhian terms, this would lead ultimately lead to ‘conversion’. In the field of conflict transformation, empowerment of the disputants is a key aspect and the third-party’s role is more of a facilitator (responsible for the process rather than the outcome) than a mediator (a much more active role in comparison to that of a facilitator).

The field of conflict resolution had not developed during the days of Gandhi and therefore he may not have been aware of all the techniques, methods, tools and approaches of
conflict resolution that we have the privilege of knowing today. However, essentially the aim of the Gandhian method of Satyagraha was the resolution of conflicts at the individual, social and political level – the ultimate purpose being transformation of the individual and the social and political structure.

14.7 SATYAGRAHA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Post-Gandhi, Satyagraha method has been applied in India and in different parts of the world. In India, the Sarvodaya and Bhoodan movements were organised in the 1950s. In the 1970s, Jayaprakash Narayan led the ‘total revolution’ campaign against several issues, corruption being one. There were anti-liquor movements in several parts of India such as in the present state of Uttarakhand in the late 1960s and early 70s, in Maharashtra in the early 1970s and in Andhra Pradesh in the early 1990s. Another significant movement was the Chipko Andolan against deforestation led mainly by women and Sarvodaya workers like Sunderlal Bahuguna. Since the 1980s, Narmada Bachao Andolan, a campaign led by Medha Patkar, has been protesting against the construction of a huge dam on the Narmada River. The campaign met with partial success in 1992 when the World Bank withdrew financial support. However, the struggle continues as the construction of the dam has not stopped.

Outside India, several campaigns have been inspired by Gandhi. Notable among those are the African-American struggle in the USA led by Martin Luther King Jr. King adopted the methods of Satyagraha in his fight against racial discrimination and in favour of civil rights in the 1950s and 60s. Another major campaign was against Apartheid in South Africa led by Nelson Mandela. Here, however, the campaign was not entirely non-violent – there was a separate underground military wing as well. Although, Mandela was not in favour of strict non-violence, he, however, “understood that a struggle that created bitterness between opponents made it harder in the long term to reach a lasting solution to a problem.” A new era ushered in South Africa in 1994 with the transition to black rule. Once in power, Mandela worked towards healing and reconciliation rather than seek revenge against the whites.

Most nonviolent campaigns in the post-Gandhian phase had charismatic moral leadership. These leaders had uncompromising honesty of politics and moral activism and exhibited tact and strategy. Most of them understood that it was a slow process, but would eventually succeed. However, violence, oppression and exploitation also took its toll several times, leading to the murder of the moral activist. But that has not been a deterrent – David Hardiman wrote in 2003, “There is hope, however, for people of such ethical power have again and again merged to pose the questions in new ways and to suggest new answers…”

Gandhi has influenced and continues to influence new social movements in India – of environmentalists, anti-war campaigners, feminists and human rights activists among others. As mentioned earlier, some prominent figures led nonviolent campaigns in the 20th century; some others continue to do so in the 21st century. Prominent among the latter is Aung San Suu Kyi. Since 1988, Kyi has led a sustained non-violent protest against the ruthless military junta of Myanmar. She has been under house arrest for several years and was the first person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991, while still in detention. The Dalai Lama too continues to wage a nonviolent resistance against the Chinese occupation of Tibet.

The 21st century Satyagraha campaigns like those led by Kyi and Dalai Lama have not met with success. This does not mean that Satyagraha is irrelevant or non-applicable in the 21st
century. The shortcomings do not lie in the principle of Satyagraha but rather in the people who practise it and who have to do so in an imperfect world. Perfect non-violence is in any case not possible in this physical world as life itself entails violence. Life is in essence a choice between violence and less violence; the latter sometimes expressed through the medium of nonviolence. Satyagraha was “designed as an effective substitute for violence.” Therefore, in Gandhian terms, nonviolent struggle is an effective (it can resolve conflict) and ethical (it does not subvert the moral autonomy of the opponent) way of exercising political power in an imperfect world. However, we all must endeavour towards the ideal of non-violence.

14.8 SUMMARY

Conflict resolution is a nonviolent process that aims to forge lasting relationships between hostile groups. Gandhi’s Satyagraha is essentially a unique conflict resolution method based on the principles of non-violence, truth, justice, morality, spirituality and self-suffering. Gandhi dealt with practical problems as they arose and sought solutions for them within the context of these principles. He formulated and demonstrated the major tenets of Satyagraha in action in South Africa, in India in Champaran, against the Rowlatt Act of 1919, the Non-cooperation Movement from 1920 to 1922, the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1929, to name a few. During these Satyagraha campaigns Gandhi employed the various techniques of Satyagraha such as prayers, fasts, boycotts, strikes, picketing, marches, non-payment of taxes, deliberate defiance of laws and constructive programme and demonstrated that Satyagraha could be used to deal with conflicts in both the political as well as the social (includes economic) sphere. There may be doubts about the efficacy and applicability of Satyagraha in the 21st century but Gandhi has inspired and continues to inspire individuals and movements fighting against the tyranny of violence, oppression and exploitation.

14.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. What is conflict resolution? What are the essential features of the process of conflict resolution?

2. What are the principles and features of Gandhian Satyagraha?

3. Gandhi demonstrated the applicability of Satyagraha in various scenarios. Substantiate your arguments with examples.

4. Satyagraha is essentially a tool or method of conflict resolution. Elaborate.

5. Discuss the relevance, efficacy and feasibility of Gandhian Satyagraha in the 21st century.

SUGGESTED READINGS


UNIT 15  GANDHI ON PACIFISM

Structure

15.1 Introduction
   Aims and Objectives

15.2 Theoretical Aspects
   15.2.1 Pacifism Leads to One World
   15.2.2 Techniques of Eliminating War
   15.2.3 Satyagraha: Substitute for Military Action
   15.2.4 Moralistic Approach to World Affairs

15.3 The Bhagavad Gita and Pacifism
   15.3.1 Forgive the Opponents
   15.3.2 Rejection of Materialism

15.4 Gandhi as a Qualified Pacifist
   15.4.1 Gandhi as an Absolute Pacifist
   15.4.2 Gandhi’s Rigorous Pacifism
   15.4.3 Change in Gandhi’s Pacifism
   15.4.4 Nature of Pacifism
   15.4.5 Flexible Adjustment of Idealism to Nationalism

15.5 Gandhi on Conflict Resolution

15.6 Nonviolent Action for Defensive, Interstate Struggle

15.7 Summary

15.8 Terminal Questions
   Suggested Readings

15.1 INTRODUCTION

“Pacifism” is derived from the word “pacific,” which means “peace making” in Latin, pax-(from pax) meaning “peace” and -ficus meaning “making”. Pacifism covers a spectrum of views, including the belief that disputes can and should be peacefully resolved, calls for the abolition of the institutions of the military and war, opposition to any organisation of society through governmental force, rejection of the use of physical violence to obtain political, economic or social goals, the obliteration of force except in cases where it is absolutely necessary to advance the cause of peace, and opposition to violence under any circumstance, even defence of self and others. Pacifism is the broad commitment to making peace.

Pacifism is often construed more broadly as a general nonviolent stance both inwardly, in the sense of seeking inner peace, as well as outwardly, toward the world and its inhabitants. Although pacifist teachings have been found in virtually every society with a recorded history, pacifism as a philosophy or a movement has grown mainly from religion. Adherents of pacifism disagree about what it actually is. Some would say that any sanction of violence or force negates a pacifist identity, while others would argue that pacifism is not absolute in its definition, nor need it be applied to all situations.
Aims and Objectives

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand

- Gandhi’s concept and meaning of pacifism
- Gandhi’s role as a qualified pacifist
- Gandhi’s pacifist methods as a means of conflict resolution.

15.2 THEORETICAL ASPECTS

Leo Tolstoy was an advocate of pacifism. In one of his latter works, *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Tolstoy provides a detailed history, account and defence of pacifism. The book was a major early influence on Gandhi. In his book, *The End of Faith*, Sam Harris argues that pacifism is a fallacy, combining hesitance with cowardice, in that the social context in which a pacifist can protest was created by the actions of direct activists. Kant maintains that the first principle of perpetual peace is that states should not make “secret reservation of the material for future war”. Michael Doyle has claimed that democracies do not go to war with one another. John Rawls has explained the stability of well-ordered democratic states as follows: “There is true peace among them because all societies are satisfied with the status quo for the right reasons”. In contrast to the just war tradition, pacifism rejects war as an acceptable means for obtaining peace. Pacifism can also be used to describe a commitment to nonviolence in one’s personal life that might include the attempt to cultivate pacific virtues such as tolerance, patience, mercy, forgiveness and love.

The basic theory and strategy of nonviolent action were worked out by Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Cesar Chavez, Gene Sharp and others who were engaged in nonviolent social protest in the 20th Century. Although the roots of this approach can be found in the long history of pacifism from Jesus onward, the Gandhi-King approach clarified the basic principles of nonviolent resistance and successfully put these principles into action in the Indian struggle for self-determination and in the American civil rights movement. One of the important ideas of this approach is that there should be coordination between means and ends. Peaceful means should be employed in pursuit of the end of peace and justice. “Velvet revolutions” that occurred in Eastern Europe in the late 1980’s and early 1990s, and Lithuania in 1990-91, when unarmed civilians succeeded in turning back Soviet troops are good examples of pacifist movements. Proponents of nonviolent action argue further, that nonviolence could be even more effective if society focused its resources on training citizens for nonviolent resistance and on coordinating nonviolent action.

15.2.1 Pacifism Leads to One World

Gandhi was an advocate of interstate fellowship and goodwill. The more important of these are his beliefs in the dharmic law which imposes a moral obligation on states as well as individuals; his desire to settle disputes at the level of the parties concerned; and his assent to the idea of ‘one world’ provided it incorporates his concept of ‘truth’ and ‘nonviolence’.

15.2.2 Techniques of Eliminating War

To eliminate war and to establish world peace, Gandhi looked to statesmen and nations to use or develop certain methods and institutions. The chief of these are third party settlement, world government, disarmament and an international police force. He argued that because the individual can be pacific, states possess an equal potential since they equal to the sum of their citizens.
15.2.3 Satyagraha: Substitute for Military Action

Gandhi recommended satyagraha as a substitute for military action. He denied that his technique of struggle is a method of war rather than of peace and said that it has a spiritual quality which is not found in ordinary warfare. As to its interstate employment, he claimed satyagraha as a law of universal application. Beginning with the family its use can be extended to every other circle.

15.2.4 Moralistic Approach to World Affairs

Gandhi expected a sovereign India to carry out a pacifying function in the world which would be a projection of the country’s heritage and its nonviolent struggle against the British Empire. Gandhi’s notions implicitly deny those ancient Hindu ideas emphasising stratagems, guile and the balance of power as the basis for India’s external relations, especially those associated with Kautilya and Kamandaka. Nonetheless Gandhi left to Indian policy makers some practical advice as well as a moralistic approach to world affairs. Adroitness and idealism are also evident in his views.

15.3 THE BHAGVAD GITA AND PACIFISM

Gandhi drew two lessons from the Bhagavad Gita: to base action on unselfishness and to be detached from worldly benefits. He did not believe that seeking Indian freedom by wartime service had been selfish or to be detached means to ignore or shun the profits of action. Gandhi’s moral was to avoid asking for something, it was not a refusal to accept something good from evil.

15.3.1 Forgive the Opponents

As causes of war, Gandhi named western imperialism and fascism. He also cited communism as a threat to world peace. His criticism of the three ideologies is qualified by an ability to forgive opponents and his faith in their reformation. Behind these political forces he saw man’s economic greed and recourse to violence as deeper sources of aggression. As remedies he called for economic justice, sovereign equality and peaceful cooperation among states as requisites for international harmony.

15.3.2 Rejection of Materialism

Gandhi’s solution for a peaceful world received support from his views on economic grievances, western colonialism and his own philosophy of non-materialism. His insistence upon the equality of all states as a precondition to peace gained strength from his backing of the self-determination of the people.

15.4 GANDHI AS A QUALIFIED PACIFIST

Gandhi’s qualified pacifism is consistent with his system of belief in which dynamic nonviolence is his dialectical method to find the ultimate truth without being the end itself. When this position is understood, it is evident that Gandhi does not offer an ethic of love divorced from justice as realists. Gandhi’s pacifism is well illustrated in some of his answers to criticism of his wartime service and by general remarks. They also illumine the differences between him and those who believe that war has no relation to justice. Gandhi held that as a member of a disarmed, subject nation which needed the spirit of resistance, he would vote for military training in a free India. Taking the initiative, he argued that Western pacifists aid war capacities by paying taxes for military purposes.
Gandhi pointed out that he opposed alien rule while they dealt with states to which they felt some loyalty. He made it clear to the peace movement everywhere that intellectual neutrality is indefensible during war-time. Gandhi told pacifists that they must decide which the just side is in a military contest. Applying his conviction to particular events, he considered righteous the Spanish Republicans fighting Franco, the Chinese struggling against Japan, and the Poles resisting Germany, although he deplored the violent defence methods involved.

Gandhi identified the victims of aggression, he continued to pass moral judgments against the course of Jews, he said: “if there ever could be a justifiable war in the name of and for humanity, a war against Germany, to prevent the wanton persecution of a whole race, would be completely justified. But I do not believe in any war”. Gandhi found that justice rests with one party to a conflict and that some good is possible from war despite its wrong means. Evidence of this position is seen in his support of the Japanese in their war with Russia in 1904-1905, in debates with Western pacifists, and in a number of his comments during the 1930’s when he endorsed the cause of the victims of fascism.

15.4.1 Gandhi as an Absolute Pacifist

Gandhi’s ideas about war cut across unqualified pacifism, conditional pacifism and patriotic realism. As an unqualified pacifist, Gandhi believed that nothing of value is produced from military conflict. This view can be found in his idea during the period 1909-1914, in his comments about Western democracies immediately after World War I and during the early years of World War II. It is seen also in his condemnation of nuclear war. As an absolute pacifist, he is more utopian than his general premises suggest.

After World War I, Gandhi alleged that the Allies had been as deceitful, cruel and selfish as Germany, and that they had been a menace to the world because of their secret treaties and military record. With the outbreak of World War II, he looked back and criticised the peace makers at Versailles for having denied justice to Germany and took to task Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points for depending on arms rather than nonviolence for their ultimate sanction. Expressing his standpoint, in April 1939, when the British and French guaranteed Poland’s security against German aggression, he wrote: “After all, what is the gain if the so-called democracies win? War certainly will not end. Democracy will have adopted all the tactics of the Fascists and the Nazis, including conscription and all other forcible methods to compel and exact obedience. All that may be gained at the end of the victory is the possibility of a comparative protection of individual liberty.”

The ‘Royden Affair’ gives an excellent illustration of Gandhi’s unconditional pacifism during World War II. Mude Royden, a British pacifist, decided late in 1941 that her capacity for nonviolence was not sufficient for the circumstances in which she found herself. Following her interpretation of Christ’s idea, she decided to support the war which she could not effectively diminish. When Gandhi learned of her decision, he criticised her new position and asked her to repent and to return to her former unqualified nonviolence. It does not seem that Gandhi understood that her personal incapacity to observe strict pacifism was a condition to which he himself confessed in the 1920s as one of his explanations for supporting the British cause in World War I.

15.4.2 Gandhi’s Rigorous Pacifism

Gandhi’s rigorous pacifism during World War II was intensified by nationalist India’s negotiations with the British Government for immediate freedom. From 1939 to the spring
of 1942 he generally found no righteousness in the Allied cause. Sometimes he became indifferent to any issues that were not Indian. Privately, Gandhi wrote to a friend in May 1940, that though Europe was destroying itself, he would not permit his sympathies to be involved.

15.4.3 Change in Gandhi’s Pacifism

The change in Gandhi’s pacifism came about during the World War II when he gave his permission for an immediately liberated India to become a defence theatre for operations against Japan under the terms of a treaty with the democracies. He saw himself as a witness for non-violence, allowing the Western powers and those Indians who were not pacifist to defend the India-Burma frontier, and thereby Mother India. Asked if India itself would declare war, Gandhi replied: Free India need not do so. It simply becomes the ally of the allied powers simply out of gratefulness for the payment of a debt, however overdue. Human nature thanks the debtor when he discharges the debt. During a time of crisis in the Indian nationalist efforts to oust British power, the dictates of politics overcame his idealism. Nehru considers India as a unique change involving suffering in Gandhi’s mind and soul. It is clear that a precedent existed in Gandhi’s past for the shift in his outlook on war in 1942, namely, his support of the British imperialism in World War I following earlier pacifist declarations.

Gandhi resumed an unconditionally ironic attitude when the Second World War ended. Speaking about free India’s defence, he said that military forces would be incompatible with the ideal state and with democracy. The mention of war criminals brought forth the response that they ‘are not confined to the Axis Powers alone’. He felt that Roosevelt and Churchill are no less responsible for war than Hitler and Mussolini. In fact, at the time of Roosevelt’s death, Gandhi said that World War II had no positive achievement and that the future outlook for peace was dim. He was spared the humiliating spectacle of being party to a peace which threatens to be prelude to war, bloodier still if possible.

15.4.4 Nature of Pacifism

The patterns that emerge from Gandhi’s views of the nature of pacifism are those of absolute pacifism, qualified pacifism and patriotic realism. The first is a viewpoint familiar to international relations: war is unjust as to its methods, participants and results. On the other hand, his qualified pacifism is exceptional in that it stresses the responsibility of nonviolent men – and of states since he drew no distinction between individual and collective nonviolence – to decide who the aggressor is and to do so without abdicating the quest for peace. It is because of Gandhi’s assertive, conditional pacifism that Reginald Reynolds credited Gandhi with rescuing Christian pacifism from overemphasis on passive resistance and non-resistance. As to his realistic position on war, this points to the difficulty of combining demands for self-determination with pacifism. Those men or nations wishing to be free and to be pacific are likely to discover some utility in violence.

15.4.5 Flexible Adjustment of Idealism to Nationalism

Gandhian approach to pacifism represents the flexible adjustment of his idealism to the demands of his nationalism. Examples are found in comments during World War I, in subsequent explanations for aiding the British Empire, and in his suggestions for the defence of India during the 1920’s. He was flexible when he permitted the United Nations and non-pacifist Indians to defend India in 1942 if the country were free.
15.5 GANDHI ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Gandhi experimented with various means of resolving conflicts. Passive resistance, according to Gandhi, had to be supplemented by an active effort to understand and respect adversaries. In an atmosphere of respect, people could find peaceful, creative solutions. Gandhi influenced his followers to use their non-violent actions to attack the heart of their oppressors, and in turn they would receive the sympathy and respect that they so greatly deserved. Gandhi based much of his pacifist teachings on the Hindu traditions while using the religious text, the Bhagavad Gita. In this sacred text he found excerpts to support the pacifist views on avoiding violence.

Relativism can provide no reason to support pacifism. But there is a type of pacifism that is not absolute, known as contingent pacifism. While absolute pacifism admits no exceptions to the rejection of war and violence, contingent pacifism is usually understood as a principled rejection of a particular war.

War: A Brutalising Method of Change

Gandhi said that British Raj constitutes a struggle between the Modern Civilisation, which is the Kingdom of Satan, and the Ancient Civilisation, which is the Kingdom of God. The one is the God of War; the other is the God of Love. He spoke out against war as a degrading and brutalising method of change inferior to the way of suffering. He did so while maintaining that the peace is always superior to war. Gandhi countered British imperialism with civil disobedience. Though his struggle was pacific, he limited the application of his pacifism to free India’s military defence, apparently because he momentarily expected his country’s independence.

Non-violence in the Event of an Invasion of India?

Gandhi cautioned against excessive pacifist criticism of defending a free India by arms and urged non-pacifists to demonstrate their beliefs if independent India were attacked. He declared nonviolence to be a temporary ideal for securing Indian sovereignty and not pertinent in the event of an invasion of India. Despite pacifist sentiments, when the First World War broke out, Gandhi’s stand changed and once again he supported Britain in war and found a potential good in armed victory. Gandhi added that fundamentally he had been and he still was a pacifist. For man to exist, however, involves some violence. A believer in ahimsa should always try to end a war.

No Desire to Substitute British Rule with any other Foreign Rule

A test of Gandhi’s pacifism came during World War II when he was confronted with the question of whether he would approve a war of a national liberation by which Japanese military intervention would help to achieve Indian statehood. Nehru offered national Indian aid to the British war effort if India secured immediate independence. But Gandhi did not permit his aspiration for Indian freedom to lead him to condone violent interference from outside his country, since this would have given India a more severe rule than it had under the British Empire. He wrote: “I would not be guilty of inviting any power to invade India for the purpose of expelling the English. For one thing, it would be contrary to my creed of non-violence. I have too great respect for English bravery and arms to think that an invasion of India can be successful without a strong combination of different powers. In any case, I have no desire to substitute British rule with any other foreign rule. I want unadulterated home rule, however inferior in quality it may be”.

Gandhi’s Political Thought
War: No Relation to Justice

Atomic warfare gave Gandhi a fresh opportunity to claim that war has no relation to justice. ‘So far as I can see’, he wrote, ‘the atomic bomb has deadened the finest feeling that has sustained mankind for ages’. There used to be the so-called laws of war which made it tolerable. War knows no law except that of might. The atom bomb brought an empty victory to the allied arms but it resulted for the time being in destroying the soul of Japan. What has happened to the soul of the destroying nation is yet too early to see. Forces of nature act in a mysterious manner.

Imperialism: Forceful Control of a Nation by Foreign State

To Gandhi ‘imperialism’ meant the overseas control of non-Western areas and people by Western powers. He employed ‘colonialism’ as a substitute, and he seldom used the term ‘imperialism’ to describe the forceful control, east or west, of a nation by any foreign state. His thinking about imperialism for the most part of the British type, evolved from belief in its progressive character to criticism of its motives and rejection of its results.

Arbitration: Method of Resolving Interstate Questions

Of the many ways of pacific settlement, Gandhi singled out what he called ‘arbitration’ as his preferred method of resolving interstate questions, meaning any informal effort by a third party to immediate, conciliate or use good offices. In particular he appreciated the attempt of President Roosevelt, in April 1939, to settle differences between the West European democracies and Germany.

Within Gandhi’s belief in the higher law of dharma, applicable to states as well as to men, there are ideas of justice and order comparable to those of the natural law tradition which does so much to encourage positive international law. Man’s moral responsibility is Gandhi’s avenue for enforcing the higher code in the world. He drew no distinction between interpersonal and interstate duty.

Federation of Friendly Interdependent States

Gandhi believed that the world should be organised to maintain justice and peace and these appear in his ideas about world government. His views on this topic must be understood in connection with his efforts to grope beyond notions about the British Commonwealth and to envisage a larger association of states. For instance, Gandhi told a Congress party audience in December 1924, when he assumed the party chief’s office: “The better mind of the world desires today not absolutely independent states warring one against another, but a federation of friendly interdependent states. I want to make no grand claim for our country. But, I see nothing grand or impossible about our expressing readiness for universal interdependence rather than independence. Gandhi’s ‘league’ for ‘fully independent’ states suggests less cohesion and more attention to sovereign equality than the ‘federation of friendly interdependent states’ as suggested in his 1924 statement. In addition to equality, he made it clear he foresaw a universal membership in any new world organisation, and not limited to those states in the British Commonwealth or those who were victorious in World War II.

Gandhi endorsed inspirational resolutions of the Congress party which suggested a federal world state based on self-determination of all people and economic justice. Still he did not entirely agree with practical efforts by others to establish an immediate world organisation, but he offered to compromise on details if respect was shown to his ethic of non-violence.
Atom Bomb is of No Effect before Truth and Non-Violence

Gandhi’s abhorrence of an atomic war intensified his faith in non-violence: ‘There have been cataclysmic changes in the world. Do I still adhere to my faith of truth and nonviolence? Has not the atomic bomb exploded that faith? Not only has it not done so, but it has clearly demonstrated to me that the twins constitute the mightiest force in the world. Before it the atom bomb is of no effect. The two opposing forces are wholly different in kind, the one moral and spiritual, the other physical and material. The one is infinitely superior to the other which by its very nature has an end. The force of the spirit is ever progressive and endless. Its full expression makes it unconquerable in the world. In saying this I know that I have said nothing new. I merely bear witness to the fact’.

Nuclear Discoveries created a ‘Balance of Terror’

Gandhi believed that nuclear discoveries had created a ‘balance of terror’ forestalling a third world war by fear of mutual destruction. He conceded that there might be a temporary revulsion to atomic war, but the world would return to violence when the feeling had passed. From Gandhi’s viewpoint, states using nuclear weapons can never be ‘just’, and nothing of value results from an atomic war.

15.6 NONVIOLENT ACTION FOR DEFENSIVE, INTERSTATE STRUGGLE

Gandhi believed that his technique of nonviolent, direct action can be employed for defensive, interstate struggle which customarily involves military violence. Illustrations of this belief are especially evident in the last decade of his life and show the confidence with which he would substitute for war a method he had developed and found effective in the colonial circumstances of India.

Impartial World Police Force

Gandhi’s ideas do point toward the establishment of an impartial world police force, such as provided for under Article 43 of the United Nations Charter making available on a permanent, stand-by basis, armed units to member states for use by the Security Council to maintain international peace and security. For creating a United Nations army after the fact of aggression, as in the 1950 Korean and 1956 Suez crises, his ideas are very important.

15.7 SUMMARY

Gandhi believed that ultimate peace is in a divine plan which has not been fully revealed to men as they have an obligation to apply what they know in order to establish temporal peace. In particular, he held that disarmament can and should be introduced by one or several states. He doubted that a great power would actually introduce universal disarmament, and he put his faith in India to show the way toward that goal. Still he hoped for some armed state, an apostolate of one, to be a witness for the truth of nonviolence and to dare to disarm itself, whatever the risks, and thereby to serve the world. As western pacifists have often done, he looked to small, neutral Switzerland to give up traditional defence methods.

Gandhi thought that the first condition of peace is trust in an active, interposing deity, which the West had failed to realise. Without this trust man would feel God’s punishment. Gandhi
suggested prayer in the event of nuclear War. Potential victims of atomic attack, he explained, should go into the open and pray for the pilot of the airplane bringing atomic weapons so that he might realise through extra-human intervention that those below intended no evil toward him.

Gandhi saw a spiritual unity among all men transcending their temporal differences. It is the application of principles, rather than any demand for political, economic or cultural integration, which characterises his views on pacifism. He opposed aggression whether or not it directly uses military force, receives legal recognition from the parties concerned or the international community. Consistently, Gandhi believed that the actual process of war is unrighteous because it contradicts ahimsa and the higher law of dharma. Gandhi said that “the children of violence will commit suicide and perish unless they turn away from violence”. His views differ on whether belligerents can be just and whether something of value is ever produced from the evil process of war. For Gandhi, truth, was the ultimate good.

15.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. What do you understand by Pacifism? Describe the theoretical basis of Pacifism.
2. Discuss the role of Satyagraha in Gandhian Pacifism.
3. Critically examine the different kinds of Gandhian Pacifism.
4. Describe the main elements of Gandhian Pacifism.
5. Do you think that an impartial world police can be effective for the world peace?

SUGGESTED READINGS


McDaniel, Jay., Gandhi’s Hope: Learning From Other Religions as a Path to Peace, Maryknoll, Orbis, New York, 2005.


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16.1 INTRODUCTION

The approach of Gandhi to peaceful world order represents the flexible adjustment of his idealism to the demands of nationalism. Gandhi said that the world should be organised to maintain a just peace. The better mind of the world desires today not absolutely independent states. Gandhi believed in a federation of friendly inter-dependent states. Gandhi said that ‘the consummation of that event may be far off. I want to make no grand claim for our country. But I see nothing grand or impossible about our expressing our readiness for universal interdependence rather than independence.” If one takes care of the means, the end will take care of itself. Non-violence is the means; the end for every nation is complete
independence. Gandhi worked within the nation-state framework. Not only he struggled for one’s nation’s independence, his own future vision of the world was one of a system of sovereign nation-states. Immersed in the colonial period, it was quite historically sensible to struggle for the independence of his country and also to have a view that if all nations enjoy political freedom, then there could be a peaceful world.

Aims and Objectives

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand

- Gandhi’s concept of world order
- The role of non-violence as a prerequisite for total development
- The role of satyagraha in the nuclear age

### 16.2 REQUISITES FOR A PEACEFUL WORLD ORDER

At the time of the United Nations creation, Gandhi specifically told to end colonialism and war, to impose generous peace treaties, to create a world police force, and to establish economic justice and a world federation. Gandhi thought that the first condition of peace is trust in an active, interposing deity, a pre-requisite for the peaceful world, which the Western countries had failed to realise.

#### 16.2.1 Justice and Duty

Within Gandhi’s belief in the higher law of dharma, applicable to all states, as well as to men, there are ideas of justice and order comparable to those of the natural law tradition which does so much to encourage positive international law. Man’s moral responsibility is Gandhi’s avenue for enforcing the higher code in the world, especially since he drew no distinction between inter-personal and inter-state duty. ‘I learnt from my illiterate but wise mother’, Gandhi said, ‘that all right to be deserved and pre-reserved came from duty well done.” Thus, the very right to live accrues to us only when we do the duty of citizenship of the world.

#### 16.2.2 Rule of Law

The Rule of law system guarantees that officials cannot act arbitrarily disregarding the laws consented to by the people. The officials in the ideal democracy are accountable to the sovereign public by answering citizen’s questions, replying to their mail, following their laws and courts and not resorting to violence, or doing anything that undermines people’s liberty, equality, and justice. Unfortunately many democracies allow their military/police forces and secret service to use coercion and force against the public. According to Gandhi, the military should be turned into a peace force (Shanti Sena), policemen should act as social workers, jailors should function like doctors and educators, and jails should be turned into hospitals and schools. Only then can the peace-keeping forces in society become really accountable to the people. By denying any role to violence, Gandhi contributed to enhancing the process of peaceful accountability of the government to the people.

#### 16.2.3 Pluralism and Toleration

Gandhi said that pluralism and toleration are the two sides of the same coin. Commitment to pluralism-toleration is a commitment to rationalism and non-violence. Blind faiths, irrational beliefs, and monistic truths have the tendency to inhibit and discourage rational thinking, to
ban and penalise examination, to disregard or falsify factual evidence, and to banish or punish public discussion.

### 16.2.4 Democratic World Order

Gandhi believed that a genuine democracy must have a foreign policy that extends to other countries the democratic principles that are cherished and practised at home, even while working to build democracy on the national stage. Builders of democracy may act locally, but they must think globally. Gandhi rejects use of violence against any injustice by denouncing Marxist, fascist and militant nationalist appeals to violence for ending economic injustice.

### 16.3 A PEACEFUL SOCIAL ORDER AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Gandhi said that promoting individual activities that contribute to social peace like creating conditions for mutual tolerance of differing ways of thinking and living in a social order is the cornerstone of a peaceful and prosperous society. The spread of health and education is essential for the generation of such a social environment. The mobilisation of individual disposition to be tolerant towards each other and show their good will for the social good thus constitutes a very important element in preserving peace. Closely connected with the above-mentioned trend of the modern state with enlarged conception of peace is the commitment to human rights. Human Rights guarantee the citizens not only protection from the excesses of the state and society but also positive entitlements and facilities for individual growth.

#### Truth and Non-violence

Gandhi was a pacifist. He found that justice rests with one party to a conflict. Gandhi’s pacifism is consistent with his system of belief in which dynamic non-violence is his dialectical method to find the ultimate truth without being the end itself. Gandhi believed that ultimate peace is in a divine plan which has not been fully revealed to men, they have an obligation to apply what they know in order to establish temporal peace.

#### Peace without War

Nations in East and West had been accustomed to settle their differences by war. Gandhi told India and the rest of the world that one could match one’s soul-force against physical force and wear the other down with goodwill. All evil comes from ignorance and all good from faith in equality, the underlying sameness and oneness of things. War consists not in battle only in the act of fighting, but in the will to fight, the attitude of hostility. The so-called peace treaties do not make peace unless they are backed by honest intentions. Violence, as a means to achieve ends, is both impractical and immoral. It is impractical because the descending spiral ending is a distraction for all.

#### Religious Tolerance

Gandhi believed that the essential unity of all religions has been universality of love. It is implied that there is no place for hatred between people professing different faiths. The ultimate aim of all religions is moral order. It aims at peace and tranquility in society. It attempts to uphold human values. Gandhi hoped that the individual being pure, sacrifices himself for the family, the latter for the village, the village for the district, the district for province, the province for the nation, and the nation for all.
Solutions to Shortcomings of Democracy

Gandhi offers a two-pronged solution to the shortcomings of modern democracy. At one level, Gandhi emphasises consensus, instead of majority, that is, mere numbers and counting of heads should not guide democracy. At another level, arriving at peaceful persuasion and conversion through rational-humanistic arguments and compromises are the best guarantees of genuine democracy. Besides, Gandhi places a special responsibility on the majority to act as the big brother/sister to win over the minority, the little brother/sister. At yet another level, Gandhi focuses on responsibilities rather than rights. If every citizen is conscious and willing to fulfill his obligations towards others in the society and the world, then the rights of everyone are automatically protected in a meaningful way. The sense of obligation transforms the mental framework from ego and selfishness to one of thoughtfulness, selflessness, and service. The latter qualities humanise democracy and harmonise relations between majority, minority, and the individuals. If people are sovereign and if people select/elect the officials, then these officials should be accountable to the people. If the laws are made by the elected legislatures, then these legislators should be answerable to the electorate for the kind of laws they make. Elections, plebiscites, referenda, parliamentary questions, legislative votes of non-confidence, and press interviews are the means of enforcing parliamentary accountability; terrorism, coup d’état, or civil war cannot be the methods of enforcing such accountability.

League of Fully Independent States

Gandhi believed that there will be an international league only when all the nations, big or small, composing it is fully independent. The nature of that independence will correspond to the extent of non-violence assimilated by the nations concerned. He said that one thing is certain that in a society based on non-violence, the smallest nation will feel as tall as the tallest. Gandhi’s ‘league’ of ‘fully independent’ states suggests less cohesion and more attention to sovereign equality than the ‘federation of friendly interdependent states’.

Universal Membership for All Nations

Gandhi saw a universal membership in any new world organisation. It should not limit to those states that are in the British Commonwealth or those who were victorious in World War II. Gandhi said that the organisation should be an effective force to keep the peace, and recommended that it adopt Satyagraha.

16.4 WAR: THE UNSOLVED PROBLEM OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The major unsolved problem of international relations, Gandhi maintained, is war, that is to say, inter-state aggression. He opposed aggression whether or not it directly uses military force, receives legal recognition from the parties concerned or the international community. His ideas suggest, moreover, that he was not satisfied about men’s periodic efforts to analyse the nature and causes of war and to undertake its prevention. Consistently Gandhi believed that the actual process of war is unrighteous because it contradicts ahimsa and the higher law of dharma. Violent revolution of the alienated peasantry was the main reason for the rise of dictatorships in many countries, including Czarist Russia, Nationalist China, feudalist France and Germany, and French-colonial Indochina, Dutch-colonial Indonesia, Spanish-colonial Mexico, Portuguese colonial Angola and Mozambique, and so on. ‘The children of violence will commit suicide and perish unless they turn away from violence’, he observed in a discussion on war. However, his views differ on whether belligerents can be
just and whether something of value is ever produced from the evil process of war. Some of the diversities on these points are resolved by the tendency of his pacifism to admit limitations, in particular that truth, not peace, is the ultimate good. The demands of his nationalism upon his idealism account for other inconsistencies. For these reasons his opinions about the character of war sometimes differ from those of Western pacifists who hold that in every respect war is the absence of justice.

16.4.1 Causes of War

Gandhi named Western imperialism and fascism as causes of war. He also cited communism as a threat to world peace. His criticism of the three ideologies is qualified by an ability to forgive opponents and his faith in their reformation. Behind these political forces he saw man’s economic greed and recourse to violence as deeper sources of aggression. As remedies he called for economic justice, sovereign equality and peaceful co-operation among states as requisites for international harmony. The first solution received support from his economic grievances against Western colonialism and his own philosophy of non-materialism. His insistence upon the equality of all states as a precondition to peace gained strength from his backing of the self-determination of most people, though not Indian Moslems and Zionists. For many reasons he was an advocate of interstate fellowship and good will. The more important of these are his belief in the religious law which imposes a moral obligation on states as well as individuals; his desire to settle disputes at the level of the parties concerned; and his assent to the idea of ‘one world’ provided that it incorporates his ‘truth’ and his ‘non-violence’.

16.4.2 Disarmament and the World

Gandhi held that disarmament can and should be introduced by one or several states. He doubted that a great power would actually introduce universal disarmament, and he put his faith in India to show the way toward that goal. Still he hoped for some armed state, an apostolate of one, to be a witness for the truth of non-violence and to dare to disarm itself, whatever the risks, and thereby to serve the world.

16.4.3 Industrial Colonial Technological Military Authoritarian Complex

Gandhi believed that colonialism, militarism and wars are the unavoidable essentials of high industrialisation. Further, large scale industrialisation is inconceivable without dehumanised science and technology. The modern industrialised militarised colonial state is impossible without authoritarian big government. Gandhi said that, ‘I, therefore, define the highly developed modern state as ‘the industrial colonial technological military authoritarian complex.’ All the five elements are common to all industrial states irrespective of the ideologies they profess. Ironically enough, every one of them claims to be a democracy – the capitalist democracy, the socialist democracy, the proletarian democracy, the people’s democracy, racist/theocratic democracy, and so on. But, every one of them has reduced and harmed the fundamentals of the ideal democracy, both at home and abroad.

16.5 NON-VIOLENCE: PREREQUISITE FOR TOTAL DEVELOPMENT

Gandhi has presented non-violence in a new form and shape before the world. The form of his non-violence is no escape or exile but resistance. He marched forward using non-violence as the best weapon to encounter immorality for morality, inhumanity for humanity
and injustice for justice. His objective was to create a society based on the principle of non-violence, where alone man’s freedom would be safe and mankind would be free from repression and tyranny, whereby peaceful social life is ensured. Gandhi wanted non-violence as the spirit of life and to fuse it in all social relations- familial, political, economic and educational. In his view, a person who is non-violent at home, with neighbours or in society but has no sympathy and respect towards others is not truly non-violent. It is with the quality of non-violence that we love those who hate us, not merely loving those who love us. Man as animal is violent but his humaneness is non-violent. The philosophy of Gandhian non-violence is a pre-requisite for the total development, including the personality, of a man. The application of non-violence is also relevant both in private and public spheres of life. In the economic field it means a decentralised village economy, in the political field it means a federation of autonomous village republics and in the international field it means avoidance of the use of force and the peaceful settlement of disputes.

16.5.1 Use of Arms for Justice

As a substitute for national defense forces, he first had critical ideas but eventually expressed affirmative views about an international police agency using weapons to maintain peace and repel aggression. Significantly, late in life he approved its use under unbiased auspices of armed justice in an imperfect world.

16.5.2 No Place for Imperialism

To Gandhi, ‘imperialism’ meant the overseas control of non-Western areas and people by Western powers. Gandhi considered the violence of Mussolini and Hitler, like all violence, as a transitory phenomenon corrected by non-violent resistance. Gandhi’s faith in satyagraha influenced his understanding of Nazism; thus he advised Jews in Germany to use non-violent, direct action against Nazi persecutions in place of the passive resistance which he said they were employing. It is believed that German Jews might have attracted world attention sooner than they did had they been trained in and used Gandhi’s satyagraha. Gandhi added that the Nazi empire would fall because it had over expanded and was based on the erroneous ideology of ‘ruthless force reduced to an exact science and worked with scientific precision.’ The sins of imperialism do not remain confined to foreign lands. They come home to roost when the imperialist soldiers, clergymen, businessmen, bureaucrats, and politicians came home. Brutalised by the very cruelties they inflicted on the weak, the poor and the dehumanised peoples of the colonies, the imperialist brought the wages of sin. Murder, rape, child molestation, drug addiction, imprisonments, political corruption, unscrupulous business practices, racism, bigotry, resource mismanagement, environment degradation, militarism – all practised abroad and all antithetical to democracy – flourish within the imperialist states.

16.5.3 Cruelties of Colonialism

The cruelties of colonialism – military subjugation, economic exploitation, cultural suppression, and political oppression, carried on over hundreds of years – have so poisoned and brutalised two thirds of the world that all hopes and attempts at creating democracy have been dashed to the ground with the rise of fascist, or communist, or militarist regimes in almost all the countries of Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.

16.5.4 Economic Inequalities and Trusteeship

Gandhi proposes nonviolent moral appeals against feudalism and capitalism. The Gandhian doctrine of Trusteeship is built on the idea that capitalists must be convinced and converted to accepting that they should act, not as the sole and private owners of wealth, but as the
trustees of the people, managing wealth on behalf of the people for the benefit of all. Gandhism prefers cooperative enterprises over private and competitive capitalism.

16.5.5 Globalisation from Below

To create a culture of peace we need “globalisation from below” with a solid recognition that this globalisation is only possible with active participation of all men, women, youth and children from all countries. Peace is not created out of diplomatic activity. It is created out of the everyday skills of peaceful problem solving and conflict resolution in families, neighbourhoods and among different social, cultural, religious and ethnic groups within and between societies.

16.6 ROLE OF SATYAGRAHA IN NUCLEAR AGE

Citizen apathy, the relative uselessness of traditional home guards and militia, the need to build cores of resistance to invaders who cannot possibly be stopped at the border or who invade everywhere by air, these and other critical problems face Western defence officials of atomic and non-atomic powers alike. Gandhi’s satyagraha may offer assistance to civil defence in a nuclear age.

16.6.1 Say No to Atom Bombs

Gandhi believed that the atomic bomb has vanished the finest feeling that has sustained mankind for ages. The atom bomb brought an empty victory to the Allied arms but it resulted for the time being in destroying the soul of Japan. What has happened to the soul of the destroying nation is yet too early to see. Forces of nature act in a mysterious manner. Gandhi’s abhorrence of an atomic war intensified his faith in non-violence. There have been cataclysmic changes in the world. Gandhi asked “do I still adhere to my faith of truth and non-violence? Has not the atomic bomb exploded that faith? Not only has it not done so, but it has clearly demonstrated to me that the twins constitute the mightiest force in the world. Before it, the atom bomb is of no effect. The two opposing forces are wholly different in kind, the one normal and spiritual, the other physical and material.” From Gandhi’s viewpoint, states using nuclear weapons can never be ‘just’ and nothing of value results from an atomic war.

16.6.2 World must take Lessons from Indian Culture of Democracy

Gandhian revolution was based on humanism, secularism, and pluralism; the revolution used the methods of rationalism, love and nonviolence, and the instruments of satyagraha; and the revolution involved satyagrahis who vowed not to be prejudiced, not to lift the sword, but to love their enemies, to seek reasonable and peaceful solutions to all conflicts. These values and culture, the methods and instruments, and the attitudes and behaviour continue in independent India. Among more than one hundred countries that struggled for attaining independence after World War II, India is the one country that has developed and sustained democracy, without disintegration, long suspended or abolished legislatures and courts, and banned political parties, and with popular election, and the mass media. The legacies of the non-violent revolution in India have been the following: the establishment of the massive, full-fledged and dynamic democracy, the nonviolent abolition of the world’s largest democracy, the non-violent abolition of the largest feudal system through legislation and Bhoomdan (land gift movement); the peaceful ending of the long-lasting and well-entrenched “untouchability” of millions; the constitutional integration of some 700 princely states through peaceful diplomacy; the enunciation of the foreign policy of non-alignment and peaceful coexistence that has greatly influenced communist countries; and the successes of the anti-racial movements in the United States and South Africa.
16.7 RESTRUCTURING KNOWLEDGE

The core of Gandhi’s proposal for a knowledgeable society was the introduction of productive handicrafts in the school curriculum. The idea was not simply to introduce handicrafts as a compulsory school subject, but to make the learning of a craft the axis of the entire teaching programme. It implied a radical restructuring of the sociology of school knowledge in the society, where productive handicrafts had been associated with the groups.

16.7.1 Protection of Natural Environment

Gandhi said that the state has also the obligation not only to persuade the citizens to act to promote social good but also to undertake positive functions, such as promotion of environmental protection for social health and peace through an ecologically safeguarded environment. In a broader sense, peace would include social harmony which involves natural resources. Gandhi believed that natural resources are the primary sources for valuable and useful commodities. They are mainly raw materials and energy resources present in the environment, for example, minerals, forest, animals, water, soil etc. The youth should ensure its proper utilisation and conservation. This would imply rational use of resources and their preservation from reckless exploitation and destruction. He further advocated effective control and management of resources in such a way that they will be useful to man for longer time.

16.7.2 Environment Friendly Industrialisation

The enjoyer of the natural resources by way of limiting the wants or demand should be responsible for his or her fellowmen. This is the simple philosophy with which Gandhi looked at the economic development. He noted with concern that a man should be ‘environmental friendly’. If he does not, the environment will create all problems. Toynbee noted once that “if we don’t abolish war, war is going to abolish US”. Similarly if the industrialisation is not checked up it will spoil the entire life setting very badly which will therefore lead us all to the death knell. It is better to note here the Gandhian quotation on industrialisation. It reads: “My own view is that evils are inherent in industrialization and no amount of socialism can eradicate them.” Gandhi was clear in his advocacy that the mechanical or Machine or industrial or artificial life would create problems which would lead the humankind to the point of no return. However, it should be noted here that Gandhi never hated industrial development. But he hated the inhuman face of industrial planning which causes the replacement of human labour with machine.

16.7.3 Solidarity and Stability

Democratic rights and obligations are not a ‘one-time’ or ‘one in a way’ provision. Only when liberty, quality, and justice last long do they become effective principles for improving human life in democratic societies. That is, only a stable system without economic inequality, cultural crises, political disunity, and territorial disintegration can enshrine and nurture democracy. Assassinations and assaults, subversion and terrorism, coups and counter-coups, and insurrections and revolutions cannot create stability. Violence is the most destabilising force in any society, much more so in a democracy. But autocratic regimes and dictatorial institutions need and thrive on disunity, disintegration, unrest, and militarisation. The best way to achieve and maintain political stability is through people’s solidarity or sense of unity. Solidarity has been variously described – fellowship, fraternity, friendship, and love. Political solidarity can be built upon the premises of equality, liberty, socio-economic justice,
psychological satisfaction, and humanism. Stability and solidarity with the society cannot last long in a world being torn apart with instabilities and disunity. Sooner or later, outside forces of disruption, inhumanity, and violence penetrate national boundaries disturbing national stability and solidarity.

16.8 SUMMARY

According to Gandhian principles of equality and liberty, all citizens are capable of thinking and are free to act. Such pluralism is bound to generate conflict situations that have the potential to generate violence. While autocratic regimes thrive on violent clashes, democracy disallows or discourages violent methods of conflict resolution. Legislative reforms, executive intervention, judicial adjudication, and appeal to public opinion are the usual constitutional processes of settling disputes in a democracy. Gandhi’s world order was based on mutual interdependence of the nations, adopting non-violence as a tool of establishing a just society, universal solidarity and stability, firm resistance to the forces of imperialism and colonialism, economic justice and a society free from exploitation, and abandoning the developing of nuclear weapons. Gandhi’s ‘Satyagraha’ and his twin principles of truth and non-violence play a much more effective role today for they contribute to establishing a peaceful world order as per his vision.

16.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the views of Gandhi on the world order.
2. What are the requisites for a peaceful world order?
3. Describe the role of pluralism and tolerance in the democratic world order.
4. Examine the Gandhian solutions to shortcomings of democracy.
5. Critically examine Gandhi’s views on war.
6. Describe the importance of satyagraha in the nuclear age.

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