

MODERN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

**CBCS CORE COURSE (B.A. HONOURS)
VI SEMESTER**

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INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY**

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

Modern political philosophy began in the 16th century and extended till the first half of the 20th century. Modern philosophy had many new elements which were different from the past. One of them was rise of the concept of *consent*. During the time of modernity, the belief has been that legitimacy of a government is based on consent of those governed by it. Before modernity, government legitimacy was based on the belief in divine rights of the king while consent of the governed was totally ignored. Second, modern political philosophy gives emphasis on rights of individuals which are to be respected by even the rulers. Thirdly, there were attempts to make sense of the changes during modernity which led to new theories of historical progress. Fourthly, in terms of epistemology, modern political philosophy gave importance to rationality and the power of individual's mind to make sense of the world. In modern political philosophy, modernity is associated with individualism, liberalism, social contract, democracy, secularisation and equality. A scientific and materialistic way of life is the basis of modernity which avoids religious and spiritual perspective. Other features of modernity involve accelerated urbanisation, rise of nation states and bureaucracy and deepening of communication and financial exchanges. Modern political theory with its western liberal-democratic shade attempted to build a science of politics; objective, empirical, observational, measurable, operational and value-free.

At the other end of modern political theory stands the Marxist political theory, also called the *dialectical-materialist* or the *scientific-socialist* theory. Its importance lies in change through the struggle between opposites; between relations of production and productive forces with a view to have a better mode of production; development from the lower stage to the higher one; from, say, capitalistic to socialistic and from socialistic to communistic. It is a theory which provides a systematic and scientific framework of analysing and explaining social and political change. It is a method of interpreting the past, understanding the present, and projecting the future. This course covers some of the important thinkers from modern political philosophy and is divided in six blocks.

Block I has one unit titled *Enlightenment, Rationality and the Idea of Modernity*.

Block II deals with ideas of *Jean Jacques Rousseau* and has three units covering his views on state of nature and the *Noble Savage*, General Will and Self Government and his Critique of Liberal Education. **Block III** highlights feminist thinker *Mary Wollstonecraft*'s views on Rights of Women and her Critique of Rousseau's Idea of Education. **Block IV** deals with *John Stuart Mill* and his ideas on Liberty and Individualism, Suffrage and the Rights of Women and The Principle of Utility. **Block V** concerns with *Karl Marx* and his concepts like Historical Materialism, Class and Class Struggle and Capitalism and Exploitation. The last block highlights the views of Marxist-feminist *Alexandra Kollontai* on Socialisation of Housework.

Every unit has exercises to assess your progress and the answers are given at the end of each unit. There is a list of readings at the end of the course that would help to broaden your perspective and go deep into the study of modern political philosophy.



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BLOCK I

INTRODUCTION

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BLOCK I INTRODUCTION

This block has one unit titled Enlightenment Rationality and the Idea of Modernity. Europe is considered as the cradle of modern political philosophy as ideas like enlightenment and modernity began here. Enlightenment, also called the *age of reason*, is believed to have begun in 18th century Europe. It is called *Lumieres* in French and *Aufklärung* in German. Enlightenment brought new ways of thinking, changed the way knowledge was understood (epistemology) and organisation of state and society based on that knowledge. It contributed to rise of modernity while there was significant break with the ways of life from the past. One of the central figures of enlightenment, German philosopher *Immanuel Kant* wrote an article titled '*What is Enlightenment*' in 1784. He used the Latin phrase *Sapere Aude* as the motto of enlightenment which meant that we should have the courage to use our own understanding and knowledge. Religious reformation, scientific revolution and emergence of concept of sovereignty after the Thirty Years War in Europe led to rise of enlightenment. Some influential ideas associated with enlightenment are – opposition to absolute monarchy, liberty and individual rights, separation of powers, free market capitalism and equality. In modern political philosophy, modernity is associated with individualism, liberalism, social contract, democracy, secularisation and equality. Some of the main proponents of political modernity include *Thomas Hobbes*, *John Locke* and *Rousseau*.

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UNIT 1 ENLIGHTENMENT RATIONALITY AND THE IDEA OF MODERNITY*

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Enlightenment: Meaning and Concept
 - 1.2.1 Phases and Characteristics
 - 1.2.2 Main Political Thinkers and Ideas
- 1.3 Rationality
- 1.4 The Idea of Modernity
- 1.5 Criticism
- 1.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.7 References
- 1.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit would introduce concepts like Enlightenment, Rationality and Modernity which are critical to understand modern political philosophy. Socio-political and economic conditions shape prevailing philosophical trends in a given time period and study of these factors in 18th century Europe would explain the reasons for rise of Enlightenment and Modernity. At the same time, a number of important political thinkers rose during this period and introduced many ideas that continue to dominate Western political thought even today. After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the meaning of Enlightenment
- Describe its phases and characteristics
- Explain the meaning of rationality and modernity
- Understand the relationship between Enlightenment, Rationality and Modernity
- Explain some viewpoints that criticize these concepts

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Europe is considered the cradle of modern political philosophy. The events before and after 18th century led to rise of modernity in Europe in which enlightenment played a key role in the 18th century. There were changes in all spheres of life in European countries, although these changes had country-specific context and varied in their pace. Enlightenment began in West European countries like England, France and Germany and spread across Europe. The ideas of enlightenment later travelled to North and South America, Asia and Africa as European countries explored the world through colonialism. There were many reasons for the rise of enlightenment in Europe which can be seen in some important intellectual movements that preceded it. In Western Europe, political thinkers, philosophers, scientists and social scientists used scientific reason to seek answers in various fields including politics. Absolute monarchs, who had a lot of wealth and military power, ruled most of the European countries in 17th and 18th century. They ruled on the basis of divine rights doctrine, controlled religious authorities and dissent against them was strictly punished. Enlightenment also challenged the hierarchical view of all life as given by Great Chain of Being. All types of matter and life was organised in a hierarchical structure, according to *Great Chain of Being*. God is at the top of the chain followed by angels and humans. They were followed by animals and plants. Influenced by Plato and Aristotle, the Great Chain of Being justified the claim that everything was created and determined by God. Later, this position was challenged by enlightenment philosophers like *Diderot* and *Voltaire* who argued that it was man who was at the centre of the world, not God. In 1688, however, the Glorious Revolution in Great Britain began the transition from rule of absolute monarchs to constitutional monarchy in which the parliament was to play a big role as the representative of people. Next year in 1689, the English Bill of Rights imposed restrictions on the powers of monarch which were to be shared with the parliament.

Another cause of enlightenment was that the *reformation* movement had already begun to challenge the authority of Church and *Martin Luther's Ninety-five Theses* written in 1517 started the reformation movement in European Christianity. Scientists like *Newton* and *Galileo* had used reason and observation to scientifically explain things and in the process, proved many claims of the Catholic Church to be wrong. Galileo supported heliocentric view (Sun at the centre) of the Solar system instead of Church supported idea of *geocentric* (earth at the centre) view. Newton succeeded in mathematically explaining the laws of motion which strengthened the human belief to attain knowledge. In the beginning of the 17th century, French and English writers rejected divine knowledge provided by revelation (supernatural disclosure to human beings) or Church. It was called *Deism* which believed in God's existence through rationality, reason and observation. They believed in existence of God, but argued that he does not interfere in functioning of the world. Further, Renaissance began in Europe in 15th century after the end of the Middle Ages. Some of the themes of Renaissance that were reflected in enlightenment were – encouraging non-religious studies focusing on human beings (humanity), rationality of individuals

and scientific temper. The pace of urbanisation was increasing in 18th century Europe as more people headed towards cities and a new public sphere in form of salons, coffeehouses, reading clubs and societies came up where private individuals could meet and discuss public issues like politics and religion. According to German philosopher *Jurgen Habermas*, public sphere was critical in nature and there was a dialogue between all the parties involved. He had contrasted public sphere with representational culture that existed in Europe before 18th century in which one party tried to overwhelm the subjects by imposing its opinions on them. Public sphere was accompanied by growth in printing and mass media like books, pamphlets and newspapers which could shape public opinion in favour or against an issue beyond the purview of the government or the Church. The growth in trading and merchant class also helped in spreading the ideas of enlightenment. These events ensured that enlightenment was not confined to any particular class and had a general impact on the masses. It is in this socio-economic and political context that enlightenment rose in Europe and spread across the world.

1.2 ENLIGHTENMENT: MEANING AND CONCEPT

Enlightenment, also called the age of reason, is believed to have begun in 18th century Europe. It is called *Lumieres* in French and *Aufklärung* in German. Enlightenment brought new ways of thinking, changed the way knowledge was understood (epistemology) and organisation of state and society based on that knowledge. It contributed to rise of modernity while there was significant break with the ways of life from the past. The central argument was that legitimacy and authority originate from *reason* instead of faith and customs. Progress, humanity, liberty, human rights, fraternity and tolerance were promoted by enlightenment. By supporting constitutional government and separation between church and state, enlightenment went against the absolute monarchs and church and paved way for American and French revolutions. One of the central figures of enlightenment, German philosopher *Immanuel Kant* wrote an article titled '*What is Enlightenment*' in 1784. He used the Latin phrase *Sapere Aude* as the motto of enlightenment which meant that we should have the courage to use our own understanding and knowledge. Kant said that enlightenment is a process in which a man emerges from his self-imposed tutelage. Here, tutelage is inability of a man to use his own understanding without directions from someone else. That is why, Kant said *dare to know*.

There were two diverging strands in enlightenment, *radical* and *moderate*. The radical version was committed to a revolutionary and materialist worldview that argued in favour of democracy, individual rights and replacing the authority of religion with that of people. Main proponents of radical enlightenment were Dutch philosopher *Baruch Spinoza*, French philosophers *Marquis de Condorcet*, *Pierre Bayle*, *Baron d'Holbach*, *Denis Diderot* and English philosopher *Thomas Paine*. The moderate version did *not* seek revolutionary changes in religion and authority and argued in favour of accommodation between traditional and new systems. This view was supported by *Immanuel Kant*, *Jean Jacques Rousseau*,

Isaac Newton, Rene Descartes, John Locke, Christian Wolff, Montesquieu, Voltaire and David Hume. Another difference was that the moderates believed reason was *limited* in its scope and hence, religion and faith should be preserved. The supporters of radical enlightenment, on the other hand, believed everything can be transformed by reason. *Alexa Menashe* has argued that the radicals were able to speak and argue against different forms of discrimination like gender and race while the moderates upheld inequality and slavery.

1.2.1 Phases and Characteristics

There are mainly *three* phases or stages of enlightenment. The first phase was during the *first* half of 18th century which was influenced by the *scientific revolution*. Ideas of scientists and mathematicians like *Isaac Newton, Galileo, Rene Descartes* and *Johannes Kepler* had a profound impact on the enlightenment movement in this phase where scientific and mathematical methods were applied to various fields. The *second* phase was *high enlightenment* that was marked by ideas of French ‘philosophes’ (philosophers are called *philosophes* in French) like *Voltaire, Diderot, Montesquieu* and *Rousseau*. *Voltaire* in his 1764 book, *Philosophical Dictionary* argued that everything could be understood and explained rationally. The authority of the Church was challenged by different sections on the basis of reason. The *last* phase of enlightenment was the period from the last decade of the 18th century to beginning of the 19th century. This period witnessed the French revolution while there was shift from mercantilism to economic liberalism. This period also saw rise of idealist philosophy in *Germany* as is evident in the works of *Immanuel Kant*. Enlightenment rationality made way for Romanticism in the first half of the 19th century as it laid more emphasis on emotion and individuality over reason.

Following are the characteristics of the enlightenment period:

1) **Scientific Temper and Reason:** The scientific revolution was important in laying down the foundations of enlightenment as it advocated reason to be the basis of authority and legitimacy. Many enlightenment philosophers had their background in mathematics and science and gave importance to rationality and empiricism to achieve human progress. In many cases, the enlightenment thinkers were either atheists or deists who would dismiss all spiritual and religious matters as metaphysical or superstition.

2) **Scepticism towards Traditional Authority in Politics and Religion:** Enlightenment involved an attitude where claims about knowledge were to be doubted. *David Hume* in his 1748 book, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* raised questions about the ability of human beings to know anything with certainty. It was because of scepticism that questions were raised about religion and political authority during enlightenment in Europe. Scepticism could also be seen in the philosophy of ancient Greece and *Ajnana* school of philosophy in ancient India. Enlightenment thinkers favoured popular sovereignty, but did *not* completely reject monarchy as an institution. Some of them were not against taking favours from monarchs of that time as well. It is also

important to mention that the enlightenment thinkers were not revolutionaries, but those who believed in reform.

3) **Human Progress:** The idea of human progress was central to debates during enlightenment. The scientific discoveries instilled confidence among different sections of people that humans were capable of understanding the working of universe and could control environmental conditions. It was believed that humans had made progress from barbarous rusticity to an age of politeness. Here, there was a belief that humans are rational beings who would cooperate to achieve goals of enlightenment including happiness and progress. The optimistic belief of enlightenment was that the goodness and reason in human beings would create a prosperous, peaceful society and perfect people. French philosopher *de Condorcet's* 1795 book, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Spirit* has shown the relationship between human rights and justice on one hand, and scientific progress on the other. He argued for unity among human beings irrespective of divisions like religion and race. *Condorcet* also said that expanding the vistas of knowledge in social and natural sciences would create a better and just world for individual freedom.

4) **Local Variations:** In Europe, enlightenment moved forward with different pace and local context in different countries. In Italy, the authority and power of Church decreased which led to increase in scientific fervour and innovation. In France, there was *confrontation* between the government and enlightenment thinkers while the British government ignored the enlightenment thinkers altogether. In Germany, enlightenment ideas appealed to the middle class and led to nationalism without posing any threat to authorities. The authorities in Russia encouraged fields of arts and science. In Scotland, enlightenment thinkers emphasised on political economy. Scottish thinkers like *David Hume* and *Adam Smith* laid emphasis on economic liberalism. Smith gave ground breaking concepts like free market capitalism, demand and supply, minimum state control (*laissez-faire*) and comparative advantage to argue that nations become affluent when they manufacture what they are best in making and import what they do *not* produce. Hence, the ideas of enlightenment varied from country to country and what would be proclaimed in Britain or France would not be applicable to other European countries. From Europe, the enlightenment ideas spread to other parts of the world with colonialism.

5) **Empiricism:** The word empiricism originates from Greek word, *empeiria* which means experience. It is a theory of knowledge which says all concepts and understanding is based on experience. It emphasised evidence, especially one that was gathered through scientific methods and experiments. One of the main proponents of empiricism was *John Locke* who said that human mind at birth is a blank slate (*tabula rasa*) and sensory experiences shape an individual's ability to process and understand knowledge.

6) **Cosmopolitanism:** The core belief of cosmopolitanism is that human beings across the world form a single *community*. During the 18th century, terms like *world citizenship* and *cosmopolitanism* were used during the enlightenment period

that expressed open minded and impartial attitude. A man with no fixed abode and who would not be a stranger anywhere was described as cosmopolitan by *Encyclopedie*, a collection of thoughts of enlightenment thinkers published in France between 1751 and 1772 and edited by Diderot. With rise in capitalism, trade and empires emerging which were global in nature, growing interest in Hellenistic philosophy, rise of the notion of human rights and human happiness, the idea of cosmopolitanism gained further ground during the enlightenment period. Kant in his 1795 essay, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* argued for a cosmopolitan right or law that would guide the global society to achieve long-term peace. Kant addressed the post-Hobbesian international order, wherein there would be long-term peace among states and he tried to defend a cosmopolitan social contract. Such a contract was to be grounded in acts of human will and would promise to make laws that not only would restrain the power of the sovereign, but would also limit the possibility of war among states. This contract would also respect the rights of individuals as citizens of the world.

1.2.2 Main Political Thinkers and Ideas

One of the main areas impacted by enlightenment was *politics*. Political modernisation came to the West due to enlightenment as institutions of liberal democracy and values like freedom were propagated. Enlightenment played an important role in checking the power of organised religion and prevented yet another cycle of religious and intolerant wars in Europe. The main political thinkers and their ideas during the enlightenment are discussed below.

1) **Immanuel Kant:** Kant defined enlightenment in his article titled ‘*What is Enlightenment*’ in 1784. He argued that people should dare to know and think freely instead of relying on any external agency to make sense of the world. He was a reformist as he argued that political freedom would expand not because of revolutions, but due to political progress. In the realm of international politics, Kant argued in favour of a *voluntary federation* of states (League of Nations) that could maintain and preserve respect and equality among countries. This would ensure justice at international level.

2) **Voltaire:** He was one of the leading figures in French enlightenment. Unlike some of his contemporaries, Voltaire’s contribution to political philosophy is *not* well recognised although it is valuable. He supported political liberalism and religious tolerance. He died in 1778 but his ideas played an important role in the French revolution. He defended civil liberties, especially freedom of speech. One of his famous quotes defending an individual’s right to freedom of speech is, “I may not agree with what you have to say, but I’ll defend to death your right to say it.” It also reflects his commitment to tolerance. Voltaire had dismissed the idea that a universally applicable political order was possible which could be rationally constructed. On the other hand, Voltaire insisted that reason could improve and reform political order. However, he emphasised that reform process has to be gradual and would depend on the conditions of the country in which it is taking place. As also suggested by *Aristotle*, Voltaire believed that there was *no* best regime as it depended on conditions of the country and character of the people.

3) **Montesquieu:** French philosopher Baron de Montesquieu gave the concept of *separation of powers* which was later implemented in many constitutions around the world. The legislative, executive and judicial functions of the government should be separate from each other so that there is a system of *checks and balances* between the three branches and political liberty can be protected. This balanced distribution of political power also ensures that power is not concentrated in one individual or one branch of government. Enlightenment thinkers also favoured *separation of church/religion* from *politics*. Montesquieu was one of the earliest to highlight *sociological* or *anthropological* approach to politics. Instead of abstract principles of Locke's liberalism or Marxism, Montesquieu held the view that traditions and customs, climate, religion, geographical size and economy of a country have an important impact on its politics.

4) **Social Contract Theorists – Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau:** Some of the underlying ideas of Western liberal thought can be attributed to *Thomas Hobbes* through his 1651 book, *Leviathan*. Individual rights, belief in natural equality of all men and the conception that political authority should have a popular basis were the ideas that became founding principles of liberal thought in the West. Locke and Rousseau also gave *social contract* theory and argued that popular consent should be the basis of any government. Locke's views on tolerance, natural rights, limited government and justification of private property based on labour made him central figure in Western liberalism and very often, he is also called as the *Father of Enlightenment*. As explained earlier, Locke's concept of *tabula rasa* is one of the key arguments in favour of empiricism. Locke had criticised absolute monarchy and favoured self-government. He also defended people's right to overthrow an unjust rule. Rousseau's relationship with enlightenment was *ambiguous* as he put equal emphasis on *emotion* and *reason*. He had criticised modern society and decline in its standards of morality. However, Rousseau was committed to individual freedom and equality. He believed that *nobility* should be *abolished* as all men were equal. Rousseau was a seminal democratic theorist who was the *first* major thinker to argue that democracy is the *only* legitimate form of government. His ideas of equality of all human beings, democracy and freedom have influenced Modern republican governments. The views of social contract theorists played an important part in contributing to the American and French revolutions as these theories gave people a reason to overthrow their monarchs. Later, enlightenment ideas inspired *independence* movements in Haiti and Latin American countries like Peru, Bolivia, Venezuela and Colombia. This established the principle that future governments will have to be accountable to the people.

5) **J S Mill:** English philosopher John Stuart Mill was born after the *end* of enlightenment era in Europe and lived during the times of romanticism. He did not contribute to the times of enlightenment, but was influenced by the ideas of enlightenment. Mill combined the enlightenment reason with *psychological* and *historical* insights of romanticism. The importance of culture and the enlightenment idea of the need for social reform were reflected in Mill's ideas.

Mill thought that the enlightenment philosophers had reduced humanity to something much simpler than it was and it was also devoid of any emotion. He added a qualitative dimension to human happiness and injected enlightenment ideas with character and culture.

6) **Karl Marx:** Like Mill, Marx too was born *after* the age of enlightenment. There was profound impact of enlightenment ideas on Karl Marx. His views reflected some of the core beliefs of enlightenment but at the same time, Marx also criticised and modified some of these concepts. *Isaiah Berlin* has argued that enlightenment ideas are clearly visible in Marx's thought. *First*, Marx, like the enlightenment thinkers, was committed to reason to understand social phenomena. *Second*, he also rejected supernatural and superstitious explanations. *Third*, Berlin called Marx a *perfectibilian* since Marx believed that society is inevitably progressive and movement from one state to another shows progress. However, Berlin has also highlighted *contradictions* between Marx and enlightenment thinkers. Unlike the 'Encyclopedists', Marx believed that social transformation cannot take place overnight. Marx believed in *revolution* while the enlightenment thinkers favoured *social reform*. In the West, enlightenment led towards modernity characterised by free market capitalism and liberal democracy. Marx had contested capitalism through his economic view of history and argued that the proletariat would lead a bloody revolution against the bourgeoisie to overthrow capitalism and establish Communism where historical progress would end.

7) **Mary Wollstonecraft and Alexandra Kollontai:** Wollstonecraft and Kollontai represent two contrasting views on the question of women as Wollstonecraft was a *liberal* enlightenment philosopher while Kollontai gave a *Marxist* perspective on feminism. Before enlightenment, women had an inferior status to men in Western society. Enlightenment started a debate around the status of women in which both male and female philosophers contributed. Rousseau believed that women were less rational than men and depended on them for their survival. Locke argued that males themselves had created the perspective of their superiority over females. There have been allegations against Kant that he endorsed patriarchal views while gender hierarchies were part of his theories of morality and aesthetic judgement. Wollstonecraft was a British enlightenment philosopher who questioned the *duality* in the views of enlightenment thinkers as they supported ideas like equality, liberty and tolerance for all but *excluded* women from such concepts. She wrote her book, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) in which she applied liberal philosophy to women and argued in favour of their rights. One of central ideas of Wollstonecraft's was a society in which individuals (both males and females) had a right to *self-determination*, a concept that was later associated with modern liberalism. Alexandra Kollontai was born in the second half of 19th century and applied theoretical tools of Marxism to find solutions of problems faced by women in general and proletarian women in particular. Her ideas stood in contrast to liberal feminist ideas. In sync with the spirit of Marxism, Kollontai argued for economic restructuring of state to achieve equality and freedom for women. She argued that discontents of women

were linked to class inequality while patriarchy was connected to capitalism. Kollontai expected that the revolution would bring emancipation for the women.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

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

ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. Distinguish between moderate and radical enlightenment.

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1.3 RATIONALITY

Rationality argues that knowledge can be unearthed through the use of *logic* which is *independent* of *sensory experience*. It is human capability to think and decide according to evidence, knowledge and understanding that results in intelligent and just conclusions. Classical Greek philosophers like *Plato* and *Aristotle* believed that humans were superior to animals due to their ability of reasoning. Plato's theory of forms was accessible only to reason, not senses. Rationality was one of the pillars on which the enlightenment thought rested. *Rene Descartes* (France), *Gottfried Leibniz* (Germany) and *Baruch Spinoza* (Netherlands) were some of the leading proponents of rationality. By emphasising on scientific way of thought, the rationalists were taking on the scholasticism school of thought that combined mysticism, intuition and religious dogma. Thomas Hobbes had argued that it was because of reason that people decide to come out of state of nature to have a government and a civilised society. Dialectical reasoning of Marx indicated that history was moving towards Communism. In *contrast* to rationality, another idea called *Empiricism* existed. Empiricists like John Locke argued that knowledge came mainly from sensory experiences. Knowledge which is *independent* of *experience* is called *a priori* (rationality) while knowledge that depends on empirical proof is called *posteriori* (empiricism). Traces of early empiricism were also visible in *Vaisheshika* school of Indian philosophy founded by natural scientist and philosopher *Kanada*. Rationalists believed that some ideas are present in mind at the *time or even* before *birth* like concepts of *mathematics*. Locke refuted this claim through his concept of *tabula rasa* as explained earlier. Kant tried to harmonise the two diverging views by arguing that knowledge is acquired by both, experience and reason. Rationality in politics gives importance to use of reason that results in concepts like *secularism* and *utilitarianism*.

1.4 THE IDEA OF MODERNITY

Modernity is generally understood as the period between 1500 to second half of the 20th century in the Western world which began with the end of Middle Ages. Modernity was *different* from the earlier period as it was characterised by the rise of *capitalism*, *protestant Christianity* and *political republicanism*. In modern political philosophy, modernity is associated with *individualism*, *liberalism*, *social contract*, *democracy*, *secularisation* and *equality*. A scientific and materialistic way of life is the basis of modernity which avoids religious and spiritual perspective. Other features of modernity involve *accelerated urbanisation*, *rise of nation states* and *bureaucracy* and deepening of *communication* and *financial* exchanges. Some of the main proponents of political modernity include *Thomas Hobbes*, *John Locke* and *Rousseau*. There are two ways to classify modernity – in terms of *time period* and its *geographical expanse*. In terms of time period, the *three* phases of modernity are *early* modernity (1500-1789), *classical* modernity (1789-1900) and *late* modernity (1900-1989). This classification has been given by *Marshall Berman*. In the early modernity, people started to experience modern ways of life. In the second phase, means of communication came up to increase the reach of modern ideas accompanied by rise of capitalism. In late modernity, *globalisation* was visible that impacted modern life. On the other hand, there are *three* stages of modernity based on its *geographical expanse* as explained by *Volker H Schmidt*. The first stage was of *Eurocentric* modernity as it began in parts of North Western Europe and spread to other parts of Europe later. The beginning was marked by *Renaissance* and *Protestant Reformation*. In the second stage, *West-centric* modernity rose and European modernity was absorbed in west-centric modernity. The US economy had overtaken the British economy by the end of the 19th century which signified west-centric modernity. The third stage is called *Polycentric* modernity, which began in the second half of the 19th century as *Japan* started its modernisation process. The real beginning of polycentric modernity started after *decolonisation* began due to the end of the Second World War. In this phase, modernity spread to parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Modernity was the bigger concept which was achievable through enlightenment and rationality. They focused on human progress through scientific reasoning. It could be said that if modernity was the goal, enlightenment and rationality were the means to achieve them.

1.5 CRITICISM

Enlightenment had its share of problems and there are many viewpoints which have criticised it. There was a reign of *terror* after the *French* revolution and doubts were expressed whether an egalitarian society was capable to govern itself. Too much emphasis on reason given by enlightenment thinkers led to *competing* ideas, one of them being *Romanticism* which gave importance to passion, emotion and sensation. Another school of thought, the *Frankfurt School* including *Herbert Marcuse*, *Max Horkheimer* and *Theodor Adorno* developed the critical theory which argued that the post-enlightenment society was repressive and irrational.

Enlightenment led to *one-dimensional* behaviour and thought process which makes it difficult to explore its *alternatives*. The post-modernists led by *Michel Foucault* further built upon the anti-enlightenment trend by rejecting progress, reason and emancipation and they argued that modern types of power combined with knowledge to create new types of domination. There have been allegations of *Ethno-centrism* against modernity. European values and culture were used as a frame of reference while formulating the ideas on enlightenment and modernity and application of these ideas to other cultures could be problematic. Sometimes, it supported the *superiority* of Europeans over the rest of the world. It is evident from the fact that European colonialism was justified in the name of *The White Man's Burden* and *Civilising Mission* by some enlightenment thinkers. Lastly, one of the main criticisms of modernity in India came from *M K Gandhi*. Explaining Gandhi's critique of modernity, *Bhikhu Parekh* has argued that Gandhi believed that modern civilisation privileged *body* over *soul* while it did not appreciate moral and psychological aspects of an individual. Gandhi saw Western civilisation was a symbol of *maya* (greed, materialism and illusion) which cannot lead to real happiness and independence. It would also act as a hindrance in achievement of self-realisation, he argued.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

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

ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. Explain Gandhi's critique of modernity.

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1.6 LET US SUM UP

Enlightenment, also called the *age of reason*, is believed to have begun in 18th century Europe. Enlightenment brought new ways of thinking, changed the way knowledge was understood (epistemology) and organisation of state and society based on that knowledge. It contributed to the rise of modernity while there was a significant break with the ways of life from the past. The central argument was that legitimacy and authority originate from reason instead of faith and customs. Progress, humanity, liberty, human rights, fraternity and tolerance were promoted by enlightenment. Modernity was the bigger concept which was achievable through enlightenment and rationality. They focused on human progress through scientific reasoning. It could be said that if modernity was the goal, enlightenment and rationality were the means to achieve them. Rationality argues that knowledge can be unearthed through the use of logic which is independent of sensory experience. In modern political philosophy, modernity is associated with

individualism, liberalism, social contract, democracy, secularisation and equality. Enlightenment and modernity were criticised by the Romanticists, Frankfurt School and the Post-modernists. Gandhi believed that modernity acted as a hindrance in achievement of self-realisation as it gave more importance to bodily desires, greed and materialism.

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1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1) Your answer should highlight the following points:

- Radical version committed to a revolutionary and materialist worldview
- Argued in favor of democracy, individual rights and replacing the authority of religion with that of people
- The moderate version did not seek revolutionary changes in religion and authority and argued in favor of accommodation between traditional and new systems
- Another difference was that the moderates believed that reason was limited in its scope and hence, religion and faith should be preserved while Radicals believed that everything can be transformed by reason

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

Enlightenment
Rationality and the
Idea of Modernity

1) Your answer should highlight the following points:

- Gandhi believed that modern civilization privileged body over soul
- It did not appreciate moral and psychological aspects of an individual
- Gandhi saw Western civilization was a symbol of *maya* (greed, materialism and illusion) which cannot lead to real happiness and independence
- It would also act as a hindrance in achievement of self-realization



