
UNIT 9 **GANDHI'S VIEWS ON COLONIALISM AND IMPERIALISM**

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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 insatiated 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 in to 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

1. What do you understand by colonialism and imperialism? Elaborate its impact on the socio-economic life.
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

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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

10.2 UNDERSTANDING 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 baptismation 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. Whatsoever 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 :
 - (a) Concept of Justice
 - (b) Notion of Freedom

SUGGESTED READINGS

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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,¹ 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 fascism² 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, xlviii, 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

1. Bidyut Chakrabarty, *Social and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, Routledge, London, 2004.
2. Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, (Third Edition), Palgrave, Houndmills, 2003.
3. Government of India, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, 100 volumes, Publications Division, New Delhi, 1958-2000.
4. Bidyut Chakrabarty and Rajendra Kumar Pandey, *Modern Indian Political Thought: Text and Context*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2009.
5. Homer A. Jack., (ed.), *The Gandhi Reader: A Source Book of His Life and Writings*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1956.
6. O’Sullivan, N., (ed), *Terrorism, Ideology and Revolution*, Harvester Press, 1986
7. Arendt, Hannah., *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Cleveland, 1962
8. Fellice, Renzo D.E., *Interpretations of Fascism*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1977.

(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

- 12.1 Introduction
 - Aims and Objectives
- 12.2 Gandhi's Critique of Socialism and Communism
- 12.3 Social Transformation
- 12.4 Redistribution of Power
- 12.5 Dictatorship of the Proletariat
- 12.6 Politics, Religion and Economics
- 12.7 An Overview
- 12.8 Summary
- 12.9 Terminal Questions
 - Suggested Readings

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 moralistic 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 malaises 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.

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