UNIT 4  B.R AMBEDKAR AND RAIMUNDO PANIKKAR

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

The main purpose of this unit is to provide a bird’s eyeview on the basic philosophical understanding of B.R Ambedkar & Raimundo Panikkar. The first part (Ambedkar) will mainly focus on Ambedkar’s main thoughts which were born out of his social thinking. The second part introduces Raimundo Panikkar’s main concepts and understanding which have its foundation on his inter-religious and inter-cultural thoughts.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, popularly known as Baba Saheb Ambedkar, was one of the most learned among the political and social leaders of the 20th century in India. He wrote many books and edited many papers. He wrote not only on the problems of the Dalits, but also on economics, politics, religion, minorities, education, labour, stratification of society etc.
Raimondo Panikkar, a reputed thinker, has been an inspiring presence in the field of multi-faith and multi-cultural dialogue for over half a century. He occupies a unique place in the history of both Indian and world history of philosophy and theology by way of coupling Indian thoughts with the western.

4.2 AMBEDKAR’S LIFE AND WORKS

Ambedkar, the glory of India and pride of Dalits was born on April 14, 1891 in a low caste family of suppressed Mahar community of Mhow in Madhya Pradesh. After his graduation, he received scholarship from the king of Baroda for higher studies in USA and England. He graduated in law and took a doctorate in economics. On account of ill treatment meted out to him being an untouchable, he left the service and returned to Bombay to practice law. On 14th October 1935, he declared that he would not die in Hinduism. He served the country as the chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee. Ambedkar is regarded as the modern Manu and deserves to be called the father or the chief architect of the Constitution of India. On August 15, 1947, he was made the minister of law in the Central Cabinet and he resigned that post in 1951 due to the difference of opinion on the bill on Hindu code. He embraced neo-Buddhism with his three lakh followers on October 14, 1956 just before his death on December 6, 1956. His works include: Slavery and Untouchability; Which is Worse?; Annihilation of Caste; A Reply to Mahatma Gandhi; What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to Untouchables?; Who Were Shudras?; The Buddha and his Dhamma; Annihilation of Caste.

4.3 INFLUENCE AND BACKGROUND TO HIS THOUGHTS

Ambedkar was born in a community of those who have been unjustly treated as the despised people of the Indian soil. Right from his childhood, he suffered terribly the social evils of caste discrimination and its holocaust called untouchability. He was a voracious reader and owned one of the largest personal libraries. He had a vast reading on Karl Marx, Bertrand Russel, Harold Lasky, Leo Tolstoy and George Bernard Shaw. In a way Ambedkar continued the same tradition of liberal thought found in the writings of social reformers like Rande. Ambedkar’s social theory was influenced by the British liberal tradition too. Buddhist teaching also made a great impact on the philosophy of Ambedkar.

Ambedkar’s purpose was practical rather than speculative and his philosophy of life was essentially a development and evolution under the condition of an inhuman social order and a wrongly idealized social relationship in India that treated the human existence of Dalits as subhuman. For him social reform has to come before the political reform. He criticizes violently the caste system. He feels that the caste system as it stands cannot be the basis of society. He believes that the caste system should be rejected as basically unjust; it is a social system which embodies the arrogance and selfishness of a perverse section of the Hindus who were superior enough in social status to set in fashion and who have authority to force it on their inferiors. Caste does not result in economic efficiencies. Caste cannot and has not improved the race. The whole life-ambition of Ambedkar was to regain social equality to the former untouchables among whom he was born.
4.4 AMBEDKAR’S SOCIAL THOUGHT

The ideal to be realized is of one man\woman, one value in all walks of life, political, economic, and social. This ideal of one value is to be achieved by stopping religious, social and economic exploitation of man\woman by man\woman. Absence of exploitation in any form is the essence of socialism. Socialism does not only embrace economic equality, but also social and political equality. The foremost hindrance to socialism in India is the caste system in Hinduism and its byproduct untouchability which denied almost all the human rights to the untouchables.

Following are the characteristics of Ambedkar’s state socialism: Condemnation of existing social, political and economic order as unjust order, An advocacy of a new order based on the principle of one man (woman), one value, one vote, A belief that this ideal is realizable through socialism and parliamentary democracy and constitutional means, A revolutionary way of establishing social democracy to carry out the programme of social solidarity.

He had expressed his desire in the parliament to establish a social democracy, which would satisfy the economic, social, educational and cultural needs of the people. In his concluding speech in the constituent assembly on November 25, 1949 he declared: social democracy means a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principle of life. These principles of liberty, equality and fraternity are not to be treated as separate items of a trinity. They form a union of trinity in the sense that to divorce one form from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy. The basic concept of Ambedkar’s political thought is the equality of all men\women, which is to be achieved by a state socialism of a constitutional and parliamentary democracy.

Origin of Caste and Untouchability

The concept of the origin of caste and untouchability according to Ambedkar is to a large extent different from that of the Vedic and the non-Vedic theories of caste. Ambedkar holds that caste as a closed system has its genesis in the practice of superimposition of endogamy over exogamy. The practice of untouchability for Ambedkar has its origin in the phase of conflict between the settled and nomadic tribes and those who were defeated in the war were forced to be the ‘broken men’. The broken men (women), in the course of history due to the onslaught of Vedic Brahmanism, were turned into untouchables (Dalits).

Annihilation of Caste System

Annihilation of casteism is one of the most essential elements in Ambedkar’s socio-philosophical frame. It cannot be done just by abolishing the sub-sects, nor by inter caste dining. Ambedkar proposes a solution on two levels: (a) the proximate, immediate means to remove caste is intermarriage. (b) But the fundamental remedy consists in bringing about a social reform before political reforms and in denying the faith in shastras, where he says; “you must not only discard the shastras, you must deny their authority. You must have the courage to tell the Hindus what is more wrong with their religion.” According to him the Hindu is the sick man\woman of the
society who makes other people also sick. His protest against Hinduism was expressed by burning *Manusmriti* in a public meeting.

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### 4.5 AMBEDKAR’S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

His political thinking seems to revolve around the following two convictions: (a) Rights are protected not by laws, but by the social and moral conscience of the society. (b) A democratic form of government presupposes a democratic form of society. Indian constitution remains indebted to Ambedkar for his significant contribution to the peaceful living in the land of diversity. For Ambedkar, state is to provide security against internal disorder and external aggression. The state stands for the welfare of its members. It is the people who make the state and hence the state is to serve the needs of the people. It is a means to achieve the common good of the society. Between state and society, Ambedkar would prefer society as the primary and state as secondary. State, according to Ambedkar, is not of a divine origination but of human origination. To him, the state is a human organization with its objective being the protection of the rights of the individuals. One of his major convictions evident in his political philosophy can
be stated as. The state was not an end in itself, but only means for the furtherance of human ends in the interests of a better future of the society. He greatly emphasized the role of the law of the state in the growth of the individual. To him, law was an important factor in maintaining social peace and justice among different groups of people. Thus, he concludes that all are equal before the law. He upheld right as the basis for the human development and the nation at large.

Ambedkar advocated “One state one language formula”, because he thought it would be a solvent to radical and cultural conflicts. He also advised his country fellows that if they were willing to remain united and integrated as a whole and want to develop common harmonious culture, they should put all the efforts to adopt one language – Hindi, as a common language. The division of the states on the basis of language has created blocks in realizing the Indianness. It has given vent to the upsurge of regionalism that has attenuated the integrity of India. People have confined themselves within the walls of the state. Therefore it is very difficult to accept others as brothers and sisters.

**Idea of Freedom**

Ambedkar’s idea of freedom is very different from Gandhi and Nehru. The main concern of these two national heroes was more of political freedom. But Ambedkar’s main focus was political freedom with social freedom. For him political freedom was meaningless without the social and economic freedom. His life was a hope for the hapless people who were exploited unjustly.

**Meaning of Democracy**

According to Ambedkar, democracy is not merely a form of government, it is primarily a form of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. For him the essence of democracy is the equal share in the existence of human rights. He realized the incapability of Western pattern of Democracy and he gave a new meaning to the term Democracy. For him democracy means the absence of slavery, caste, and coercion. The roots of Democracy are to be searched in social relationship, in terms of the associated life among people.

**4.6 CONCEPT OF HUMAN PERSON**

He develops his concept of human being in relation to his understanding of social order. According to him, a good social order must recognize the individual in the society. By recognizing the individual, a good social order collectively recognizes the good of the community. In the absence of the individual, the notion of society or collectivity ceases to exist. Therefore, the primary role of a good society is that it should treat ‘man (woman) as an individual’ first. He/she needs to be respected in the society for the reason that he/she is a human person. He further holds that human existence is not to be treated solely in the physical sense alone, but it has to be respected in the sense of something higher that a human has spiritual super-existence through knowledge and love. For Ambedkar respect of the individual devoid of any caste-class stratification is sacred.

For him the human society is to be built on the foundation of freedom or liberty, equality and fraternity. These values are based on the notion that the individual human person is not a means but an end himself. While the concept of liberty emphasizes the inviolability of the human
person, the concept of equality insists that the right of the individual is to be treated as an equal and to be respected as complete member of the society irrespective of his/her attainments. Similarly, fraternity, according to Ambedkar, is the disposition of an individual to treat men/women in reverence and love and dignity and the desire to be in unity with other fellow beings. Fraternity gives strength for the individual to commit for the welfare of all. Ambedkar further points out that the tenets of liberty, equality and fraternity are interlinked to each other and they are rooted in the idea of upholding the totality of the human person as complete individual in the society.

4.7 HIS ATTITUDE TO RELIGION

His attitude towards religion was not spiritual like that of Gandhi. His approach was intellectual and socio-political. Ambedkar holds that religion is a part of one’s social life or inheritance; one’s life and dignity and pride are bound up with it. He believes in the social force of religion; and that force lies in religion being a unified system of beliefs and practices. According to him, religion is an influence or force suffused through the life of each individual molding his/her character, determining his/her action and reactions, his/her likes and dislikes in the society.

Religion for Ambedkar should respond to the problem of human society and promote human community living. In this sense, Ambedkar recognizes the Marxist frame that religion is a social phenomenon. However he differs from the Marxist orientation that religion is the opium of people. Rather he strongly upholds that the religion is natural and necessary for human community living. In agreement with the Marxian frame, Ambedkar conceives a false religion as an ideology that could be used as a tool to oppress the Dalits. It is here that Ambedkar makes a critical approach to Hinduism. According to him, in the name of god the religion, Varnashrama Dharma and untouchability were advocated in India. It was contended that the given unjust social structure was God-given and hence cannot be changed. Due to this Ambedkar developed utmost anger towards Hinduism and Hindu gods and even god-based religions like Islam and Christianity were not acceptable to him. Perhaps, because of this factor, he could not take a final decision or conversion until 1956. Buddhism, finally he accepted, was not primarily god-oriented, but was thoroughly Indian. He looked at religion from cultural dimension. He was on the assumption that if the depressed classes join Islam or Christianity they not only go out of Hindu religion, but they also go out of Hindu culture. Conversion to Islam or Christianity would denationalize the depressed classes. He separated religion from culture and held Hindu religion responsible for slavery, the practice of untouchability and exploitation of the depressed classes. Ambedkar was of the opinion that the social ideals of Buddhism are the best way to be adopted to promote peaceful social living because the Buddha’s method is based on love, persuasion and moral teaching.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) How does Ambedkar develop his political philosophy?
2) How does Ambedkar look at human person?

3) What is the approach of Ambedkar to religion?

4.8 LIFE AND WORKS OF RAIMUNDO PANIKKAR

Born on 3 November 1918 in Barcelona to the parents who came from diverse backgrounds, Raimon Panikkar became a reputed figure in the field of theology, philosophy and social thinking. His father was an Indian Hindu and his mother was a Catalan Catholic. Panikkar was ordained a Catholic priest in 1946. Later, he undertook studies in Indian philosophy and religion. For the next fifty years Panikkar pursued his academic career as a professor in European, Indian and North American universities. Some of his works include; *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism, The Trinity and Religious Experience, Worship and Secular Man, The Vedic Experience, Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics, The Intra-religious Dialogue* and *The Cosmotheandric Experience*.

Basic Stand Point

Raimondo Panikkar still remains as a reputed figure in the field of inter-religious dialogue. So his primary concern is that of culture, religion and the relationship between the two. Religion, philosophy and culture are three "elements" of the human reality. If the first could be compared to the feet with which Man journeys towards his destiny, philosophy could represent the eyes that scrutinize that journey, and culture, the earth on which human being is walking during his/her concrete pilgrimage. An intercultural approach shows that one cannot separate Philosophy from Religion, and that both are dependent on the culture which nurtures them.

4.9 PHILOSOPHY, CULTURE AND INTERCULTURALITY
Philosophy could be understood as the activity by which human being participates consciously and in a more or less critical manner, in the discovery of reality and orients himself/herself within the latter. The concept has thus become the unique instrument of philosophy. Each culture offers to philosophy the language that is essential for the philosophy to formulate its insights. But it is the philosophy that tries to question the very foundations on which each culture is based. Philosophy is authentic, revolutionary, protesting and transforming. In other words, each philosophy emerges from the womb of a culture, and simultaneously by questioning what holds that culture together, can transform it. In fact, every deep cultural change has emerged from philosophical activity. It is philosophers who influence most of the destinies of history.

Interculturality

Interculturality is the philosophical imperative of our times. Monoculturalism is lethal and multiculturalism is impossible. Interculturality recognizes both assertions and seeks a middle way. Interculturality is inherent to the human being and a unique culture is as incomprehensible and impossible as a single universal language and as one man alone. Interculturality is a possibility situated between two (or more) cultures. We cannot claim to define through one single word what intercultural philosophy is, nor even presuppose that such a philosophy exists. Each culture is a galaxy which secretes its self-understanding, and with it, the criteria of truth, goodness, and beauty of all human actions. There are no cultural universals. But there are, for sure, human invariants. But the way according to which each one of the human invariants is lived and experienced in each culture is distinct and distinctive in each case. Cultural respect requires that we respect those ways of life that we disapprove, or even those that we consider as pernicious.

4.10 MULTI-FAITH DIALOGUE AND DIALOGICAL DIALOGUE

For Panikkar, multi-faith dialogue is both a highly political and highly urgent activity directed towards creating new forms of human consciousness and corresponding new forms of religiousness. It involves the crossing-over of traditions in a manner that does not abandon one's primal tradition, but deepens and extends it. Something new is created at the level of human and religious consciousness. Panikkar's primary principle for religious encounter is that it must be a truly religious experience. According to him, it is more an exchange of religious experiences than of doctrines. The dialogue route is existential, intimate and concrete. Its purpose is not to establish some universal religion. For the philosopher, it is in order that human relations remain personal. One cannot have human contact with a computer; a machine is not a person. Genuine dialogue between religions, therefore, ought to be this dialogue: between you and me, between you and your neighbour; it should be like a rainbow where we are never sure where one colour begins and another ends. It must be free from particular and general apologetics.

Those involved in interfaith dialogue should not see their task in terms of defending religion in general against the non-religious or anti-religious attitudes of secular society. Religious encounter is a meeting of persons, not simply the meeting of minds. It is not only a theological symposium but a religious encounter in faith, hope and love.

Dialogical Dialogue
Dialogical dialogue begins with the assumption that the other is also an original source of human understanding and that, at some level, persons who enter the dialogue have a capacity to communicate their unique experiences and understandings to each other. There are certain indispensable prerequisites for dialogical dialogue. These include a deep human honesty, intellectual openness and a willingness to forego prejudice in the search for truth while maintaining "profound loyalty towards one's own tradition." Second, one needs a deep commitment and desire to understand another tradition. Both partners are encouraged to "cross over" to the other tradition and then "cross back again" to their own. One learns to think and understand on the basis of the symbol systems of more than one tradition. Symbols are both bounded and open. Their interpretation is never exhausted. And yet they are concrete, always tied to a particular worldview.

**Check Your Progress I**

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer

1) In what way, according to Panikkar, philosophy and culture are related to each other?

2) How does Panikkar explain the concept of interculturality?

3) Explain the process of inter-religious dialogue according to Panikkar?

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**4.11 THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF THE DIVINE, HUMAN AND NATURE**

The individual who is separate from the others, or from the earth or the divine, does not exist. We belong both to earth and to the divine by our very nature. We are conscious and free parts of a whole, but not as puppets that can be easily directed by threads, but rather we find ourselves within a cosmic interweaving or network. The human being is a person, not an individual. I understand a person as ‘a knot in a net’ of relationships. These threads connect us with our fellow men, the earth and divinity. The more conscious the person is, the more he\she realizes that his\her person reaches out to the confines of the world. That is the enlightened man\woman.

**Cosmotheandiric Vision**
Panikkar develops his cosmotheandric vision of reality with reference to three major religious traditions: the Christian Trinity; the Vedanta Hindu Advaita; the Buddhist pratityasamutpada. He believes that the threefold pattern-traditionally Theos-anthropos-cosmos- are invariants of all religions and cultures. He describes the cosmotheandric principle as an intuition of the threefold structure of all reality, the triadic oneness existing on all levels of consciousness and reality. In Christian terms, ultimate reality, the Trinity, is one but also three; in Hindu terms the ultimate unity of all things is literally neither one (advait nor two (advitya); in Buddhist terms everything is radically related to everything else (pratityasamutpada).

The cosmotheandric principle could be stated by saying that the divine, the human and the earthly are the three irreducible dimensions which constitute the real. Everything that exists, any real being, presents this triune constitution expressed in three dimensions. Panikkar's formulation of reality as cosmotheandric challenges the assumption that reality is reducible to Being: there is also Non-Being, the abyss, silence and mystery. We cannot identify even the consciousness with reality because there is also matter and spirit. Panikkar conceives that reality is not mind alone, or cit, or consciousness, or spirit. Reality is also sat and ananda, also matter and freedom, joy and being. In fact, this is for Panikkar the fundamental religious experience; Being or reality transcends thinking. Panikkar's cosmotheandric vision reveals three assumptions regarding the reality. Firstly, reality is ultimately harmonious. Secondly, reality is radically relational and interdependent in such a way that every reality is constitutively connected to all other realities. Thirdly, reality is symbolic. We do not have a God separate from the world, a world that is purely material, nor humans that are reducible to their own thought-processes or cultural expressions.

Concept of Theos

The divine dimension of reality is not an 'object' of human knowledge, but the depth-dimension to everything that is. Panikkar does not want to confine the divine mystery into mere God-talk. He identifies divine mystery using non-theistic terms as infinitude, freedom and nothingness. The mystery of the divine is the mystery of the inherent inexhaustibility of all things, at once infinitely transcendent, utterly immanent, totally irreducible, and absolutely ineffable.

Concept of Anthrpos

Consciousness is the human dimension of reality which is not reducible to humanity; Consciousness permeates every being. Everything that is, is consciousness. In other words, consciousness relates not only to humans who know but to everything else that is actually or potentially known. From the other perspective, if consciousness relates to everything, the human person can be never reduced to consciousness. Panikkar presents human experience as a threefold reality: aesthetic, intellectual and mystical. He critiques technocratic culture for reducing human life to two levels, namely, the sensible and the rational, forgetting the mystical aspect.
Panikkar's intention is to show that genuine human experience involves the harmony of senses, intellect and mystical awareness in correlation with matter, thought and freedom. Thought and mystical awareness are not possible without matter, indeed, without the body. All our thoughts, words, states of consciousness and the like are also material, or have a material basis.

**Concept of Cosmos**

The world of matter, energy, space and time is our home. These realities are ultimate and irreducible. There is no thought, prayer or action that is not radically cosmic in its foundations, expressions and effects. The earth is sacred. For example, he insists that there is something more than pure materiality in a simple stone. Through its existence in space and time, the stone is connected to the entire universe with which it shares its destiny. In Panikkar's terms, there are no disembodied souls or disincarnated gods, just as there is no matter, no energy, no spatio-temporal world without divine and conscious dimensions. Every concrete reality is cosmotheandric- a symbol of the 'whole'. It is not only God who reveals; the earth has its own revelations. Matter, space, time and energy are then co-extensive with both human consciousness and the divine mystery.

**Concept of Human Being**

He places human person in the context of culture as his main concern was that of interculturalism. For him Man/Woman is a cultural animal. He also believes that culture is not extrinsic to him/her, but natural. He further explains that human is a being that is naturally cultural – or culturally natural. Culture is the field that makes it possible for us to cultivate the world that it itself presents to us, so that man/woman may become fully human and achieve his fullness. Culture is the specific form of human nature. The nature of man/woman is cultural. Culture is neither artificial nor additive to man/woman. The ultimate criterion for condemning another culture will therefore consist in showing that it is anti-natural.

**Concept of Truth**

According to Panikkar, truth does not allow itself to be conceptualized. It is never purely objective, absolute. To talk about absolute truth is really a contradiction in terms. The pretension of the great religions to possess all truth can only be understood in a limited and contingent context. Not to be conscious of our myths leads to integralism. But in order to be aware of our myths, we need our neighbour, and therefore dialogue and love. The truth is first of all a reality that permits us to live, an existential truth that makes us free. He says that he is not such a relativist as to believe that the truth is cut up in slices like a cake. But, he expresses his conviction that everyone participates in the truth. And the value of dialogue between the various religions is precisely to help me perceive that there are other windows, other perspectives. Therefore I need the other in order to know and verify my own perspective of the truth. Truth is a genuine and authentic participation in the dynamism of reality. He makes it clear that the dialogue between religions is not a strategy for making one truth triumphant, but a process of looking for it and deepening it along with others.

4.12 **HIS UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGION**
Religion is the path that leads one to the state of fulfillment or salvation. Salvation, understood here in its broadest sense, is anything making one whole, healthy, free, and complete. It could also be understood by different people as heaven, nirvana, nothingness, just society, etc. Thus, a religion is that set of practice and/or doctrines which one believes will lead one to the liberation or fulfillment of one’s being. These practices and doctrines are spatially, temporally and culturally conditioned. Within each religion one can distinguish three aspects: (1) the socio-historical expressions in and through which a religion is alive, (2) the sacramental or sacred structures that mediate a relationship to the transcendent and (3) the transcendent divine reality, the mystery, the goal of all religions. At the socio-historical level religions are equivalent to each other; at the sacramental level they complement and supplement each other; and the level of the mystery, which is neither one nor many, and which is called by many names and is experienced in many ways, religions bear witness to the infinite richness of the mystery and the impossibility of any one religion to exhaust it. For him religions are like the different colours of a rainbow, there are several colours and no colour has a monopoly over the others.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) Explain the cosmotheandric vision of R. Panikkar?

2) Where does Panikkar place human being in his understanding?

3) What is the concept of truth according to Panikkar?

4) How does Panikkar look at religion?

4.13 LET US SUM UP
The underlying feature of the philosophical approach of Ambedkar is its praxis-orientedness. His philosophical thinking, in other way, has something to do with concrete life situations as his thinking was derived from the dreadful practice of casteism and untouchability. The basis of his socio-political philosophy is the establishment of a just society which is free from any kind of exploitation. Even his approach to religion was born out of his social thinking. Though he criticizes religion, namely, Hinduism for perpetuating the prevailing poor social status of the backward communities, he also admits the indispensible nature of religion in fostering social living.

Focus on Panikkar’s experience of Christian-Hindu, Christian-Buddhist and Christian-Secularist dialogue. It will outline his “rules of the game” for interreligious dialogue and intercultural encounter. Attention will be drawn to his distinct levels of religious discourse identified as mythos, logos and symbol. Panikkar’s more adventurous proposal for the meeting of the world’s religious and cultural traditions will be introduced through elucidation of his “cosmotheandric vision” of reality—what he now calls “the radical trinity” of cosmic matter, human consciousness and divine freedom. The conversation will conclude with an overall assessment of Panikkar’s contribution to contemporary thinking on multi-faith dialogue and religious pluralism.

4.14 KEY WORDS

**Annihilation of Caste**: Ambedkar’s social project of rejection of Brahmanical hegemony in social order.

**Cosmotheandric Vision**: interconnectedness of realities of the Divine, human and the world

4.15 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES


