
UNIT 15 TAGORE, NEHRU AND AMBEDKAR

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15.1 INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi led the Satyagraha movement in India to attain Swaraj. He mobilised the masses to participate in the nationalist movement. Gandhi's principles of Truth, Non-violence and morality appealed to the masses and a unique bond was established between them. In the course of his Satyagraha, Gandhi had to deal with the contemporaries who were also associated with the nationalist movement, with their own distinct perspectives. Notable among them were Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, Jawaharlal Nehru and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Gandhi had both agreements and disagreements with them on certain issues but he maintained his close association and friendship with them. They were his contemporaries and close companions in the larger framework of national freedom struggle.

Aims and Objectives

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand

- The political philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore
- Political ideas of Jawaharlal Nehru
- The political and social ideas of Dr. .B.R.Ambedkar and
- Gandhi's close association with these renowned men

15.2 RABINDRANATH TAGORE

'Rabindranath Tagore', popularly known as 'Gurudev', was a renowned poet of international repute, who received Nobel Prize for his literary contribution in 1913. A versatile genius, his interest was not confined to poetry and literary activities. He made notable contributions to religious and educational thought, to moral regeneration and economic reconstruction. His contribution in the field of political philosophy and socio-political reforms is of immense importance for which he is acclaimed as one of the architects of modern India. Tagore had very close friendship with Gandhi. Gandhi called him 'Gurudev' while Tagore referred to Gandhi as 'Mahatma' as early as February 1915, when Gandhi had just arrived from South Africa. They had an intellectual debate over certain issues, and their friendship lasted till Tagore's death in 1941.

Rabindranath Tagore was born at a time when the currents of nationalist, religious and literary movements were prominent. He was influenced by Raja Rammohan Roy and Bankimchandra Chatterjee, known for their immense contribution to the nationalist movement in Bengal. The spirit of patriotism in Tagore was evident even in his early years. In 1875 he attended the Hindu Mela, a patriotic gathering held annually at Calcutta and recited a Bengali poem, 'Hindu mela Uphar', composed by himself. Again in 1887 he recited another poem, attacking Lord Lytton's repressive policy and maladministration. Thereafter through his works, he expressed his patriotic feeling.

Tagore played a prominent role in the Swadeshi movement that swept through Bengal with the background of Partition of Bengal in 1905. He presided over the annual session of Bengal Provincial Congress held at Pabna (now in Bangladesh) and elucidated his plan of making the society an effective agency of creative activity and chalked out a programme for national reconstruction with the village people as the nuclei. Tagore was concerned by the split that took place in the Surat session of the Congress between Extremists and Moderates. In his presidential speech at Pabna, he emphasised the need for resolving the conflict without transcending the limits of discipline. However, Tagore could not reconcile his conscience with the differences prevalent in the Congress. Being a Universalistic, his mind was not confined to a particular political doctrine. He was especially pained by the revolutionary path chosen by few youths, which he considered as a futile attempt, an inconsistent gesture in the great Indian tradition. Though he left active politics, his patriotism made him a close observer of the nationalist movement. He expressed his anguish towards the British government through literary works and letters. His fiery writings inspired many people to plunge into national movement. Tagore strongly condemned Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 13th April 1919 and anguished by the incident, a month later, he returned the title of 'Sir' conferred on him by the British government. In his letter to viceroy, Tagore said, "The rulers who have handy the efficient machinery

to crush the human life and use it against innocent, unarmed and vulnerable people cannot stand on the justification that it was a need of political compulsion”.

Tagore's entire life was devoted to literary writing and was influenced by his love for man and humanity; like Gandhi, he wrote extensively on the issues of history, religion, education, society, polity, village life, civilisation, culture etc. Among these are essays such as the *Bharatbarsh Dharm*, *Swadeshi Samaj*, *Atma Parichay*, *Kalaniketan*, and *Swaraj Sadhana*. He established *Shantiniketan* with the objective of building educational institution outside State-sponsored system and taking students closer to the nature and practical life.

15.2.1 Tagore's Political Philosophy

Tagore propounded the philosophy of practical humanism. He was concerned with man, not as the citizen of a particular state. For him humanity stood above everything. He was aware of the arrogant and irrational power of the British rulers who insulted and injured humanism; as a humanist, he resolved to fight this evil and had firm conviction in the principle of morality, goodness and love and championed individual freedom. He believed that the essence of freedom is illumination of the soul by a process of self-realisation. Therefore for peace, prosperity and progress of man and society the people should be awakened first. According to Tagore man has two entities 'self' and 'the universe' which should be harmonised. Tagore preached Universalism. He believed that cooperation and reciprocity of different cultures and civilisations is the need of present age. The synthesis of different cultures may enlighten the world.

15.2.2 Nationalism

Although Tagore praised western civilisation, he criticised the concept of nationalism which emerged in the West. Tagore was aware that Nationalism has released man from the shackles of feudalism. It has provided an opportunity for the people living in a distinct country to have an independent existence. Nationalism has inculcated desire in the subject people to free themselves from the shackles of foreign rule. However in the practice Nationalism has evils which the poet has criticised. Tagore said that Nationalism has bred disharmony between nation states. It has led to international discord, bitterness and strife. It has inculcated spirit of exclusiveness and intolerance. Above all, love for one's own country has led to hatred for the others. Self-interest and Self-aggrandisement are the features of Nationalism. Greed, material prosperity and the consequent mutual jealousy led the nation to the powerfulness by creating fear of each other. This instinct of selfishness and lust for power are greatest dangers to mankind. When a Nation considers itself greater than people, it attacks the very vital of humanity. The West, under the impact of nationhood, has lost the consciousness; the living bond of society is broken and is replaced by mechanical organisation.

In his book *Nationalism*, Tagore advocated that unlike the West, India sought unity in diversity. Tagore opined that India is a country of divergent races, religions and languages. She has accommodated foreign religions and cultures. This assimilative potentiality of Indian civilisation and social system is immensely unique. The basis of Indian civilisation is society and the spiritual ideal of man, which is eternal. Commenting on nationalism in Japan, Tagore said that Japan took the concept of nation from the west but she has kept intact the spirit of the East. She has her own soul, which must assert itself over all her requirements.

To Tagore, nationalism can serve greater good to humanity if it believes in national self-respect. Nationalism should be based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity instead of suspicion, fear, distrust and national egoism. To him, humanity is greater than nationalism and it can prosper and progress by happy synthesis of the spiritual unity of East and the scientific and technological advancement of the West.

15.2.3 Swaraj

Tagore's view of civilisation was based on reason and goodness in which the individual will not be oppressed. He therefore urged for Swaraj or Home rule. However he had a conviction that the awakening of India was a part of the awakening of the world. According to Tagore, Swaraj cannot be attained by blind obedience to an outside power but only by the realisation of self in the light of intellect. He attributed India's decline and fall to the fact that India had surrendered her right to reason and judge the blind forces of Shastric injunctions and social conventions. Tagore further said, "Those who have failed to attain Swaraj within themselves must lose it in outside world too." Political independence is not the real Swaraj. Swaraj means moral and spiritual transformation of the individual in society. Swaraj, to him, was an internal attribute of man which could not be attained by any external means. It is through political consciousness and the consciousness of the self that Swaraj can be attained in the real sense of the term. Political agitation may end foreign rule but it would not be permanent. Swaraj is futile if the people are not educated or taught to be self-reliant. Thus Tagore's concept of Swaraj is essentially related to self-realisation and creativity. In his own words "The village of which the people come together to earn for themselves their food, their health, their education, to gain for themselves the joy of so doing, shall have lighted the lamp on the way to Swaraj. It will not be difficult therefrom to light others, one after another and thus illuminate more and more of the path along which Swaraj will advance by the organic processes of its own living growth". Tagore associated the welfare of the people with Swaraj. For him the welfare of the people is a synthesis comprised of many interrelated elements: health, work, reason, wisdom and joy. As he said, "If even the people of one village of India, by the exercise of their own power, make their village their very own, then and there will begin the work of realising our country as our own:"

15.2.4 Swadeshi Samaj

When Tagore urged for Swaraj he had a complete image of Swaraj in his mind which tried to preserve the continuity of Indian traditions. Tagore pointed out that the western civilisation revolves around the State; State is the keystone of the political arch. However, in India, society has been the main spring of constructive activity through ages. In his essay 'Swadeshi Samaj' published in 1904, Tagore has elaborately discussed this idea which reveals his emphasis on society. Swadeshi Samaj is a manifesto of Tagore's belief that India's problems are essentially social and must be resolved through society. The fundamental purpose of his scheme was to make society supreme and to promote social co-operation. To Tagore, society is the life force of India's civilisation. But it was crushed under the aegis of the British rule and the society which had hitherto been supreme made secondary. This emphasis on supremacy of the state, he says, led to all calamities in India. State interference of any kind is likely to dwarf individual's inner faculties, weaken the sense of responsibility, destroy the power of self-help and kill initiative. The state's function should be restricted to the extent of hindering of hindrances.

15.3 TAGORE AND GANDHI

Tagore's achievement in literary and creative spheres equals Gandhi's achievement in political sphere. Both of them exhibited the urge to put India in world literary and political thought. They were contemporaries in their works and deeds. The friendship and affection between the two continued in spite of their differences.

Tagore first came to know Gandhi for his work in South Africa through C. F. Andrews, who closely associated with Gandhi in South Africa. Andrews, a prolific correspondent, regularly kept Tagore informed of Gandhi's activities in South Africa. The real interaction between Tagore and Gandhi began in 1914, upon Gandhi's return to India. Gandhi chose Tagore's Shantiniketan to send the members of Phoenix Ashram till his arrival. Gandhi recalled later, "It was here that the members of my South African family found warm hospitality in 1914, pending my arrival from England, and I too found shelter here for nearly a month".

Gandhi visited Shantiniketan on 10th March 1915. To this day it is observed as 'Gandhi punyaha Din' at Shantiniketan every year. It is during February 1915 that Tagore referred Gandhi as *Mahatma* and their association began with the exchange of letters and articles. They expressed each other's confidence and support on some basic issues. In 1920 Gandhi even invited Tagore to visit his ashram. However after 1920 Tagore began to express doubts about some aspects of the political movement led by Gandhi, especially his non-cooperation movement.

Both Tagore and Gandhi were basically humanists. The ideal of Indian independence was the bond between them. They sought to utilise the inner capacities of the people in creative ideals. Gandhi's 'Village Swaraj' and Tagore's 'Swadeshi Samaj' had a common meeting ground and both believed that India's domination by foreign rule was self-made and could be challenged by the soul-force. Both of them rejected material civilisation of the West. On many occasions Gandhi sought Tagore's advice and intellectual support before launching a major course of action. For instance, he wrote to Tagore before the resumption of civil disobedience in January 1932, before his famous fast on the issue of depressed castes and separate electorate and again at the time of his entry at the Guruvayur temple. Tagore and Gandhi were completely in agreement on the issue of communalism. Gandhi was the gospel of communal harmony and Tagore fiercely criticised communalism through his writings. In 1937 Tagore requested Gandhi to be a Life Trustee of the Vishwa Bharati. In 1934 Gandhi had become 'Advisor' to the Village Industries Association in Shantiniketan at Tagore's request. Gandhi had, on several occasions, mobilised funds for Vishwa Bharati.

There were differences between these luminaries, the foremost being the issue of non-cooperation movement which Gandhi launched. Tagore believed that the idea of non-cooperation is political asceticism. It may develop into frightfulness in the human nature, losing faith in the basic reality of life. Secondly, Tagore raised the issue of Charkha, in his essay, 'Cult of Charkha' (1925). Gandhi propounded his Constructive Programme for rural development and economic regeneration through propagation of Charkha. Tagore expressed apprehensions about not only its economic efficacy, but also the use of moral language in place of the economic. He criticised the undue emphasis and blind faith in Charkha that distracted attention from other more important factors in the task of all-round reconstruction. He asked, "Is charkha alone capable to bring us Swaraj or remove

our poverty? How long would it possible to hide ourselves away from commerce with the outside world?" Tagore insisted that more than Charkha, it is the internal union of hearts that attains Swaraj. Tagore's doubts were genuine but Gandhi had his own philosophy regarding the Charkha. For him it was the symbol of Swadeshi and nationalism. Moreover Gandhi had not recommended charkha alone, but a chain of activities for the rural reconstruction. Gandhi and Tagore differed on the efficacy of fasting. Tagore found it painful to contemplate the suffering while Gandhi brought it upon himself by fasting.

15.4 JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

Few statesmen in the twentieth century have attained the stature of Jawaharlal Nehru. He is a symbol of Asia's political awakening and is recognised as an indomitable fighter for freedom and international peace. Indian by birth yet western by education, modern in outlook yet influenced by the heritage of India, staunch patriot yet a man with international vision. Nehru was the symbol of a new society - liberal, humanist and equalitarian. Nehru's public life spanned over a period of 45 years- 30 were devoted to the struggle for independence, and for 18 years he held the dual position of national leader/Prime minister and world statesman.

Nehru began his political activities by participating enthusiastically in Home Rule League established by Tilak and Annie Besant. Nehru joined civil disobedience movement launched by Gandhi and had come under the influence of Gandhi. He faced six months imprisonment during civil disobedience movement. In the early years of 1920 Jawaharlal stood for the ideal of complete independence for India instead of dominion status. Gandhi had reservations about the hasty decision of Purna Swaraj; hence never adopted it as Congress resolution. However, when Nehru became the President of the Indian National Congress at Lahore, the historic independence (Purna Swaraj) resolution was passed on the midnight of December 31, 1929. In the 1930s, Nehru was imprisoned on various occasions for around 6-10 years. He became the President of the Congress again in 1936, 1937 and 1946. During Quit India movement, he was imprisoned for nearly three years. After release, he became the leading spokesman of India in several negotiations with the British. In 1946 he formed the Interim Government of India. On 15th August 1947 he became the first Prime minister of Independent India. Until his death in 1964 he earned reputation for India in the international politics and laid a strong foundation of modern India.

Jawaharlal Nehru was a keen student of History and his 'Glimpses of World History' and 'The Discovery of India' are the testimonies of it. These texts have made notable contributions in the realm of learning and Indian History.

15.4.1 Political Ideas of Nehru

Nehru was not a political philosopher in the academic sense but he was certainly a man of ideas. His ideas reflected in his writings, speeches and policies which he introduced as the head of the state. It was ideological foresight of Nehru that laid the foundations of a strong, democratic, secular and socialist India.

15.4.2 Nationalism and Internationalism

Nehru was a great nationalist. He supported liberal nationalism and rejected the aggressive expansionist nationalism based on religious or racial superiority. To Nehru, Nationalism as it existed in India was both a composite and a living force. Supporting the nationalist

movement against the arrogant British rule, Nehru said that India's desire to control her own affairs needs no justification. The British rule of 180 years is just a small phase in the long history of India. Nationalism gives strength and unity to the State. He was a firm believer in the right to self-determination.

Nehru believed that in spite of numerous diversities, there is a unity running throughout Indian History. India has an assimilative quality which has created a composite Indian culture. He had a firm conviction that nationalism is not only a psychological feeling but also a rational understanding of nation's rich heritage. He opined that the attempt of European Historians to subvert Indian history, would not allow Indians to have a proper understanding of the prosperous Indian traditions. He therefore tried to Discover India's luminous history and culture.

Nehru's dream was of a strong India, not in the sense of military preparedness but strong by actions, cultures and ideas; strong to serve humanity by peaceful means. There was gradual change in Nehru's Nationalism towards Internationalism. In 1929 he had declared that India wants freedom from British domination but does not want to de-link herself from the rest of the world. After Independence India would make all efforts of International co-operation and establish World Federation. However, World Federation can be established only by independent, sovereign States. After Independence Nehru made efforts in this direction and propounded peaceful means to resolve international conflicts. It was under his leadership that the principle of Non-alignment became the foundation of India's Foreign Policy. In accordance with Internationalism he suggested five principles (Panchasheel) of international relations. viz.1) Non-aggression, 2) Mutual Respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, 3) Non-interference in each other's internal affairs 4) equality and mutual co-operation 5) peaceful co-existence.

15.4.3 Democracy

Nehru's strong commitment to Democracy was deeply rooted in humanism. He criticised authoritarianism, Nazism and Fascism. He was a passionate and genuine defender of freedom. His idea of democracy was closer to Western democracy, with due emphasis on elections, adult franchise, representation, political parties and democratic institutions like Parliament. As a political successor of Gandhi, he emphasised nobility of means.

Nehru had firm conviction that Democracy cannot succeed if there is economic disparity. He associated Democracy with socialism, equitable and just distribution of wealth and means of production. He believed that Democracy and capitalism are contradictory to each other. Democracy implies political power in the hands of all the people, whereas in capitalism the real power goes in the hands of few. In Nehru's ideal of Indian democracy, people were at the centre stage. He defined democracy as an ideology that provides equality and justice to the people. He emphasised the need to create feeling of participation among people, for better relations with government. Nehru favoured Parliamentary democracy for its lasting impact and also for its principles of continuity and change.

15.4.4 Socialism

As a student in London (1910-12), Nehru became attracted to the ideas of Fabian Socialism. Nehru's participation in the Brussels Congress of oppressed nationalities (1926-27) and later his visit to Soviet Union (1927) convinced him that the only key to the solution of problems of India and the world lay in Socialism. In line with the Fabian

tradition, he realised the importance of State and accepted it as a perpetual necessity for realising an egalitarian society. He believed Socialism as an economic theory of state ownership and control of the basic means of production and distribution. It was the economic technique for the liberation of masses from feudal autocracy. Nehru's fascination for Socialism and economic development emanates from his deep concern for the suffering of Indian masses and a strong will to better their lives. However Socialism for Nehru was not just an economic doctrine but a philosophy of life which involved profound changes in habits, instincts, values and motivation. He looked upon socialism as an extension of democracy and Liberty. Democracy has no meaning without equality and equality cannot be established so long as the instruments of production are not owned by the state. He had firm conviction that socialism can be established not by revolution or violence but through democratic, peaceful means without uprooting the Indian tradition.

In 1936 Lucknow Congress, he not only reiterated his belief in Socialism but even expressed the desire that the Congress should become a Socialist organisation. After independence Nehru's approach to Socialism took a concrete shape. The Directive Principles in the Indian Constitution was a clear reflection of Socialism. The Avadi Session (1955) of the Congress adopted Socialist pattern of Society as the national goal. In accordance with it, the 1956 Industrial Policy was drafted. Socio-Economic Planning is the indispensable aspect of Nehru's Socialism. He was inspired by the Russian experiment of planning, during his visit. He believed that the problem of Indian mass poverty and national economic stagnation could not be solved except through planning on socialistic basis. For Nehru, Planning was the process through which production would be increased and greater distributive justice achieved. It was essentially linked up with industrialisation and not ready to pay the price of human suffering for planning, as it did in Soviet Union. The credit for introducing and initialing democratic planning in India goes to Nehru.

15.4.5 Secularism

Nehru was a thorough secularist and no religious creed satisfied his scientific quest for truth and reality. As a humanist thinker, Nehru respected the great founders of religion but he unhesitatingly condemned the role of organised religion in society. He was aware of its dangers and misuse. Nehru had realised the relevance of secular State in order to preserve and protect the composite cultural tradition of Indian Society. It was also essential for the maintenance of social stability and religious harmony among diverse groups. To maintain national unity and orderly progress in a pluralistic society, Nehru considered Secularism as a vital necessity.

It implied that state should not have any religion; neither should it have affinity with any religion but it should protect the rights and freedom of all religious communities. He also believed that material progress should be based on ethical and moral principles and continued his faith in Gandhian principle of spiritualisation of politics.

15.5 NEHRU AND GANDHI

In 1916 Lucknow Congress, Nehru met Gandhi and came under his spell. Their partnership of exceptional energy and integrity survived numerous strains and stresses subjected by upheavals of politics and life. Nehru developed great admiration towards Gandhi for his work in South Africa. It was the cause of Indian Freedom that brought Gandhi and Nehru together and kept their association intact for many a year. Nehru was impressed by Gandhi's tremendous earnestness and devotion to work and the latter

became a fatherly figure to Nehru. He also admired the harmonious poise and emotional interaction that characterised the personality of Gandhi. In a telegram sent to Gandhi in May 1933, when he was about to embark on his twenty-one days fast, Nehru wrote, "I feel lost in strange country where you are the only familiar landmark and I try to grope my way in dark but I stumble. Whatever happens, my love and thoughts will be with you."

Nehru, however, disapproved Gandhi's fasts of self-purification. His rational mind always questioned it. On numerous occasions, Nehru was assailed by doubts about Gandhi's policies: In 1934, on the withdrawal of Civil disobedience movement, in 1937 on the formation of Congress ministries in provinces. There were few instances of clashes between Nehru and Gandhi as well. For instance, at Madras Congress Session of 1927 Nehru moved the resolution of complete independence. Gandhi was absent from the proceedings on this occasion. But when he learnt that Nehru's resolution had been approved, he exclaimed, "The Congress stultifies itself by repeating year after year resolutions of this character when it knows that it is not capable of carrying them into effect". What disturbed Gandhi at Madras session was the tone of Nehru's speeches, his surge to radicalism and his apparent abandonment of non-violence. In a letter of 4th January 1928 Gandhi wrote to Nehru, in which he said, "... Most of the resolutions you framed and got carried could have been delayed for one year. Your plunging into the "republican army" was a hasty step. (Nehru had presided over a Republican Congress at the Madras Session)" A few weeks later Gandhi wrote again, stressing the differences which had come into open. "I see quite clearly that you must carry on open warfare against me and my views. For if I am wrong... it is your duty... to rise in revolt against me. The differences between you and me appear to be so vast and so radical that there seems to be no meeting ground between us. But this dissolution of comradeship - if dissolution must come - in no way affects our personal intimacy".

These differences never clashed to the breaking point. Nehru tried to make compromise partly because of powerful emotional bond and partly because of his conviction that Gandhi's leadership was inseparable during the freedom struggle. On many occasions Gandhi supported Nehru. In 1929 and in 1946, at the time of elections to the post of Congress president, Gandhi supported Nehru against senior leaders like Vallabhbhai Patel and Acharya Kripalani. This time the choice assumed greater importance because of the impending formation of an Interim Government. One month after the election the Viceroy invited Nehru, as Congress President to form an interim Government. Nehru and Gandhi were in agreement regarding issues like commitment to the freedom and unity of India, pluralist society, Hindu-Muslim Unity, composite culture of India, secularism and peaceful and non-violent methods of settling disputes within and between nations. After independence, however, Nehru did not subscribe to 'Village Swaraj', which was so dear to Gandhi.

15.6 DR.BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was a social revolutionary, a profound scholar, a charismatic leader of the downtrodden masses. He denounced caste system and fought relentlessly to establish a society based on the democratic ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. He firmly believed that democratic society in India would be possible only when the hierarchical structure of Varna system is dismantled. A giant among intellectuals in legal acumen and Parliamentary skill, Ambedkar was the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution.

Born in an untouchable community, Ambedkar bore the brunt of caste discrimination and often faced humiliation for belonging to lower caste. Ambedkar was educated in India and Sayajirao Gaikwad, the Maharaja of Baroda provided scholarship to him for higher studies. Ambedkar did his M.A. from Columbia University and went to London School of Economics. After a brief stint in India, he left for London again; in June 1921, he was awarded M.Sc. in Political Economy by the London School of Economics for his thesis 'Provincial Decentralization of Imperial Finance in British India'. In 1922, he received the degree of Doctor of Science and Law.

Ambedkar's work in public life developed in three directions: first, awakening and organising untouchables; second, securing political representation for the untouchables; and third, encouraging the depressed classes to take education. In March 1924, Ambedkar founded Bahishkrit Hitkarni Sabha for the upliftment of untouchables. Ambedkar started fortnightly Marathi newspaper '*Bahishkrit Bharat*' in 1927, through which he started educating the depressed classes, making them aware of their political rights and relentlessly campaigned against untouchability. Ambedkar did not join the Congress movement and concentrated on social reform for he believed that Congress protects the interests of the upper castes. In December 1927 Ambedkar launched his first Mahad Satyagraha, to establish civic rights of the untouchables to draw water from a Public tank called 'Chawdar tank' at Mahad. On 25th December 1927, Ambedkar and other untouchables publicly burnt *Manusmriti*, as they considered it as a symbol of the slavery of the untouchables. In 1930 Ambedkar led another historic Satyagraha for the rights of untouchables' entry to the Kalaram temple at Nasik. This Satyagraha was launched just 9 days before (3rd March 1930) the Dandi March led by Gandhi. These Satyagrahis were peaceful and disciplined and large number of people from depressed classes participated in it.

Ambedkar knew that unless the depressed classes do not get share in the political power, their subjugation would not end. Therefore, while giving evidence before the Southborough committee, appointed by British government in 1918 Ambedkar demanded separate electorate to the untouchables. A similar demand was also put forth before the Simon Commission. The British government nominated him as representative of depressed classes to the three Round Table Conferences to be held in London. These conferences were organised to frame new Act or a Constitution for India in accordance with demands of the people of India. In the First and Second Round Table Conferences, Ambedkar reiterated his demand of separate electorate for the depressed classes and was successful. The Macdonald Award, known as Communal award, granted the depressed classes separate electorate. Gandhi vehemently criticised the principle of separate electorate and began to fast unto death against the award. Dr. Ambedkar had no option but to sign Poona Pact with Gandhi that scrapped the separate electorates. Disturbed by Gandhi's attitude towards untouchables, Ambedkar wrote a book entitled "Annihilation of Caste" and made a historic announcement at Yeola that the untouchables would leave the Hindu fold and accept another religion.

After 1935 the political scene in India had considerably changed. Provincial autonomy was inaugurated under the Government of India Act 1935. Ambedkar was convinced that Congress would neither take any initiative in the social reconstruction nor would it safeguard the interests of the Depressed Classes. Preceding the 1937 elections to the Provincial assemblies, he felt the need for having Political Organisation of the Labourers and the Depressed and in October 1936 he founded Independent Labour Party. The

Party won 15 out of 17 seats in the Bombay Provincial Assembly elections (Dr. Ambedkar too got elected). In 1942 the British government nominated Dr. Ambedkar as member of Governor General's Executive, as the in-charge of the Labour department. In 1946 Ambedkar founded the People's Education Society which started a number of Colleges for the students of depressed classes. In the same year elections to the Constituent Assembly were held and Ambedkar got elected. In August 1947 he was elected as the chairman of the Constitution drafting committee. After independence Jawaharlal Nehru included Ambedkar as Law Minister. However, he resigned from the post when he saw opposition to the Hindu code bill which he had proposed. He also established Bharatiya Buddha Maha Sabha in 1955. On 14th October 1956 he, along with his followers embraced Buddhism at a historic ceremony in Nagpur.

15.6.1 Social and Political Ideas

Prior to Ambedkar's voicing the concerns, the Dalits had hardly any role in the socio-political life of India. The Social reform movement had also not focused on the caste issue. Jotiba Phule was perhaps the first person to detest caste hierarchy and inequality. Ambedkar believed that eradication of caste system should be central in the social reforms, for political reforms are futile without social reforms and equality.

15.6.2 Criticism on Caste System

Ambedkar's life was shaped and influenced by bitter and discriminatory personal experiences for being a dalit. He therefore wanted to enquire into the origin and development of caste system and the practice of untouchability. His rational enquiry of the Hindu religion led him to the conclusion that Varna and caste system is the basis of Vedic culture. According to Ambedkar, Chaturvarna, as a basis of social organisation, is not only based on division of labour but also a division of labourers. Chaturvarna presupposes classification of people into four definite categories, the shudras being at the bottom of the ladder. They were denied all rights and privileges including that of securing education. He further argued that the early period of Aryan society recognised only three Varnas. Ambedkar explained the process of division of society into castes and sub-castes. He said that the subdivision of the society was quite natural but the unique feature was that they lost open-door character and became self-enclosed units. Prohibition of inter-marriage or endogamy further accentuated the caste divisions.

Ambedkar felt that caste system wrought injustice on the lower castes by denying them basic human rights and preventing them from rising to the cultural level of higher castes. Thus untouchables remained uncivilised and backward. Also the caste consciousness prevented the feeling of fraternity in the Indian Society. Dr. Ambedkar foresaw that only a casteless society that has inner strength can defend itself and also attain the goal of Swaraj.

Ambedkar had realised that the caste-based agricultural economy is the root cause of the suffering of the downtrodden and urged the villagers to leave the village and move to cities, to 'Educate, organise and resist' and to assert their rights.

Ambedkar detested the inherent inequalities in the society that provided no scope for individual development and for disabling the individual to choose his occupation; he also lamented on the lack of integrity, fraternity and equality. He thoroughly disliked Hinduism on these grounds and embraced Buddhism for it provided a rationalistic view, democratic principle, morality, the message of love and compassion. It enabled the disciples to modify

or even abandon any of Buddha's teachings, according to a given circumstance. Thus Ambedkar's 'Dhamma' was manifestation of creative reinterpretation of Buddhism.

15.6.3 Nationalism

Ambedkar viewed nationalism as an emotional feeling that has great strength and impossible to root it out. He reiterated that Indians would develop nationalism only when there is integration and respect for basic human rights. In a discriminatory society, the spirit of oneness cannot come into existence. Ambedkar believed not only in political integrity and independence but also in social integrity. Ambedkar's nationalism was not aggressive nationalism, for he knew that it can become irrational and can give birth to intolerance. It was rational and secular. He believed that nationalism based on religion is fundamentally against democracy. Moreover India is a multi-religious country; the nationalist movement was led by both communities to establish a secular democratic state and not a theocratic state.

15.6.4 Democracy

Ambedkar believed that without social reforms, political reforms are meaningless because the state ultimately is a social institution. Social traditions and customs influence the State apparatus. Therefore political reforms alone cannot bring about social revolution. Instead progressive views and ideas evolved from social reform can reflect in the governance of the State.

Dr. Ambedkar refers to Democracy as a system which brings about fundamental changes in the social and economic life of the people without resorting to disputes and bloodshed. He desired to remove contradictions created by economic and social inequalities. He wanted to establish the principle of one man, one vote and one value, not only in political life of India but also in social and economic life. Thus he wanted political democracy to be accompanied by social democracy. He was convinced that political democracy cannot last without social democracy.

Dr. Ambedkar was a great admirer of Parliamentary system of government. According to him, three important factors are inherent in the parliamentary system of Government. First, hereditary rule has no sanction in parliamentary democracy. Second, no single individual can presume the authority or superiority and cannot carry out administration single-handedly. The law must be made by the representatives of the people. Third, the elected representatives, the legislators and ministers must have the confidence of the people.

Ambedkar pointed out the essential conditions for the successful working of democracy.

- 1) There must be no glaring inequality in the society. Such a division in the society has within itself the germs of revolution, impossible for Parliamentary system to cure them.
- 2) There must be statutory provisions to mitigate the suffering of the oppressed classes and to protect their interests.
- 3) Existence of an effective opposition is an important factor in the working of a successful democracy. The party in power must be subject to scrutiny and vigilance. A strong opposition party can check the misuse of power by the ruling party.
- 4) There must be equality in law and administration. Ambedkar opposed 'Spoils

System' as it existed in USA. He believed that there was a need of a permanent civil service, recruited on the basis of merit for implementing the policy of the government.

- 5) There should not be tyranny of the majority over the minority. In democracy the majority is at the helm of governmental affairs. Enough care should be taken to ensure the safety and security of the minorities and effectively redress their grievances.
- 6) There must be a steady growth of Constitutional conventions and people must be educated in the observance of these conventions.
- 7) Dr. Ambedkar appreciated Harold Laski for his insistence on the moral order as a requirement of democracy. He believed that without moral order, democracy cannot sustain. Conscience of people is a test of democracy. For Ambedkar, democracy was not only a form of government, but also a way of life through which social justice can be established.

15.6.5 Socialism

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's concept of Parliamentary Democracy is reconciled with his concept of socialism. In democracy individual rights are indispensable and they can be protected by socialism. Individual rights are dependent upon the economic structure of the society. He was aware that if left to the market forces, depressed classes would become more vulnerable and would not be able to sustain in the capitalist system. He therefore advocated State Socialism, in which State should control basic industries, so that economic exploitation could be avoided. He recommended economic planning and collective farming and demanded nationalisation of insurance. Ambedkar's State socialism reflected in the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Indian Constitution. He used the Constitutional tool for implementing State Socialism since he knew that Constitution is beyond the reach of Parliamentary majority to amend or abrogate it.

15.7 AMBEDKAR AND GANDHI

On 8th August 1930, Ambedkar presided over the All India Depressed Classes Congress at Nagpur. In his presidential speech Ambedkar expressed his disapproval of the Civil Disobedience movement launched by Gandhi. However, Gandhi's Satyagraha had influenced Ambedkar considerably as reflected in the Mahad Satyagraha. Gandhi was a towering figure in Indian politics and Ambedkar had great respect for him for he effectively voiced the concerns of the downtrodden and espoused the removal of untouchability. Ambedkar had made efforts to cooperate with Gandhi in the Untouchability removal programme as early as 1924.

However Gandhi and Ambedkar had differences on certain issues such as untouchability and representation of the depressed classes. Gandhi had faith in Varna System and believed that to eradicate the practice of untouchability, it is not essential to end the Varna system. Ambedkar criticised Varna system for being divisive and emphasised the need of dismantling the caste system in order to end untouchability. He also felt that the issue of untouchability and caste system were relegated to background by the Congress. In his books 'What Congress and Gandhi have done to the untouchables' and the brochure 'Mr. Gandhi and the Emancipation of the untouchables', Ambedkar expressed his views. He therefore decided to work outside Congress party.

Ambedkar aimed at securing political power to the untouchables. He demanded rightful representation of the depressed classes in the legislative council and demanded separate electorate in the First Round Table Conference. However, Gandhi disapproved the idea of separate electorate for untouchables for he believed that the untouchables were part of Hindu Society and separate electorate may divide the Hindu Society. Ambedkar criticised Gandhi's role as representative of the untouchables. Gandhi began fast unto death against the award. Ambedkar had no option but to sign the Poona pact with Gandhi that scrapped the separate electorates but made the provision for the reserved joint electorates. Gandhi succeeded in keeping the untouchables in the Hindu fold and gave a larger share of seats to the depressed classes than the promised seats by the communal award. In spite of that, Ambedkar's bitterness towards Congress and Gandhi continued. After independence however Ambedkar's principle of Separate electorate for untouchables was not incorporated in the Indian Constitution and the provision of reservation for S.C. and S.T. was made to safeguard the interests of the Depressed Classes.

Ambedkar and Gandhi differed in their views about the methods of annihilation of castes. While Gandhi propounded Village Swaraj and villages as the basic units of democracy, Ambedkar advocated leaving village life to condemn caste hierarchy and upper caste domination. Urbanisation was his answer for breaking the chains of the caste system.

Ambedkar and Gandhi stood on the same side on the issue of non-violence; while Gandhi viewed non-violence as a 'principle' and not just policy, for Ambedkar it was primarily a policy. Ambedkar agreed with Gandhi on the issue of purity of means, which to him was an important differentiating feature between Buddhism and Marxism.

15.8 SUMMARY

Gandhi's leadership in the national freedom struggle was unparalleled. Nevertheless he thoroughly valued and respected his distinguished contemporaries, who were also his close associates. Gandhi's ideas converged and differed with those of his associates; but they never came in the way of consolidating their association and drawing strength and inspiration from each other. This Unit dealt with Gandhi's distinguished contemporaries like Tagore, Nehru and Ambedkar. In spite of their differences, they forged amicable relations and worked together for the larger goal of national freedom. Their political maturity and acumen were unparalleled and it is this intellectual convergence along with the mass support that ensured the independence for the nation.

15.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Examine at length Tagore's ideas on nationalism, swaraj and swadeshi samaj.
2. Elucidate the political ideas of Nehru with special reference to nationalism and internationalism.
3. Discuss at length Dr. Ambedkar's social and political ideas.
4. Highlight Gandhi's convergent and divergent views from that of Tagore, Nehru and Ambedkar.

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