
UNIT 2 MODERN INDIA

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Responses To The British Rule
- 2.3 The Early Activists
 - 2.3.1 Raja Rammohan Roy
 - 2.3.2 Bankim Chandra Chatterjee
 - 2.3.3 Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar
 - 2.3.4 Swami Vivekanand
 - 2.3.5 Justice Ranade
 - 2.3.6 Tilak and Phule
- 2.4 Muslim Reformists
 - 2.4.1 Sir Syed Ahmed
 - 2.4.2 Maulana Abul Kalam Azad
- 2.5 The Decisive Lead
 - 2.5.1 Rise of the Mahatma
 - 2.5.2 The Vaikom Movement
 - 2.5.3 Champion of the Dalits
 - 2.5.4 The Communist Factor
- 2.6 The Indian Promises
- 2.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to,

- learn about the state of human rights in India, in progression,
- understand and discuss various trends that helped pave way for an improved human rights situation,
- explain diverse views of the Indian leaders under the Raj, and
- have a glimpse of the promising future of human rights as envisaged in the Constitution of India.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Broadly speaking, the modern period in India started with the advent of the British and the English education in the early 19th century. India's exposure to the British rule was both a blessing and a bane. While the Brahminical hegemony persisted, the common Indian started thinking in terms of a change in the methods of production and education. The 1857 mutiny crushed the Indian voice of protest and revolt. In this Unit, we propose to acquaint you with the various trends in the 19th century and the better part of the 20th century that, in one way or the other, paved way for an improved human rights situation. We will study the repercussions of the British rule and its earlier reactions among the Hindus and the Muslims. We will learn about the various social reforms as well as the movements dedicated to the liberation of India. We will see how these influenced the Indian psyche and ultimately contributed to the betterment of human rights situation in India. We will, in this Unit, have a feel of the diverse views represented by such stalwarts as Ram Mohan Roy, Vivekanand, Tilak, Phule, Sir Syed Ahmed, Gandhi and

Ambedkar among others. The Unit will lead you into the period of Independence and enlighten you about the promising future of human rights as envisaged in the Indian Constitution. Hope, it prepares you for the detailed study of Human Rights.

2.2 RESPONSES TO THE BRITISH RULE

The arrival of the British in India initiated a new phase in Indian history. It was under the British rule that fundamental economic and political changes took place in India. Many of these changes were far from the ones intended by the British rulers. It is important to study this period because it contains much that would enrich a human rights perspective.

The impact of the British rule on Indian society was a mixed one. Although it brought forces of modernisation to the Indian soil, it also impoverished the peasantry and tribal with its exploitative policies. This led to a series of revolts against the British rule by the peasants and tribals throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. The Sanyasi rebellion in Bengal (1763 to 1800), Chuar uprising in districts of Bihar and Bengal (1766 to 1772 and again from 1795 to 1816) and tribal rebellions of Kols from 1820 to 1837, Santhals in 1855-56, Rampas in 1879 and Mundas from 1895 to 1901 are only some of them

It is important to remember that the great revolt of 1857 was not the **beginning** but the **culmination** of a long tradition of rebellions and protest. After 1857, although the peasant and tribal rebellions continued (Indigo rebellion in 1860, Pabna rebellion in 1870s and frequent rebellions in Malabar, among others), a new form of organised protests was added to it. In the 20th century various other sections of Indians joined and participated in this struggle for independence against foreign rule.

In a way, we can say that the great tradition of protest and struggle against injustice is a contribution of the peasants and tribals and not of the education Indians. At a time when the educated Indians welcomed the British rule and considered it providential, i.e., god sent, it was the rebellious peasant who fought against the British. Educated Indians joined to later in the 20th century. Any human rights activist would do well to keep in mind that Indian people have learnt the political significance of protest and struggle against injustice not from the educated middle classes but from the uneducated peasant and tribals.

2.3 THE EARLIER ACTIVISTS

Broadly speaking, the modern period in India started with advent of the British and the English education in the early 19th century. **Raja Rammohan Roy** of Bengal was the first intellectual-activist of modern India. He was not a revivalist; he ushered in a movement for freedom, social justice, and human dignity. He professed that all men are born equal. This doctrine spread in a few other parts of India. Hence, a number of intellectual-activists and reformists in the 19th and early 20th century. This intellectual movement, unfortunately, paled into insignificance during the freedom movement in the 20th century, particularly since the early nineteen twenties. It is regrettable that after independence too there has not been any such movement. It is precisely for this reason that our human rights educationists and social activists ought to give the utmost importance to our intellectual heritage.

2.3.1 Raja Rammohan Roy

Rammohan Roy realised that for the success of any scheme of social and religious reform it was

necessary to carry the people with him. **Sati abolition** would not have succeeded if he had not prepared the ground through his researches and had not carried on an agitation. He educated and roused public opinion against the practice of Sati. He was convinced that legislation without preparation of the ground might drive the practice underground. He maintained that legal sanctions alone will not help because of "the peculiar practice of Hindu idolatry which destroys the texture of the society". He added that "advocates of idolatry and their misguided followers continue, under the form of religious devotion, to practice a system which ... prescribes crimes of most heinous nature, which even the most savage nation would blush to commit". These religious practices are "the source of the total destruction of moral principles..."

Rammohan spoke the language of reason and had a rational and iconoclastic approach. He quoted Vasistha approvingly: "If a child says something reasonable it should be accepted, if Brahma himself says something unreasonable it should be discarded as a piece of straw." He approached the issue of the liberation of women with the seriousness it deserved, in a scientific and rational manner. Rammohan was not only well versed in the text of the Brahminical religion, he had also studied Islam, western history, philosophy, sciences and Christianity. Although he was critical of both Christianity and Islam in certain aspects, he was drawn towards Islam for its egalitarianism. He wrote: "I myself have read all of the Quran again and again, and has that made me Mussalman? Nay. I have studied the whole Bible, and you know I am not a Christian. Why then do you fear to read it? Read it and judge for yourself." This is exactly what our middle and upper middle class people must do.

Today, we tend to ignore our debt to other religions and cultures, particularly Islam. Rammohan was influenced by the teachings of Islam and Christianity, and he acknowledged it. He had shown the path to a solution of communal problem by giving "an intellectual nod to Islamic thought". Regrettably, none except M.N. Roy gave any attention to than "nod".

A champion of civil liberties and freedom, Rammohan petitioned to both the houses of British parliament against the Jury Act of 1827, which had introduced religious bias into Judicial system of India. The partition was signed by both Hindus and Muslims. He protested against the provision of the Bill according to which "natives, either Hindu or Mohammedan, are subject to judicial trial by Christians, either European or Native..." while Christians were exempted from being tried either by a Hindu or Mussalman juror.

The Raja protested against a Government action in 1823 which took away the freedom of newspapers and periodicals. He was the first and the only intellectual to send a memorandum to the authorities severely criticising this action and strongly upholding the freedom of the press. He submitted petitions to the Supreme Court and the King in Council.

He made a strong case for the "unrestricted liberty of publication". In his "Appeal to the King in Council", Rammohan protested against "an invasion on our civil rights ...". The appeal concludes: "Do not consign the natives of India to perpetual oppression and degradation."

2.3.2 Bankim Chandra Chatterjee

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, one of the first graduates of the Calcutta University set up by the British to turn out middle level officials for the British empire in India, turned out to be a revivalist. He rejected outright several Hindu traditions calling them effeminate and pleaded for a vigorous Hinduism which could take over the country in course of time. "Bankim was the prophet of nationalism in literature, and yet a Hindu revivalist with an excessive stress on the Hindu character, and tradition seemed to speak out through him." (*Bengal Renaissance and Other Essays*, Shushobhan Sarker, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1981, Pp.39).

2.3.3 Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

Several contemporaries of Bankim Chandra shared this outlook, while many others, particularly in Bengal, saw nothing positive in a continued British Rule. One of the contemporaries of Bankim Chandra, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, proved to be the **best defender of human rights**. He pleaded for such social reforms as widow remarriage, education to all, and help to the needy and deserving. He rejected the line of the Bhakti movement espoused by one of his contemporaries, Ram Krishna Paramhans. Rama Krishna, it was reported, had suggested to Ishwar Chandra not to go ahead with social reforms for that would be an interference with the divine dispensation. Ishwar Chandra did not accept the theory of Bhakti and asserted there was something lacking in Sanskrit literature, and therefore in the syllabus devised for graduations western philosophers should be included. Vidyasagar once got so exasperated, in the context of widow remarriage, that he exclaimed in sheer disgust, "Let not the unfortunate weaker sex (abala) be born in a country where the men have no pity, no dharma, no sense of right and wrong, no ability to discriminate between beneficial and harmful, where preservation of what has been customary is considered the only duty, the only dharma ... by what sin do women come to be born in Bharatvarsha, at all... Oh unfortunate women, what sin had you committed that you should have born in this blessed country where men are so insensitive?" (*Writing Social History*, Sumit Sarkar, Oxford University Press, Pp.267)

2.3.4 Swami Vivekanand

Swami Vivekanand, the famous disciple of Ram Krishna Paramhans, pleaded that for a stronger India we need the confluence of two great systems: Hinduism and Islam. Vedantic brain and Islamic body. He felt that education must be given the top priority in India so that the outcastes could also equate with the Brahmins. "To the non-Brahmin castes I say wait, be not in a hurry. He said, "Do not seize every opportunity of fighting the Brahmins because as I have shown, you are struggling for your own fault. Who told you to neglect spirituality and Sanskrit learning? What have you been doing all this time? Why have you been inefficient? Why do you now fret and fume because somebody else had more brains, more energy, more pluck and go than you? Instead of wasting your energies in vain discussions and quarrels in the newspapers, instead of fighting and quarrelling in your own home – which is sinful – use all your energies in acquiring the culture which the Brahmins have done. Why do you not become Sanskrit scholars? Why do you not spend millions to bring Sanskrit education to all the castes of India? That is the question. The moment you do these things you are equal to the Brahmins. That is the secret of power in India." (*Swami Vivekanand on India and her Problems*, Advait Ashram, Calcutta, Pp.70).

2.3.5 Justice Ranade

In other parts of the country, for instance in Bombay presidency, the Hindu society did not have anyone like Vivekanand. Justice Ranade was sympathetic to the issues of social reforms. He opposed conservatism. He contended: "What shall we revive?... The men and the gods of those old days ate and drank forbidden things to excess in a way no revivalist will now venture to recommend. Shall we revive 12 forms of sons, or eight forms of marriage, which included capture and recognised mixed and illegitimate intercourse? Shall we revive the Niyoga system of procreating sons on our brother's wives when widowed? Shall we revive the old liberties taken by the rishis and by the wives of the rishis with the marital tie? Shall we revive the hecatombs of animals sacrificed from year's end to year's end and in which human beings were not spared as propitiatory offerings..."

2.3.6 Tilak and Phule

The British in India sought through legislation to ban child marriages. Tilak opposed it tooth and nail and organised an opinion in the country that British must not be permitted to reform the Hindu system. Again it was he who made use of pronouncedly Hindu symbol such as Ganapati to draw the common people into the anti imperialist movement. It is rightly argued that Ganapati turned out to be a symbol of Hindu revivalism alienating the Muslims from the freedom movement. In Bombay presidency were heard the first stirrings of the dalits (Scheduled Castes) for a better life and more opportunities. The great reformer Jyotiba Phule rose against Brahminism and espoused the cause of the socially deprived communities of the Hindu system. In the year 1885, when a handful of affluent citizens of the country, under the leadership of a retired British civil servant A.O. Hume, founded the Indian National Congress, Jyotiba Phule, dressed as a common man of Bombay presidency, stood a few yards away and sought to submit a memorandum to the Governor pressing for reservation of jobs for the Dalits.

It is generally recognised that **Tilak** represented the **Brahminical aspirations** and **Phule** the aspirations of the **down trodden**. See this passage: "Phule vehemently attacked the scriptural doctrine of supermacy of Brahmins and their codes of social behaviour. He could discover and correctly interpret the villainy of the Brahminical system, of social interactions. Supermacy of the Brahmins was directly linked to and supported by the servitude of the Shudras, he maintained." (*Jyotiba Phule and Ideology of Social Revolution*, Gail Omvedt, Economic and Political Weekly, September 11, 1971, Pp.1969-717).

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What was Rammohan Roy's contribution to the human rights situation in the 19th century?
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- 2) Discuss Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's role as a revivalist.
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- 3) Justify Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's claim as the best defender of human rights.
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- 4) What was Vivekanand's advice to the non-Brahmins?
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- 5) Why did Ranade oppose revivalism?

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- 6) Compare and contrast the approaches of Tilak and Phule to the Hindu system.

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2.4 MUSLIM REFORMISTS

The rumblings of a reformist movement were also heard among the Muslim community. The Muslims also opted for social reforms. They had been unaffected by the Western culture and education for long. Their leaders were vehemently opposed to the western thoughts. They were against the British rulers who had disempowered and sidelined them. Gradually, however, they realised that their development would remain blocked without the help and favour of the British rulers. This realisation prompted them to concile with the British. Sir Syed Ahmed and Maulana Azad stood out as the champions of this cause.

2.4.1 Sir Syed Ahmed

Sir Syed Ahmed sought to break the alienation of the Muslims by founding Aligarh Muslim University. He successfully convinced the Muslims to avail themselves of European education and knowledge and inspired them to participate in the British administration like Hindu upper castes. The great reformer of the 19th century, Sir Syed Ahmed was brought up in affluence. His mother was a very strict disciplinarian and a liberal woman of religious virtues. Her teachings gave him a sense of idealism. He grew up to be a staunch realist and a hater of superstitions. He was a close witness of 1857 mutiny. He wrote a book about it, wherein he urged that keeping the Indians away from law-making was the prime cause of the mutiny. He asserted that the Indian people must have their say in the Councils. The British were greatly impressed by his thoughts. He was not a fundamentalist. He wanted equal opportunities of development for both Muslims and Hindus. His contribution in the sphere of education will remain indelible.

2.4.2 Maulana Abul Kalam Azad

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was another legendary Muslim reformer. He cautioned the countrymen against the narrowness of anti-English movement. He said: "There is no greater hindrance in the progress than narrow mindedness. In the new era of freedom that has dawned, it is our duty to free ourselves from this disease. There is no other disease dangerous for the healthy growth of national life. It makes its appearance in every field of thought and action. Like an actor, it masquerades in disguise. In the domain of religion it appears in the form of blind faith and deceives us in the name of orthodoxy. In learning and culture, it appeals to us under the (exclusive) name of our nation and country. It behoves us not to be taken by these fictitious names. We must remember that the root cause of all this is nothing but narrow mindedness."

The above quoted and the following words of this great man evince his concern for the human beings, his countryman in particular, and their rights. These thoughts speak of his universalist and cosmopolitan bent of mind. His openness and liberalism let in a fresh breeze into the minds of

the Indian nationals. He prescribes a judicious mixture of nationalism and universalism for the ills of his times. Let us see: "Man is always inclined to go to extreme in realms of thought and action. It is seldom that he steers a middle course, and that is where he stumbles. It is not many years that our educated young men had lost themselves in imitating the English in their language, dress, manners, etc. They were not mindful of their own heritage. Some of them were ever ready to quote Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe and Wordsworth but they felt no love for Valmiki, Kalidasa, Khusaro or Anis. Then there came a time when under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the national movement took a new turn and the craze for imitating the British began to wane. But not I notice that a number of my countrymen are on the verge of making another mistake. Previously, they were on one brink of the precipice and now they want to jump over another extreme. Indian nationalism is now taken to have nothing to do with Milton or Shakespeare. From certain quarters I hear that, in order to be true nationalists, we should have no tinge of modern civilisation or literature to the extent that you might forget the grand and proud civilisation of your own country, similarly it would be wrong to put yourself in a cage so that the ray of light of western learning and civilisation may not enter it. Do not forget that you can seal all your worldly possessions within national and geographical limits but no seal can be put on learning and civilisation. For them there are no territorial limits. They are above nationalities. They are free from the stains of race, colour and factions. They might have originated in any part of the world but they are now the common heritage of all countries and nations. No doubt, Shakespeare was born in England, but the immortal works of Shakespeare are for all countries. Even if England wants it, she cannot keep Shakespeare to herself. Do you think that the dramas of Kalidasa were also Indian national just as Kalidasa was? Do you think no foreigner has a claim on them?" (*ibid*, Pp.139).

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Explain Sir Syed Ahmed's place as a great Muslim reformist.

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- 2) What were Maulana Azad's views on Indian nationalism?

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2.5 THE DECISIVE LEAD

About a year before his death in 1920, Bal Gangadhar Tilak presented Gandhi as a man under whose leadership the fight for independence would carry on. Gandhi did not betray his faith. He took the struggle to a desired end. He was well flanked by such stalwarts as B.R. Ambedkar, who, among other things, fought for the human rights of the Dalits. The attainment of liberty in 1947 was the greatest victory in terms of achieving and ensuring human rights for the common masses in India, its price being a bit heavy though. M.N. Roy, the great communist leader, condemned the Vedic Hinduism, the divinely sanctioned inequality, and communalism. He criticised and condemned whatever led to violation of human rights. Let us consider the contribution of the above mentioned figures under separate heads.

2.5.1 Rise of the Mahatma

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (Mahatma Gandhi) who appeared on the Indian scene in the early decades of the 20th century was not averse to using religious symbols to win over the people for political campaigning. On the one side he talked of Ramrajya and the Gita and his Vaishnav Dharma to placate the Hindus and on the other side he sought to use Khilafat movement to win over the Muslims. He was a firm believer in Chaturvarna but he was against the practice of untouchability. But it is also a fact that no other Congress leader, except Gandhi raised the issue of caste and untouchability during the freedom struggle. As is known, Gandhiji was compelled to withdraw his temple entry and eradication of untouchability movement under pressure from his colleagues. On a number of occasions he declared that we have no right to claim independence from the British until these two evils – communalism and scheduled caste problem relating to untouchability – are eradicated.

“This monster of untouchability has invaded every form of society in India and the idea of this message is that there should not only be no untouchability between Hindus and Hindus but there should also be no untouchability between Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsis and the rest. It is untouchability in its subtle forms that separates us and makes like itself unlovely and difficult to love”, he had said. (*ibid*, Pp.22).

2.5.2 The Vaikom Movement

Down south, **E.V. Ramaswamy Naicar**, during the freedom struggle and also after independence, espoused the cause of Human Rights for Dalits by demanding removal of restrictions imposed on them. He organised the famous “Vaikom Movement” against the priestly order in the town Vaikom. Gandhi rushed to dissuade him against the move. Thus, the movement now known as Dravidian movement sprung from this point and later swept the whole of Madras state (now called Tamilnadu) and parts of South India. Naicar rejected the Brahmanical religion outright and persuaded his people to discover for themselves indigenous culture and religion. He said, “If we are treated as Sudras by Hinduism what else can we do but destroy that Hindu religion? ... What for did we wage a bitter struggle to drive away the British imperialism? Is it to give the right exclusively for the Brahmin community alone to sweep the posts held by the Britishers? Unless we enable all communities to take part in the government of the country we cannot really have a representative government for all the people.” (*Collected Works of Periyar EVR, Volume 1, Published by Periyar Self Respect Propaganda Institute, Chennai, Pp.72-73*).

In Kerala, **Sri Narayan Guru**, without rejecting Brahmanism, inspired his community **Ezhavas** for social and cultural uplift and recorded magnificent results. Even Gandhi appreciated his motives in one of his writings in *Harijan* on February 2, 1934.

2.5.3 Champion of the Dalits

The issue of human rights in India needs to be studied in the broader context of social and religious movements. From the year 1920 onwards **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar**, who single-handedly fought for the human rights of the Dalits, made earnest efforts in this regard within the Hindu framework. He wanted the doors of the temples to be opened for dalits. He struggled hard to make the village ponds accessible to the Dalits. He fought relentlessly against the Brahminical traditions such as ‘Manu Smriti’ and sought to obtain support of the upper caste Hindus for reforming some. He gave a call for annihilation of castes which according to him accounted for the absence of equality in the Hindu fold. However, the upper castes turned a deaf ear. In desperation, at the fag end of his life, he renounced Hindu religion and embraced Buddhism. He took the step to ensure

Human Rights for the dalits. Citing his reason for embracing Buddhism in a broadcast on All India Radio on October 3rd, 1954, he said, "Every man should have a philosophy, for every one must have a standard by which to measure his conduct. Negatively, I reject Hindu social philosophy propounded in the Bhagwatgita based as it is, on the Triguna philosophy of the Sankhya philosophy, which in my judgement is a cruel perversion of the philosophy of Kapila, and which had made the caste system and the system of graded inequality the law of Hindu social life. Positively, my social philosophy may be said to be enshrined in three words – liberty, equality and fraternity. My philosophy has roots in religion and not in political science. I have derived them from the teachings of my Master, the Buddha." (*The Legacy of Dr. Ambedkar*, D.C. Ahir, B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1990, Pp.156).

He addressed, "There are two aspects of conversion, social as well as religious, material as well as spiritual. Whatever may be the aspect, or line of thinking, it is necessary to understand the beginning, the nature of untouchability and how it is practiced. Without this understanding, you will not be able to realise the real meaning underlying my declaration of conversion. In order to have a clear understanding of untouchability and its practice in real life, I want you to recall stories of the atrocities perpetrated against you. Very few of you might have realised why all this happens. To me it is very necessary that we understand it... Three factors are required for the uplift of an individual. They are sympathy, equality and liberty. Can you say by experience that any of these factors exists for you in Hinduism? The Hindus can be ranked among those cruel people whose utterance and acts are two poles apart. They have this Ram on their tongues and a knife under their armpits. They speak like saint but act like butchers." (*The Legacy of Dr. Ambedkar*, D.C. Ahir, B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1990, Pp.20 to 22).

2.5.4 The Communist Factor

Another contemporary of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was the legendary communist leader **M.N. Roy**, later a radical humanist, who was unequivocal in his condemnation of the divine sanctions given in Indian culture to inequality. Roy was the only communist, who came down heavily on Vedic Hinduism. He pointed out that, "Spiritual culture has taught the Indian masses to point out the difference in the size of the five fingers of the same hand when their attention is drawn to the social inequity and inequality to which they are subjected. They have been taught to accept their position as befitting their merit. They have not only been taught to be reconciled to their hard lot but to look upon the established social order as an expression of divine dispensation. The entire caste system – that creation of the special genius of India – was based on this principle. The philosopher of facism was inspired by the Aryan spirit of caste when he suggested that 'masses of Asiatic' and African barbarians could be imported so that the uncivilised world might constantly be at the service of the civilised. Why not? Did not the Aryan Brahmins, with the help of their warrior allies, condemn the bulk of the aboriginal population of India to the perpetual servitude of the Shudra." (*Selected Works of M.N. Roy*, Vol. IV, Oxford University Press, 1997, Pp.437).

Roy wrote a book – *Historical Role of Islam*, while in jail from 1931-36, with a view of solving the Hindu-Muslim problem of communalism. Like caste and untouchability, communalism is a most obnoxious form of human rights violation in our country. Roy reminds us that in spite of the fact that Islam had played out its progressive role before it penetrated India, Islam was welcomed as a message of hope and freedom by the victims of Brahminical reactions which had overthrown the Buddhist revolution resulting in a state of chaos in Indian society. "How is it that the Mohammedans, though not large in numbers, managed to rule a vast country for such a long time and millions of people converted themselves to the new faith? The fact remains that the Mohammedans satisfied certain objective requirements of Indian society." M.N. Roy wrote this book from the conviction that "knowledge of Islam's contribution to human culture and proper

appreciation of the historical value of that contribution would shock the Hindus out of their arrogant self satisfaction and cure the narrow-mindedness of the Muslims of our day by bringing them face to face with the true spirit of the faith they profess."

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) What were the two evils Gandhi pointed out? What was his approach to these evils?

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- 2) Write a brief note on Vaikom Movement.

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- 3) Bring out B.R. Ambedkar's eminence at the Champion of Dalits.

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- 4) What has M.N. Roy to say about Islam?

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2.6 THE INDIAN PROMISES

In the early 1930s, responding to the demand of the Muslims and depressed classes (Dalits), the British government arranged a round table conference in London and gave separate electorate to the Muslims and the depressed classes. Gandhi did not object to the Muslims getting separate electorate but was terribly opposed to the Dalits getting separate electorate. He went on to fast unto death at Pune and pressure was brought on Dr. Ambedkar to give up his demand for separate electorate for depressed classes. There was an agreement to which both were signatories. It provided for political reservation to the depressed classes. It was largely through the personal efforts of Dr. Ambedkar that minorities and the backward classes including the Dalits were given several concessions in free India's constitution in year 1950. The constitution continues to be the fountain source of human rights for all segments of the Indian population.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the father of the Indian Constitution, was well aware of the problems facing the Indian society, and he knew that the **legal empowerment** alone would not make it possible for **just and equitable society**. He said, "On the 26th January, 1950, we are going to enter a life of contradictions. In politics, we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognising the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economical structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value. How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our

social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this assembly has so labouriously built up.”

The **Constitution of India** assured liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship and equality of status and of opportunity. **Article 21** proclaims, “No person shall be deprived of his life... personal liberty except according to the procedure established by law.” India also ratified the two covenants of Civil and Political rights and Economic-Social and Cultural Rights. The Indian Constitution has provided all the necessary human and democratic rights in the Fundamental Rights and Directive Principle Chapters. But despite that arbitrary arrests were made and anti democratic laws were passed by the central government and various state governments such as Preventive Detention Act 1950, Defence of India Rules 1962, Maintenance of Internal Security Act 1958, Terrorism and Anti-Disruptive Activities Act (TADA).

In independent India, the movement for Civil Liberties came into being during the infamous emergency imposed on 26th June, 1975 by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Late Jaiprakash Narayan and a number of concerned citizens of the country including academics, mediapersons, jurists, and activists joined hand and formed People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), which is the biggest civil liberty group in the country. After that a number of other organisations have come into being including People’s Union for Democratic Rights. Earlier in 1974 Jaiprakash Narayan and his colleagues founded the Citizens for Democracy.

The human right movement in the country is growing with the formation of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and other related bodies like National Commission for Women, National Commission for Minorities, National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, which have opened some avenues for the people to approach. People are not educated about their legal rights, their cultural heritage and various constitutional bodies and hence there is a dire need for human rights educationists to address all these issues comprehensively in their human right training programme at the grass root level where we still find major trappings of the society which Dr. Ambedkar had portrayed in his famous speech in the Constituent Assembly.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) What is Indian Constitution’s promise regarding human rights?
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- 2) What bodies do we have in India to give momentum to the human rights movement?
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- 3) Are you satisfied with the human rights situation in our country? Yes or No. Give reasons.
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2.7 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, you studied the modern period in India in the context of human rights. You learnt that the outset of modern period in India coincided with the advent of the British rule and the English education. In 1857, the Indian resistance was crushed and it marked a turning point in the Indian history. We saw how these under-currents led us into a society with an improved understanding of human rights. While the social reformers led the intellectual movement and contributed to the human rights situation, the freedom movement produced great champions of human rights. Raja Rammohan Roy worked for the abolition of Sati. He was influenced by Islam. He remained a champion of civil liberties and freedom. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee is remembered as a revivalist. His contemporary, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar came out as the best defender of human rights. Swami Vivekanand preached for the confluence of Hinduism and Islam. You also had an insight into the diametrically opposed thoughts of Tilak and Phule. The Muslim reform movement saw a great champion in Sir Syed Ahmed who founded Aligarh Muslim University. Maulana Azad stood up as another Muslim thinker who took a conciliatory stand with the British. He cautioned the fellow countryman against the narrowness of an anti-English movement. The father of nation, Mahatma Gandhi, attacked the social evils while leading the freedom movement. His tireless efforts to improve the lot of the down trodden, the untouchables, in particular, are widely known. B.R. Ambedkar fought for the human rights of the Dalits in his own way. We made a special mention of M.N. Roy, the legendary communist leader. He attacked the element of caste-based inequality in the Indian culture. The Unit also enlightened you about the promising future of human rights in free India as envisaged in our Constitution.

2.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Refer to Sub-section 2.3.1.
- 2) Refer to Sub-section 2.3.2.
- 3) Refer to Sub-section 2.3.3.
- 4) Refer to Sub-section 2.3.4.
- 5) Refer to Sub-section 2.3.5.
- 6) Refer to Sub-section 2.3.6.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Base your answer on Sub-section 2.4.1.
- 2) Base your answer on Sub-section 2.4.2.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Refer to Sub-section 2.5.1.
- 2) Refer to Sub-section 2.5.2.
- 3) Base your answer on Sub-section 2.5.3.
- 4) Base your answer on Sub-section 2.5.4.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Refer to Section 2.6, para 3.
- 2) Refer to Section 2.6, last two paras.
- 3) Use your knowledge and discretion to answer this question.