
UNIT 24 INDIVIDUALISM AND COMMUNITARIANISM

Gandhism (Dharma, Swaraj, Sarvodaya and Satyagraha)

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24.0 OBJECTIVES

Our objective in this unit is to understand and assess one of the major ongoing debates in contemporary political theory; namely, the debate between liberal individualism and communitarianism. After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the individualistic theory of the nature and functions of state;
- Describe and assess the communitarian critique of liberal individualism;
- Compare the major theoretical positions of individualism and communitarianism; and
- Understand the relevance of this debate to contemporary political theory and practice.

24.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will be introduced to one of the central debates in contemporary political theory, namely, the debate between liberal individualism and communitarianism.

The debate between individualism and communitarianism developed and became central to political theory during the 1980s with the publication of Michael Sandel's *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (1982). In this book, Sandel develops one of the most forceful critiques of Rawlsian liberalism, the statement of which is found in John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (1971). Since then, this debate has continued in one way or the other to inform a great deal of political theory. Infact, some of the major developments and concerns of contemporary political theory are based on arguments which emanate from this debate.

At the center of the debate between individualism and communitarianism is the question: should the just state be constructed from the standpoint of how to foster the well being of individuals or from the standpoint of how to realise an ideal community? Is political reality shaped by decisions and actions of individuals, defined as persons standing at a distance (or separate) from community bonds or is it shaped by social beings whose identity and behaviour is defined by social groups/communities to which they belong? In other words, is the basic unit of political analysis the individual or the community?

24.1.1 Individualist Versus Communitarian Position

In responding to this question, individualists and communitarians hold different and apparently conflicting positions. While the individualists see political reality as being shaped by decisions and actions of free and rights-bearing individuals, communitarians emphasize the relationship between the person and the community and see this relationship to be the basis of politics. This debate may then be characterised as one between those who favour individual rights and autonomy and those who emphasize the bonds of community in political life.

24.1.2 Relevance in the Indian Context

The debate between individualism and communitarianism is particularly relevant to the Indian context. The Indian Constitution deviates from the traditional liberal framework, which guarantees individual rights and ignores the rights of community membership. It endorses and accepts the twin ideals of individual autonomy and community membership. The Constitution contains both the guarantee of individual civil rights and liberties and the principle of equal respect for all communities. A study of the debate between individualism and communitarianism is, therefore, also important for understanding some of the questions and issues in contemporary Indian political theory and practice.

It would be helpful to note that there are different varieties of individualism and communitarianism. In this unit, we shall study some of the key arguments and themes contained in these theoretical positions.

We begin with an introduction to the meaning and origin of liberal individualism. We then go on to understand some of the main arguments of individualistic perspective, namely, the conception of self and understanding of the nature and functions of the state. This is followed by an introduction to the communitarian critique of liberal individualism. We, then, examine the positions held by communitarians on the conception of the person and the nature and functions of the state. The unit concludes by highlighting some of the main contributions and limitations of individualism and communitarianism.

Check Your Progress 1

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

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) What is the fundamental difference between Individualism and Communitarianism?

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- 2) How is the debate between Individualism and Communitarianism relevant to the Indian Context?

Gandhism (Dharma, Swaraj, Sarvodaya and Satyagraha)

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24.2 MEANING AND DEVELOPMENT OF INDIVIDUALISM

Individualism is one of the several theories of relationship between the citizen and the state and of the proper scope of state activities. Other theories of this relationship, which oppose the theory of individualism are socialism, sarvodaya, fascism and communitarianism, which we will study later in this unit. What distinguishes individualism from these other theories is its emphasis on the individual as the primary unit in political and social theory.

Some of the main advocates of individualism have been Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Herbert Spencer and more recently, F.A. Hayek and Robert Nozick. In India, Mahadeo Govind Ranade and the Swatantra Party mainly supported the individualistic view.

24.2.1 Atomism and Methodological Individualism

The concept of individualism is one of the main features of liberal political thought, the other features being universalism, egalitarianism, secularism and the separation between the public and the private. The idea of individualism covers a wide variety of ideas, attitudes and doctrines. At the heart of these ideas and doctrines is the systematic according of primacy to the individual over any social group, community or collective. The individual is regarded as an end in itself while political, economic and social institutions are considered as a mere means to that end. This idea of individualism is called 'Atomism' - a view of society constituted by individuals for fulfillment of ends, which are primarily individualistic and which exist antecedently or prior to any particular form of social life. Individualism also refers to the doctrine about the centrality of individual to any political theory or social explanation. This doctrine is called 'Methodological Individualism' - a doctrine that asserts that no explanation in social science or history can be fundamental unless based upon facts and features of individuals, their properties, goals, beliefs and actions. In other words, social wholes or the aggregate pattern of behavior must always be explained in terms of the individual.

More importantly, the theory of individualism relates to the principle of laissez-faire - a French phrase that means 'leave alone' or 'allow (us) to do'. The principle of laissez faire is a principle of economic individualism and is a part of the broader theory of relationship between the state and the citizen. It was the battle cry of tradesmen, moneylenders and small manufacturers of 18th century France and England, who felt constrained by the controls and regulations of the mercantilist state. The mercantilist state was characterised by a great deal of state intervention in the economy. In contrast, economic laissez-faire stood for the policy of non-intervention or minimal intervention by state in the economic sphere. The economy, it was felt,

should be left to operate in accordance with the demand and supply mechanism of the market. Laissez-faire or economic individualism, in other words, stands for limited government and free trade.

24.2.2 Views of Contractualists including John Rawls

Individualism is essentially a modern phenomenon that began to take shape in the 17th century in the writings of Hobbes and Locke. Since the times of Hobbes and Locke, liberal political theory has made it its primary purpose to explore the relationship between the individual and the state. According to most liberal political theories, all individuals have inalienable rights. Government derives its powers from the consent of those who are to be governed. This consent is expressed by and established on the basis of a social contract between the governed and those who govern. The distinctive feature of the individualistic position, however, is the claim that the parties to the social contract are essentially people acting as individuals, and not as representatives of a cultural or collective group. Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau spoke of a number of men establishing the state through a social contract and were explicit about eliminating associations and groups intermediate between the individual and the state. Infact, Rousseau maintained that if the General Will is to be truly expressed, it is essential that there are no subsidiary groups within the state. The most recent major exponent of the contractarian point of view, John Rawls, likewise assumes that the parties in the ‘Original Position’ who work out the principles of justice are individuals who speak for themselves. Moreover, the justice that they speak of is only for individuals. While Rawls does show some concern for social classes, he does not raise the question of whether community/groups should be considered as entities with claims to justice.

24.2.3 Views of Utilitarians

Emphasis on the individual is not confined to the social contract perspective in liberal political thought. In speaking of the greatest happiness of the greatest number, utilitarians such as Jeremy Bentham and J.S.Mill also had individuals in mind. In fact, in his work *On Liberty*, Mill emphasized the liberty of the individual and the need of the state to stay out of private concerns. Similarly, those who speak of the consent of the governed usually take it as an obvious assumption that the consent is to come from individuals. Further, the theories of democracy which deal with the concept of one man-one vote, one vote-one value and majority rule clearly have individuals in mind.

As seen above, individualism has guided much of modern liberal political thought. However, the theory of individualism is not universally accepted or is free of criticism. Political theory today is deeply divided about the relationship between the state and the citizen as well as about the proper scope of state activities. In the next section, we will examine some of the major assumptions about liberal individualism, which have come under attack from communitarianism.

Check Your Progress 2

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

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) What do you understand by ‘Atomism’ and ‘Methodological Individualism’?

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2) Discuss the views of contractualists on Individualism.

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24.3 THE INDIVIDUALIST CONCEPTION OF THE SELF

Central to the theory of individualism is its conception or understanding of the self. Infact, individualism builds its understanding of relations between the state and the citizen as well as the proper scope of state activities on the basis of its conception of the self. In this section, we will study the individualist conception of the self or person.

In the individualist view, people are free, rational and capable of self-determination. People are rational in that they are the best judges of their interest. They are capable of self-determination; that is, they are capable of determining their own conception of good life. A person's conception of good life is his set of beliefs and values about how he should lead his life and about what makes life worthwhile. People are free in the sense that they possess the ability as well as the right to question their participation in existing social practices and to opt out of them, should these practices no longer remain worthwhile. Individuals, in other words, are free to question and reject or revise any particular social relation. We, as individuals, have the ability to detach ourselves or step back from any particular social practice and question whether we want to continue pursuing it or not. No particular task or end is set for us by society; no end is exempt from a possible revision or rejection by the self. A person's goals, aims and ends are always things that he chooses to attach himself to and therefore, detach himself from, when they are no longer worthy of such attachment. A person is, thus, related to his ends, goals by an exercise of will. Rawls expresses this argument in the following phrase: 'the self is prior to the ends, which are affirmed by it'.

In the individualist view then, individual freedom of choice is needed precisely to find out what is valuable in life, to form, examine and revise our beliefs and values. People must have necessary resources and liberties needed to live their lives in accordance with their beliefs and values without being penalised (thus civil and personal liberties). They must also have cultural conditions necessary to acquire an awareness of different views about the good life and to acquire an ability to examine these views intelligently (thus concern for education and the freedom of expression).

On the basis of the conception of the individual as free, rational and capable of self-determination, individualists develop their theory about the relationship between the citizen and the state and of the nature and functions of the state.

Check Your Progress 3

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

- 1) Discuss the individualist conception of the self.

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24.4 THE INDIVIDUALIST THEORY OF THE NATURE AND FUNCTIONS OF THE STATE

The individualist theory of the nature and functions of the state is based on its conception of the self as free, rational and self-determining. According to individualism, since individuals are free, rational and capable of self-determination, their interests are better promoted by letting them choose for themselves what sort of life they want to lead. Individual interests are harmed by attempts by the state to enforce a particular view of good life. In the individualist view, the conception of the self as free, rational and self-determining necessarily requires a conception of the state as neutral and minimalist. The primary value in the political order for individualism must, then, be the neutrality of the state. Infact, a distinctive feature of liberal individualism is its emphasis on the state as a neutral and minimal political authority.

A neutral state may be defined as a state, which does not favour, protect, promote or contrarily, discriminate against or penalise any particular individual conception of good. Rather, such a state provides a neutral framework within which different and potentially conflicting conceptions of good can be pursued. It is committed to tolerating different views and conceptions of good life held by its citizens. In other words, the neutral state does not enforce a particular conception of good life. Instead it stays out of the peoples’ decisions regarding the best way to lead their lives, thereby leaving each individual free (to an extent possible) to pursue his/her own conception of good or way of life.

24.4.1 Functions of State and Government

What, according to individualism, are the legitimate functions of state and government? In the individualistic view, people have their natural or pre-political freedom. Government arises out of the consent of the governed. State is not a natural entity; rather, it is an artificial but necessary construct. State, infact, is defined as a necessary evil. Since it is a necessary evil, the government that rules the least is considered the best. The functions and role of state are, therefore, limited to guarantee and protection of individual rights and freedom. In other words, the role of state is minimal and limited to the maintenance of law and order and the provision of security to its citizens, beyond which they should be left free. The state should interfere in the liberty of citizens only to prevent one individual from unnecessarily interfering in the liberty of others.

The understanding of the state as neutral and minimalist corresponds to the principle of laissez-faire discussed above, which argues for leaving the individual free from excessive and unjustifiable state intervention and control. In the individualist view, a state that defines its duties beyond that of security and the protection of individual rights restricts freedom and the self-determination of its citizens.

Individualism, thus, sees an inverse relation between the expansion of state activities and the enlargement of the sphere of individual rights and freedom.

The individualist conception of self, its understanding of relationship between the state and the citizen and the proper scope of state activities have been criticised by a number of theoretical perspectives, some of which are fascism, sarvodaya, communism and feminism. However the most profound critique of the individualist perspective is found in the theory of communitarianism. Below, we examine the communitarian critique of individualism.

Check Your Progress 4

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

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) Discuss the role/functions of the state in the individualist theory.

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24.5 COMMUNITARIANISM: AN INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, the theory of liberal individualism has found its most distinctive and rigorous challenge and critique in what has been labelled as communitarianism. As mentioned above, the term *communitarian* was first elicited by Michael Sandel in his work *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (1982) in which he developed a critique of the liberal individualist foundations of John Rawls's theory of liberal justice. Some of the other communitarian critics of liberal individualism are Alisdair MacIntyre, Michael Walzer and Charles Taylor. These communitarian thinkers are highly inspired by Hegel and Rousseau.

Communitarians are first and foremost concerned with community. Two or more people constitute a community when they share a common conception of good and see this good as partly constitutive of their identity or selves. Such a "constitutive community" may be a close friendship, family relationship, neighbourhood or even a comprehensive political community.

Communitarians insist that each of us as individuals develops our identity, talents and pursuit in life only in the context of a community. We are by nature social beings. Since the community determines and shapes the individual nature, political life must start with a concern for the community, and not the individual. In other words, the locus of philosophical concern in reflecting on the ideal and the just state must be the community and not the individual.

The main fault of liberal individualism according to communitarian thinkers, is then that it is mistakenly and irreparably individualistic. The liberal conception of the relationship between the individual and the state is, according to communitarianism, unduly limited as well as misrepresentative of the true nature of society. In the communitarian view, it is not enough to think in terms of a two-level relationship; with the individual at one level and the state at the other. Groups and communities occupy

an intermediate position between the individual and the state and should be included among the kinds of rights-and duty-bearing units whose inter-relationships are explored. According to communitarians, by emphasising rights and freedom of individuals over society, liberal individualism neglects the importance of community membership and identity to social and political life. It ignores the extent to which the society/community in which people live shapes who they are and the values they have.

Although communitarian critics focus on different aspects of liberal individualism, it is possible to identify some of the main themes and arguments, such as the critique of the liberal-individualist conception of self and its understanding of the nature and functions of the state. Below, we will study the communitarian critique of liberal individualism with reference to these arguments.

Check Your Progress 5

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) What is Communitarianism? Explain.

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24.6 THE COMMUNITARIAN CRITIQUE OF THE INDIVIDUALIST CONCEPTION OF THE SELF

A great deal of communitarian thought has presented itself in terms of an explicit reference to and a rejection of the individualistic conception of self. The general shape of this communitarian claim is that individualistic political theory takes us (as individuals) to be too distant/separate from our social ends and conceptions of the good in a way that simply fails to correspond to the way in which we actually relate to these ends.

24.6.1 Two Main Limitations of Individualism

Communitarians point to two main limitations of the liberal individualist understanding of the self as detached and separate from social ends: first, it devalues, discounts and downgrades the importance of the community; and second, it presupposes a defective conception of the relation between the self and its ends.

Regarding the first criticism, communitarianism challenges liberal individualism for downgrading and discounting the importance of the community and more specifically, for ignoring the extent to which it is the society or the community which people live in that shape who they are and the values they have.

As seen above, individualism understands people to be self-sufficient outside of society and not in need of any community context in order to develop and exercise their capacities for self-determination. In other words, individualism does not recognise the importance of community membership in shaping a good life for the individual. Communitarians argue that the liberal picture of individuals picking and choosing their conceptions of the good is facile. Sandel and MacIntyre argue that Rawls exaggerates our capacity to stand back from and question our social roles and views the self as 'unencumbered'. On the contrary, communitarians argue that the self is 'embedded' in existing social practices.

For communitarianism, however, the community is a fundamental and an irreplaceable ingredient in the good life of the person. However resilient and independent people may be human existence outside social and community life is unthinkable. People, according to communitarians, are not Robinson Crusoes able to live in complete and permanent isolation. Rather individuals are constituted, and their identity shaped, by the community to which they belong. We, as human beings, are essentially members of a family, religion, tribe, race and nation. As such, rather than being distant from social and community ends and values, we have a history and are placed in specific social circumstances. The attachments and the moral engagements from these community membership determines "who we are" and shape "the values we have". Communitarians, thus, criticise liberal individualism for producing a particular conception of self, which is divorced from the social reality that constitutes it.

As for the second criticism, communitarianism criticises individualism for holding a mistaken or a false understanding of the relationship between the individual self and its ends. As discussed above, individualism understands 'the self to be prior to its ends' in the sense that individuals reserve the right to question, revise and reject their most deeply held convictions about the nature of good life, if these are found to be no longer worth pursuing.

According to communitarianism, to accept this understanding of self is to see oneself as disembodied, unencumbered and sharing a voluntary relationship with one's social ends and attachments. They oppose this voluntaristic picture of the relationship between the self and its ends assumed by individualism. According to them, this picture ignores the way we are embedded or situated and partially constituted by social roles and community membership.

Criticising the individualist conception of the self, communitarians ask whether we can really step back from particular values that we have and change them for new ones, or are we rather made the very people that we are by the values that we endorse so that detachment is impossible? Human beings, they argue, are essentially social beings. As such, we neither choose nor reject our social and community ends and attachments; rather we discover them. We are neither free nor standing at a distance from our social and community ends; instead, we find ourselves located/situated in them. For instance, we do not choose our family, caste or nation; we find ourselves located in them. We, then, determine our conception of the good and ends given our place, position and situation in a family, religion and nation. According to communitarianism, we are never free from all social roles and community identities. Our membership of social groups and communities determine and constitute our identity and understanding of good life. We cannot always stand back and opt out of social relations and community membership. Our social relations and roles, or at least some must be taken as given. As Sandel notes 'I can interpret the meaning of the roles I find myself in, but I cannot reject the roles themselves, or the goals internal to them as worthless. Since these goals are constitutive of me as a person, they have to be taken as given in deciding what to do with my life; the question of good in my life can only be a question of how best to interpret their meaning. It makes no sense to say that they have no value for me, since there is no 'me' standing behind them, no self prior to their ends or constitutive attachments. The self is constituted by and not prior to its ends'.

In this way, communitarians denounce the historical, asocial and disembodied conception of the person found in individualism. According to them, this conception overlooks the way in which it is the kind of society in which people live that affect their understanding, both of themselves and of how they should lead their lives. A valuable life, they argue, is one that is filled with commitments and relations. And what makes them commitments is precisely that they are not the sort of things that people can question every day.

Check Your Progress 6

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

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) Discuss the communitarian critique of the individualistic conception of the self.

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24.7 THE COMMUNITARIAN CRITIQUE OF THE IDEA OF STATE NEUTRALITY

The other main focus of communitarian critique of liberal individualism is the latter's understanding of the nature and functions of the state. As discussed above, liberal individualists characterise the state as a minimal and neutral political authority, whose functions are limited to protection of individual rights and maintenance of law and order. Since individuals are free, rational and capable of self-determination, the primary value in political order, according to individualism, ought to be neutrality of the state. As mentioned above, a neutral state is one that is not committed to any particular conception of the good, and remains equidistant from and tolerant of all conceptions of the good.

Communitarians oppose this connection between individual self-determination and state neutrality. According to them, the view that the state should be value-neutral and individuals should be free to make their own choices stems from an atomistic belief that autonomy is protected only when judgements about the good life are taken out of political realm and made on an individual basis. Rejecting such "atomism", communitarians argue that, in reality, individual judgements require sharing of experiences, the give and take of collective deliberation and collective evaluation of shared practices. In other words, individual choices about good life can only be exercised in a particular sort of community and not a cultural marketplace guided by freedom and neutrality, of the type guaranteed by liberal individualism.

The communitarian perspective, therefore, argues for abandonment of liberal neutrality in favour of politics of the common good. Communitarians conceive of the common good as a substantive conception of good life that defines the community way of life.

Rather than being neutral to different individual conceptions of good life, the common good provides standards by which individual preferences and values are evaluated. In other words, the common good forms the basis on which individual conceptions of good are ranked, and the weight given to an individual's conception depends on how much it conforms or contributes to the common good.

In the communitarian view then, a just state is not one that remains neutral towards all individual conceptions of good. Rather, a just state is one which encourages its citizens to adopt conceptions of good that conform to the common good, while discouraging conceptions of good that conflict with it. According to communitarianism, the nature of the state should not be neutral or minimalist; rather it ought to play a role in guiding its citizens in leading a good life. Hence, while liberal individualism encourages each person to define and seek his own "good", communitarianism believes that a political structure has an important role to play in defining and in helping people seek the "good".

Further, communitarians argue that the common good is required not only for guiding people's decisions about the good life, but also for establishing a just and legitimate political community. According to Taylor, the idea of the common good is required to enable citizens to accept the demands of justice demanded by a welfare state. At the heart of the theory of justice in a welfare state is the claim that the privileged ought to sacrifice a portion of their rights and rewards for the sake of others (the underprivileged). For instance, in a liberal capitalist society, the propertied classes are required to sacrifice some of their property (derived in the form of taxes) for the benefit of the non-propertied and for sustaining a just society. According to Taylor, however, the demand for such a sacrifice, in an individualistic society would seem improper as citizens would be required to sacrifice their rights for the sake of those with whom they share no community identity or common way of life. If we are distanced from a community or a shared way of life, we would necessarily be unwilling to shoulder the burdens of liberal justice. In the communitarian view then, justice is rooted in a community whose primary bond is the shared understanding of the good of both man and community.

Check Your Progress 7

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

- 1) Examine the communitarian critique of the idea of state neutrality.

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24.8 LET US SUM UP

Above, we have examined the main ideas of the debate between individualism and communitarianism. We shall now conclude this unit by pointing to some of the contributions and limitations of individualism and communitarianism.

Political Ideologies

As already discussed, the debate between individualism and communitarianism is one between those who favour individual rights and autonomy and those who emphasize the bonds of community and social attachments. While individualism sees political reality as being shaped by decisions and actions of free and rights-bearing individuals, communitarians emphasise the relationship between the person and the community and see this relationship to be the basis of politics. In spite of this opposition, both individualism and communitarianism have contributed in a big way to the theory and practice of politics.

Historically, the individualist ideas and policies constituted an emancipatory movement against the excesses of organised religions, social hierarchies and the absolute state. It asserted the worth, dignity and freedom of the individual against the absoluteness of the state. This in turn brought about the democratisation of vote. However, there are certain limitations of the principle of individualism. The central assumption of laissez-faire individualism, that it would promote economic progress and social harmony did not come through. Instead, the freedom of the individual, which had been won earlier from the absolutist state, was later denied to the non-propertied class by the system of a free market economy. In this situation, the deprived turned to the state for supportive intervention or welfare. Hence, in the 19th century, the idea of laissez-faire or economic individualism gave way to that of welfare liberalism. Today, once again there are arguments in favour of restoring freedom of the individual by replacing the idea of the welfare state with the principle of laissez-faire. Mainly, the libertarians or the neo-liberals hold this argument.

The communitarian perspective has contributed to the study of politics by rightly emphasising the importance of social/community membership and values in determining the good life of the citizen. Moreover, in societies like India which are basically made up of communities, it is imperative to recognise and respect different community values and identities. However communitarianism, if not complemented with individual rights, may some times have conservative and repressive connotations because of its respect for securing existing communities and their traditions. It can result in the exclusion of some groups whose way of life does not conform to the common good or shared way of life.

In contemporary political theory, there are attempts to highlight the complementarity between individualism and communitarianism. Some of the political theorists who made such attempts are Will Kymlicka, Bhikhu Parekh and Charles Taylor. These theorists attempt to underscore the possibility of a liberal position which does not conflict with and which perhaps take on board the arguments which communitarians have to offer. Such attempts at locating the complementarity between individualism and communitarianism are important for settling some of the major disputes in contemporary political theory and practice.

24.9 SOME USEFUL REFERENCES

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24.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Gandhism (Dharma,
Swaraj, Sarvodaya and
Satyagraha)

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) See Section 24.2 and especially, subsection 24.2.1
- 2) See sub-section 24.2.2

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) See sub-section 24.3.1
- 2) See sub-section 24.3.2

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) See Section 24.4

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

- 1) See Section 24.5

Check Your Progress Exercise 5

- 1) See Section 24.6

Check Your Progress Exercise 6

- 1) See Section 24.7

Check Your Progress Exercise 7

- 1) See Section 24.8

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UNIT 25 FASCISM

Structure

- 25.0 Objectives
- 25.1 Introduction
- 25.2 General Explanations and Features of Fascism
- 25.3 Ideological Strands of Fascism
- 25.4 Social Bases of Fascism
 - 25.4.1 War, Diplomacy and Nationalism
 - 25.4.2 The Economic Crisis of 1929
 - 25.4.3 The Political Mobilisation for Fascism
 - 25.4.4 The Question of Hegemony and Coercion
- 25.5 State and Society under Fascism
- 25.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 25.7 Key Words
- 25.8 Some Useful References
- 25.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises.

25.0 OBJECTIVES

The basic purpose of this unit is to make you understand the development of fascist ideas and states as extreme right wing political mobilisation. After reading this unit, you will be able to understand:

- Some general features of fascism and the nature of mobilisation to achieve dictatorial aims;
- Multiple ideological strands that contributed to the evolution of the fascist state and its organisational style;
- The socio-economic forces responsible for the emergence of fascism; and
- The nature of state and society under fascist regimes.

25.1 INTRODUCTION

The project of Enlightenment in Europe posed a serious challenge to the older order of society and state based on the notion of divine sanction. By the 18th century, the idea of representation and a state organised around elected representatives had taken roots. This marked the inauguration of modern politics or mobilisation of people around some specific idea or policy to achieve a specific political aim. The institutional forms of this modern politics were elections, parties and modern newspapers with all the political insignia and trappings of modern political culture, which created a public space. This led to a whole range of political choices available and competing with each other for occupying this public space. By the end of the 19th century, this had crystallised in the triple ideological division of Europe into the Left, the Right and the Center. It is important to bear this in mind in order to understand the processes of political mobilisation that brought extreme right wing organisations or fascists to power in a number of European countries during the inter-war period. The growth of monopoly capitalism and resultant intense imperialist rivalries fuelled extreme nationalist ideologies and militarism after the 1870s. In the new political context, appeal for political support was made on the basis of new, seemingly non-class identities, especially, outside the workplace. As a result, unique mass-constituencies such as “war-veterans”, “tax-payers”, “sport-fans”, or simply “national-citizens” were

created. The transformation of these latent social-cleavages into open conflict must also be seen as the necessary background for the growth of right-wing fascist dictatorship in Europe after World War I. The unit begins with some general features of fascism and then, details the ideological and social bases of fascism.

25.2 GENERAL EXPLANATIONS AND FEATURES OF FASCISM

Fascism has been interpreted in multiple ways. A favourite Marxist position is to explain it as a violent, dictatorial instrument of monopoly finance capital, which emerged in the form of brutal attack on workers, rights in a period of intensification of class struggle and acute crisis in the capitalist economy. Another interpretation views fascism as the product of cultural and moral breakdown in the aftermath of brutality and savagery of World War I. According to Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation*, World War I destroyed the foundations of 19th century Europe and unleashed a long period of crisis marked by war-mobilisation, privation and dislocation. Oswald Spengler wrote his *Decline of the West in 1918* and argued that Western civilisation, characterised by industrialism had reached a period of decline in the 20th century. Spengler attacked the rational strains of modernity in order to celebrate the 'Philosophy of Life' as an alternative. Wilhelm Reich, a neo-psycho analyst, in his *Mass Psychology of Fascism* explains Fascism as a result of extreme neurotic or pathological impulses that lay dormant in the patriarchal family set-up. Another liberal interpretation traces fascism as a product of mass society where traditional solid identities based on kinship, religion, craft and guild and residence break down and a new amorphous mass-society is created. Some others relate it to a unique expression of middle-class radicalism against monopoly business houses' profit-motive. Lastly, it has been seen as a form of Bonapartism or an autonomous authoritarian state led by a charismatic leader independent of any specific class-interests or class-domination.

Fascism emerged as a radical movement based on the rejection of liberalism, democracy and Marxist socialism. However, it differed from the conservative authoritarian groups. The conservative right invoked traditional legitimacies based on the church, the monarchy, kinship etc. whereas the Fascists wanted a radical institutional change and mobilised people in the name of *Organic Nationalism*, a belief in the harmonious collectivity of nation privileged over all other forms of human-identification. As in the human body, the structural relationship of the various organs or parts of the body to each other only serves to define and delimit their roles; so in the organic view of the fascist state, the state as the embodiment of national will takes precedence over the identities and rights of the individuals. This view also accounts for the deep-rooted hostility of fascism to inter-nationalism and to organisations and movements based on inter-nationalism such as communism, freemasonry, the League of Nations and to the multi-national Jewish community. In general, Fascism symbolised the rejection of political culture inherited from Enlightenment and its ideas such as rationalist materialism, the philosophy of individualism and pluralism. The fascist opposition to the democratic-bourgeois institutions and values did not rule out their use of mass, constitutional and plebiscite forms of politics, but they made use of these democratic institutions only to wreck them from inside and in order to undermine their value. Fascism was opposed, in all its forms, to the notion of democracy based on respect for pluralism, individual autonomy and the existence of civil and political liberties.

The mass- mobilisation of fascists was based on the pattern of militarisation of politics. They made use of military insignia and terminology in their mobilisation. As military-organisations are based on unity of command and order and perfect subordination of rank and file to the higher command, so the fascist organisations had their quasi-sacred figure of the leader-the Duce in Italy and the Fuhrer in Germany- whose will was supreme in all matters.

Political Ideologies

A party militia was often used to reinforce the sense of nationalism and wipe out opposition to their dictatorships. The extreme stress on the masculine principle or male-dominance in the fascist ideology and the exaltation of youth were also related to this militarisation of politics.

Another significant feature of fascism was the organisation of some kind of regulated, class-collaborationist, integrated national-economic structure. The idea of corporatism as a community of people free from class-conflict emerged in reaction to the growth of individualism and the new centralising states. It was a residue of the feudal ideology of mystical ‘community’ of personal ties. But gradually it acquired a modern, class-collaborationist form. The ideology of societal corporatism believed in giving full autonomy to the corporations, but fascist ideology emphasized state corporatism or the complete subordination of corporations to the needs and requirement of the fascist state.

Check Your Progress 1

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

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) What are the different ways in which fascism has been interpreted?

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2) Distinguish between fascism and conservative right wing authoritarianism.

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25.3 IDEOLOGICAL STRANDS OF FASCISM

At the ideological level, there was no single unifying idea that guided the fascist movement and state. Fascism emerged from heterogeneous borrowings from various ideas. The basic ingredient of fascism, as we have noted above, was a kind of synthesis of organic nationalism and anti-Marxist ideas. The influence of Sorel’s philosophy of action based on intuition, energy and élan was also discernible in the pattern of fascist mass-mobilisation. The fascists also tried to apply Darwin’s ideas

to the development of society. They believed that people in any society compete for survival and only superior individuals, groups and races succeed. This belief directly fed into the anti-Jewish politics or anti-semitism practiced mainly under German fascism, but also elsewhere. Such application of Darwin's ideas in the realm of society came to be known as 'Social Darwinism'. Adolph Hitler's autobiographical statement in *Mein Kampf* (1924) made out an explicit case for the application of such Social-Darwinist racial ideas. In this book, Hitler characterised parliamentary democracy as a sin against 'the basic aristocratic principle of nature' and depicted all human culture as the exclusive product of the creative Aryan race and condemned the Jewish community as inferior and lacking in creativity. The mass-extermination of millions of Jews grew out of this insanity of Nazi ideology in Germany where completely impersonal bureaucratic 'extermination' of a people classified as a species of inferior inhumans was put into practice. The political theorist Carl Schmitt wrote his critiques of parliamentary democracy in the 1920s arguing for a plebiscitary dictatorship. The Philosopher Martin Heidegger attacked Western modernity for its technological violence and for a contempt of being. In various ways, these philosophies of the right were to become justifications for the Fascist and Nazi regimes in the 1930s.

Fascism in Italy emerged as the convergence of three different trends. The radical Syndicalist Confederation of Trade Unions split in 1914 over the issue of Italian participation in war (World War-I). The Syndicalists had believed in the 'self-emancipation' of the 'producers' through regulation at factory level. The workers associations or syndicates would replace the state at an appropriate time and these would act as the instruments of self-government. Now the right wing syndicalists moved towards extreme nationalism. They described nations in class terms, i.e., as 'plutocratic' or having colonies or 'proletarians' or 'have not' nations without colonies. Italy was described as a proletarian nation. The Futurists who rejected traditional norms and existing institutions and exalted 'violence', and who were fascinated by speed, power, motors and machines or all the modern technological possibilities, contributed a second major ideological factor. Mussolini's 'socialistic' views and ideas on 'national revolution' was the third major ideological strand of Italian fascism. This heterogeneity of ideas along with local political exigencies was responsible for variations in the form of the fascist movement and state.

25.4 SOCIAL BASES OF FASCISM

In the following sub-sections, we will describe the nature of political and institutional forces that helped in the development of the fascist movement and state and sustained it.

25.4.1 War, Diplomacy and Nationalism

World War I provided the sociological and psychological conditions for the crystallisation of the fascist state. It revealed the capacity of nationalism in the mobilisation of masses and economic resources. It further demonstrated the importance of unity of command, of authority, and moral mobilisation and propaganda in the service of the modern state. After the war, fascism emerged as a vision of a coherent and reunited people, mobilised on the basis of a whole communal liturgy of songs and torch-light procession, highlighting the cult of physical force, violence and brutality.

At the Versailles, the victorious Allied powers tried to extract the terms of defeat from Germany. Severe reparations were imposed on Germany. Germany's military might was reduced to 100,000 men. Germany also suffered in terms of territorial possessions including loss of its colonies. Discontent over the severity of the Allies' peace terms and conflicts and squabbles over the newly drawn frontiers contained

seeds of future conflicts. There was no mechanism to adjudicate rival claims and resolve conflicts. The League of Nations lacked the executive powers to impose peaceful solutions. Hitler was ready to use military force to achieve union with Austria and to get sufficient 'living space' (Lebensraum) for the German people. Italian fascism claimed colonies for a 'proletarian' Italy. Japanese militarists demanded an 'equitable distribution of world resources' and were willing to favour a military action to achieve their aim. Nationalism, war and diplomacy forced individuals and groups within national boundaries to take sides. It also made it possible to restrict the public democratic space. Any person or group could be identified as the 'national enemy' or 'traitors' and wiped out for not owing allegiance or loyalty to the fascist 'national' state. Earlier defeat was attributed to the betrayal of these elements in the fascist propaganda.

25.4.2 The Economic Crisis of 1929

World War I resulted in mass destruction, of resources both physical and human, and hence, productive capacities of societies involved in it. Reconstruction and 'recovery' in Europe after the war was financed by US loans. The process went on smoothly till a crisis began in the US over the rapid drop in agriculture prices. As the world agriculture production began to rise with 'recovery' in Europe, North American agriculture was hit by a rapid drop in the prices and many faced bankruptcies. Soon the stock markets in America were affected in October 1929. As a result of the global integration of the markets, the crash affected all the economies. Plantations, farms and factories closed down throwing millions out of jobs and restricting output. The Industrialists who had taken advances and loans from banks and financial institutions found it difficult to repay. Many banks and financial institutions started facing bankruptcies. With millions out of jobs and factories, there was no demand for goods and services as the purchasing power of the people deteriorated. The economies showed no sign of recovery. In such circumstances, re-militarisation advocated by fascist leaders created jobs not only in the armies, but also in the armament industries. As this stimulated a demand for goods and services, the fascist programme appealed to people in crises-ridden times-especially when it also satisfied their 'national pride'.

25.4.3 The Political Mobilisation for Fascism

The initial programme of fascists in Italy, launched as 'Fasci Di Combattimento' (1919) called for the installation of a republic and reflected demands for radical democratic and socialistic reforms including confiscation of huge war-time profits of capitalists, the suppression of big joint-stock companies and land for landless peasants. These leftist elements of the programme were dropped in 1920 and only an emotive mixture of strident patriotism, justification of war, a concern for national greatness and aversion to the socialist party were retained. The growth of fascist squads, with the support and connivance of state officials and army was directly linked to actual or perceived threats of the left. The support of the traditional conservative elites such as army officers, bureaucrats, and businessmen was utilized and left its imprint on the fascist party and state. In order to achieve a broader mobilisation of people, the military type militia, semi-military propaganda type organisations and regimented fascist trade unions were also created. The Party and its grand Council controlled all these organisations.

Similarly, chauvinist sentiment and popular radical demands in Germany were used by Hitler's fascist organization, the German National Socialist Worker's Party (NSDAP) in order to gain mass political support. It called for a greater Germany with land and colonies, the annulment of the treaty of Versailles, nationalisation of big monopoly business, profit sharing in big enterprises, the abolition of unearned incomes and agrarian reforms. German fascism capitalised on the growing unease created by the Great Depression of 1929 and its impact on the German economy. They made use

of the political instability of the Weimer republic, whose own constitution was used as an instrument to subvert it from within. All these factors created conditions for the rise of the Nazi Party, the organisation of German fascism. It had a particular appeal for those patriotic Germans whose national pride had been hurt by the defeat of Germany in World War I and its subsequent humiliation at Versailles.

25.4.4 The Question of Hegemony and Coercion

The German fascist state associated with the Fuhrer Adolph Hitler earned for itself the distinction of being the most barbaric and destructive regime that used industrial techniques for the execution of planned mass murder and genocide. The secret state police office, or 'Gestapo' as it came to be known in Germany was created in 1933 under the Prussian Interior Ministry, and rapidly attained autonomy from the provincial government. From 1934, Heinrich Himmler became the head of this nation-wide fascist organ of terror. Its Prussian section was headed by Reinhard Heydrich, who was also in charge of the SD, a party intelligence organisation affiliated to the dreaded SS, with a nation-wide network of informers. It became the internal disciplinary executive of the German fascist state. Such organisations of terror acquired the complete power of life and death over every German. Any opposition to the fascist state was ruthlessly suppressed. Absolute power was concentrated in the hands of the Fuhrer. The use of a rational bureaucratic mechanism in order to exterminate the gypsies, Jews and political opponents through concentration camps is a well-known aspect of the fascist state. All this points towards overwhelming dependence of the fascist state on the coercive machinery of state power. Similarly, in Italy, Spain and other fascist regimes, every attempt was made to dismantle democratic institutions of the civil society and replace them with institutionalised dictatorships based on the personal command of the dictators. All this necessitated more and more regimentation of the civil society. Some scholars even characterise fascism as a 'totalitarian state' or a state, which acquires day-to-day control over the life of its citizens. But despite the dictatorial rule, fascism made use of certain consent-building experiments. At the ideological level, use of nationalist sentiments and even anti-Semitism had a popular sanction behind it.

Apart from this, some new methods were also tried. The fascist state in Italy created the Opera Nazinale Dopolavoro in 1925. Its main concern was the organisation of leisure time for the working people. It ran a huge network of local clubs and recreational facilities with libraries, bars, billiard halls and sport grounds. The Dopolavoro circles arranged concerts, plays, films shows, and organised picnics and provided cheap summer holidays for children. By the 1930s, there were about 20,000 such circles in Italy. Moreover, although the Syndical Law of 1926 brought labour under the control of the state in the interest of production and confirmed the fascist trade unions in their monopoly of negotiations with employers and banned strikes, the fascist state also introduced some welfare schemes for the workers in the 1930s. Family allowances were given in 1934, largely to compensate for the loss of income resulting from the imposition of a forty-hour week. Insurance against sickness and accident was incorporated into wage agreements, and later in the 1930s, Christmas bonus and holiday pay were introduced. All such measures were meant to establish legitimacy of the state that had abolished civil liberties and democratic rights. Compared to Italy, German labour was more tightly regimented under the Nazi regime.

Check Your Progress 2

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

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) Explain what ideological strands contributed to the growth of fascism.

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Political Ideologies

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2) How was Italian fascism different from its German counter-part?

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25.5 STATE AND SOCIETY UNDER FASCISM

The fascist state emerged as the institutionalisation of personal dictatorship. In Italy, all opposition parties and organisations were banned in October 1926. The Public Safety Law (1926) made the security of the state take precedence over personal liberties. The Fascist Party itself was bureaucratised and syndicalist ideas were suppressed within the party. Many industrialists from North Italy including the owner of Fiat Company, Giovanni Oienyale, had financed Mussolini’s fascist organisation. Private capital was a beneficiary of the fascist control of labour. The “Corporate State” was formally created in 1934 with 22 combined corporations of employers and employees, but they lacked the real power to take economic decisions. State intervention in the economic life of the Italian nation was marginal in the early part of fascist regime. The Great Depression and the need to fulfill imperialist ambitions, especially in the Mediterranean Sea and Africa for its aggressive nationalist-militarist project led to an increased state intervention in the economic life. The foundation of the Institute for Industrial Reconstruction (IRI) and Instituto Mobiliare Italiano (IMI) in the 1930s reflected this trend of economic regulation in the service of modern warfare. However, even in 1940, IRI possessed only about 17.8% of the total capital assets of Italian industry. The state, in particular, focused on the growth of chemical, electrical and machine industries and gave impetus to modernisation through electrification of railways and telephone and radio industry. However, compared to Germany, investments in military-production were low despite the regime’s rhetoric of Italy “being in a permanent state of war”. Moreover, despite early radical denouncements of the monopoly capitalist class, the fascist state helped in cartelisation and trusticisation i.e. creation of large industrial federations.

Mussolini also tried to appease the Church. Large grants were made for the repair of war-damaged churches. In 1923, religious education was made compulsory in all secondary schools. The Roman question was finally settled in 1929. The Lateran Pacts were signed with the Church, giving virtual control of religious-education to the

Church and the Pope's right to govern the Vatican was recognized. The Church's main lay organization, Catholic Action, was guaranteed freedom provided it stayed out of politics.

The personal absolutism and party's control of social life was more stringent in Germany. In Italy, big business, industry, finance, army and professional bureaucracy retained a large degree of autonomy and fascism came to power on the basis of a tacit compromise with these established institutions and elites. In Germany, the Enabling Act (March 1933) became the legal basis for Hitler's dictatorship. Legislative power was transferred to the executive. The bureaucracy was purged of politically undesirable and 'non-Aryan' elements. The federal character of the state was destroyed. The basic constitutional rights were suppressed. The "rule of law" was transformed into the 'rule of leader'. The extra-legal notion of the Fuhrer, to whom bureaucracy and the army swore 'unconditional obedience', assumed crucial importance in the administrative functioning and signified burial of constitutionalism. The will of the leader became the basis for the legitimacy of law. The independence of the judiciary was completely destroyed. Furthermore, the press was completely controlled. Liberal and Jewish-owned newspapers and the Socialist Press were forced to close down. Any type of literature, and art that was found anti-thetical to the fascist perception was banned. The control of cultural life of citizens through propaganda and education became one of the chief goals of the Nazi regime. All education was transformed in accordance with fascist ideals. Text- books were re-written. Jews were forbidden to teach and racial theories of 'Aryan- German' master race supremacy became a part of the curricula.

The fascist state in Germany also attempted to achieve a complete regimentation of labour. "Trustees" appointed by the owners fixed wages. A labour front was created in October 1934. It operated not as a trade union, but as a propaganda machine, and included employers and professionals as members. Its stated aim was the maximisation of work, and the fascists controlled it. The fascist state's attitude to women was based on ultra-conservative patriarchal sentiments. The social role of women was defined by the slogan of "Kids, Kitchen and Church".

The most oppressive aspect of fascism in Germany was a systematic persecution of Jews. The ideology of Nazi party in Germany was informed by a strong hatred of the Jews and an intense obsession with the maintenance of the Aryan purity of the German Master race. The Jews were stereotyped as inferior, racially impure and a source of all ills of Germany. They were deprived of citizenship, places in the universities and administration. Their businesses were attacked. They were subjected to all sorts of unprecedented discrimination. Later on, millions of them were sent to concentration camps and massacred during World War II. Italian fascism in contrast, lacked any systematic policy of racial anti-semitism, at least, up to 1937. However, in November 1938, under the influence of the Nazis, racial anti-Jews laws were also passed in Italy.

Check Your Progress 3

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) Describe the salient features of the fascist state and society.

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25.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have learnt the basic features of the fascist movement and the state, the role of war in preparing the conditions for the emergence of fascism and the basic ideological strands that contributed to fascism and its organisational styles. We should understand fascism as distinct from the conservative right-wing movements, it should be viewed as a radical attempt from a rightist perspective to restructure society and its institutions. Extreme nationalism bordering on imperial designs to obtain colonies, complete subordination of institutions like the judiciary, the press, labour-organisation and concentrations of all executive, legislative and judicial powers in the hands of dictators, and deep rooted hostility to democratic rights were some of the key elements of fascist polities. However, there were subtle variations within the fascist practices due to local specific conditions. Fascism was not a homogenous movement. Moreover, although coercive-machinery of the state was used to eliminate all political oppositions, fascist states also used certain measures to maintain legitimacy of dictatorial regimes, even if this legitimacy was based on chauvinistic and popular racial feelings.

25.7 KEY WORDS

Anti-Semitism	:	prejudice against Jews.
Corporatism	:	A semi-collectivist creed that attempted harmonious relationship between employees and employers by binding them in a common organisation.
Militia	:	A semi-military organisation.
Mobilisation	:	preparing people for action around a particular idea.
Social-Darwinism	:	application of Darwin's ideas to the development of society, a belief that people in society compete for survival and only superior individuals, groups and races succeed.
Syndicalism	:	A belief in the self-emancipation of the producers through regulation at the factory level by workers' syndicates or associations.

25.8 SOME USEFUL REFERENCES

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25.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

**Gandhism (Dharma,
Swaraj, Sarvodaya and
Satyagraha)**

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) See Section 25.2
- 2) See Section 25.2

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) See Section 25.3
- 2) See Sections 25.3, 25.4 and 25.5

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) See Section 25.5



UNIT 26 MARXISM

Structure

- 26.0 Objectives
- 26.1 Introduction
- 26.2 What is Marxism?
 - 26.2.1 Utopian and Scientific Socialism
 - 26.2.2 Evolutionary and Revolutionary Socialism
- 26.3 Basic Principles of Marxism
 - 26.3.1 Dialectical Materialism
 - 26.3.2 Historical Materialism
 - 26.3.3 Theory of Surplus Value
 - 26.3.4 Class Struggle
 - 26.3.5 Revolution
 - 26.3.6 Dictatorship of the Proletariat
 - 26.3.7 Communism
- 26.4 Theory of Alienation
- 26.5 Theory of Freedom
- 26.6 A Critical Appraisal and an Overview
- 26.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 26.8 Some Useful References
- 26.9 Answers to Check your Progress Exercises

26.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you will read about the theory and practice of Marxism, propounded by Karl Marx and others. The basic tenets of the philosophy comprising of dialectical and historical materialism, the theory of surplus value, class struggle, revolution, dictatorship of the proletariat and communism are discussed at length. After going through the unit, you should be able to:

- Discuss the pre-Marxian strands of socialism such as utopian socialism;
- Enumerate, describe and discuss the basic postulates of Marxism;
- Comment on other important components of the Marxist theory such as the theories of alienation and freedom and finally; and
- Critique Marxism as well as comment on its contemporary relevance.

26.1 INTRODUCTION

The present unit aims at examining and explaining the principles of Marxism, which is the most revolutionary ideology of our age. Along with liberalism, Marxism ranks as the most important philosophy of our time. Liberalism, Idealism and Marxism are the three important theories of Political Science. C.L Wayper has divided various views regarding the state into three parts, viz., the state as a machine, as an organism and as a class. In other words, the organic view of the state, the mechanistic view of the state and the class view of the state. The organic view is idealism, the mechanistic view is liberalism and the class view is marxism.

The present unit is subdivided into the definition of Marxism, Utopian and Scientific Socialism, Revolutionary and Evolutionary Socialism, the main principles of Marxism, a critique and a conclusion. The main principles of Marxism, are seven, viz., Dialectical

Materialism, Historical Materialism, Theory of Surplus Value, Class Struggle, Revolution, Dictatorship of the Proletariat and Communism. The concept of Alienation and freedom generally associated with younger Marx or the humanist face of Marxism have also been dealt with.

26.2 WHAT IS MARXISM?

Marxism generally refers to the ideas of the German philosopher, Karl Marx. But Marxism does not mean exclusively the ideas of Marx. It includes the ideas of Marx, Friedrich Engels and their supporters, who call themselves Marxists. Thus, Marxism refers to the body of ideas, which predominantly contains the ideas of Karl Marx. Marxism is a living philosophy. Marxist thinkers are continuously contributing to the philosophy of Marxism. Thus, it is said that Marx is dead, but Marxism is still alive.

The Marxist philosophy existed even before the birth of Karl Marx. This is the reason David McLellan has written three volumes on Marxism, viz., *Marxism before Marx*; *Thought of Karl Marx* and *Marxism after Marx*. Similarly, the Polish thinker Leszek Kolakowski has authored three volumes on Marxism. The point once again is that Marxism does not mean only the ideas of Karl Marx.

26.2.1 Utopian and Scientific Socialism

As said earlier, Marxism existed before Marx. These are known as the early socialist thinkers. Karl Marx calls them Utopian Socialists. They were utopian, because their diagnosis of the social ills was correct, but their remedy was wrong. It was impracticable, and therefore, they were called utopian. The word 'utopia' was derived from a novel of Thomas Moore titled, 'Utopia.' It refers to an imaginary island, called Utopia, where a perfect socio-economic-political system existed. There was no exploitation and people were happy. Some important utopian socialist thinkers are Robert Owen, Charles Fourier, Louis Blanc, Saint Simon, Sismondi and Proudhon.

Marx calls his socialism as 'Scientific Socialism'. It is scientific, because it offers the economic interpretation of history by using the scientific methodology of dialectical materialism. It explains not only the true causes of exploitation, but also offers the scientific remedy of revolution and dictatorship of the proletariat to cure the social ills of exploitation. It not only offers scientific reasons for class division and also struggle in society, but also provides for a scientific mechanism to establish a classless and exploitation less society.

26.2.2 Evolutionary and Revolutionary Socialism

Socialism is further divided into evolutionary and revolutionary socialism. Evolutionary socialism does not believe in revolution and wants to attain socialism through peaceful means. Evolutionary Socialists have faith in parliamentary democracy and want to bring social change through the ballot. They eschew violence and so, are opposed to a violent revolution. They also do not subscribe to the dictatorship of the proletariat and advocate a peaceful democratic transition from a class divided to a classless society. Fabian Socialism, Guild Socialism, Democratic Socialism are all various types of evolutionary socialism.

Revolutionary socialism, on the other hand, believes in class struggle, revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat. According to them, social change cannot be peaceful. It has to be violent. A peaceful revolution is a contradiction in terms. Revolution is the midwife of social change, and this revolution must be violent. Revolutionary Marxism is generally identified with the scientific socialism of Karl Marx. Syndicalism is also a type of revolutionary socialism.

Evolutionary socialism also traces its roots from the ideas of Karl Marx and Engels. They have talked about the withering away of the state. Exponents of evolutionary socialism have picked up the theory of withering away of the state, and argued that gradually through peaceful means, social change can be effected and an exploitationless and classless society can be established. However, the critics of evolutionary socialism do not accept this thesis, and argue that the idea of withering away of the state applies only to the socialist state or the dictatorship of the proletariat and not to the capitalist state. It will never wither away. It has to be smashed through a violent revolution. Therefore, the logic of evolutionary socialism is flawed.

Check Your Progress 1

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
 ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.
- 1) Distinguish between Utopian and Scientific Socialism.

Or

Distinguish between Evolutionary and Revolutionary Socialism.

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26.3 BASIC PRINCIPLES OF MARXISM

The basic tenets of Marxism are the following: dialectical materialism, historical materialism, the theory of surplus value, class struggle, revolution, dictatorship of the proletariat and communism. Now, these principles will be discussed in detail.

26.3.1 Dialectical Materialism

Dialectical materialism is the scientific methodology developed by Marx and Engels for the interpretation of history. Here, Marx has borrowed heavily from his predecessors, particularly, the German philosopher Hegel. Dialectics is a very old methodology, employed to discover truth by exposing contradictions, through a clash of opposite ideas. Hegel refined it by developing the trilogy of thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis. It is popularly known as the *Dialectical Triad*. Progress or growth takes place through the dialectical process. At every stage of growth, it is characterised by contradictions. These contradictions induce further changes, progress, and development. The thesis is challenged by its anti-thesis. Both contain elements of truth and falsehood. Truth is permanent, but falsehood is transitory. In the ensuing conflict of the thesis and the anti-thesis, the truth remains, but the false elements are destroyed. These false elements constitute contradictions. The true elements of both the thesis and the anti-thesis are fused together in a synthesis. This evolved synthesis during the course of time becomes a thesis and so, it is again challenged by its opposite anti-thesis, which again results in a synthesis. This process of thesis, anti-thesis, and synthesis continues until the stage of perfection is reached. In this evolutionary process, a stage will come, when there will be no false elements. These will be destroyed at different stages of evolution. Ultimately, only the truth remains,

because it is never destroyed. It will constitute the perfect stage and there will be no contradictions and so, there will be no further growth. The dialectical process will come to an end after arriving at the perfect truth. It is the contradictions, which move the dialectical process and a complete elimination of contradictions marks the end of the dialectical process itself.

For materialism, Marx is highly indebted to the French school of materialism, mainly the French materialist thinker Ludwig Feuerbach. It is the matter, which is the ultimate reality and not the idea. The latter is a reflection of the former. How we earn our bread determines our ideas. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence but, on the contrary, it is their social existence that determines their consciousness. Marx has observed that “Hegel’s dialectics was standing on its head and I have put it on its feet”. Hegel has developed dialectical idealism. For him, it is the idea, which ultimately matters. Idea lies in the base or the sub-structure, which determines everything in the superstructure. Society, polity, economy are in this superstructure which is shaped by the prevalent dominant ideas of the age. Ultimately it is the idea, which matters, and the other things are only its reflection. Marx replaced idea with matter. According to Marx, the material or the economic forces are in the substructure and the idea is a part of the superstructure. Idea is the reflection of material forces. The economic forces determine the idea and not vice-versa. Thus, Marx has reversed the position of idea and matter. This is the reason that he claims that “in Hegel it was upside down and I have corrected it”.

The base or the substructure consists of the forces of production and the relations of production. These two together constitute the mode of production. When there is a change in the forces of production because of development in technology, it brings changes in the relations of production. Thus, a change in the mode of production brings a corresponding change in the superstructure. Society, polity, religion, morals, values, norms, etc. are a part of the superstructure and shaped by the mode of production.

26.3.2 Historical Materialism

Historical materialism is the application of dialectical materialism to the interpretation of history. It is the economic interpretation of world history by applying the Marxian methodology of dialectical materialism. The world history has been divided into four stages: primitive communism, the slavery system, feudalism and capitalism.

Primitive communism refers to the earliest part of human history. It was a propertyless, exploitationless, classless and stateless society. Means of production were backward, because technology was undeveloped. The community owned the means of production. They were not under private ownership and so there was no exploitation. Stone made hunting weapons, the fishing net and hooks were the means of production. The entire community owned these. Production was limited and meant for self-consumption. There was no surplus production and so there was no private property. Since there was no private property, there was no exploitation. Since there was no exploitation, there was no class division. Since there was no class division, there was no class struggle. Since there was no class struggle, there was no state. It was, thus, a communist society, but of a primitive type. Though life was difficult, it was characterised by the absence of exploitation, conflict and struggle.

Technology is not static; it evolves continuously. Technological development results in the improvement of production. This leads to surplus production, which results in the emergence of private property. Means of production are now not under the community, but private ownership. Society is, thus, divided into property owning and propertyless classes. By virtue of the ownership of the means of production, the property owning class exploits the propertyless class. Class division in society and exploitation lead to class struggle. Since there is class struggle, the dominant class, that is the property

Political Ideologies

owning class creates an institution called the state to suppress the dissent of the dependent class, that is the propertyless class. Thus, the state is a class instrument and a coercive institution. It protects the interests of its creator, that is the property owning class.

In the beginning, this society is divided into masters and slaves. Masters are the haves and the slaves are the have nots. The slaves carry out all the production work. The masters live on the labour of slaves. They exploit the slaves and whenever the slaves resent, the state comes to the rescue of the masters. Thus, the state serves the interests of the master class. It uses its coercive powers to suppress the voice of the slaves.

The slave system is succeeded by feudalism. Technological development leads to changes in the means of production and this brings about corresponding changes in the relations of production and the superstructure. The slave system is replaced by the feudal mode of production and it is reflected in the society, polity, morality and the value system. The division of society into feudal lords and peasants characterises feudalism. The feudal lords own the means of production, that is land, but the peasants carry out the production work. By virtue of ownership of the land, the feudal lords get a huge share of the produce without doing anything. Thus, the feudal lords are like parasites, who thrive on the labour of peasants. Feudal lords exploit the peasants and if the peasants ever resist their exploitation, their resistance is ruthlessly crushed by the state, which protects and serves the interests of the feudal lords. The peasants are a dependent and exploited class, whereas the lords are a dominant and exploiting class.

Capitalism succeeds feudalism. Technological development continues and so there is change in the forces of production, which leads to a mismatch between the forces of production and the relations of production, which is resolved through a bourgeois revolution. Thus the contradiction between the forces of production and the relations of production is resolved. The feudal mode of production is replaced by the capitalist mode of production. Division of society into the bourgeois and the proletariat class characterises capitalism. The bourgeois class owns the means of production, but the proletariat class carries out the production. Proletariats are the industrial workers. They sell their labour in lieu of meager wages. It is usually a subsistence wage, which is sufficient only to support them and their families, so that an uninterrupted supply of labour force can be maintained. Production is not for consumption by the self, but for profit. The desire to maximise profit leads to a reduction in wages and a rise in working hours. This further deteriorates the lot of the working class, which is eventually pushed into a situation, where it has nothing to loose except its chains. This paves the way for the proletariat revolution.

Check Your Progress 2

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

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) Explain in your own words the meaning of Dialectical Materialism.

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- 2) Enumerate and describe the salient features of either primitive communism or feudalism.

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26.3.3 Theory of Surplus Value

Marx has developed the theory of surplus value to explain the exploitation in the capitalist society. Here, Marx was influenced by the theories of classical economists. He subscribed to the labour theory of value. The value of a commodity is determined by the amount of labour consumed in its production. Labour is also a commodity. It can be bought and sold like other commodities. Out of the four factors of production, labour is the most vital. In its absence, the other factors of production are useless. Land, capital and organisation are the other factors of production. It is the application of labour to these factors of production, which makes them productive. In the absence of labour, they are sterile.

If a wage is paid in proportion to the amount of value created by a labourer, then there is no exploitation, But this is not the case in capitalism. Labour is unique in the sense that it creates more value than is required for its maintenance. The difference between the value created by the worker and the value paid to the worker, as wages, constitute the surplus value and the profit of the capitalist. For instance, if a worker has created a value of say Rs. 25,000 in a month and has been paid Rs. 15,000 as wages, then the remaining Rs. 10,000 will constitute the profit of the capitalist. Thus, the worker always creates more value than he is actually paid. This surplus value created by the worker is the profit of the bourgeois, which has been defended by the classical economist, because it leads to capital accumulation, which is invested further in new industries and enterprises and leads to growth and prosperity. For the Marxists, it is the exploitation of the workers, which has to be abolished.

With the growth of capitalism and the rise in competition, the wages of the workers continue to fall and reach the stage of subsistence level. Subsistence wage is the minimum possible wage; beyond this the wage cannot be reduced. It is the minimum possible wage for the survival and perpetuation of the labour force. Thus, cut throat competition in capitalism leads to deterioration of the lot of the proletariat. This intensifies class struggle and eventually leads to revolution.

26.3.4 Class Struggle

According to Marx, the history of all hitherto existing society has been the history of class struggle. Except the primitive communist stage, all historical ages have been characterised by the antagonism between the dominant and dependent classes or the haves and the have nots. This antagonism is caused by class contradictions; it is the result of exploitation by the property owning class of the property less class. Throughout history, there have been two contending classes in every epoch. In the slavery system, they were the masters and the slaves, in feudalism, the feudal lords and the peasants and in capitalism, the bourgeois and the proletariat. The masters, the feudal lords and the bourgeois are the owners of the means of production. However, it is the slaves, the peasants and the proletariat, who carry out production,

but their produce is taken away by their exploiters and in return, they are given just enough for their survival. By virtue of the ownership of the means of production, the property owning class exploits the propertyless class. This is the main source and cause of class struggle. The interests of the contending classes are irreconcilable. No compromise or rapprochement is possible between the contending classes. The inherent contradictions of contending classes of every epoch can be resolved only through the annihilation of the exploiting classes.

26.3.5 Revolution

Class struggle paves the way for revolution. Class struggle is imperceptible, but revolution is perceptible. Intensification of class struggle prepares the ground for revolution. Class struggle is a long drawn affair, but revolution is short, swift and violent. In the words of Marx, 'revolution is the indispensable mid-wife of social change'. Transition from one historical stage to another occurs through revolution. Feudal revolution brought an end to the slavery system; the bourgeois revolution ended feudalism and the proletariat revolution will bring an end to capitalism. Thus, any epoch making social change is always brought about by a revolution.

Revolution occurs when there is incompatibility between the means or forces of production and the relations of production. To resolve this incompatibility, revolution occurs, which brings corresponding changes in the relations of production and the superstructure to make it compatible with the forces or means of production. Technological development brings changes in the means of production. The handmill gives you a society with the feudal lord, and the steam-mill, a society with the industrial capitalist.

Proletarian revolution will be the last revolution in the annals of history. Revolution occurs to resolve contradictions. So revolution will not take place, if there is no contradiction in society. After the proletarian revolution, there will not be any further revolution, because there will be no contradiction. However, revolution will take place only when the forces of production have fully matured. Revolution cannot be advanced or postponed. It will occur when the forces of production have matured and do not match the relations of production. Revolution brings an end to this mismatch.

The sequence and direction of social evolution cannot be changed. No stage can overleap an other stage. No stage can be short-circuited. Primitive communism will lead to the slavery system, the slavery system to feudalism and feudalism to capitalism. Dictatorship of the proletariat or socialism will succeed capitalism, which is the penultimate stage of social evolution. Dictatorship of the proletariat will eventually lead to the establishment of communism. With the proletarian revolution, revolution itself will come to an end.

26.3.6 Dictatorship of the Proletariat

The proletarian revolution will lead to the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is also known as the *socialist state*. The state apparatus created by the bourgeois to oppress the proletariat will be taken over by the proletariat themselves. Now, the table will be turned and the proletariat will use the state apparatus against the bourgeois. The bourgeois will try to stage a counter-revolution to restore the old system and so, the coercive institutions of the state are needed to restrain the bourgeois.

The state has always been the instrument of oppression. The dominant class to oppress the dependent class has created the state. It is a class instrument. The state protects and serves the interests of its creator, which is the property owning class. This class has always been in a minority, whether it is the masters or the feudal lords or the capitalists. Thus, a minority has been oppressing a majority viz., the slaves or

the peasants or the proletariat through the coercive organs of the state. Under the dictatorship of the proletariat, for the first time the state comes under the control of the majority. Now, for the first time, the state's coercive apparatus is used by the majority against the minority.

According to Marx, all states have been dictatorships and so the socialist state is no exception. It is also a dictatorship. The state has always been used by one class to suppress the other class. In the socialist state, the proletariat class will use the coercive organs of the state such as the army, the police, prison, judicial system etc., against the bourgeois class. Marx argues that if democracy means the rule of the majority, then the proletariat state is the most democratic state, because for the first time in the annals of history, power comes into the hands of the majority. Before the proletariat state, power has always been in the hands of the minority. So if majority rule is the criterion, then only the proletariat state can be called a democratic state.

26.3.7 Communism

Under the living care of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the socialist state will blossom forth into communism. Socialism is a transitory stage. It will pave the way for the eventual emergence of communism. Which is stable and permanent. This will be the phase of social evolution. After the establishment of communism, there will be no further social change. The dialectical process will come to an end. A perfect, rational social system will be established, free from antagonisms and contradictions. There will be no class contradictions and so, no class struggle. Infact communism will be a classless, stateless, private propertyless and exploitationless society.

In a communist society, there will be no private property in the form of private ownership of the means of production. The means of production will be under the ownership of the community. Cooperation and not cutthroat competition will be the basis of communist society. Production will be for consumption and not to earn profit. Profit motive will be replaced by social needs. Since there will be no private property, there will be no exploitation. Since there will be no exploitation, there will be no class division, no property owning and propertyless class, no haves and have nots or no dominant and dependent class. Since there is no class division, there is no class struggle and so no need of the state. This is the reason why a communist society will be a classless and stateless society.

State is the instrument of exploitation. It is a class instrument and a result of class division in society. Since there is only one class of workers in communism and no other class to suppress or oppress, there will not be any need of the state. It will become redundant in a communist society. It will be relegated to the museum. The state, however, will not be smashed; it will gradually wither away.

Communist society will be governed by the Louise Blanc principle of 'from each according to his capacity to each according to his need'. There will be no place for parasites. He who will not work will not eat also. There will be only one class of workers. The entire society will be converted into the working class. There will be no place for exploitation. It will be an egalitarian society. There will be harmonious relationship among the people.

Check Your Progress 3

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) What is the theory of surplus value?

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2) Explain the concept of class struggle.

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3) Enumerate and describe the salient features of a communist society.

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26.4 THEORY OF ALIENATION

There have been two distinct phases in the Marxist philosophy. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, present the human face of Marxism. In the *Manuscripts*, capitalism has been analysed without reference to class antagonism, class struggle and violent revolution. Here, the evil influences of capitalism have been explained through alienation and loss of identity and freedom. These views of Marx have been identified with a younger Marx. There occurs an epistemological break in Marx's philosophy with the writing of *Communist Manifesto* in 1848. The later Marx is known as mature Marx, who developed the theory of scientific socialism. Marx's earlier ideas were discovered only in 1932, with the publication of the *Manuscripts*.

The theory of alienation is an important Marxian concept. The Hungarian Marxist George Lukacs had developed the theory of alienation entirely on his own even before the publication of *Manuscripts* in 1932. However, the concept of alienation became popular only after the publication of the *Manuscripts*. Marx has identified four levels of alienation. Firstly, man is alienated from his own product and from his work process, because the worker plays no part in deciding what to produce and how to produce it. Secondly, man is alienated from nature. His work does not give him a sense of satisfaction as a creative worker. Under mechanisation, work tends to become increasingly routinised and monotonous. Thirdly, man is alienated from other men. The competitive character of the capitalist system forces everyone to live at someone else's expense and divides society into antagonistic classes. Lastly, man is alienated from himself. The realm of necessity dominates his life and reduces him to the level of an animal existence, leaving no time for a taste of literature, art, and cultural heritage. The capitalist system subordinates all human faculties and qualities

to the conditions created by the private ownership of capital and property. The capitalist himself, no less than the worker, becomes a slave of the tyrannical rule of money.

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26.5 THEORY OF FREEDOM

As a humanist philosophy, Marxism is primarily a philosophy of human freedom. Freedom consists not only in securing material satisfaction of human needs, but also in removing the conditions of dehumanisation, estrangement and alienation. The capitalist system is characterised by necessity as opposed to freedom. Necessity refers to the conditions under which the inevitable laws of nature govern the life of man. These laws of nature exist independent of man's will. Man can acquire scientific knowledge of these laws, but cannot change them at his will. Freedom does not consist in an escape from necessity. Freedom lies in the knowledge of these laws of nature and the capacity to make these laws work towards the definite end of the emancipation of human society.

Thus, a sound knowledge of the productive forces operating behind the capitalist system and a programme to make these forces work toward human ends were essential instruments of human freedom. Only a programme of socialist revolution would accomplish humanity's leap from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom. The emancipation of human society and the realisation of true freedom is possible only with the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of communism.

Check Your Progress 4

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

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) Discuss either the theory of alienation or the theory of freedom.

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26.6 A CRITICAL APPRAISAL AND AN OVERVIEW

Marxism has been subjected to severe criticism. It has simplified the class division of society into two classes, the haves and the have nots. This is far from the reality. Society is very complex and is divided into numerous groups. There is no clear cut division of classes as envisaged by Marxism. Moreover, there exists a huge middle class. Marxian thinkers predicted that with the advancement of capitalism, the middle class would disappear and merge with the proletariat class. But this has not happened so far and there is no possibility of it ever happening. Infact, the reverse has happened; the middle class has strengthened its position and increased its size. Marxists also predicted the narrowing of the capitalist class. Here again, just the opposite has happened. Instead of shrinking, the base of the capitalist class has been enlarged. Marx predicted the accumulation of capital, but there has been the dispersal of capital. The condition of the proletariat class has not deteriorated as predicted by Marx. Thus, the actual working of the capitalist system has proved the Marxist theory of classes to be wrong.

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Marxists had predicted that the inherent contradictions of capitalism would lead to its collapse. But this has not happened so far. No advanced capitalist system has collapsed. Capitalism has proved its resilience. It is the socialist system, which has collapsed in various parts of the world. Capitalism has the tremendous capacity of adaptation. This is the main reason for its survival. Marx failed to assess capitalism correctly.

According to Marx, the proletarian revolution will occur only when capitalism has matured. There is no chance of the proletarian revolution occurring and succeeding in a backward feudal society. But this is exactly, what has happened in reality. Revolution has taken place only in feudal societies such as Russia, China, Vietnam, Cuba etc. This was the main issue of debate between two factions of Russian Marxists, the Mensheviks led by Plekhanov and the Bolsheviks led by Lenin. Ultimately, the Bolsheviks prevailed over the Mensheviks, but the latter were closer to classical Marxist teachings. According to Marx, his teachings can lessen the birth pangs, but cannot short circuit the various stages of social evolution. However, Lenin and Trotsky in Russia and Mao in China established communism in a feudal society without going through the process of first establishing capitalism. To resolve this obvious contradiction, Trotsky developed the 'theory of Permanent Revolution'. He fused the bourgeois revolution with the proletarian revolution in his theory. These two revolutions can occur simultaneously in the view of Trotsky. Though this seems to be a more practical view, it does not confirm to the basic Marxian principles.

The Marxian theory of economic determinism has been severely criticised. It is not only the economic factor, but other factors also that are equally important in bringing about social change. If economy determines polity, society, morality, value system etc., then economy itself is shaped by these. It is a *two way* process. Economic forces are not immune to the influences of polity, society, culture, religion, values, norms etc. If the base or the substructure shapes the superstructure, then the superstructure also shapes the substructure. Thus, the theory of economic determinism cannot be accepted. Later Marxist thinkers like Gramsci accepted the important role of the superstructure.

The Marxian concepts of the dictatorship of the proletariat and communism suffer from several flaws. After the proletarian revolution, the proletariat will seize the state apparatus from the bourgeois. With the establishment of communism, the state will become redundant and will gradually wither away. This has not happened. In socialist society, the state in fact became all-powerful. Instead of weakening, the state has consolidated its position and there is no possibility of its fading away. The Marxian dream of a stateless society will never be realised. The state will continue to play a leading role in a socialist and communist society and there is no possibility of it ever being relegated to the museum.

The socialist state wherever it has been established, has either been overthrown or discredited. Wherever, it is still surviving, it has been compelled to introduce wideranging changes, which do not confirm to the teachings of classical Marxism. The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, disintegration of the Soviet Union and economic reforms in China have led thinkers like Francis Fukuyama to write the obituary of Marxism. Fukuyama in his famous book *End of History* proclaims the triumph of capitalism over communism in the post-cold war world. According to him, with the victory of capitalism over communism, history has come to an end. Here, Fukuyama talks of history in the Hegelean sense. After capitalism, there will be no further economic and political evolution. Capitalism is the most rational and perfect system. It is the most perfect ideology and philosophy. So ideological and philosophical evolution comes to an end with the emergence of capitalism. Its main challenger communism has been defeated and this further proves its claim that it is the best possible social, economic and political system ever evolved by humanity.

It is very difficult to accept the thesis propounded by Fukuyama. The importance of Marxism lies in two fields. Firstly, it has been used as a tool for social analysis. Secondly, it gives a voice to the voiceless. It is the philosophy of the poor, the oppressed and the suppressed people. If the contribution of Marxism is analysed in these two fields, we will reach the conclusion that it is still relevant and has not become redundant as claimed by the liberal critics. Marxism as an approach of social analysis is still relevant as it was in the past. Its importance as a method of social analysis will never diminish, irrespective of whether the socialist state survives or not.

Marxism as an ideology has definitely lost its edge, but it has not become totally redundant. As long as exploitation will continue, people will be oppressed and suppressed, Marxism will remain relevant. Marxism as a philosophy of the exploited and the oppressed will continue to inspire the masses to strive for their emancipation. So there is no question of its defeat and irrelevance. Infact the systems, which have collapsed, were not organised on classical Marxian principles. They were a variant of Marxism-Leninism and Stalinism. So it is the Leninist-Stalinist systems, which have collapsed in Europe and elsewhere and not classical Marxism.

Marxism as an approach will continue to be used by scholars for social analysis and the exploited-oppressed people will continue to espouse Marxist philosophy for their emancipation. Here, Marxism will never become irrelevant. It will always provide an alternative philosophy to liberalism. Marxism will also act as an effective check on the excesses of liberalism. It will mitigate the rigors of the capitalist system.

Check Your Progress 5

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) Discuss the major grounds of attack on the Marxist theory.

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2) Examine the contemporary relevance of Marxism.

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26.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed various kinds of socialism such as utopian and scientific socialism, evolutionary and revolutionary socialism. The basic principles of Marxism such as dialectical materialism, historical materialism, surplus value, class struggle, revolution, dictatorship of the proletariat, communism have been discussed in detail. These principles constitute the foundation of scientific and revolutionary socialism.

Marxism is not only the philosophy of class antagonism, class conflict, class struggle and violent revolution. It is basically a philosophy of humanism and freedom. Capitalist society has led to the estrangement, alienation and loss of identity and freedom. We find the human face of Marx in his early writings, particularly in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. In the theory of alienation and freedom, we find a humanist Marx. In *the Communist Manifesto* and *Das Capital*, which are his later writings, we find a mature and revolutionary Marx. Thus, there are two Marx's, a younger and humanist Marx and a mature and revolutionary Marx. However, there is no dichotomy between the two. There is a continuity of thought between the two and so any distinction is superficial.

Marxism is a living philosophy. After Marx it has been enriched by Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Rosa Luxemburg, Gramsci, Lukacs, Althusser, Mao etc. Exponents of the end of ideology and the end of history have written off Marxism. But Marxism as an approach for social analysis and the philosophy of the oppressed class will continue to be relevant. It will inspire the masses to strive for their emancipation. Marxism is a revolutionary philosophy. It is a philosophy of social change. In the words of Marx, philosophers have sought to interpret the world; what matters, however, is to change it. It aims to establish an egalitarian society, free from exploitation of one class by another. Only through Marxism, arguably, humanity will take a leap from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom.

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26.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) See sub-sections 26.3.1 and 26.3.2

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) see sub-section 26.4.1
- 2) see sub-section 26.4.2

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) see sub-section 26.4.3
- 2) see sub-section 26.4.4
- 3) see sub-section 26.4.7

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

- 1) see Sections 26.5 and 26.6

Check Your Progress Exercise 5

- 1) see Section 26.7



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UNIT 27 GANDHISM (DHARMA, SWARAJ, SARVODAYA AND SATYAGRAHA)

Structure

- 27.0 Objectives
- 27.1 Introduction: Gandhi's Writings
- 27.2 Some Influences which Shaped Gandhi's Political Thought
- 27.3 Swaraj: Inward Freedom and Outward Freedom
- 27.4 Independence and Parliamentary Swaraj
 - 27.4.1 Some Features of Parliamentary Swaraj
- 27.5 Sarvodaya: Swaraj as Self-Realisation through Social Service
- 27.6 Satyagraha Versus Passive Resistance
 - 27.6.1 Principles and Methods of Satyagraha
 - 27.6.2 Some Evaluative Comments on Satyagraha
- 27.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 27.8 Some Useful References
- 27.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

27.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, our aim is to acquire a contextual understanding of the meaning and significance of the moral-political theory of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), who is rightly revered as a *Mahatma*. His main political ideas are *swaraj*, *sarvodaya* and *satyagraha*. Regarding these political ideas, let us raise the following questions, to which we shall seek answers from this unit:

What does Gandhian *swaraj* mean? How is it a richer or better ideal than mere political independence or political freedom? How is it related to parliamentary democracy, self-control, self-realisation, etc.?

What, according to Gandhi, does *sarvodaya* mean? What, according to him, is the connection between *sarvodaya* and self-realisation? How is *sarvodaya* different from the political theory of utilitarianism and communism?

What are the distinctive principles and methods of the *satyagraha* way of political resistance and social transformation? How does *satyagraha* differ from passive resistance?

27.1 INTRODUCTION: GANDHI'S WRITINGS

Gandhi's moral-political ideas can be found in his books as well as in his articles, letters and editorials in the four weekly journals, which he edited or published at different times during his public life in South Africa and India. These weekly journals were: *Indian Opinion*, *Young India*, *Harijan*, and *Navajivan*. Gandhi's books, some of which were first serialised in his journals, were: *Hind Swaraj*, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, *Ashram Observances in Action*, *A Guide to Health*, *Discourses on the Gita* and *Constructive Programme*. Gandhi also wrote and published paraphrases and/or translations (in Gujarati) of Plato's *Apology*, W. Salter's *Ethical Religion*, John Ruskin's *Unto this Last*, Henry David Thoreau's *Principles of Civil Disobedience* and Leo Tolstoy's *Letter to a Hindoo*. Almost all of Gandhi's writings, including his numerous speeches, interviews

and correspondence, can be found in the 100 volumes of the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Publications Division, Government of India).

**Gandhism (Dharma,
Swaraj, Sarvodaya and
Satyagraha)**

Gandhi's writings were produced, not in any academic setting, but in the midst of actual political struggles by huge masses of people against racial discriminations, colonialism, economic exploitation, untouchability and communalism. Gandhi led those struggles in South Africa (1893-1914) and India (1915-1948). He also campaigned for them during several visits to England, where, incidentally, he had studied for and passed the bar-at-law examination. He did some of his writing on his days of silence and fasting and during several terms of imprisonment in South Africa and India. His famous book, *Hind Swaraj*, was written on board the ship *Kildonan Castle* during a return journey from England to South Africa in November 1909.

27.2 SOME INFLUENCES WHICH SHAPED GANDHI'S POLITICAL THOUGHT

For a historical-contextual understanding of Gandhi's moral-political theory, it is necessary to bear in mind that during the years from 1905 to 1918, his attitude towards the British imperial system went through a protracted process of change from loyal support to, first, disenchantment and, then, to radical opposition. Some of the events which contributed to this change in Gandhi's political ideology were: the Partition of Bengal, racial discriminations against Indians in South Africa, the Rowlatt Acts, the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre and the Khilafat issue.

The change in Gandhi's political thinking during this period was also influenced by the following books, which he read:

i) **Critical Writings on Modern Civilization (including some books on non-conformist Christianity)**

During this period, Gandhi read the works of Tolstoy, Ruskin, Carpenter, Maitland, Salter, R.P.Dutt, Dadabhai Naoroji, etc. Of these, Leo Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You* and *The Gospel in Brief* and John Ruskin's *Unto This Last* had a very great impact on Gandhi. They and to a lesser extent, the writings of other authors contributed to his becoming disenchanted with modern western civilisation. From these writings, Gandhi also derived some normative ideas of an alternative to the individualistic, utilitarian and authoritarian principles on which the imperial/colonial government rested. Gandhi's ideas of swaraj and sarvodaya, meaning self-realisation through service to others (see below), were greatly influenced by Tolstoy and Ruskin.

ii) **Hindu Religious Philosophy**

Gandhi also studied the *Bhagavad Gita* and several other holy books of Hinduism, some of which were recommended to him by his Jain mentor, Rajchand Mehta, also called Raychandbhai. These were books on yoga, *advaita vedanta*, Jainism, Buddhism, Samkhya, etc. These books led Gandhi to espouse a set of religiously inspired norms or principles of personal and collective conduct, e.g., the values of *satya*, *ahimsa*, *aparigraha* and *samabhava*. Gandhi saw in them an alternative or corrective to the dominant, modern/western values or principles of individualism, utilitarianism and violence. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, for instance, he found an "infallible guide of conduct." The hymns of Narsinh Mehta, a saint-poet of the fifteenth century, also instilled in him the value of service to others, especially the poor and the needy.

These readings and the aforementioned events turned Gandhi into a radical opponent of the imperial/colonial government in 1919-20. At a special session of the Indian National Congress held at Calcutta in 1920, Gandhi successfully moved a resolution

on non-co-operation against the government. India’s goal, he said, is nothing less than *swaraj*.

It was through this process of change in his thinking and actions during this decisive phase in his life that he developed his moral-political theory and practice of *satyagraha*, *swaraj* and *sarvodaya*. Together, these seemed to him to be providing an emancipatory alternative to the political theory of colonial/imperial modernity. He also believed that his conception of *swaraj* and *sarvodaya* is an emancipatory alternative to illiberal traditionalism as well.

Check Your Progress 1

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

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) Enumerate some of the important writings/authors who influenced M. K. Gandhi.

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2) Briefly trace the influences which shaped Gandhi’s socio-political thought.

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27.3 SWARAJ: INWARD FREEDOM AND OUTWARD FREEDOM

By *swaraj*, Gandhi meant both outward or political freedom and inward or spiritual freedom. In “outward freedom,” he included national political independence and parliamentary *swaraj*. They are forms of outward freedom in that they seek to free people from external control or rule by others, be they foreigners or one’s own compatriots.

By “inward freedom,” he meant freedom from such inner impediments as ignorance, illusions, selfishness, greed, intolerance and hatred. These, according to Gandhi, impede or obstruct the individual’s self-realisation or attainment of *moksha*, i.e. the *atman*’s realisation of its identity with the *Brahman* or *paramatman*. Hence, he writes: “Government over self is the truest *swaraj*, it is synonymous with *moksha* or salvation.”

Gandhi made an original contribution, both in theory and in practice, with regard to both these types of swaraj. He talked of his ideal of *swaraj* as a square, of which the four inseparable sides are: (i) political independence; (ii) economic independence; (iii) non-violence in social relations and moral obligations toward others; and (iv) Truth as *dharma*. Gandhi's description deserves quoting:

Let there be no mistake about my concept of *swaraj*. It is complete independence of alien control and complete economic independence. So at one end, you have political independence, at the other the economic. It has two other ends. One of them is moral and social, the corresponding end is *dharma*, i.e. religion in the highest sense of the term. It includes Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, etc., but is superior to them all. You may recognise it by the name of Truth that pervades everything and will survive all destruction and all transformation. Moral and social uplift may be recognised by the term we are used to, i.e. non-violence. Let us call this the square of *swaraj*, which will be out of shape if any of its angles is untrue. In the language of the Congress, we cannot achieve this political and economic freedom without truth and non-violence, in concrete terms without faith in God and hence, moral and social elevation.

27.4 INDEPENDENCE AND PARLIAMENTARY SWARAJ

The first component of Gandhi's conception of swaraj as outward freedom is national political independence. He made a greater contribution than any other single individual to the transfer of political power from the imperial government to the Indian national leadership. He is rightly called the 'Father of the Nation'.

While maintaining that national political independence was an essential meaning of his conception of *swaraj*, Gandhi argued that it is only a partial or incomplete meaning or component of it. In his view, a fuller or deeper conception of *swaraj* "is infinitely greater than and includes independence." That fuller conception of swaraj includes, besides national political independence, the following additional components: a "parliamentary or democratic swaraj" and swaraj as self-realisation through service to others. Of these two additional components of comprehensive swaraj, the former is discussed in this section, leaving the latter to the next section.

In 1931, Gandhi declared that he was "wedded to adult suffrage." On another occasion, he said: "Swaraj of a people means the sum total of the swaraj (self-rule) of individuals." He elaborated it in the following words:

By Swaraj I mean the government of India by the consent of the people as ascertained by the largest number of the adult population, male or female, native-born or domiciled.... [R]eal swaraj will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused. In other words, swaraj is to be obtained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority.

What is conveyed in the above passages is a model of what Gandhi called "parliamentary or democratic swaraj," for the attainment of which, he devoted a considerable part of his political work.

In *Hind Swaraj* (1909), Gandhi had taken an extremely negative view of the value or role of the institutions of modern civilization, namely, the parliament, law-courts, the police, the military, machinery, hospitals, railways, etc. These institutions of modern

civilization, he said, were divorced from morality, whereas, by contrast, “the tendency of Indian civilization is to elevate the moral being.” Accordingly, in place of the institutions of modern western civilization, he put forward an alternative ideal of “real home rule ... [namely] self-rule and self-control” by the individuals in accordance with the spiritual values of truth and non-violence.

However, within a year of his active involvement in mobilising the Indian masses into the freedom struggle, Gandhi made a partial revision of his earlier views on the institutions of modern civilization. That revision was due not only to his active involvement in the freedom struggle, but also to the criticisms which many political thinkers and political leaders had made of Gandhi’s booklet. At any rate, within about a year of his final return to India from South Africa in 1915, Gandhi came to adopt a rather positive attitude towards the institutions of modern life, including the parliament, law-courts, machinery, railways and hospitals. Rather than dismissing them outright as he had done in his *Hind Swaraj*, he now reluctantly included them in what he called his “pardonable programme for the attainment of parliamentary swaraj.”

He said that his *Hind Swaraj* was to be taken, not as “an attempt to go back to the so-called ignorant dark ages”, but as an attempt to examine modern civilization “in the scale of ethics.” He declared that in the name of his ideal swaraj, he would *not* dream, as he had been accused of doing, “of no railways, no machinery, no army, no navy, no laws and no law courts.” He would rather have them re-structured so that they operate “for the benefit of the people,” and “not as now for draining the masses dry.” He now viewed “parliamentary”, i.e., “democratic swaraj” as a very necessary and valuable component of his conception of comprehensive swaraj. “So far as I can see,” he wrote in 1920, “Swaraj will be a Parliament chosen by the people with the fullest power over finance, the police, the military, the navy, the courts and the educational institutions.”

As to the organisational features of “parliamentary swaraj,” Gandhi preferred it to be a village-based, decentralized set-up, in which all but the lowest level of government was to be indirectly elected by the immediately lower level. This decentralised, village-based model of parliamentary/democratic swaraj was not the model that was favoured by the Congress and adopted by the Indian Constitution. The Constitution, however, does incorporate some so-called Gandhian institutions such as the village panchayats. Moreover, the personal and civil liberties as well as the democratic rights component of the liberal-democratic political philosophy of the Constitution are basic to Gandhi’s own moral-political philosophy.

27.4.1 Some Features of Parliamentary Swaraj

In his practical and theoretical work for establishing Parliamentary Swaraj, Gandhi concentrated on endowing it with four features: universal adult franchise, civil liberties, minority rights, and a primary commitment to justice for the poor and the exploited. These, he believed, are the necessary ingredients of parliamentary swaraj.

Gandhi regarded personal and civil liberties to be the “foundation” and “breath” of Parliamentary Swaraj. In a speech before the all India Congress Committee in September 1940, he said, “Freedom of speech and pen is the foundation of Swaraj”. It is the “only means”, he added, for the non-violent way of attaining swaraj.

The famous Karachi Resolution of the Congress on Fundamental Rights (1931) which was drafted by Jawaharlal Nehru, in consultation with Gandhi, was moved for adoption by Gandhi himself who incorporated many suggestions and revisions made by Gandhi. In fact, Gandhi was the mover of the resolution. The resolution included a most impressive list of personal and civil liberties and democratic, political rights.

Concerning the primacy of personal and civil liberties, Gandhi wrote:

Civil liberty consistent with the observance of non-violence is the first step towards Swaraj. It is the foundation of freedom. And there is no room there for dilution or compromise. It is the water of life. I have never heard of water being diluted.

Now, let us turn to the Minority Rights component of the Gandhian conception of Parliamentary Swaraj. Gandhi was acutely aware of the danger of parliamentary democracy lapsing into majoritarian tyranny over, or intolerance of, minority groups or communities. While he held resolutely to the procedural, majority rule principle of democratic government, he was equally committed to its other, twin or inseparable principle, namely the principle of the guarantee or protection of fundamental, cultural or religious rights of minority communities. In 1931, he said:

It has been said that Indian Swaraj will be the rule of the majority community, i.e., the Hindus. There could not be a greater mistake than that. If it were to be true, I for one would refuse to call it swaraj and would fight it with all the strength at my command, for, to me *Hind Swaraj* is the rule of all the people, is the rule of justice. Whether under that rule the ministers were Hindus or Mussalmans or Sikhs, and whether the legislatures were exclusively filled by the Hindus or Mussalmans or any other community, they would have to do even-handed justice. And ... no community in India need have any fear of Swaraj being monopolised by any other...

Gandhi maintained that “matters of first rate importance” to the religious and cultural life of the minority communities should be kept outside the purview of the democratic, procedural principle of majority rule. Very insightfully, he wrote:

Democracy is not a state in which people act like sheep. Under democracy, individual liberty of opinion and action is jealously guarded. I, therefore, believe that the minority has a perfect right to act differently from the majority.

The golden rule of conduct ... is mutual toleration, seeing that we will never all think alike and we see *Truth* in fragment and from different angles of vision. Conscience is not the same thing for all. Whilst, therefore, it is a good guide for individual conduct, imposition of that conduct upon all will be an insufferable interference with everybody's freedom of conscience.

A very special feature of Gandhi's conception of parliamentary/democratic swaraj is the justice of its basic institutions, which seeks to promote the welfare of all by giving primacy to the interests of the poor and needy. “A non-violent system of government,” he said, “is clearly an impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists.” Let us quote him again:

Economic equality...is the master key to non-violent independence. ...It means the levelling down of the few rich in whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation's wealth, on the one hand and a levelling up of the semi-starved naked millions on the other. A non-violent system of government is clearly an impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists.

Gandhi often spoke of his ideal of swaraj as “the poor man's swaraj.” At the time of independence in 1947, he advised his countrymen to adopt a preferential approach to the poor not merely at the public-policy level, but at the personal level as well. He said:

Political Ideologies

I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions?

Gandhi’s conception of social/distributive justice, which he often referred to in terms of “economic quality,” is rooted in his trusteeship doctrine of property. He believed that statutory trusteeship is a form of organising economic life, which, without depriving the individuals of their legitimate incentives for greater productivity and without depriving the society of the increases in wealth, brings about a non-violent, equitable distribution of wealth.

In March 1946, Gandhi wrote: “Supposing India becomes a free country tomorrow, all the capitalists will have an opportunity of becoming statutory trustees.” He further stated:

As for the present owners of wealth, they would have to make their choice between class-war and voluntarily converting themselves into trustees of their wealth. They would be allowed to retain the stewardship of their possessions and to use their talent to increase the wealth, not for their own sake but for the sake of the nation and therefore, without exploitation. The state would regulate the rate of commission which they would get commensurate with the service rendered and its value to society. Their children would inherit the stewardship only if they proved their fitness for it (*Harijan* 31.3.1946).

In an article entitled “Theory of Trusteeship” (*Harijan*, 16 December 1939), Gandhi wrote:

I am not ashamed to own that many capitalists are friendly towards me and do not fear me. They know that I desire to end capitalism almost, if not quite, as much as the most advanced socialist or even the communist. But our methods differ, our languages differ. My theory of ‘trusteeship’ is no makeshift, certainly no camouflage. I am confident that it will survive all theories. It has the sanction of philosophy and religion behind it.

Check Your Progress 2

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

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) What were the four basic components of Gandhi’s Swaraj?

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2) Discuss Gandhi's critique of modern western civilization.

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27.5 SARVODAYA: SWARAJ AS SELF-REALISATION THROUGH SOCIAL SERVICE

Let us begin this section by noting that while *swaraj* conveys Gandhi's idea of freedom, *sarvodaya* (welfare of all) conveys his idea of equality. We may also note that Gandhi's doctrine of sarvodaya (which is often rendered as non-violent socialism) is a corrective to utilitarianism, communism and the doctrines which justify inequalities and exclusions on the basis of caste, race, colour, gender, etc.

"*Sarvodaya*" is the title, which Gandhi gave to his paraphrase of John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*. In that book, Ruskin gave a moralistic critique of the science of political economy of self-interest. He brought out the role of "social affection" in our lives. Reading Ruskin brought about "an instantaneous and practical transformation" of Gandhi's life. He learned three lessons from Ruskin's book, namely : (i) that the good of the individual is contained in the good of all; (ii) that a lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's in as much as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work; and (iii) that a life of labour, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman is the life worth living.

Of these three principles, the first is the main principle of *sarvodaya* (welfare of all). It is also the source of the other two principles. Gandhi clarified that he had known the first principle before reading Ruskin's book, which only served to confirm it and give it a modern articulation. As we shall see below, a good deal of Gandhi's ideas on sarvodaya were derived, as in the case of swaraj, from the holy books of Hinduism.

There are several steps in Gandhi's thinking on *sarvodaya* (welfare of all). They are:

- 1) Our aim in life is self-realisation or *moksha*.
- 2) Self-realisation or *moksha* means identification of the self or *atman* with *Brahman* or God. This requires a discipline or *yoga* of self-purification.
- 3) The way of realising our identification with *Brahman* or, in other words, the way of finding God is to see God in all his creation or manifestation.
- 4) Love or service of all is the way to self-realisation or *moksha* in this world.

Conveying these ideas, Gandhi wrote as follows:

- Man's ultimate aim is the realisation of God, and all his activities, political, social and religious, have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God... The immediate service of all human beings becomes a necessary part of the endeavour simply because the only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and be one with it. This can only be done by the service of all.

Political Ideologies

- I am impatient to realise myself, to attain *moksha* in this very existence. My national service is part of my training for freeing my soul from the bondage of flesh. Thus considered, my service may be regarded as purely selfish. For me, the road to salvation lies through incessant toil in the service of my country and there through, of humanity.

Gandhi derived many of these ideas from the holy books of Hinduism. In them, he found a clear enunciation of the value of “disciplined rule from within,” which he understood to be the “root meaning” of *swaraj*. He wrote:

The root meaning of *swaraj* is self-rule. *Swaraj* may, therefore, be rendered as disciplined rule from within.... ‘Independence’ has no such limitation. Independence may mean license to do as you like. *Swaraj* is positive. Independence is negative.... The word *swaraj* is a sacred word, a Vedic word, meaning self-rule and self-restraint, and not freedom from all restraint which ‘independence’ often means.

Gandhi interpreted the *Bhagavad Gita* as depicting the futility of war and violence. Besides non-violence and truth, the other principles of morality which, according to Gandhi, the *Gita* teaches are: *tapas*, *dana* and *yajna*. He saw a “gospel of service” in the third chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*. It taught him to desire the welfare of others. In his *Discourses on the Gita*, he *pointed* out that the Lord or Brahman dwells in all, including “the lame, the crippled and the afflicted.”

On the idea of service to all, Gandhi was also deeply influenced by his parents, the teachings of the Vaishnava saint-poets, especially, Narsinh Mehta, and the writings of Ruskin and the non-conformist Christians, especially Leo Tolstoy.

Gandhi believed that without self-restraint or self-purification, we could not render *moksha*-oriented service to others. Refuting the charge that these are ideals for the ascetics, he said that they are meant “for acceptance by mankind in general.” He wrote:

No worker who has not overcome lust can hope to render any genuine service to the cause of Harijans, communal unity, Khadi, cow-protection or village reconstruction. Great causes like these cannot be served by intellectual equipment alone, they call for spiritual effort or soul-force.

According to Gandhi, the terrain on which the connection between one’s *moksha*-realisation and one’s disinterested service of all takes place is the field of politics; namely, the field of “toil in the service of my country and therethrough of humanity.” This connection between *moksha*-realisation and service-centred politics was a constant theme in Gandhi’s writings and public work. Appropriately, he concluded his *Autobiography* with the following statement:

To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face, one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics; and I can say without the slightest hesitation, and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means. Identification with everything that lives is impossible without self-purification; without self-purification, the observance of the law of *ahimsa* must remain an empty dream.

In a ‘Foreword’ he wrote to *Gokhale’s Speeches*, Gandhi urged the *sadhus*, *rishis*, *munis*, *maulvis* and priests to become *political sanyasis*. He also called upon political workers to become spiritually and morally engaged. In his ‘Last Will and

Testament', he recommended the disbanding of the existing Congress organisation and its flowering into a Lok Sevak Sangh. He wished that its members would, thereby, devote themselves to the remaining tasks of the programme of swaraj and sarvodaya, which he delineated as follows:

India has still to attain social, moral, and economic independence in terms of its seven hundred thousand villages as distinguished from its cities and towns.

Gandhi also stipulated that the *loksevak*s would abjure untouchability and must believe in "the ideal of inter-communal unity, equal respect and regard for all religions and equality of opportunity and status for all irrespective of race, creed or sex."

Gandhi's moral-political conception of sarvodaya is a corrective both to Western utilitarianism and to the inequalities and exclusions of the traditional caste system. His critique of utilitarianism can be found in his Introduction to his *Sarvodaya*, which was his paraphrase of Ruskin's book, *Unto This Last*. Gandhi wrote:

People in the West generally hold that the whole duty of man is to promote the happiness of the majority of mankind, and happiness is supposed to mean only physical happiness and economic prosperity. If the laws of morality are broken in the conquest of this happiness, it does not matter very much. Again, as the object sought to be attained is the happiness of the majority, westerners do not think there is any harm if this is secured by sacrificing a minority. The consequences of this line of thinking are writ large on the face of Europe.

In 1926, Gandhi brought out the difference between utilitarianism and sarvodaya in the following words:

A votary of ahimsa cannot subscribe to the utilitarian formula [of the greatest good of the greatest number]. He will strive for the greatest good of all and die in the attempt to realise the ideal. He will therefore be willing to die, so that the others may live. He will save himself with the rest, by himself dying. The greatest good of all inevitably includes the good of the greatest number, and therefore, he and the utilitarian will converge in many points in their career, but there does come a time when they must part company, and even work in opposite directions. The utilitarian to be logical will never sacrifice himself. The absolutist [i.e. the universalist or the votary of ahimsa] will even sacrifice himself.

Check Your Progress 3

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) What are the essential elements of Gandhian Sarvodaya?

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2) Trace the influence of Bhagvad Gita on the concept of Sarvodya.

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27.6 SATYAGRAHA VERSUS PASSIVE RESISTANCE

Satyagraha is the name of the Gandhian, non-violent way of political action to resist and transform untruthful and violent systems of social or political power. During 1906-14, Gandhi successfully used such a way of political action to resist the policy of racial discrimination, which the British colonial government of South Africa had adopted against the Indian immigrants. In India, he led many local satyagraha campaigns, some notable ones being those of Champaran, Ahmedabad, Vaikom, Bardoli and Kheda. He also led a number of all-India satyagraha movements, beginning with the one against the Rowlatt Act in 1919.

Gandhi acknowledged that his theory of satyagraha was influenced to some extent by Henry David Thoreau’s writings. In Thoreau’s essay, “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience”, Gandhi found confirmation of his views on coercive features of state and on the individual’s obligation to his own conscience. “From Thoreau and Ruskin”, Gandhi wrote, “I could find out arguments in favour of our fight.”

Gandhi’s initial struggles against racial discriminations in South Africa were described as ‘Passive Resistance’. But, he soon found the English term to be unsatisfactory, partly because it was not intelligible to ordinary Indians and partly because it did not convey the special characteristic of his method of political struggle. Hence, in 1906, he invited the readers of his weekly, *Indian Opinion*, to suggest an alternative name. The best of the suggestions received was *sadagraha*, meaning “firmness in a good cause.” Gandhi changed it to *satyagraha* as it conveyed his preferred idea of “truth-force.” He explained his choice in the following words:

Truth (*satya*) implies love, and firmness (*agraha*) engenders and therefore serves as a synonym for force. I thus began to call the Indian movement “*satyagraha*” that is to say, the force which is born to Truth and Love or non-violence, and gave up the use of the phrase “passive resistance.”

Gandhi distinguished between body-force = brute-force = the force of arms from soul force = love force = truth force. He referred to the former as the method of violence, which, he said, is celebrated in and by modern civilization. Satyagraha, he said, relies on soul-force or truth-force and is appropriate to *swaraj*. He wrote:

Satyagraha... is a method of securing rights by personal suffering; it is the reverse of resistance by arms. When I refuse to do a thing that is repugnant to my conscience, I use soul-force. For instance, the Government of the day has passed a law, which is applicable to me. I do not like it. If by using violence I force the Government to repeal the law, I am employing what may be termed body-force. If I do not obey the law and accept the penalty for its breach, I use soul-force. It involves sacrifice of self.

According to Gandhi, satyagraha was both practically necessary and morally desirable for the Indian Freedom Movement. He said that since the “English are splendidly armed”, it would take many, many years for the Indians to arm themselves in a matching or effective manner. More than this practical difficulty, Gandhi disapproved of the immorality of the method of violence. He pointed out that “to arm India on a large scale is to Europeanise it” or, in other words, to continue to be seduced by the morally flawed modern European civilization.

According to Gandhi, the distinctive features of satyagraha, in comparison with “passive resistance,” are as follows:

- i) While the passive resisters harbour hatred toward their adversaries, the satyagrahis view their opponents with love.
- ii) The passive resisters, unlike the satyagrahis, may harass and injure their opponents.
- iii) Satyagraha, unlike passive resistance, can be offered even to one’s nearest and dearest ones.
- iv) Passive resistance is a resistance by the weak and helpless, and it does not exclude the use of violence, whereas satyagraha is a moral-political action by the strong, and it excludes the use of violence. Believing themselves to be weak, the passive resisters would tend to give up the struggle at the earliest opportunity. “On the other hand,” Gandhi wrote, “if we offer satyagraha believing ourselves to be strong, two clear consequences follow. Fostering the idea of strength, we grow stronger and stronger every day. With the increase in our strength, our satyagraha too becomes more effective and we would never be casting about for an opportunity to give it up.”

27.6.1 Principles and Methods of Satyagraha

Satyagraha is based on the principles of satya (truth), ahimsa (non-violence) and tapas (self-suffering). Gandhi clarified this in his oral submission before the Disorders Inquiry Committee, presided over by Lord Hunter at Ahmedabad on 9 January 1920. The relevant questions and answers are reproduced below:

- Q) I take it, Mr. Gandhi, that you are the author of the Satyagraha movement.
- A) Yes, Sir.
- Q) Will you explain it briefly?
- A) It is a movement intended to replace methods of violence and a movement based entirely upon Truth. It is, as I have conceived it, an extension of the domestic law on the political field and my experience has led me to the conclusion that the movement and that alone can rid India of the possibility of violence spreading throughout the length and breadth of the land, for the redress of grievances.
- Q) People differ as to the justice or injustice of particular laws?
- A) That is the main reason why violence is eliminated and a Satyagrahi gives his opponent the same right of independence and feelings of liberty that he reserves to himself and he will fight by inflicting injuries on his person.

Gandhi believed in the dharmasastra tradition according to which dharma, derived from ‘dhr’ (to be firm, to sustain or uphold) refers to the moral law governing the cosmos. Its essence is satya (truth), the root of which is sat (being, reality, right, what is and what will be). Gandhi writes:

The word satya (truth) is derived from sat, which means being. And nothing is or exists in reality except Truth. That is why sat or Truth is perhaps the most

important name of God. In fact, it is more correct to say that Truth is God than to say that God is Truth... it will be realised that sat or satya is the only correct and fully significant name of God.

Since “nothing is or exists in reality except Truth”, the practico-political field too, says Gandhi, must partake of it. For Gandhi, in other words, the dissociation of politics from truth or morality is untenable. He said:

Some friends have told me that truth and non-violence have no place in politics and worldly affairs. I do not agree. I have no use for them as a means of individual salvation. Their introduction and application in every-day life has been my experiment all along.

Gandhi’s satyagraha is an experiment for the introduction of truth and non-violence into political conduct.

According to Gandhi, although Truth is absolute, our knowledge and experience of it is relative and partial. What we take to be truth may be untruth for others. Infact, the satyagrahi assumes that his opponents or oppressors are also truth-seekers, acting on the basis of what they perceive to be the truth. It is for this reason that ahimsa (non-violence) is the means of discovery of truth. “The basic principle on which the practice of non-violence rests”, writes Gandhi, “is that what holds good in respect of oneself equally applies to the whole universe. All mankind in essence is alike. What is therefore possible for one is possible for everybody.” Acting on the basis of relative truths, the satyagrahis seek to resolve basic conflicts and ensure social harmony through the non-violent path of vindicating the validity of rival truth claims. Gandhi writes:

It appears that the impossibility of the full realisation of truth in this mortal body led the ancient seeker after truth to be appreciative of ahimsa. The question, which confronted him, was shall I bear with those who create difficulties for me, or shall I destroy them? The seeker realized that he who went on destroying others did not make headway but simply stayed where he was, while the man who suffered those who created difficulties marched ahead, and at times even took the others with him... The more he took to violence, the more he receded from truth. For, in fighting the imagined enemy without, he neglected the enemy within.

Satyagrahis use truth-force or love-force not to eliminate the opponents or oppressors, but to bring about a restructuring of the total conflictual or oppressive relationship so that both parties to the initial conflict can realize a heightened mutuality or moral interdependence. Through satyagraha, the victims of oppression seek to liberate themselves by aiding in the emancipation of their oppressors from their self-deceptive truth-denying beliefs and actions. *Satyagraha*, Gandhi wrote in *Hind Swaraj*, “blesses him who uses it and him against whom it is used.”

By ahimsa, Gandhi did not mean merely non-injury to others. That would be a more negative or passive connotation of ahimsa, which has also a positive or active meaning, namely, love or charity. Gandhi writes:

In its negative form it (ahimsa) means not injuring any living being whether in body or mind. I may not, therefore, hurt the person of any wrong-doer or bear any ill-will to him and so cause him mental suffering. In its positive form, *ahimsa* means the largest love, the greatest charity. If I am a follower of **ahimsa**, I must love my enemy or a stranger to me as I would my wrongdoing father or son. This active ahimsa necessarily includes truth and fearlessness.

In the light of what has been said earlier, we may conclude that for Gandhi, action based on the refusal to do harm to others is a negative test of moral or practical truth. Its positive test is action meant to promote the welfare of others.

Our desires and motives may be divided into two classes – selfish and unselfish. All selfish desires are immoral, while the desire to improve ourselves for the sake of doing good to others is truly moral. The highest moral law is that we should unremittingly work for the good of mankind.

We have so far considered two elements of satyagraha, namely, satya (truth) and ahimsa (non-violence). A third element is Tapas (self-suffering). Action based on love toward others, we saw earlier, is a positive test of truth. From this Gandhi goes on to say that tapas or self-suffering is the test of such love. Suffering injury in one's own person, writes Gandhi, "is... the essence of non-violence and is the chosen substitute for violence to others". Self-suffering by satyagrahis, it must be understood, is not out of their cowardice or weakness; it is based on a higher form of courage than that of those who resort to violence and it is meant to aid in the moral persuasion of one's opponents or oppressors.

In the satyagraha mode of conflict resolution, self-suffering plays a complimentary role to that of reasoning. Persuading others through reasoning is indeed the essence of satyagraha. But satyagraha recognizes the limits of reason in resolving fundamental social, religious, political or ideological conflict, in which a rational consensus may not be easily or quickly forthcoming. Infact, Gandhi insisted that the direct action techniques of satyagraha are to be resorted to only after employing the usual processes of reasoning with the opponents or oppressors and only for securing their rational consent or conversion. He writes:

Since satyagraha is one of the most powerful methods of direct action, a *satyagrahi* exhausts all other means before he resorts to *satyagraha*. He will, therefore, constantly and continually approach the constituted authority, he will appeal to public opinion, educate public opinion, state his case calmly and coolly before everybody who wants to listen to him; and only after he has exhausted all these avenues will he resort to *satyagraha*.

In a *satyagraha* campaign, the satyagrahis seek to validate the truth of contested social "system" or norms through (i) reasoning, i.e., persuading the opponents about the untruth of their position and at the same time remaining open to their counter-arguments; and (2) appealing to the opponents through the self-suffering of the *satyagrahis*.

The various methods of satyagraha are: (1) purificatory or penitential actions by the *satyagrahis*, such as pledges, prayers and fasts; (2) acts of non-cooperation, such as boycott, strikes, hartal, fasting and *hijrat* (i.e. voluntary emigration); (3) acts of civil disobedience, such as picketing, non-payment of taxes and defiance of specific laws; and (4) a constructive programme of social reform and social service, such as the promotion of inter-communal unity, the removal of untouchability, adult education, and the removal of economic and social inequalities.

At each stage of the programme, the satyagrahis, while holding on to truth as they see it, assume their own fallibility and give the opponents every chance to prove that the satyagrahi's position is erroneous. Satyagraha "excludes the use of violence because man is not capable of knowing the absolute truth and therefore not competent to punish." The ideal to be kept in mind is that of a self-regulated society of communitarian truth, in which every one "rules himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbour". "The claim for satyagraha", writes Joan Bondurant, "is that through the operation of non-violent action, the truth as judged by the fulfillment of human needs will merge in the form of a mutually satisfactory and

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agreed-upon solution.” Hence, the important operative principles to be observed by satyagrahis are the admission of truths as relative, non-violence and toleration, and the self-suffering of satyagrahis. Gandhi justified these operative principles in the following passages:

In the application of Satyagraha, I discovered that in the earliest stages that pursuit of truth did not admit of violence being inflicted on one’s opponent, but that he must be weaned from error by patience and sympathy. For what appears to be truth to one may appear false to the other.

People’s conceptions of true interests and just laws differ. This is the main reason why violence is eliminated and a Satyagrahi gives his opponent the same right of independence and feelings of liberty that he reserves to himself and he will fight by inflicting injuries on his person.

Evolution of democracy is not possible if we are not prepared to hear the other side. We shut the doors of reason when we refuse to listen to our opponents, or having listened, make fun of them. If intolerance becomes a habit, we run the risk of missing the truth. Whilst, with the limits that nature has put on our understanding, we must act fearlessly according to the light vouchsafed to us, we must always keep an open mind and be ever ready to find that what we believed to be truth was, after all, the untruth. This openness of mind strengthens the truth in us.

Check Your Progress 4

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) How did Gandhi distinguish between passive resistance and satyagraha?

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2) Briefly enumerate the methods of Satyagraha.

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27.6.2 Some Evaluative Comments on Satyagraha

Concerning Gandhi’s theory and praxis of *satyagraha*, several critics maintain that non-violence and self-suffering are impractical methods against violent oppression.

The Gandhian way, they way, is “other-worldly” and “anti-humanist”. Gandhi maintained that non-violence and self-suffering were “not for the unworldly, but essentially for the worldly.” He did admit that these principles were very difficult to practice, but insisted that we need to, and can, keep on moving along these lines. “Perfect non-violence whilst you are inhabiting the body, he wrote, “is only a theory like Euclid’s point or straight line, but we have to endeavour every moment of our lives”. Gandhi rightly maintained that it is desirable and possible to bring about a predominantly non-violent society.

It may still be objected that *satyagraha* demands of the satyagrahis, self-suffering even unto death. It is true that self-suffering is a major element of satyagraha. However, self-sacrifice is also involved in case of violent resistance. Sacrifice even unto death is, thus, the common element in both violent and non-violent resistance against oppression. That is why Gandhi approved of the use of satyagraha only in cases of conflict over fundamental issues and only after all milder methods of non-violence have failed. “I should be deeply distressed,” he wrote in 1921, “if on every conceivable occasion every one of us were to be a law unto oneself and to scrutinise in golden scales every action of our future National Assembly. I would surrender my judgement in most matters to national representatives.” But when a situation of violent oppression persists even after all milder methods of non-violent resistance have been tried, Gandhi maintained that self-suffering even unto death of the non-violent fighter for truth is a better assertion of individual freedom than is the death-in-defeat of the violent resister.

Gandhi has himself given several explanations of the merits of the satyagraha way of political resistance and social transformation, in comparison with the methods of violence. In 1924, reacting to rumours that he was likely to be invited to visit the Soviet Union, Gandhi wrote:

I do not believe in short violent cuts to success. Those Bolsheviki friends who are bestowing their attention on me should realize that however much I may sympathise with and admire worthy motives, I am an uncompromising opponent of violent methods even to serve the noblest of causes. There is, therefore, really no meeting ground between the school of violence and myself.

Two years later, Gandhi gave the following explanation of the real difference between violent and non-violent methods:

My non-violent resistance is activated resistance on a different plane. Non-violent resistance to evil does not mean absence of any resistance whatsoever, but it means not to resist evil with evil but with good. Resistance therefore, is transferred to a higher and absolutely effective plane.

As we saw above, Leo Tolstoy’s *The Kingdom of God is Within You* exerted a tremendous influence on Gandhi’s views on the repressive character of the modern state and his commitment to non-violent resistance. Gandhi acknowledged that reading Tolstoy made him realise the “infinite possibilities of universal love” and made him a “firm believer in ahimsa”. Gandhi and Tolstoy corresponded with each other. In his last letter to Gandhi, Tolstoy acknowledged that his satyagraha movement in South Africa was a new and most important mode of emancipatory struggle by the oppressed.

Like Tolstoy, Einstein too has written in deep appreciation of Gandhian satyagraha. In a tribute published in a *festschrift* for Gandhi’s seventieth birthday, he wrote:

Gandhi is unique in political history. He has invented an entirely new and humane technique for the liberation struggle of an oppressed people and carried it out with the greatest energy and devotion. The moral influence which he has exercised upon thinking people through the civilised world may

be far more durable than would appear likely in our present age with its exaggeration of brute force. For the work of statesmen is permanent only in so far as they arouse and consolidate the moral forces of their peoples through their personal example and educating influence.

Check Your Progress 5

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
- ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

- 1) Critically asses the concept of Satyagrah.

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27.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have read about the major intellectual components of Gandhism, viz, Dharma, Swaraj, Sarvodya and Satyagraha. The unit has introduced you to some of the prominent thinkers whose ideas and writings shaped Mahatma Gandhi’s social and political thought. The concept of Swaraj, you have learnt, has both an outward and inward dimension. The idea of Parliamentary Swaraj has been separately dealt with in detail. As also Sarvodaya. Last but not the least, the concept of Satyagraha and Passive Resistance has been elucidated as well as the principles and methods of Satyagraha. The unit ends with a critical assesment of Satyagraha. It is hoped that you would be now in a better position to the understand the fundamentals of Gandhian thought.

27.8 SOME USEFUL REFERENCES

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27.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Gandhism (Dharma,
Swaraj, Sarvodaya and
Satyagraha)

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) See Section 27.1
- 2) See Section 27.2

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) See Section 27.3
- 2) See Section 27.4

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) See Section 27.5
- 2) See Section 27.5

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

- 1) See Section 27.6
- 2) See sub-section 27.6.1

Check Your Progress Exercise 5

- 1) See sub-section 27.6.2

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