

Story Of Development Of

INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT



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Contents

	Page No.
Preface	3
1. Ancient India and West Asian Invaders	4
2. British Conquest	5
3. Around 1857	6
4. Bhakti Movement and Hindu Clergy	7
5. Period from 1857 – 1920 A.D.	9
6. Leaders with whom British were comfortable	12
7. Communal and caste politics before independence	17
8. The ones whom British hated	20
9. Independence and Partition	22
10. Constitution	25
11. Political parties	33
12. Political Ideologies in Modern India	36
13. Hope for future	40



About The Author – [Page No. 41](#)

PREFACE

Let me admit at the outset that I am not an historian and hence am not qualified for writing a history of development of Indian political thought. That is the reason I did not call this mini-book history and instead have called it “story”.

A storywriter has much more freedom than a historian can ever have. A story, unlike history, is never a complete account of events. A storywriter picks on some aspects of a story that interest him and leaves the rest untouched. I am told that most historians also do the same. All the same I prefer to be called a storywriter rather than a historian.

As a storywriter I have made full use of the freedom that I am supposed to be entitled to. The mini-book, that I most humbly present to you, is not even a research paper loaded with facts, figures, statistics and references. I have tried to tell a story that should grip your attention; that is readable and gives my impressions about the way political thought has evolved in India and its present state of affairs.

You may agree or disagree with some of my impressions. My views on some of the leading personalities of the past century may either please you or disturb you. I may even be wrong at some places. As I said I belong to the vast majority of people who are not historians. The impressions that I have articulated here are not just my personal views. These views are often expressed by common people like me who view events and history from a limited perspective and not from an expert’s point of view.

Though I am always willing to apologize if my impressions and views hurt anyone’s sentiments and to correct any factual errors, the fact would remain that there may be others, who think like me rightly or wrongly. In the process of evolution of thought of a society, false impressions play as important role as true ones do. So my humble suggestion to all those, who do not like what I have written, would be to step up their efforts towards informing people about their point of view instead of coming after me with a baton in hand.

Some others may feel that I am a cynic who has few kind words for anyone. I must clarify that I am an incorrigible optimist. Yes, I am harsh towards the dead wood. I reserve my soft touch and kid gloves for the sprouts that are just springing forth from the ground.

Unfortunately, Indian political thought, as it exists today, has more dead wood than it can carry. It needs to break out of the moulds of the past and seek new paradigms. But before it does this, there is a need to understand the past and the present. Hope that the mini-book will help you do this.

If after reading the preface you read the full mini-book and, more important, after reading the mini-book still have not put me on your most-hated list, I am sure that we shall be able to walk together.

An American athlete once said, “If you walk long enough and if you talk long enough, you can always get people to see things your way.” Let us continue to talk and walk.

Anil Chawla
14 January 2004

1. Ancient India and West Asian Invaders

British pat their backs for creating a nation called India out of a multitude of hundreds of small states. Nothing could be more wrong. Even when India was divided into hundreds of states, the whole country followed almost identical laws. Kings of individual states had almost no legislative powers. The whole country followed a set of laws codified in various *Smritis*. Unfortunately, the institutions, that kept *Smritis* in pace with changing times, had been destroyed. Invaders from West Asia had razed to ground the temple towns that housed major universities. The process of destruction of the universities began from 1001 A.D. when Jaipal was defeated by Sultan Mahmud. Twenty-five years later, in 1026 A.D. Somnath temple was destroyed by Ghazni.



When the British came, they could not even have understood the role that universities, destroyed centuries ago, were playing in the civic society of India. British invaders, unlike their predecessors, refused to accept the centuries old laws as codified in *Smritis*. They enacted a new set of laws for the country. It was first time in the history of the country that legislative, executive and judicial powers were wielded by one set of persons. (More about this aspect in the author's article "Republic in Ancient India - Need For A New Paradigm In Political Science" available at <http://www.samarthbharat.com>)



Days of East India Company

2. British Conquest

It was in the first half of seventeenth century that British established their first footholds in India. In 1686, English fought a war with Moghuls. In 1690, peace was made between Moghuls and English. In 1757, (battle of Plassey) the British defeated Siraj-ud-daulah. Three years later at Wandiwash, they defeated French. This was the beginning of their tightening of grip over India.

In the process of grip-tightening, British struck at the root of what constituted India. They threw away the old laws, structures and systems. In fact, they created a class of Indians who thought like the British did and joined them in ridiculing every tradition of the country. By this clever act, English positioned themselves as natural rulers, a so-called superior race destined to rule. Indians were encouraged to look at their traditions as decadent, uncultured and uncivilized.

British were capturing the mind of the nation and were teaching it to think live slaves. Simultaneously, the nation was being looted systematically at a scale that was truly unprecedented. It is no coincidence that industrial revolution in England occurred at the time when British were transferring resources on a massive scale of from India to England. Development that British did in India was either urban or was with an intention to aid in the transfer of resources (example - railways, ports). This development led to an impoverishment of rural India. It is notable that Bengal, where British gained full control in 1757 after Battle of Plassey, had famines only during the period when British were in control 1757-1947 - neither before nor ever after.

In the midst of this weakening of mind and body, India, as a country or as an emotional binding-element, was just about barely managing to survive. The universities that were the legislative bodies for the country as a whole and provided the country with a common thread had disappeared more than seven centuries ago. The laws created by them were being replaced by new ones based on a system that was completely alien to the land. Changes in economic ground-rules created a crisis of survival for sections of society that acted as keepers and creators of culture. Brahmins and devadasis were the two sections that were most affected by these changes. Brahmins were forced to give up their traditional duties as educators and law-interpreters. Devadasis were forced into prostitution. (Please read the author's mini-book on devadasis)

By the middle of nineteenth century, the old identity of India had withered away almost completely. The first war of independence of 1857 (called mutiny by British) was a ragtag affair that had no ideological grounds and lacked a clear direction. Indian soldiers working for English army were motivated by some religious sentiments, while princely states joined the war for self-preservation. Though this was the first pan-India effort during a period of more than a thousand years, it did not emerge out of a pan-India consciousness. The war failed because some Indian states felt that their interests were better served by jumping to the English side. An effort that began with self-interests ended with self-interests.

3. Around 1857



After suppressing the first war of independence, English started brutal oppression of all those who had dared to revolt. Not many in India are aware of the number of people who were hanged by British soldiers from the nearest trees or blown from cannons without as much as a sham trial.



Indian soldiers being blown from cannons by the British in Delhi in 1857.
A famous painting of Russian painter Vassili Verestchagin (1842-1904)

Thus began a period of consolidation of British Empire in India. British Government took over controls of the colony from East India Company in 1858. In the next few decades, English braced themselves to rule the country for a long time to come. They had physically eliminated everyone who could possibly have raised a voice against their rule. With their newfound confidence, they enacted a large number of laws. Indian Penal Code, General Clauses Act, Contract Act, Factory Act, Civil Procedure Code, Criminal Procedure Code - were all enacted during this period.

STORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

By this time, a significant number of Indians had been created who thought and lived like true Englishmen and had their interests firmly anchored in British colonialism. It suited the British interests that these natives with British minds should emerge as leaders of Indians. With this purpose in mind, British helped in formation of Indian National Congress in 1885.

At the same time some other developments were taking place that were changing the political scenario in an unexpected manner. These were taking place in the area of religion, yet they affected political thought in a big way. To understand this let us go back in time.

4. Bhakti Movement and Hindu clergy

During the period when institutions of learning and worship were being destroyed by armies of Muslim rulers, a new movement emerged in India. This has been called *Bhakti* (devotion) movement. Meera, Kabir, Tulasidas, Ravidas, Soordas, Raskhan were some of the main proponents of this movement that emphasized personal devotion to God, by whatever name called. Saints of *Bhakti* movement composed beautiful hymns that became immensely popular throughout the country. At a time when the country was going through a period of decline, defeat and plunder, the *bhakti* movement acted as a soothing balm and helped the people keep their sanity and self-respect. *Bhakti* or devotion to God with complete devotion to the exclusion of all social realities is a sort of escapism from harsh realities to the arms of a comforting parental figure of some deity. All the prominent saints of *Bhakti* movement date to the period between 1300 A.D. and 1700 A.D.



Born in the same period, Guru Nanak, founder of Sikhism, was also a saint of the bhakti tradition. However, subsequent gurus who followed in his footsteps transformed Sikhism into a militarist outfit fighting the Moghuls. Sikhism thus became the first Indian movement that had its roots in religion but had aims that were clearly political. Initially, Sikhs had resisted the British but later gave up their opposition. After this Sikhism lost its relevance as a religious-political movement that could affect the society and country at large and got reduced to a community focused on its own self-interests.

STORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

After the conquest of India by British, the pressure on Hindus to convert to Islam eased. English had no theological agenda. They were sympathetic to various churches but their primary focus was money. Many Englishmen, who came to India, had received liberal education and looked down upon theology. They had brought with them memories from Europe and England of schism between church and King. They superimposed the same schism on the Indian context. They were aided by the new generations of so-called religious Hindus, who belonged predominantly to *Bhakti* movement. Followers of *bhakti* cult had no intention of getting involved with issues of governance, development or politics. They were content in singing hymns about Krishn, and did not want to adopt the activist tradition that Krishn espoused.

In addition to bhakti-cultists, there was another group that claimed to represent Hindus. This was the orthodox Brahmanical order represented by various Shankaracharyas. This lot was caught on one hand in the philosophical quicksand of Shankar's illusionism where nothing was real and on the other hand in rituals and caste-based social norms. Shankaracharyas and their monasteries were (one might say are) fossilized versions of dynamic universities that acted as law-makers before 1000 A.D. Unlike Krishn and Ram, who picked up arms to fight oppressors, Shankaracharyas as well as *Bhakti* movement saints did not advocate fighting the invaders or oppressors. They were content in their own small world of rituals and hymns. They liked the British, who unlike the Muslim rulers gave them the freedom to carry on their rituals. Englishmen were looting the country; were charging land revenue at the rate of 50 per cent of produce; were forcing the farmers to poverty and starvation; were destroying the traditional artisan economy; were even demolishing the traditional structures that supported Brahmins and *devadasis* - but the saints and shankaracharyas did not even bat an eyelid.



This suited the English rulers. They were happy playing the role of King in a country where Church was disorganized and did not even look at any area that King decreed to be his prerogative. This ragtag band of clergymen was happy receiving petty favours from the English rulers. It did not concern these so-called religious men that their behaviour was against all that key Hindu texts preach.

Many texts were rewritten or at least re-interpreted. Action, courage and warrior mentality were no longer the key words. The new buzzwords were devotion, serving one's guru, rituals, recitation of hymns endlessly, purity of food, vegetarianism etc. Caste was not a cast-iron compartmentalization in ancient India. Almost all the renowned sages like Ved Vyas and Vashishtha were not born to Brahmin parents. (Ved Vyas's mother was a fisherwoman) The shankaracharyas de-emphasized learning and scholarly pursuits. To justify their parasitical existence, they picked selectively from religious texts to strengthen a brahmanical order that was purely caste-based and looked at birth as the key differentiator.

5. Period from 1857 – 1920 A.D.

The scenario of post-1857 India was ideal for English colonialism. Political opposition by soldiers and princely states had been crushed. Religion, that in ancient India had been an integral part of individual and social life, was now segregated into a separate compartment, which helped the clergy to prosper and pushed the followers into a path of escapism from life by imbibing their brand of opium. In this dark hour, India had neither religious leaders nor any political leaders.

British realized that every country needs its own leaders. They were afraid that if there was a political vacuum, it was most likely to be filled up by extremist elements opposed to British Empire. Hence, they created Indian National Congress in 1885. But the course of history was changed by two leaders who are known today as Hindu religious leaders but who were bitterly opposed by the orthodox Hindu elements consisting of all shankaracharyas and saints.



Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883) founded Arya Samaj on 7 April 1875 at Bombay. This was the first religious-political movement in India after Sikhism. But there were three crucial differences between Arya Samaj and Sikhism - (a) Sikhism had grown from Bhakti movement, while Arya Samaj rejected Bhakti and emphasized knowledge and action (b) Sikhism had evolved into a militia, Arya Samaj did not take this route (c) Sikhism, though rooted in Hindu traditions, outgrew its Hindu roots and became an independent religion; Arya Samaj stuck to the Hindu roots. The then prevalent orthodoxy of Hindu saints and clergy opposed Arya Samaj tooth and nail. Fourteen attempts were made to poison Swami Dayanand Saraswati. He survived all but the last.

Arya Samaj accepted the Vedas but rejected caste system. It advocated education for all including women, who were also encouraged to read Vedas. This was a sacrilege to the orthodoxy. Most important was the fact that Arya Samaj had a nationalistic agenda. Swami Dayanand Saraswati was probably the first to talk of swadeshi, many years before Gandhi arrived on the scene. Arya Samaj became immensely popular in Western India particularly Punjab. The educational institutions set up by Arya Samaj in Punjab created a generation that fuelled the freedom movement in years to come.

STORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

Swami Vivekanand (1863-1902) did not set up an organization like Arya Samaj, but his influence on development of Indian political thought was no less. Like Swami Dayanand, he broke away from bhakti cult and stressed on knowledge and action. But, unlike Swami Dayanand, he did not reject idol worship. Swami Dayanand's primary focus was reform of Hindu society and political message, though important, was secondary. Swami Vivekanand wanted Indians to develop pride in their culture. To that extent one can say that Swami Vivekanand's message was more political than reformist. He belonged to a sect that worships Kali, the goddess of strength that kills demons and has human skulls hanging around her neck. It is this image of strength that Vivekanand represented. For him service of mankind was more pious than any rituals. He rejected caste system. Swami Vivekanand, like Swami Dayanand, faced severe opposition from the then prevalent Hindu orthodoxy all his life. He decided to go to USA and talk of Hinduism when crossing the sea was declared to be a taboo by Hindu orthodoxy. In 1893, he delivered his famous speech at the Parliament of Religions held at Chicago. For three years he preached in USA and England.



Recognition of Swami Vivekanand by West was not just an acceptance of him as a person. It was a recognition of Hinduism as a religion that was not outdated or obscurantist or uncivilized, as it was being painted by some Indians who were more English than Englishmen. Swami Vivekanand helped Hinduism rise out of the clutches of orthodoxy. The new educated class that was emerging across the country found a new identity that did not break them from their roots and yet was modern in outlook. Swami Dayanand's message had got confined to the newly formed community of Arya Samaj, which became one more sect of Hinduism. Swami Vivekanand's appeal was universal. He inspired a new generation of nationalists across the country in places as far as Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Bengal.

Two leaders of the same period who influenced the direction of Indian political thought were Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856 - 1920) in Maharashtra and Lala Lajpat Rai (1865 - 1928) in Punjab. Both were passionately nationalist. Tilak was the first to declare that independence is the birth right of Indians. Both were deeply religious Hindus. Lala Lajpat Rai was an active member of Arya Samaj.

STORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT



Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak

For national awakening Tilak initiated Ganeshotsav and Shivaji Utsav in 1894. Tilak will also be remembered for his scholarly work "Geeta Rahasya" - an interpretation of Shrimad Bhagwad Gita as a philosophy of action. Tilak and Rai, both joined Indian National Congress and rose to become its President. However, both realized the futility of constitutional agitation, as was the policy of Congress. Both were known as key leaders of *Garam Dal* (Hot Group) of Congress and were opposed to soft moderates known as *Naram Dal*. Both were mass leaders but did not look down upon revolutionaries who wanted to use arms to overthrow the British. In fact, they inspired many revolutionaries.



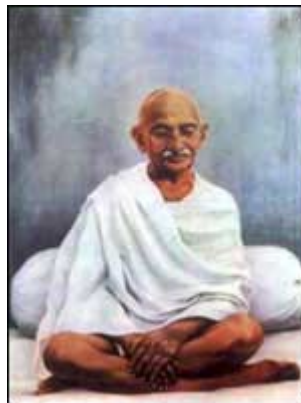
Punjab Kesari Lala Lajpat Rai

The revolutionary movement had started causing sleepless nights to the British at the beginning of the twentieth century. The revolutionaries were just a handful, but the British did not want to take any chances. The revolutionary ideology, though never articulated very clearly, was a mix of religion, nationalism and politics. For the British, this was a lethal concoction that needed to be addressed if they had to retain India as part of their empire. *Garam Dal* in Congress was becoming popular. Hindu Mahasabha, which at that time was not a political party, was also helping *Garam Dal*. In fact, most *Garam Dal* leaders had strong connections with Hindu Mahasabha.

6. Leaders with whom British were comfortable

One really does not know whether the British actually helped the process, but one cannot help noticing that from 1920 onwards a group of leaders arose with whom the British were comfortable. This group of leaders included Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Mohammad Ali Jinnah and BR Ambedkar. Followers of Tilak and Lajpat Rai were sidelined within Congress. In some cases British acted with a tough hand and put such people behind bars either in India or in cellular jail of Andamans. It cannot just be a coincidence that on one hand Lala Lajpat Rai was assaulted brutally and wounded on the chest by police while leading a peaceful demonstration in Lahore on 30 October 1928; on the other hand Gandhi never received a single blow or lathi from police all his life. Even when Gandhi and Nehru were imprisoned, due courtesies were shown to them. No such courtesies were shown to Subhash Chandra Bose or Veer Savarkar, who were treated worse than ordinary criminals. Incidentally, it may be worthwhile to mention here that in 1915 January when Gandhi landed in Bombay on his return from South Africa, his ship was allowed to berth at Apollo Bunder, an honour reserved for royalty and viceroys.

Let us look at the development of political ideology in post-1920 era without getting involved with the role played by the British in promoting or patronizing the leaders of this era. Two conflicting streams dominated this era. One stream may be called Gandhian ideology, while the other was Jinnah's Islamic nationalism and two-nation-theory. Let us look at both the streams one-by-one.



Gandhi's ideology rests on the following key elements:

- a) **Truth** - This is a profound concept of Indian philosophy. However, in Gandhi's mouth it loses all its profundity and acquires an identity that no one except Gandhi could understand. In practical terms, Gandhi used this label to justify anything that he felt was desirable or good. All his life he remained the sole arbiter between truth and non-truth. After his death, no one has been able to use the label with any dexterity and is at the moment gathering dust below the national emblem of four lions, where one reads *Satyamev Jayate* (Truth alone wins). All the same it must be acknowledged that the hype associated with the word truth helped Gandhi acquire a divine image. This combined with his attire was instrumental in making Gandhi a "*mahatma*" or great soul.

STORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

- b) **Non-violence or Ahimsa** - Shunning violence is a virtue preached by many religions like Jainism. But no one had ever practiced non-violence as a political strategy. Credit must be given to Gandhi for this unique addition to the world's political thought. Non-violence helped freedom movement expand its base. Yet, Gandhi's belief in non-violence was not without its contradictions. Gandhi helped the British recruit soldiers for Second World War where Indian soldiers were fed as cannon fodder. He never raised his voice to plead for mercy for revolutionaries who were hanged mercilessly by British rulers. After independence, Nehru spoke of non-violence as a value on world forums for many years. But after the invasion by China, even Nehru realized that a country needs a strong army and not someone who delivers sermons on non-violence.

There is no doubt that from the viewpoint of British colonialists, Gandhi's non-violence was very convenient. Non-violent agitations of Gandhi did little harm to British interests; and if it did get too hot for them Gandhi was always too willing to oblige by withdrawing an agitation at the heat of the moment, as he did with Quit India movement.

History alone will decide about the role played by Gandhi's agitations in forcing the British to finally grant independence to India. There are many who believe that the mutiny (1946) in Royal Indian navy was what forced the British to quit.

After independence non-violence has remained a political strategy with all political parties of India, though no political party (not even Congress) accepts non-violence as a creed. Members of Congress eat meat even at public functions. For a true Gandhian this is sacrilege. But then there are hardly any true Gandhians in modern India.



- c) **Swadeshi and Khadi** - Swadeshi or buying / using goods made in one's own country is a worldwide phenomenon. Two centuries before Gandhi, there were spirited citizens in England asking Englishmen to refrain from using Calico or cloth from India. Swami Dayanand also made a call for boycott of foreign goods. Picketing of shops selling foreign goods was carried out in Bengal two decades before Gandhi reached there. Gandhi's contribution to Swadeshi was khadi - hand-woven cloth made from handspun yarn. Other Indian thinkers were not averse to using Indian mill cloth, but Gandhi went a step further and insisted on cloth made without using any power. Khadi became a symbol of Congress and India's freedom fighters. As a symbol it was most effective and carried high levels of emotional appeal.

STORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

The flip side of khadi was that it represented an aversion to use of technology. Fortunately, after independence Nehru quickly dumped Gandhi's zero technology model of development. If Nehru had not done so, India would still have been dependent on the developed world for even the most basic products.

Swadeshi hurts other countries wanting to sell to India, but insistence on khadi actually serves them by keeping Indian industry undeveloped. In modern India khadi is worn on a regular basis only by some politicians and a handful of committed Gandhians.

- d) **Village industries, decentralization and Ram rajya** - Gandhi often talked of these. However, neither Gandhi nor anyone following him has developed these concepts to any degree. In modern India, there have been some experiments along these lines but most of them have not been very successful. Hence, these continue to be touted by a few without impacting the overall model of progress, growth or development in any significant manner.
- e) **Minimum consumption** - If there is one Gandhian virtue that characterized the era, it was ascetic living where one actually aimed to reduce one's consumption. Leaders of that era sacrificed their life and all pleasures of life. In return, they were respected by one and all. One may criticize Gandhi and his philosophy, but he commands respect and reverence due to his personal lifestyle that was truly ascetic and saintly. But Gandhi was not alone in this. By and large the same can be said of almost all major leaders of pre-independence India. Unfortunately, exactly the opposite can be said of a vast majority of leaders of independent India. One may say that even this quality of Gandhian era did not live beyond Gandhi.



In attire, mannerisms and style Gandhi was a Hindu saint. He did not reject the bhakti movement. He used his own hymns and prayer meetings for bringing people together. Others (including Swami Dayanand and Swami Vivekanand) before him had spoken for eradication of untouchability, but he did untiring work for this cause. As a man of action and as a great leader and organizer, he influenced Indian history. His influence on development of political thought has waned after his death, though during his life time he had become the sole political thinker of India.

STORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

Two areas, where Gandhi's influence has been long lasting, deserve special mention. The first is in the area of untouchables. He set out to uplift so-called lower castes and eliminate untouchability. This has been a success story of Gandhi and his followers, but in the process casteism has struck deeper roots in Indian society. Caste-based politics has become a feature of modern Indian democracy.

The second area where Gandhi's influence is felt even after his death relates to position of Muslims in Indian politics. Gandhi made special efforts to woo Muslims. This is where he was on an entirely different path compared to any of his predecessors. The non-cooperation movement (1920) was launched in support of Khilafat movement, which wanted the British to restore the status of Caliph in Turkey. Khilafat movement was a ridiculous emotional response of a handful of Indian Muslims to a fall-out of World War One in a country located more than six thousand kilometers away. Turkey later established democracy and Khilafat movement lost all relevance. Gandhi's support to Khilafat movement started a new practice in Indian politics - extending support to the extremist elements among Muslims.

Indian Muslims, like their Hindu brethren, had no political leaders before 1857. In the post-1857 era, a class of educated, moderate Muslims was emerging, albeit very slowly. It would not have suited the interests of the British to have this educated class lead the Muslim community. Till the beginning of twentieth century, India had no history of communal riots. Hindus and Muslims had lived amicably without any major clashes at the level of people. The British policy of divide-and-rule separated the two people. For this they encouraged the extremist elements of both communities. Gandhi also supported the extremist elements among Muslims by recognizing their concerns as issues of concern to Muslims in general. It was this combined effect of British policies and Gandhi's politics that led to the development of a separatist Muslim leadership. Ironically, there were progressive moderate Muslim leaders in Congress who worked for education and development of Indian Muslims and who were opposed to two-nation-theory, but neither Gandhi nor British accepted them as representatives of Indian Muslims.

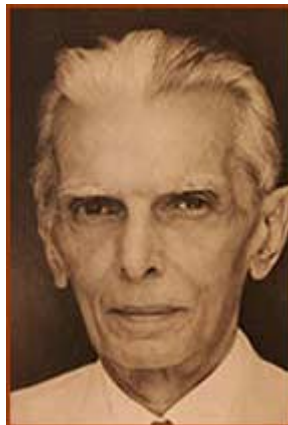
The conversion of Mohammed Ali Jinnah (1876 – 1948) from a liberal 'brown Englishman' to an ardent advocate of Islamic nationhood should be seen in the light of above circumstances. Till December 1920 Jinnah was an active member of Congress; he was known as Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity and was an advocate par excellence. He had studied law in London where he changed his name from the original "Mohammedali Jinnabhai" to the anglicized "M. A. Jinnah" (short for Mohammed Ali Jinnah); his clothes to the impeccable double breasted coat (his smart Seville Roy suits tailored in London were his hall marks till the end of his life); and polished his English to the extent that it was indistinguishable from any upper-class Englishman (in fact, many Englishmen found his superior mastery of their language disconcerting and rather disorienting!) During his Congress days (1906-1920) he was a firm believer in constitutionalism (euphemism used in those days for the belief that Indians should appeal to British using constitutional methods only). He opposed Gandhi's agitation plans on the grounds that this amounted to adopting unconstitutional methods. He left Congress in December 1920 after he was ridiculed at Nagpur convention of Congress for opposing Gandhi.

STORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

Even while retaining the membership of the Congress, Jinnah had joined the Muslim League in 1913. In fact, he joined the League only after bringing its objectives in line with the Congress. By 1916, he had produced such extraordinary unity and cooperation between the two parties and communities as was unequalled before or since.

He opposed tooth and nail the tactics adopted by Gandhi to exploit the Khilafat. Jinnah argued at the National convention (1928): "What we want is that Hindus and Mussalmans should march together until our object is achieved...These two communities have got to be reconciled and united and made to feel that their interests are common".

Jinnah's disillusionment at the course of politics in the subcontinent prompted him to migrate and settle down in London in the early thirties. He returned to India in 1934. Under his leadership, Muslim League won some 108 (about 23 per cent) seats out of a total of 485 Muslim seats in various legislatures in the elections held in early 1937.



During the next ten years (1937-1947) Jinnah was transformed from a struggling, though bright leader, to the sole representative of Indian Muslims espousing the two-nation theory. The British found in him a person with whom they were comfortable, just as they had Gandhi and Nehru in Congress. British strategic long term interests dictated the British game-plan. Events and forces overtook the moderate liberal Jinnah. It is said that he never realized the true import of partition. He had a house in Bombay. His friends advised him to sell the house when he was involved with discussing partition plans. He never sold the house because he had plans to return to Bombay after retirement. His first speech to Constituent Assembly of Pakistan was the speech of a true liberal and secular person. He, father of Pakistan – the first nation founded on religion, said that religion can have no place in politics and Pakistan would be safe for all religions.

7. Communal and Caste Politics Before Independence

Jinnah's journey from liberalism to Islamic extremism is typical of the political career of many Indian leaders who chose any particular group as their constituency and identity. Sooner or later the leader becomes a slave of his chosen identity or rather of the perceived image of the said identity. Hindu leaders who followed into the footsteps of Swami Dayanand or Swami Vivekanand also faced the same fate. Swami Dayanand and Swami Vivekanand had started a revolt against the ruling orthodoxy of Hindu religion. The followers of the two swamis set up Hindu Mahasabha at the beginning of twentieth century. Hindu Mahasabha wanted to bring all Hindus under one forum. It was not a political party till 1937. The desire to unite all Hindus forced Mahasabha leaders to collect diverse sections of Hindu society including the most orthodox ones. In the process the Mahasabha lost touch with the agenda of reform set by Swami Dayanand and Swami Vivekanand.

After losing the reformist agenda, Hindu Mahasabha was left with no ideology that could act as a binder except the identity of being Hindu. This identity was never defined in explicit terms by Mahasabha. As a result, slowly but surely, the progressive reformist elements were pushed into the background and rabidly orthodox elements took over. In pre-independence India this process was aided by the British who arrested progressive elements (since generally they wanted to work for independence) and let the rabidly orthodox go scot-free (since the orthodox had no political agenda and British believed in freedom of religion of natives). Nothing illustrates this better than the extraordinarily harsh treatment of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883 – 1966) by the British.



Savarkar (called Veer Savarkar by many) was a rationalist Hindu and a staunch nationalist. His reform agenda was far ahead of his times. His progressive outlook can be gauged by one instance – he directed that after his death his body be cremated in an electric crematorium, since it is a cleaner way of disposing a dead body. Till today no other major Indian leader has been cremated in an electric crematorium. Savarkar was not ready to accept a tradition just because it had been around for centuries. He was willing to make changes that were needed to keep up with the times. Savarkar was prevented by the British for a large portion of his active life from participating in political activity. As a result, the field was left open at Hindu Mahasabha for fanatical, short-sighted leaders who could think of no other agenda for the party except that of virulent anti-Muslim sentiment.

STORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

In 1925, *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) was started with the objective of working towards formation of a Hindu *Rashtra* (nation). During initial years, RSS worked closely with Hindu Mahasabha leaders. RSS was intended to be a semi-military setup, though it claimed to be a socio-cultural organization. Its primary purpose was to act as defenders of the Hindu faith. It provided arms training to Hindus. Muslims were not allowed to be a part of RSS. The structure of RSS was identical to that of the Catholic Church. It recruited fulltime volunteers who were called *pracharaks* or the ones spreading the message. *Pracharaks* were supposed to follow a hard life and not get married. RSS was an organization devoted to action; hence all intellectual activity was looked down upon. A young *pracharak* reading a newspaper might surely have been admonished by his superiors and ridiculed by his colleagues for indulging in *budhi-vilas* (luxurious indulgence of intellect).



RSS's vision of Hindu India had its roots in ancient glory of India. Yet, it was modern in outlook. It accepted Swami Dayanand and Swami Vivekanand. The issue of idol worship (opposed by Dayanand and accepted by Vivekanand) was left to personal choice of each individual. Caste system was not accepted. RSS cadres attending camps were supposed to take meals together, irrespective of their caste. This was a revolutionary step for a Hindu organization at that time. During initial years, RSS received no support or recognition from shankracharyas, saints and other orthodox elements of Hindu society.

Ideologically, RSS during initial years was a mix of the modern and the traditional. But fine-tuning of ideology was never an issue at RSS. This was an organization that appealed to the hearts and had little use for people who had a good head. Till independence, RSS played a very limited role in Indian political arena. It was only after independence that RSS grew in stature and impact – more about that later.

During the period of 1925-1947, Hindu Mahasabha and RSS co-operated with each other. In 1937, Hindu Mahasabha became a political party. RSS cadres tacitly supported the Mahasabha's efforts in elections held in early 1937.

The role played by RSS in freedom movement is a matter of debate. But it cannot be denied that Hindu Mahasabha leaders participated in freedom movement under the banner of Congress. It appears that RSS, as an organization, in spite of its nationalist leanings and strong links with Hindu Mahasabha, kept away from politics (or freedom struggle) to steer clear of the wrath of the British Government. This clever strategy helped RSS grow. As a result, at the time of independence it had developed strong pockets of influence in many areas of the country.

STORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

RSS grew by adopting a strategy, which ensured that British did not bother about it. RSS has never been accused of receiving the patronage of British. The same cannot be said of Dr. BR Ambedkar (1891 – 1956). His parents were untouchables. His father was a retired army officer and headmaster in a military school. He began his public life in 1924 when he started '*Bahiskrit Hitakarini Sabha*', for the upliftment of the untouchables. Ambedkar adopted a two-pronged strategy: (a) Eradication of illiteracy and economic uplift of the downtrodden; (b) Non-violent struggle against visible symbols of casteism, like denial of entry into temples and drawing water from public wells and tanks.



Ambedkar won two major victories when High Court of Bombay gave a verdict in favour of the untouchables and he made a successful non-violent march and entry into a temple. He formed a political party 'Scheduled Castes Federation' in April 1942.

Ambedkar never participated in the freedom movement. In fact, there is sufficient evidence to prove that he opposed it tooth and nail. He opposed Gandhi as well as Congress. His ideas were purely caste-based and made all attempts to play up the caste divide. Gandhi's concern for untouchables was not divisive and lacked a tone of bitterness. Ambedkar spoke with bitterness and wanted to malign, divide and demolish Hinduism. British rulers and Christian missionaries loved him because he spoke exactly in their terms.

Ambedkar, like Jinnah, chose a narrow label as his defining identity. Soon he was a slave of the label. His political existence depended on his identity as a Scheduled Caste (a euphemism for untouchable). He could never outgrow that identity. In a way, he became as much a pawn in the divisive game of British imperialism as Jinnah had become. It is rumoured that after the holocaust of partition Jinnah realized his mistake. The same cannot be said of Ambedkar. He continued with his bitter, no-holds-barred casteist politics even after independence.

One does not know the popular support that Ambedkar enjoyed in pre-independence India. He owed every single position in his life to either academic performance or British / royal patronage. He was born in Madhya Pradesh. He spent good portion of his life in Maharashtra and Gujarat. Yet, he represented West Bengal in Constituent Assembly – a nomination that was secured by some deft backstage maneuvering.

8. The Ones Whom British Hated

If one side of pre-independence political spectrum was represented by Gandhi, Nehru, Jinnah and Ambedkar, the other side had men and women who lost their lives fighting the British. They were political untouchables before independence and continued to be so even after independence. They were revolutionaries. The official history of India's freedom movement does not give them any credit for independence. Yet, the emotional response that their names evoke far surpasses the official recognition accorded to them.

Their contribution to Indian political thought has at best been marginal. They represent the extreme romantic stream of Indian politics. Their most important contribution has been to the building up of the common emotional core that makes India survive as a country. Bhagat Singh or Mangal Pandey belonged to the country as a whole and not to any province or caste or religion.



Bhagat Singh

The revolutionary, who continues to inspire emotionally to this day, but who also achieved a fair measure of success at ground was Subhash Chandra Bose (born January 1897). Bose had worked with Congress and had risen to be its President. However, his views did not match those of Gandhi and he was forced to quit Congress. He founded a new party by the name of Forward Bloc. In 1941, he escaped from house arrest and went to Europe where he met Hitler. With the help of Germany and Japan, during World War Two, he organized and led Indian National Army (INA), initially founded and commanded by Captain Mohan Singh. He also set up a Provisional Government of India, which was recognized by Germany, Italy and Japan. INA achieved significant military success against British forces. Bose's slogan "*Delhi Chalo*" (Let us march to Delhi) enthused the whole country except, of course, Congress leaders. Bose received a setback when Axis forces started losing to Allies. In August 1945, he is reported to have boarded a military plane that presumably crashed. The controversy about his death continues to this date.

STORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT



The controversy about Subhash Chandra Bose's alleged death underlines the strong emotions that he arouses to this date. It is said by some that Subhash Chandra Bose was the inspiration for a mutiny in Indian Navy during 1946. INA consisted largely of prisoners of war of Indian Army captured by Axis forces. INA's success had given a legendary status to Subhash Chandra Bose in armed forces of Government of India. Britain had ruled India with the support of armed forces consisting almost entirely of Indians. A successful mutiny in armed forces would have led to a disgraceful end of British imperialism in India. Some scholars are of the opinion that growing national consciousness in armed forces was a critical factor behind English decision to quit India.



The Great Divide (Of 1947)
A painting by Arpana Caur

9. Independence and Partition

On 15 August 1947 India attained independence. But a day before that a new nation named Pakistan was created. This was the first time in world-history that a country based solely on religion was carved out of a nation that traced her history to pre-historic times. The bloodshed that this drawing up of new borders involved was never anticipated by the leaders who had agreed to the partitioning. If there is one thing that will always be at the backdrop of any political thought process in India, it is the holocaust at the time of partition. The holocaust affected everyone in the country at the emotional plane if not materially.



A Landscape With Knives
A painting by Alpana Caur

It is a miracle that after partition India did not become a Hindu country, just as Pakistan became an Islamic state. There were many reasons for this and every historian is likely to choose the reason that best suits his ideological leanings. Some have commented that India chose to be secular because Hindu psyche is secular. One cannot deny this fact, but it appears that the reasons for choosing to remain secular were based on realpolitik.

Hindu Mahasabha had been thrown to the sidelines and was dominated by orthodox elements with no vision. Progressive rationalist Hindus like Veer Savarkar had not been allowed to grow for the past three decades. RSS was in its infancy and did not even see itself as a political force. Congress leaders could see following three challenges to their supremacy in post-independent India:

- a) Hindu organizations like Hindu Mahasabha, RSS etc.
- b) Revolutionaries led by Subhash Chandra Bose
- c) Communists

STORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

The first, at the time of independence, appeared to be no challenge. Revolutionaries had been battered by British to the point of extinction. Communists held little appeal in a country that had deep religious roots. Moreover, communists had played virtually no role in independence movement and hence, they held no appeal among Indian people.

Britain wanted to retain its influence in India even after independence. Hence, there was no way that Britain would have allowed groups inimical to her interests to take over in independent India. Though there was no major organized group other than Congress at the time of independence, there were elements within Congress who did not toe the British line. Nehru's projection as future Prime Minister of India was a clever ploy of Britain. Ambedkar's nomination to Constituent Assembly was also aided by British officers. Nehru and Ambedkar (both claimed to be Englishmen by mind) laid the foundations of modern India as per their political vision and interests.



Immediately after independence, Nehru came to the centre-stage of Congress; Gandhi was still worshipped and tolerated but he ceased to influence the course of politics.



Rajghat – The place where Mahatma Gandhi was cremated

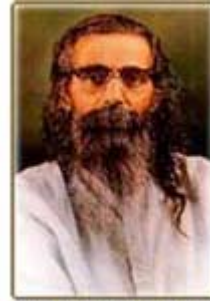
Gandhi's assassination on 30 January 1948 was a boon in disguise for Nehru who could now throw into the dustbin of history all that Gandhi preached. Gandhi's disappearance liberated Nehru from the shackles of Gandhian economic and moral principles. Gandhi had talked of rural economy but Nehru built cities like Chandigarh based on the designs of Western architects. At the time of Gandhi's death, Constituent Assembly was involved with drafting of Constitution. It should not surprise anyone that the Constitution of India does not display any influence of Gandhi.

STORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

Gandhi's assassination was blamed on Hindu Mahasabha and Veer Savarkar. RSS was banned. This was one big setback for RSS and Hindu Mahasabha.



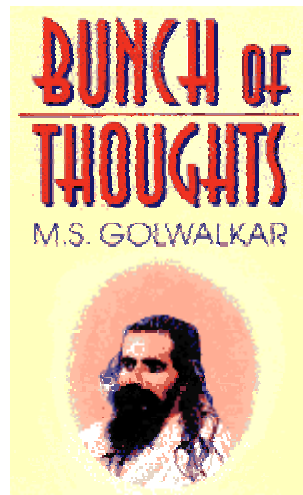
K. B. Hedgewar



Guruji. M. S. Golwalkar

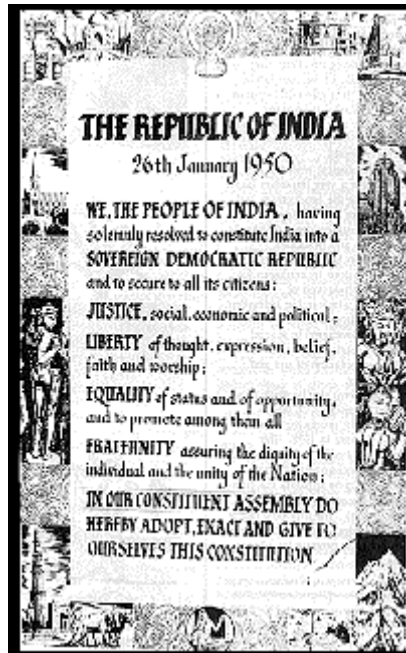
Founding fathers of RSS

From this point onwards RSS disassociated itself from Hindu Mahasabha completely and thereafter Savarkar's name was not even mentioned at RSS functions. Hindu Mahasabha faded away into virtual oblivion. RSS had a large team of young committed enthusiastic fulltime volunteers, who took RSS to great heights in years to come. By severing links with Hindu Mahasabha, RSS lost all touch with its historical moorings. In times to come, RSS ideology began with a glorious dreamlike narration of ancient India and jumped straight to Guru Golwalkar's Bunch of Thoughts.



In 1950, the country had a new secular constitution. Indian politics and political thought changed completely after the adoption of the Constitution.

10. Constitution



The constitution, as adopted on 26 January 1950, is a rehash of Government of India Act, 1935 and British parliamentary systems with values and ideals of French and American Revolutions sprinkled on top. For the past fifty-four years, generations of Indians have been led by schoolteachers to believe that Indian constitution is the best in the world. If indeed it were so, it would have made India the best country in the world. But result-oriented evaluation is neither a feature of Indian constitution nor of the governments set up under the constitution. Without getting involved with the merits and demerits of the constitution, let us look at the impact of the constitution in development of Indian political thought. A few points that merit attention:

- a) **Shadow of British colonialism** – The constitution emphasized continuity with the past. None of the institutions of colonialism were demolished. The new set of rulers were so enamoured of the British that they strengthened and developed every single institution of governance designed by British colonialists. Parliament under Indian Constitution was such a shadow of British parliament that for decades, the rules of practice in Indian parliament ape the conventions of Britain.

The leaders of independent India did not feel it necessary to understand the complexities of Indian psyche or even that of British society. They believed that what had worked in British was bound to work in India. So they transplanted the British system into India. If problems were encountered, they blamed it squarely on the failure of ‘stupid natives’ to follow a highly developed system.

If this sounds arrogant and smells of imperial haughtiness, well that is what it is. There have been no political thinkers of any stature in independent India because the rulers feel that they do not need any thinkers. In their view, solution to every vexing problem had been worked out by the superior brains of England and all that was needed was for Indians to ape shamelessly.

- b) **Arrogance** – Constituent Assembly was not a directly elected body. It did not derive its mandate from the people of India. It was constituted under an act of British Parliament. One would have expected such a body to realize its limitations and to do a limited job leaving the rest to elected representatives. In other countries, faced with such a precarious situation, the leaders have adopted a minimalist approach laying down the bare minimum of guiding principles. Not so in India!

The leaders who had grown under the influence of British colonialist treated the future generations of the country with a disdain typical of an imperial power towards natives. They expected the future generations to be either scoundrels or incompetents who could never be trusted. Hence, they laid down a constitution, which specified every single small detail that they could think of.

It never occurred to them to question the legitimacy of their own authority to bind future generations. The constitution was never put to referendum and was never even discussed by the Parliament.

This type of arrogance and cockiness has been a feature of Indian politicians since independence. Deliberations, discussions and the humility to seek approval from a wide cross-section of people are virtues that are unknown to Indian politicians. Deep in their hearts, they see themselves as monarchs filled with conceit and unbridled power. As petty monarchs, they encourage sycophancy and yes-men.

- c) **Lack of moral values** – Indian Constitution copied the British parliamentary system with one major change. Britain has a Church of England and moral values are the domain of Church. For example, in the run-up to New Year's Day (2004) Archbishop of York prayed publicly for wisdom and courage for Prime Minister Tony Blair so that Blair might mend his ways. In effect, Archbishop called Tony Blair's decision to take Britain into war against Saddam Hussein's Iraq an unmitigated disaster. This would be unimaginable in India.

Indian constitution is secular (the word was inserted in Preamble in 1976 by 42nd amendment, but the constitution was labelled as secular even before that). This at an individual level means that every individual has a right to follow any or no religion. But at the level of society, the Constitution has removed each and every watch-keeper of moral values. India was the first major non-communist country in the world to adopt a form of government that was secular in this sense of the word. This laid the foundation of anomie (lack of usual social and ethical values) in India.

In communist countries the Communist Party was Church and King rolled into one. Party's failure to inspire people to work hard, to follow an ethical life, and to sacrifice individual pleasures for greater social good was the unbecoming of communism. Indian Constitution did not even create a lame duck institution like Party that could act as the final arbiter on moral issues. The Constitution does not prescribe any moral values or source of moral values.

This vacuum created by Indian constitution makes politicians all-powerful. There is no system of keeping checks and balances on politicians who act unabashedly to further their self interests. A few weeks ago Chief Minister of a major state decided to dissolve the assembly and have snap polls. He did not even feel like giving a fig leaf of justification. He said that the time was most favourable for his party. Same logic is being followed by NDA Government to order early polls for Lok Sabha. Their actions are constitutional, but are their actions moral? Who cares!

This attitude is the dominant feature of modern Indian politics. Political analysts and thinkers of modern India spend major portion of their time either analyzing the political fallout of actions and decisions of politicians or in splitting hairs about constitutional provisions. Ethics and morality, that are above all laws, have no place in modern Indian political thought.

- d) **Rights without duties** – Absence of ethics and morality manifests itself in another more serious form in Constitution of India. The Constitution does not prescribe any duties for anyone, not even for ministers or members of parliament or prime minister or president. In 1976 article 51-A was inserted. This section prescribes non-enforceable fundamental duties for citizens. There are no duties for key functionaries. There have been instances when ministers did not attend office for months but this could not be objected to since they have powers and privileges, but no duties.

Constitution's lacuna has led to an utter sense of irresponsibility in various departments and institutions of Central and State Governments of India. Inefficiency is the norm rather than an exception.

It is ironic that in the past five decades, not many political thinkers in India have expressed themselves on this critical weakness of governance in India.

- e) **Welfare state** – Constitution ushered a welfare state in India. A President of USA had said, "Ask not what the country can do for you; ask what you can do for the country." Indian constitution turned this on its head. Everyone in India was taught to look at the state as a benevolent all-season Santa Claus. Politicians have loved this image of themselves as universal benefactors and the populace has been led from one illusory world to another with promises of more and more goodies.

STORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

When state takes on itself the role of welfare state distributing goodies free of cost, there is bound to ensue a free-for-all fight to capture as much as possible of the goodies. India has seen such fights more and more fierce in the past five decades. Politicians lead their constituency (geographic or caste or community) with utter disregard for national interests to grab as much as possible.

Swami Dayanand and Swami Vivekanand's dream of achieving casteless society has been confined to books that gather dust. The new political reality is caste. Every political party makes elaborate calculations of caste equations while choosing candidates in any election. Leaders claiming caste loyalty have a double-quick rise in all political parties. Each such leader ensures that his caste gets maximum benefits from State rightly or wrongly.

This might sound ridiculous to those outside India – post-independence political thought in India has been devoted to a large degree on – who should get what and how much from the state. A century of British divide-and-rule could not achieve the level of fragmentation of society that welfare-state-oriented political thought has achieved in half the time.

- f) **Minorityism** – Democracy is not a dictatorship of the majority and a democratic setup recognizes minority rights. This basic principle has been stretched to such ridiculous limits in Indian constitution that everyone in India would love to be part of some minority group or community. Minorities have right to regulate their places of religion and Government cannot interfere either in their places of worship or in their educational institutions. Majority community enjoys no such rights. Government collects all religious offerings made to Hindu temples but cannot do so from minority religious institutions. No wonder there is a clamour by various groups that were part of the majority earlier to 'attain' minority status.
- g) **Scheduled Castes and Tribes** – Ambedkar's contribution and Gandhi's shadow on the constitution can be seen in the form of reservations in jobs and elected bodies for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, sections of society that were oppressed for centuries. The reservations were initially expected to be for a period of one decade but have now become an almost permanent feature of Indian constitution and laws. Over the past five decades, the list of castes and tribes that form the schedules has expanded. New categories like backward castes and other backward castes have been invented. The day may not be far when every caste will enjoy some form of reservation or the other.

Castes which were not considered backward a few decades ago are now trying to hard to proclaim their backwardness and get included in the schedules that bestow the coveted status of scheduled castes. Members of scheduled castes and tribes include significant numbers of persons who are economically strong and have acquired the best of education and social status. They have never experienced any discrimination but they are the ones who make most of the reservations and other beneficial provisions. They are also the ones who make maximum noise about historical injustice done to untouchables by Hindu society. It is not unusual for some of them to go overboard in their enthusiasm and even up cook up imaginary stories to buttress their claims.

Sometime back Government of state of Madhya Pradesh published a document called “Dalit Agenda” (*dalit* means oppressed) prepared by some intellectuals who specialize in political thinking on caste lines. The document was full of so much exaggeration that it sounded ridiculous to anyone who bothered to read it. It relied on propaganda websites of anonymous and dubious ownership to give instances of atrocities being committed in Madhya Pradesh.

Swami Vivekanand and Swami Dayanand wanted to abolish caste from Hindu society. The constitution of India has strengthened the caste system. Many so-called progressive political thinkers of today’s India do not tire of showering praises on Ambedkar and all those who think solely in terms of caste. As a result of official and political patronage (as well as of Christian missionaries), it has become a lucrative business in India to become a progressive thinker and write about how some castes and tribes are routinely subjected to discrimination and torture. No wonder, political thought in modern India is more casteist than it was a century ago.

- h) **Mercenary Army** – Under British rule Indian armed forces were no better than a mercenary force serving imperial interests and being used as cannon fodder wherever needed. The imperial power treated the army respectfully but gave it no powers to participate in strategic decision-making.

Indian Army

Constitution of India has continued to treat the armed forces as mercenary forces – all powers being concentrated in the hands of politicians and bureaucrats. This is done in the name of civil control over the army. Full of conceit and ignorance, the leaders and civil servants treat officers and soldiers of armed forces as second-class citizens. The armed forces are often not even consulted on national security issues. They have paid many times in the past five and a half decades with their blood for the mistakes committed by conceited politicians and civil officers. The ultimate irony is that a soldier who has a shorter service span and risks his life gets the same or less salary than a peon who just moves files from one table to another in a government office in Delhi.



STORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

If there is one element of fear that pervades the thought of almost all political thinkers in India, it is the fear of army becoming powerful. Successive coups and military coups and dictators in neighbouring Pakistan and Bangladesh have fuelled this fear. The fear psychosis has led the pendulum to swing to the other extreme. Neither the constitution nor conventions have tried to strike a balance by giving the armed forces their rightful place in strategic decision making on issues concerning national security. This has led to high level of silent but intense dissatisfaction in armed forces. One hears these rumblings in informal interactions. Of course, the discontent has never been expressed publicly. But as the army continues to lose some of its brightest men in operations across the country due to follies of politicians, there is a smouldering volcano that the civil society may not be able to smother for too long.

- i) **Labourers of knowledge** – Academic community and intellectuals found no role for themselves in the elaborate provisions of constitution. Due to the efforts of some scholars like Dr. Radhakrishnan who were part of Congress at the time of independence, it was decided to make the universities report to the President or Governor. But this was a small saving grace that had no constitutional backing. In due course, this has been significantly diluted.



It is not unusual to see Professors, Principals, Vice Chancellors and other academic luminaries being treated like dirt by ministers and even bureaucrats. A joint secretary of Ministry of Human Resources Development can very easily ruin the career of a would-be-Nobel-laureate in India.

No wonder, academic community in India spends more time in mutual backbiting and discussing postings, transfers etc. than in any meaningful research. Many of them have developed high level of expertise in cultivating contacts with politicians and bureaucrats by playing to their fragile egos. It is these experts who rise up the academic hierarchy in India. If you ever meet a Vice Chancellor of any Indian university, please do not ask him his research interests; just ask him the name of his godfather who helped him get the post.

This state of academic community is a major factor for the virtual vacuum in modern Indian political thought.

- j) **Services under the Union and the States** – Indian constitution has just two key focuses – politicians and bureaucrats. Part XIV of the Constitution is titled “Services under the Union and the States”. This part gives constitutional protection to government employees working in civil capacity. Strangely, the part (or rest of constitution) gives no protections whatsoever to defence personnel, who are treated as poor step-cousins.

The constitutional protections provided to civil servants have been largely responsible for the care-for-none attitude of government servants in India. They behave as if they are above all law. Corruption, the bane of modern India, has taken deep roots in government employees. No government can hope to fight corruption till the constitutional immunities enjoyed by government employees are reduced.

Indian political thought in recent years has delved considerably on the subject of removing corruption. But most thinkers have fought shy of advocating revocation of Part XIV of Constitution.

- k) **Unbridled judiciary** – Historically, judiciary evolved in Europe as an extension of the Church. The concept of independence of judiciary meant that judiciary was controlled by the Church and not by the King. As the power of church waned, the responsibility of guiding and controlling the judiciary fell on universities, academic community and intellectuals. In countries that have no written constitution or where the constitution lays down only the basic principles, the norms for control of judiciary have evolved by conventions. In India (probably the only country of the world having such a detailed constitution) the evolution of systems for control of judiciary has been prevented by the supremacy of judiciary enshrined in the constitution.



Supreme Court of India has not just judicial powers. It has unlimited legislative powers under Article 141 that lays “The law declared by the Supreme Court shall be binding on all courts within India.” Using this power, Supreme Court has acted in all fields except in the field of judicial reforms. Courts in India are known for their inordinate delays. Corruption is rampant in Indian courts. Subordinate staff of almost every court routinely accepts bribe on every hearing of the case from both sides in full knowledge of the judges. Chief Justice of India, a few months back, accepted that many judges are corrupt. It is not unusual for an accused in a criminal case to seek a lawyer, who has some special relationship with the concerned judge, before filing bail application.

Indian political thinkers have generally avoided commenting on the sorry state of judiciary in India. Editors of most newspapers refuse to publish anything against judiciary. This is not out of reverence but out of fear evoked by the unbridled powers of judiciary. Judges have frowned threateningly on even the mildest criticism. So, published political thought in India is completely silent on this subject. But that does not mean an absence of thought. In informal discussions, the anger against corrupt judges and their subordinate staff (and also against ethics-less lawyers) bursts forth.

Giving credit where it is due, one is bound to concede that the Constitution of India, in spite of all its shortcomings, has worked for more than five decades. There was a fear when India attained independence that India would slip into anarchy. This fear has proved to be unfounded.

Hundreds of small independent kingdoms came together under the Constitution of India. The transition from a mix of monarchy and colonial rule to self-governance has been smooth in India, unlike in many other countries of Asia and Africa.

The extinguishing of royal families that had survived even during British rule is an achievement that Constitution achieved bloodlessly. Some of the erstwhile royals took to electoral politics. Many achieved fair level of success, but most of them just faded away into oblivion.

The other achievement of Constitution of India has been keeping the theological elements or the priestly class at bay. Hindu religion does not have a central authority or Church but it does have a huge priestly class consisting of number of shankaracharyas, saints, ascetics and other priests. This orthodoxy, along with that of other religions like Islam, Sikhism, Jainism and Christianity, was kept an arm's length distance from matters of state. The orthodoxy has not taken it lightly and continues to exert to get a foothold into the political arena.

11. Political parties

Constitution of India appears to usher a party-less democracy in India. The concept of a political party finds no mention at any place in the Constitution. This might have been an oversight by the makers of Constitution. One presumes that if they wanted to do away with the concept of political parties they would have said so.

Notwithstanding the intentions of the fathers of the Constitution, political parties are a part of the political scenario of modern India. The Constitution (Fifty-second) Amendment Act, 1985 added a Tenth Schedule – “Provisions as to disqualification on ground of defection”. The tenth schedule and new provisions enacted few weeks ago have given unlimited powers to party bosses who now control the voting rights of members of parliament and state legislative bodies. No elected representative has a right to vote as per conscience. Discussions and debate in parliament and legislative assemblies are nothing more than farce since no member has a right to think or alter opinion based on discussions in the house. Everyone must sit with a closed mind in the august house and raise hand or voice strictly as per party whip.

It will not be an exaggeration to call Indian democracy as *whipocracy*, rule by whip rather than by discussions and deliberations. The unrestrained power enjoyed by party bosses in India is most undemocratic since all major parties are run as personal fiefdoms. Party membership registers are full of fictitious names; party elections are routinely rigged or not held at all and sycophancy is the norm instead of free and frank discussions.

The roots for this state of political parties in India can be traced to the Gandhian era in Congress. Gandhi, for all his pious looks and soft appearance, brooked no dissent. Anyone who disagreed with him had to quit Congress. His attitude was like that of a legendary US carmaker who said, “A customer can have any colour of his choice as long as his choice is black.” Gandhi’s attitude was similar – everyone was free to express views as long as one agreed with Gandhi.

After independence, Nehru carried forward this tradition. Fortunately for Nehru, Gandhi was no more on the scene, leaving the field open for him. After Nehru’s death, his daughter Indira Gandhi and later her heirs have ruled Congress for most of the time. The dynasty rule in Congress is natural fallout of the culture where the only purpose of the second line is to praise the first line of leadership. In due course, second line leadership becomes incapable of doing anything else except acting as errand-boys. That should explain why Congress had to choose Sonia Gandhi, widow of Rajiv Gandhi, as president. There is already a demand for getting her daughter Priyanka to lead the party.

STORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT



Sonia Gandhi



Priyanka

This fascination for dynasty surprises many outside India. There are many explanations for this. Some are of the opinion that India has yet to grow out of its history of monarchy. This is a simplistic explanation that though partly true misses some essential facts. The other reason is that as a brand, due to its association with freedom movement, Congress has enormous emotional appeal and electorate is drawn to it. In other words, it makes career sense for a budding politician to align with Congress. This influx has kept the Congress survive. Moreover, a leader that owes his / her position to birth in a dynasty rather than to support of subordinates can supersede seniority and promote talent. This has meant that Congress 'high command' has been able to pick and promote bright men and women, as well as to reward performance without bothering about the discontent among rank and file.

All other parties, except probably Communists, have followed the Congress model. Sycophancy towards the high command is the rule and any dissent or even divergence of opinion is scoffed at. In a way, within Congress there is considerable freedom – as long as one is loyal to the top ruling family there is full freedom of opinion and one can indulge in all forms of mudslinging, backbiting and arm-twisting of one's colleagues. A political analyst once wrote that open internal fights within Congress help the Congress high command select the best and most capable (no comments on what constitutes "best and most capable").

In contrast with Congress, the other major party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was born in 1980. It traces its history to Jansangh, which was founded in 1952 and was merged in 1977 into Janata Party (an amalgamation of all non-Congress and non-communist parties). In 1980, Janata Party split when a dispute arose about leaders belonging to erstwhile Jansangh being members of RSS. BJP and its earlier version Jansangh have been controlled with a tight fist by RSS.

Bharatiya Janata Party
भारतीय जनता पार्टी

STORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

RSS, as mentioned earlier, claims to be a socio-cultural volunteer organization. RSS has promoted different organizations catering to different sections of society. It has a trade union, a student body, a cultural body, a charitable organization and many others in what it calls as Sangh Pariwar (Sangh family or clan). BJP is a member of the Sangh clan. As a ruling party at centre and in many states, BJP has brought enormous power and stature to RSS and associated organizations.



V. Naidu, President, BJP

A key difference between Congress and BJP is the role played by RSS in BJP. Fulltime officials of RSS, almost like the clergy of a church, hold enormous clout within BJP. No one can hope to have a career in BJP after antagonizing the local RSS *pracharak* (officer). This leads to multi-level sycophancy. It is not sufficient to just be loyal to the top bosses. One has to please the bosses of local units of RSS, VHP, BMS, ABVP and such other multitude of organizations. A strong negative comment by anyone can put a stop to a bright career. Within the Sangh clan, there are a large number of persons who have veto power and almost no one has full authority. This leads to a complex web of personal and group loyalties that need careful management. A master of intrigue, flattery and whisper campaigns can achieve more in this setup than a popular leader. Of course, one does not talk of other qualities like intellectual capabilities or vision, which are viewed as negative traits for anyone except the top bosses.

Barring BJP, Congress and communist parties, almost all other parties in India are one-leader parties built around the personality of one leader or the other. Some of them have a focused target audience, often consisting either of some castes or of a state. For example, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) is personal fiefdom of Mayawati (her mentor Kanshiram who founded the party is no longer active). She has full freedom to perform any number of political and ideological somersaults in the best interests of scheduled castes and tribes whose interests she claims to safeguard. The number of parties catering to just one state is very large – Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh; DMK, AIDMK, PMK, MDMK in Tamil Nadu; AGP in Assam and so on.

Communist parties have a significant presence in just two states – West Bengal and Kerala. In both states, communist parties have diluted their ideology, as needed, to suit local flavour and needs. In spite of the dilution they do have an ideology, which they do not hesitate to flaunt. The same cannot be said about any other party.

12. Political Ideologies in Modern India

Ideology is a word that one does not hear very often in modern India. Almost all parties, except communists, have converged towards one common direction – middle-of-road pragmatism. The convergence has emerged because of intellectual bankruptcy of the parties instead of being a reasoned response to circumstances. Yet, if one has to look for streams of ideologies the following may be mentioned:

- a) **Middle-of-road pragmatism** – Congress may be credited with giving birth to this unique ideology where one has freedom to move in any direction – right or left – without calling it an ideological shift. One decides on the spur of the moment based on exigencies or more often on the mood of the high command. When Indira Gandhi was nationalizing Congress men praised her and a few years later when Narsimha Rao and Manmohan Singh started privatization of government companies, this was hailed by the same set of people. BJP, in its earlier incarnation Jansangh, claimed to be rightist but now it has no such pretensions and it unabashedly follows middle-of-road pragmatism.



Sonia Gandhi with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee
Sitting on same side of the ideological fence

- b) **Secularism** – India is a secular country and every party has to be necessarily secular. Yet, there are some parties who have holier-than-thou attitude when it comes to secularism. In effect, secularism translates into opposition of so-called saffron ideology and RSS clan. By this yardstick, Muslim League that is a purely Islamic party is secular while BJP is not secular. It might sound funny but Church and Imams are the ones who are the biggest allies of so-called secularists. Generally speaking, to be politically secular it is not sufficient to oppose interference in matters of state by theological groupings; one must give more than due importance to legitimate as well as illegitimate concerns of minorities even at the cost of sentiments of majority community. For example, giving subsidy to Muslims for Hajj pilgrimage is necessary as per secularists but giving even a fraction of that subsidy to Hindu pilgrims is something that will have seculars up in arms.

STORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

- c) **Communism** – At one time, there used to be two brands of communism in India – Soviet and Chinese. The collapse of USSR pushed the parties aligned with the former into a crisis. Even the ones inspired by Mao Tse Tung are in a state of shock due to the new policies of Chinese Government. In the past decade communists have made serious efforts to accept the new realities and develop their own version of Indian communism suitable for India. With their efforts and with the help of well-oiled organizational machinery, they have been able to hold on to their position in the two states (West Bengal and Kerala) where they have been traditionally strong. However, it cannot be denied that communism has stagnated and no one would predict a bright future for communism in India.
- d) **Socialism** – Preamble of Constitution of India declares India to be a socialist republic. Hence, like in the case of secularism, every political party has to be compulsorily socialist. The problem is that no one really knows what the term means. Everyone has his / her own meaning of socialism and in the absence of any authorized definition, no one can be pronounced right or wrong. A few decades back, socialism was a watered-down version of communism. It was what mixed economy was supposed to be where public sector and private sector co-existed. In the cocktail of mixed economy the bartender decides the proportions and no one dare question the bartender. So a socialist can be advocating privatization of all public sector units except the ones engaged in space research, while another may be arguing for nationalization of all large industries. This sort of freedom has produced as many socialist parties as there are leaders. An old joke says that if there are two socialists, they have three parties between two of them – one each of both individually and one of the two together.
- e) **Saffron ideology** – The patent and copyright for this are claimed by Sangh clan. No one dare act as protector of Hindu faith without due authorization from them. They protect their turf with such ferocity that it appears as if they invented it.

Swami Dayanand, Savarkar and Hindu Mahasabha are rarely mentioned in Sangh functions. Swami Vivekanand is revered but the ideology of Swami Vivekanand is hardly understood. Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), a Sangh clan outfit that claims to be sole representative of Hindus almost like a Hindu church, has collected together large number of shankaracharyas and saints. VHP's vision of Hinduism is in sharp contrast to the vision of Hinduism propounded by Swami Vivekanand. VHP has collected under its banner the people who opposed Swami Vivekanand bitterly all through his life and even afterwards.



STORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

Within Sangh clan, celebration of Vivekanand's birth anniversary is the responsibility of its student wing ABVP. VHP does not celebrate Vivekanand's anniversary. BJP makes use of Swami Vivekanand's image as and when needed and also takes the help of VHP as required. A similar conflict is seen in economic field where Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM) advocates economic policies that are sharply opposed to those being followed by BJP as leader of ruling coalition. Obviously, there are many internal contradictions within what is broadly labelled as saffron ideology.

Sangh clan is not inclined to resolve these internal contradictions. RSS and BJP have adopted an omnibus approach where everyone is welcome to jump on the bandwagon. In the process Sangh clan has become a caravan of such opposing views and directions that one wonders about the ideology that keeps the clan together.

Officially, Sangh's view is that it is aiming to bring together all Hindus on one forum without bothering about their different views. Officially speaking Hindu is defined by Sangh as everyone who has emotional attachment to the land and culture of India. Unfortunately, no one outside Sangh accepts this definition of Hindu. Even within Sangh the acceptance of this definition is only for public consumption. Deep within their heart, each member of Sangh clan has his own view about such ideological issues.

It is not the culture of Sangh to resolve contentious issues by open debate. Brushing under the carpet everything that might lead to discord is the norm. Senior Sangh functionaries justify it by saying that a strong organization is built on the basis of links of heart and not by resolution of ideological disputes.

Having declared ideology to be a non-issue, moderates within Sangh and BJP have slowly been forced to yield ground to the orthodox elements of Hindu society, even though on economic front proponents of globalization have been able to have their way. RSS began as an egalitarian organization where caste and region were not given any importance. However, as orthodoxy is taking over, caste and region are becoming key considerations in internal groupings. Along with orthodoxy have come the elements believing in bhakti or devotion.

Hindu revivalism or renaissance, that had begun about one and a quarter century ago with a reformist agenda, apparently seems to have run out of steam. The so-called heirs of proponents of renaissance are eyeing electoral victories and plum positions. They have no hesitation in joining hands with archrivals based on considerations of expediency.

Yet, the lamp of modern Hindu revivalism or renaissance as lit by Swami Vivekanand and Swami Dayanand is not burnt out. The movement was carried forward for some time by Hindu Mahasabha and later by Sangh clan. In spite of the weaknesses of the torchbearers, the spirit of the movement has in fact grown stronger over the years.

STORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

- f) **Islam and Christianity** – Both are religions and there may be some objections to including them in political ideologies. Yet, in regions where Islam or Christianity has some strength, religion has been used as political ideology.



Kashmir's population has a majority of Muslims. This has led to a separatist movement in Kashmir supported by Pakistan. In districts bordering Bangladesh, immigrants from across the border have changed the demographic profile leading to Islamic organizations becoming politically significant.



In northeastern India, Christianity has been growing and Church has become a strong political force. Even in Kerala, where Christianity arrived in first century A.D., Church plays an active political role, even though communists are a strong force in the state.

Both, Islam and Christianity in India receive substantial funds from foreign countries. Islamic organizations get funds from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and other Islamic countries. Christian churches receive support from global network of Christian charities and religious organizations. As a general statement, one may say that as long as in any region Muslims or Christians are a minority, Islamic or Christian organizations active in the region raise their voice for secularism; but as soon the community achieves clear majority, they no longer espouse secularism instead an agenda of ethnic cleansing starts taking shape and demands for separating from India are raised.

- g) **Casteism** – In past five decades, this has become the most prominent ideology of India. All parties give due consideration to caste equations while nominating candidates for elections.

Rise of caste as an ideology in Indian politics can partly be traced on one hand to the influence of Gandhi, Ambedkar and Constitution of India. On the other hand, one may blame it on the adoption of first-past-the-post practice. But to a large measure, it is because of the inability of the political parties and organizations to offer any direction to the country. Caste has emerged as an ideology of choice to fill the vacuum of political thought in modern India.

13. Hope for Future

Does the above account of present status of political thought in India fill you with despair, pessimism and cynicism? Whenever one looks at the big picture and mainstreams of thought, there is a fair chance that one misses the feeble undercurrents that are barely managing to survive. However, it is these undercurrents that shape the future.

Any idea begins its journey almost like a small sperm among millions. The journey from existence as a sperm, to life as an embryo, then as an infant and finally growing up through childhood to adult life seems full of so many risks that one can not even attempt to predict chances of success. Yet, just as life goes on through this difficult journey, ideas also do grow up and mature.



The above story of development of political thought in India talks of the ideas that have grown, attained adulthood and are now headed towards their final resting place – the graveyard of history. One cannot write story of the ones who are not yet born or are just born or are struggling through childhood. Yet, these are the ones who will rule the political thought of tomorrow's India.

Indian politics inspires no hopes when one looks at political parties and leaders. But when one looks beyond the parties and leaders, one finds the country has a large number of bright men and women who have enormous potential, who are honest and who are willing to risk their life for the country.

At the moment, many of these men and women appear to be groping in the dark. Yet, they are the ones who inspire hope.

Let us hope and pray for these bright men and women as well as for the ideas that are struggling to make their presence felt. We may not know them, but they are the ones who hold hope for future of India.



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