

Modern Indian Political Thought

Lecture – 1

INTRODUCTION

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- **Modern Indian Political Thought:** Emerged in the context of formation of nation and state in modern India; and in making of the 'idea of India' i.e. Gandhi & his views on *Swaraj* & critique of modern civilization; Nehru & his views on secularism and statecraft; Ambedkar, social reforms movements & his views on caste and liberal democracy; they were all engaged in this project of making modern India.

It may be said that they were all engaged in one similar project of constructing the 'idea of India' but in actuality they represented various shades of opinion and ideologies and differed from each other quite substantially.

Periodization of IPT: Ancient
Medieval
and Modern

Continuity with Change

Orientalist challenges and nationalist responses

➤ Political 'Theory' and 'Thought'

'Political theory' and 'political thought' is intimately connected to the issues and concerns related to politics

In comparison to 'theory' which is broader, systematic and generalized statements that help in understanding or explaining politics in a country or society i.e. concepts like freedom, equality, democracy, justice; Political 'thought' is narrow and limited to 'articulation' and 'reflection' of structure and functioning of politics usually done by Individual or a group of individual.

➤ 'Indian Political Thought' or 'Indian Political Theory'

Eurocentric Views: Western 'thought' or 'philosophy' and eastern 'tradition' or 'culture'; **Response:** '*Swaraj in Ideas*' – K C Bhattacharya; How it should be applied? Not with some kind of narrow nativist approach; But, by avoiding binaries: 'Tradition' and 'Modernity'; 'Indian'/'Indigenous' and 'Foreign'; Need is to focus on **dialogue** or **Samvad**

"from India may come influences which will widen the horizons of Western political thinkers and which will give political ideas a sounder foundation of philosophical and metaphysical speculation" – Norman D Palmer

Indian political thought and its study can well pave the way for the growth of Indian political theory and can also contribute to the corpus of existing concepts in political theory in general

Methods of Studying Modern Indian Political Thought

Conventional Method

- Thinker Centered Approach
 - As a result of this- individual figures were treated as icons and lesser known thinkers remain obscure

Contemporary Method

- Themes Based Approach
 - It offers a comparative analysis of many thinkers under one theme
 - Makes the study of MIPT more accommodative

Modern Indian Political Thinkers: Their Significance

- Their ideas emerged in the context of colonialism in response to orientalist thinking. They have metaphysical and epistemological assumptions that differ sharply from those of the west.
- Their ideas are future oriented but deeply embedded in the present context. They speak in many ways to the concern of the present.
- Combination of political activism and theoretical reflection is peculiar to these thinkers such as Gandhi, Ambedkar, or Nehru.
- Through them, one can understand two centuries of Indian history, its various ups and downs as seen and interpreted by the men and women who themselves helped shape and define these most interesting times of our country.
- Greater diversity of the thinkers within the Indian political tradition.

Their Concerns:

- To harmonise between urban and rural; national unity and religious diversity or discord; advancement of the rights of the lower castes and women; individual freedom and social equity; material prosperity and spiritual accomplishments; nationalist ideals and global approach
- The orientation of some of these thinker-activists was outward as well as inward; in seeking to unite their country and make it more democratic, they also looked at the most productive ways in which India could engage with other nations in an increasingly interconnected world.
- Several Indian political thinkers had the whole of humanity and not just the Indians as their audience. They offered theories for the resolution of not merely Indian predicaments or problems but of world historical problems or issues: During the 2nd World War Congress Draft on world problems; Anti-imperialist movements in other parts of Asia and Africa; Upholding or strengthening world organisations such as UN.

Three categories of thinkers:

- One group of thinkers favoured imitative reproduction of the modern western modes of political action and organisation.
- Second group of thinkers believed in the revival of and admiration for India's classical tradition of social and political thought and ideas.
- Third Group of thinkers attempted to create a blending of the traditional Indian and the modern western paradigms of politics. Tradition and Modernity and the combination of both.

Absence and Presence of Thinkers

Major Absence: B. G. Tilak, G. P. Gokhale, Dadabhai Naoroji, S. C. Bose, D. D. Upadhyay

- Objective of this course is to include those thinkers who are representatives of various ideological strands in modern Indian political thought.
- Inclusion of these figures such as Gandhi and Ambedkar for example, who have helped in the shaping the founding values of Indian republic and continue to influence Indian politics and society even today.
- Individuals dealing with both theory and practice or what is also called praxis.

Focus of the Course

- Both individual thinkers and themes they dealt with.
- To enable the students to historically situate the thinker in their personal, political as well as in their ideological domains.
- To make the students familiar with various strands of modern Indian political thought.

Conclusion

- Modern Indian political thought is a rich repository of ideas and concepts which emerged in response to colonialism and simultaneous with the formation of nation and state in modern India
- A broader and thematic study of thought can substantially contribute to the corpus of existing concepts to understand Indian society and politics better. It may also pave the way for the growth of 'Indian Political Theory' still marginal discipline in Indian academia
- Such thought emerged in various *Bhashas* such as modern Bengali, Marathi, Assamese, Tamil, Malayalam, Hindi spheres as well; and their specific and comparative study will further open-up and enrich the understanding to Modern Indian Political Thought
- However, this course is more about the key thinkers and their ideas/themes that led to the founding of modern Indian republic and continue to reverberate in our contemporary politics

Bibliography

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Thank You

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