Lesson : Basic Features of Indian and Western Political Thought: A

Comparative Analysis

Lesson Developer : Mithilesh Kumar Jha

College/ Department: Department of Political Science, University

of Delhi

Basic Features of Indian and Western Political Thought: A Comparative Analysis

Content List

Introduction

It is extremely difficult and always problematic to map out in any certain terms the political thought of an individual, or of a society or a culture. Such task,

usually, bear the risk of being reductionist and essentialist. When it comes to analyse the basic feature of the Indian and Western political thought, such task becomes even more problematic. Conceptually, it is difficult to classify a thought as exclusively 'Western' or 'Indian', as very often we see a convergence between the two. So, to look for an exclusively 'Indian' or 'Western' political thought is bound to be a challenging and at times a futile exercise. Yet, for the purpose of differentiating some critical and distinct features, one can make some possible points of differentiation between the western and Indian political thought.

Generally speaking, when we use the category 'west' we mean European and North American countries. In the modern times, most of the world was under the political subjugation of these western countries for a very long time. So, it became imperative for the people of these non-western countries to read and comprehend western political thought. These other non-western world may have their traditions of political thinking and thought. But, in most part of the worlds, these indigenous traditions of thought remained marginalised and Western political thought became the dominant traditions of political thought in the academic disciplines and the political discourses across the globe. In contemporary times, however, there have been various challenges to such hegemony of western political thought and other non-Western traditions of political thought (i.e. Chinese, Indian, Islamic, African) are being explored and probed vis-a-vis western political thought.

In comparison to the other traditions of political thought in the world, western political thought remained, one of the most widely explored areas of scholarship. Even the very idea of non-western thought is based on and often seen in terms of the 'west', which is not just a geographical expression, but a psychological category, as Ashis Nandy has put it – 'The west is now everywhere, within the west and outside; in structures and in minds'[1].

Indian Political Thought: Debates, Concerns and Basic Features

One can very well understand the complications of classifying a thought as purely an Indian political thought, by interpreting the sentence – *Is there an Indian way of thinking?,* as has been done by A. K. Ramanujan[2]. Depending upon the focus upon the particular word of the sentence, we can get different meanings, and hence a number of interpretations of the sentence become possible. According to Ramanujan, we can get at least four possible interpretations:

Is there an Indian way of thinking?
Is there *an* Indian way of thinking?
Is there an *Indian* way of thinking?

---

[1] Nandy, Ashis. *The Intimate Enemy Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. xi
[2] Ramanujan, A. K. 1989. 'Is there an Indian way of Thinking? An Informal Essay', *Contribution to Indian Sociology*, Jan, 23:41, pp. 41–58

Is there an Indian *way of thinking*?

By the first version, we can get the meaning that there was once an Indian way of thinking, but it does not exist anymore. Therefore, true Indian way of thinking can be discerned from the earliest texts like *Vedas* and *Puranas*. According to the second version, the meaning that can be discerned is that, there is no single way of thinking in India, but many. There have been 'Great and little traditions, ancient and modern, rural and urban, classical and the folk'[3]. The third version can be understood as whether we can call a particular way of thinking as essentially 'Indian' way of thinking, distinct from, say the Western or other traditions? We can give two possible answers to it. One is that in Indian way of thinking there is nothing specific to India. Everything comes here from the outside. Second is that, there is something specific and distinctive about 'Indian'. So, everything that might have come here from the outside is accommodated here, and has upon it a distinct 'Indian' mark. According to the fourth version, the possible answer to the way of thinking in India could be that, in India the thinking is based on feelings, emotions and intuitions and not on rational thought. So, we get the meaning that the west is materialist, rational and scientific hence its philosophy is far more superior, whereas India has no philosophy but only religion and superstitions. So, there are varieties of ways in which one can understand the Indian way of thinking that also include political thinking and thought in India. However, for the sake of differentiation of Indian political thought from the western political thought we can briefly observe the key concepts and concerns of political thinkers in India starting from the earliest days of Kautilya and other ancient Indian thinkers to the medieval and to modern Indian thinkers.

Political Thought in Ancient India: Kautilya, Nitishastra, Dharmashastra and Charvaka's Materialism

Political thought in ancient India is considered to be most effusively developed in Kautilya's *Arthashashtra* – a treatise on the art of governing. In this work, kautilya has somewhat successfully rescued politics from the domain of religion and morality. He has provided a pragmatic approach for the art of governing. His *Saptanga* theory of state and *Mandal* theory are perfect examples of the primacy of politics in Kautilya's thought.

Value addition: Know it More

---

[3] Ibid, p. 41

Saptanga Theory of state

As per the Saptanga theory of state, Kautilya envisaged, seven integral elements of the state – Swami (King), Amatya (Ministers), Janapada (People and Territory), Durga (Forts), Kosha (Treasury), Danda (Army or the Force), Mitra (Allies)

However, it is not correct to consider Kautilya as the only exponent of political thought in ancient India. Besides, his *Arthashastra*, other texts from the *Nitishastra* and *Dharmashastra* traditions also indicate the richness of political thinking in ancient India. Manu's *Manavdharmashastra* or *Manusmritis* and *Shantiparva* of the *Mahabaharata* are rich sources for the understanding of the political thought in ancient India. These texts propounded not only the monarchical form of the state but also linked politics intricately with religion or more clearly with the notion of *Dharma*. Even the whole purpose of politics and the state was seen, as not only to maintain *Dharma* but also to uphold it and to punish those who transgress the dictates of *Dharma*. Individual's life and his actions in such discourse revolved around the notion of *Karma* theory, which believed in the rebirth. It believed that the condition of man in the present birth was the result of the actions done in the previous birth and fruits of the actions in this birth would be reaped by him in the next birth. Thus, their actions of this birth was controlled and regulated both by the notion of *Dharma* and also of *Karma*.

Value addition: Know it More

Mandal theory

Mandal theory was a guide for the ruler (*Vijigishu Raja*) to maintain the relationship with the neighbouring rulers. A King, according to Kautilya, has to determine the status of its neighbours as friends and enemy depending upon the geographical position and the power of the states.

Kautilya: The Great Philosopher of Ancient India
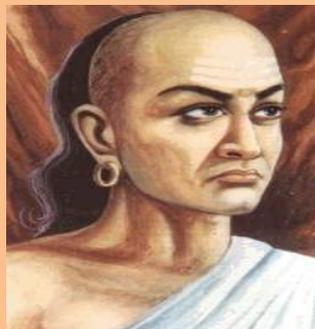
Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chanakya Accessed on February 03, 2015

However, there were multiple traditions of thought in ancient India, which to a great extent still remains relatively less explored. This is precisely because the major source of information about the thought in ancient India is mostly texts – *Shastras*, *Puranas*, *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharta*. However, these texts are not exclusively about the politics and the state. These are concerned more with the metaphysical notions and concerns like *atma*, *parmatma*, ideal life and society etcetera and hence, are highly idealistic in nature. Thus, in these texts, *this-worldly* affairs are considered merely as illusion and it focuses on the absolute, *Brahma*, the ultimate reality. And the whole purpose of individual life, according to the ancient Indian thought, was to attain the reunion with the *Brahma*.

However, there were materialist traditions of thought as well like Charvak's. It focused on the reality of this world and seeks to attain pleasure only in this world. It rejected the notions of reality in the *other world* and life after the death. However, it is believed that this tradition of thought did not influence much and remained only at the margin of dominant mainstream Brahminical thinking. In the ancient India, the notion of *Dharma* and *Danda* along with the theory of *Karma* remained the foundational ideals of society and politics.[4]

Political Thought in Medieval India: Barani, Abul Fazl, Bhakti and Sufi Traditions

Medieval period of political thought in India, often categorised as Muslim period of political thought, had heterogeneous ways of political theorisations.[5] Religion continued to dominate the political discourse in this period and the doctrine of the divine origin of the king was the established fact of the political life. However, in this period there developed a more powerful and vigorous state institutions in India, particularly under the *Delhi Sultanate* and the *Mughals*. Although, it is assumed that this period was the *Dark Age* for the indigenous culture and traditions of thought, as Islam, coming from the outside, established its political supremacy, dominated the politics, culture and arts in medieval India. Hence, it is often believed that there was a break from the ancient traditions of Indian political thought in this period and indigenous traditions of political thinking remained more or less obscure. But, this is not the correct understanding, as Nandita Prasad has suggested in her recent work, that medieval period had also witnessed the continuous growth of indigenous

---

[4] For details on the role of *Dharma* and *Danda* in ancient political thought see Parekh, Bhikhu. 1986. 'Some Reflections on the Hindu Tradition of Political Thought', in Thomas Pantham and Kenneth Deutsch (eds), *Political Thought in Modern India*, New Delhi: Sage Publications

[5] For details on the variety of traditions of political thought in the medieval period see Sahai, Nandita Prasad. 2013. 'Revisiting Middle Period Political Thought Text, Practices, Material Culture', in Pradip Kumar Datta and Sanjay Palshikar (ed.) *Indian Political Thought*, Delhi: ICSSR and Oxford University Press, pp. 89–120

traditions of political thinking that includes the *Nitishastra* and *Dharmashastra* traditions. These indigenous traditions of political thinking also theorised the needs for the formation and the sustenance of the major Hindu kingdoms and Empires like Vijayanagara, Rajputana, etc.[6]

Among the Islamic traditions of political thought, there were two major traditions. Firstly, in the beginning there was more conservative and orthodox notion of politics and religion in Islamic thinking. It is categorised as *adab* traditions. In this tradition of thought *Sharia*[7] was interpreted in the most orthodox manner and was regarded as the basis for the legitimacy of the political rule. Secondly, in the later period, particularly in post-Mongol period, there developed a liberal interpretation of the *Sharia*. This tradition of political thought is considered as *akhlaqi* traditions. These two traditions of thought are reflected in the works of two great and the prominent thinkers of medieval India – Zia Barani's *Fatwa-i-Jahandari* and Abul Fazl's *Akbarnamah*.

Barani was basically a theologian. His major challenge was to resolve the conflict between the demands of the *sharia* and the constraint of the ruling or governance over a territory largely inhabited by the non-Muslim subjects. Barani, although accepted the absolute authority of the god and was critical of the Islamic rulers for their pretensions of absolute temporal power. However, he considered such rule as inevitable for the smooth functioning of the society. So, he thought of Delhi Sultanate as the Islamic state, and wanted it to uphold and maintain the supremacy of the Islam. Although, he championed the cause for *Zawabit* or a secular state, but this secular state according to Barani was to complement *sharia*. He believed that the monarchical state could not work independent of or separately from the *sharia*. And the supreme purpose of such rule was to protect the interest of the Muslim community (umma). *Barani* also gave the *Ulema* (the priest) important position in the Islamic state. His interpretation of *Sharia*, according to Barani, was final and even the king was expected to act according to the advice of the *Ulema*.

---

[6] For details on the indigenous traditions of the political thinking in India in the medieval period see, Ibid
[7] It is considered as the major source of Islamic law which governs all the aspects of life of a Muslim. Their individual and community life, society, politics and culture is said to be based on Shariat.

Abul Fazl: Akbarnama
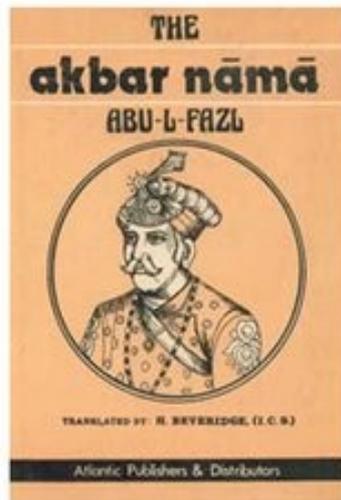
Contrary to Barani, Abul Fazl in his *Akbarnamah* gave a more liberal perspective on the state and monarchy. He projected a world view which was based on universal religiosity in place of sectarian notion of religion. He did not agree with the Muslim orthodoxy which differentiated between Muslim and non Muslim subjects. In fact, resorting to the secular ethics, he rejected the notion of *Kafir* and *zimmi*, and believed that the rights of the subjects did not follow from their religion. Fazl also give the authority to the king to change and modify old traditions or create the new one as the situation demands. He also gave king primacy over *Ulema*, as he believed that the king knows the best interest of his subjects. According to Fazl, the major task of the emperor was to protect the *jaan* (life), *maal* (property), *namus* (honour), and *din* (faith) of his subjects, irrespective of their religious denominations. In return the king has some share in the resources or property of his subjects in the form of taxes. This non sectarian perspective on the state and monarchy proved to be one of the major reasons for the sustenance of Mughal rule in a muliti-religious and multi-cultural country like India.

The origin and the growth of the Bhakti and Sufi movements in the medieval period also brought about some radical shifts in the political discourse in India. Being a reformist movement, the first and foremost thing, that these two traditions did, was that, it removed the hold of priests and *ulema* over the religious matters and preached more personalised and unmediated relationship between the devotees and their deities. In the religious matters the status of Sufi saint were considered as superior to even the king. It was considered that in

comparison with the Sultan the Sufi saints were nearer to the God. It also provided a bridge between the Islamic and Hindu traditions. It gave birth to a syncretic culture in India. This culture led to a more tolerant and accommodative society and politics in medieval India.

Modern Indian Political Thought: Western Challenge and Indian Responses

Political thought in modern India is developed, it is believed, as Indian responses to the western challenge.[8] Modern Indian Political thought developed in a context of the Britisher's Political subjugation of India. It was based on the Indians response to the Britisher's challenge that India had no thought, no philosophy, no history, etceteras. In the modern times the Indians have not only responded to this challenge but also looked upon the degenerated and degraded Indian society and traditions more critically. The major concern for the Indian thinkers in the beginning was how to reform the decayed Hindu society and the religion. While doing so, like in Raja Rammohan Roy, they did not necessarily criticise the British rule in India but focused on the social and religious reforms. In fact, many considered the Britisher's rule in India as the liberal government. They also thought of it as the blessings for the regeneration of Hindu society. But gradually they realised the exploitative nature of the British rule as the root cause of all the major social and economic problems in India, particularly after the publication of Dada Bhai Naroji's *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*. Gradually, the political thinkers and leaders in modern India came to associate all the social, cultural and political problems in India with the British rule. However, initially they did not want to completely overthrow the British but fought for the greater representation of the Indians under the British rule. But, from the beginning of the twentieth century they came to believe, finally, that the India can't progress under the British rule, and began to fight for the complete independence of the country. So, it happens that most of the political thinkers in modern India are also those who had actively engaged in the politics and shaped the destiny of the modern India.

---

[8] Dalton, Denis. 1982. *Indian Ideas of Freedom: Political Thought of Swami Vivekananda, Aurobindo Ghosh, Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore,* Gurgaon: The Academic Press

Raja Rammohan Roy: Father of the Indian Renaissance

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ram_Mohan_Roy, Accessed on February 03, 2015

Now, in order to understand the major trends in the political thinking in Modern India, we will look through the writings and works of its most influencing thinkers like Raja Rammhoan Roy, Vivekanand, Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Savarkar, Aurobindo, Iqbal, Nehru and Ambedkar. In these thinkers, we can also see not only a critical response to the western challenges, but an invisible present of the west in their thinking and theorisation as well. There are many thinkers who looked at the ancient Indian past and reinterpreted it, in the light of modern learning and worked for the establishment of its superiority over the other traditions of thought, while there were many others, who did take inspiration from the past but also looked at the other sources of knowledge including the Western, while there were yet many others, who wanted complete rupture from the past and radical transformation along the rationalist line, in order to create an egalitarian society in India. So, broadly we can see the two major influences on the political thinkers in modern India. Firstly, ancient Indian traditions and thought; and secondly, the western political thought.

Another major distinctive feature of the modern Indian political thinking has been its consideration of the whole world as a family. Taking inspiration from the ancient idea of *Vasudhaiv Kutumbkam* (The world is one family) many of the modern Indian political thinkers did not limit their thinking to India alone. They were not concerned only with the problems of India but they also offered solutions to the major predicaments and problems of the world. They were equally concerned with the question of origin, civilisation, good life, notion of freedom or *mukti*, human progress, political morality, nation and nationalism.

We, for the analytical purpose, can broadly divide the modern Indian thinkers into three major traditions. Firstly, there were a great many number of thinkers who learned from the western traditions of thought – whether liberal or Marxist, and wanted to reproduce it in the Indian context. Secondly, there were those

who were revivalist and wanted to reform Indian from within and also wanted to reassert the superiority of Indian past. Finally, there were those like Mahatma Gandhi who worked for the creative blending of the traditional Indian and modern western paradigm of politics.[9]

The beginning of modern Indian political thought is attributed to the social and political thought of Raja Rammohan Roy. He pioneered the social and religious reforms in nineteenth century Bengal which led the foundation for social and political reforms in modern India. Taking inspiration from the western liberal philosophy he championed the cause for the freedom of press in India and supported English education instead of Sanskrit. His *Brahmo Samaj* was a major social and religious reform movement in nineteenth century Bengal. He wanted to rescue Hinduism from its age old dogmas and superstitions. He worked tirelessly to abolish inhuman practises of *Sati*. Like many other contemporaries he also trusted the 'good nature' of the British. He supported British rule and saw in it the real progress of India.

Among the social and religious reformers in India, Dayanand Saraswati and his *Arya Samaj* played a critical role. He wanted to create a self reliant Hindu society based on the true teachings of *Vedas*. Vivekananda and Aurobindo were the other two thinkers in modern India, who focused on the spiritual accomplishments of the Hindu philosophy. They reinterpreted the Hindu *Shastras* and *Vedas* in the new light and provided the spiritual basis to Indian nationalism. They both were great patriot and saint. They emphasized not only on the political freedom from the foreign rule but more importantly they regarded spiritual realisation as the most important task for the Individual and society.

Rabindranath Tagore was a great patriot and he thought of rupture from the inner self as the main reason for the degrading status of Hindu society. While he was critical to the foreign rule in India, he was also equally critical of the emergent Indian nationalism. In fact, he was critical of all forms of nationalism. In his opinion the true progress of human being and community is not possible if it follows any creed of nationalism. Nationalism, in Tagore's opinion, is based on greed and violence, and hence it cannot work for betterment of humanity. So, despite being a great patriot, he opposed all forms of nationalism and instead worked tirelessly for the critical and creative engagement of the east and west. He was a great champion of unity and harmony among different civilisations and culture. His vision of cosmopolitanism is based on the cooperation and creative engagement between different cultures. He established *Shantiniketan* for the realisation of such cosmopolitan vision.

Mahatma Gandhi, the main propagator of the ideals like *Swaraj* and *Satyagraha*, is one of the most influential thinkers of modern India. He is perhaps to most

---

[9] Pantham, Thomas, Kenneth Deutsch (eds). 1986. *Political Thought in Modern India*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 'Introduction'.

profound critic of the British, not because he wanted to reform Hinduism from within, made Indian struggle for freedom a mass movement and provided a pivotal role in nationalist movement, but more importantly, because, he was perhaps the first modern Indian thinkers, who theoretically provided the foundational critic to the western or modern civilisation in his *Hind Swaraj*. He completely rejected the suitability of western civilisation in the Indian context. In fact, he was of the opinion that the modern civilisation had done enormous damage in their home countries, and once it is blindly imitated or transplanted in a country like India, its capacity to do harm would become incalculable. His techniques of *Satyagraha* and non-violence were not only used in the Indian struggle for freedom but it also inspired many political activists like Nelson Mandela in South Africa and Martin Luther King in United States of America in their struggles against injustices.

Savarkar and Iqbal, in their respective vision of politics and society, emphasized upon the role of religion in politics. They were, both, influenced by the western traditions of rational enlightenment thought and idea of nation and nationalism. Savarkar in his vision of a strong Hindu *nation*, focused on *Hindutva* and criticised Hinduism for its caste practices and irrational rituals. He provided ideological basis for the strong majoritarian Hindu nationalism in India.

Know It More		
Major Indian Political Thinkers	**Period**	**Major Works**
Kautilya	370 – 283 BCE	*Arthashastra, Chanakya Niti*
Abul Fazl	1551 – August 12, 1602	*Akbarnama* in three Volumes, Third Volume was *Ain-i-Akbari*
Raja Rammohan Roy	May 22, 1772 – September 27, 1833	*Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin* (A Gift to Monotheists)
Swami Vivekanand (Narendranath Datta)	January 12, 1863 – July 4, 1902	*Raja Yoga* (1896), *Karma Yoga*, (1896) *Jnana Yoga*, *Vedanta Philosophy*
Aurobindo Ghosh	August 15, 1872 – December 5, 1950	*Life Divine, The mind of Light, Essays on Gita, The synthesis of Yoga, The Ideal of Human Unity*
Rabindranath Tagore	May 7, 1861 – August 7, 1941	*Gitanjali, Gora, Ghare-Baire, Yogayog, Sadhna: The Realisation of Life*
Mahatma Gandhi	October 2, 1869 – January 30, 1948	*Hind Swaraj, The Story of My Experiments with*

		Truth
Veer Savarkar	May 28, 1883 – Feb 26, 1966	*1857 – The First War of Independence, Hindutva, Six Golden Pages,*
Muhammad Iqbal	November 9, 1877 – April 21, 1938	*Tarana-e-Hind (The Song of India), The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*
Bhimrao Ambedkar	April 14, 1891 – December 6, 1956	*Annihilation of the Caste, Who were the Shudras?, The Budha and His Dhamma*
Jawaharlal Nehru	November 14, 1889 – May 27, 1964	*Discovery of India, Autobiography, and the Glimpses of the world History*

Iqbal considered Islam as the basis of an ideal society. However, influenced by the western philosophy, he gave greater importance to the individual 'self' in religious matters. He was very critical of orthodoxy and conservative elements within the Islam. On the basis of Islam, he supported the separate nation for the Muslims but he was equally critical of nation and nationalism. He thought of the nation as breaking the inherent unity of Islam and therefore, propagated the idea of Pan-Islamism.

Nehru and Ambedkar both were the champions for transforming India through a strong state. Though, ideologically they differed. Nehru was one of the tallest leaders of the Indian National Congress, where as Ambedkar was the leader of the oppressed. He considered untouchability, practiced in Hinduism as the worst from of injustice. Throughout, the nationalist movement, he was critical of the Congress and its leadership. He thought that they were the organisation of the caste Hindus and shall never work in the interest of the lower castes. However, on the eve of independence, Ambedkar played an important role in the constitution making. He was the chairman of the drafting committee. He became the first law minister of independent India and resigned from the post on the controversy over Hindu code Bill. He also renounced Hinduism and embraced Budhism for its egalitarian ideals.

Ambedkar was prophetic in his estimation of the contradictions in Indian society. For him, with independence India entered a life of contradiction, where in the political and legal life we all become equal, but in social and economic life there remains persistent inequality. And this basic contradiction, for Ambedkar, was the major challenge for the liberal state and constitutions in India.

Nehru, a great democrat and institution builders believed in the parliamentary democracy, planned development and scientific progress of India. He was a great champion of mixed economy[10] and wanted to create a socialistic pattern of society in India.

Western Political Thought: Debates, Concerns and Basic Features

Western tradition of political thought have developed a very rich tradition of political theorisations over the period of two and a half thousand years, starting from the Plato and Aristotle in the Greek city states, to modern political philosophers like Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau. Machiavelli's political thought in between the end of medieval period and the beginning of modern period is a shining example of continuous tradition of Western political thought. They have systematically developed a polity centric philosophy and have raised different questions concerning politics – i.e. notions of Justice, State, Legitimacy, Authority, Power, Rights, Freedom, Autonomy, Political obligation. All of the thinkers in western philosophy seem to relate to each other in a thread and together constitute a discipline of enquiry, a form of discourse which provides the basic terminology of a political discourse. None of them are isolated; in fact, many times, it appears that they are in dialogue with each other. In this fashion, we find Aristotle in dialogue with Plato, Hegel with Kant and Marx with Hegel and so on and so forth. They also seem to raise the same question in the light of their own context and rearticulate it in a new fashion. So, continuity and innovation remained the defining feature of the western political philosophy. We often find in their thought 'arguments in support of, or against, the alternative political arrangements'.[11] Plato and Aristotle are rightly considered as the most influencing political philosophers in western traditions. Most of the thinkers do refer to the works of these two foundational figures of political philosophy in Western traditions.

Western Political Thought: Plato, Aristotle

Plato and Aristotle were responding to the problems that were specific to the Greek city states. Greek city states were very small unit of political organisations and were a face to face community. They had a very rich tradition of debate and dialogue. In the times of Plato and Aristotle these societies were undergoing radical transformations. Plato's idea of Justice as the basis of an ideal and just society, ruled by the philosopher king and communism of wives and property, was the response to the transformations taking place in those societies. Aristotle on the other hand was more pragmatic in his approach to politics. He, before developing his own philosophy of ideal state, studied 158 existing constitutions

---

[10] In a mixed economy private capital and industrial enterprises were allowed to coexist with the state or public enterprises. In Indian context it was the state enterprises which controlled the commending height of the economy.

[11] Jha, Shefali. *Western Political Thought From Plato to Marx*, Delhi: Pearson, p. viii

of his time. On the basis of the number of rulers and the purpose of their rule, he classified the governments in the following ways;

Value addition-know it better		
Aristotle's Classifications of the Governments		
No. of Ruler	**Genuine**	**Perverted**
One	Monarchy	Tyranny
Few	Aristocracy	Oligarchy
Many	Polity	Democracy

Aristotle
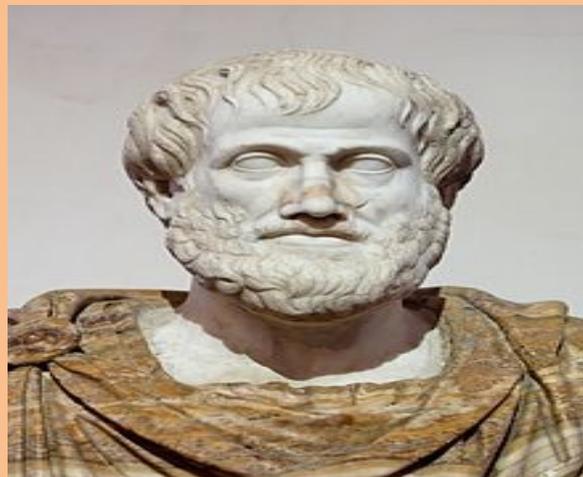
Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristotle Accessed on February 03, 2015

Aristotle was also the first thinker who talked about the man as a *zoon politikon* (political animal). His famous statement that Man is a social animal and the one live outside the society is either a God or a beast, summarises the centrality of politics in his philosophy. He believed that realisation of true nature of the individual is possible only in a society. Aristotle also conceptualised a very thick notion of citizenship, by which he meant not partial participation in the life of the *polis*, but full and equal participation of the citizens. He defined citizenship as

'capacity to govern and be governed in turn'. He considered polity as his ideal form of the state.

Value addition : Know It More
Zoon Politikon-Meaning
Artistotle's used the term *zoon politikon* to characterise human nature. In this understanding man, by his nature, is a political animal. Man by his own nature can't live outside the society. It is also said that those who live outside the society are either a 'beast' or a 'God'. This term also entails that man can realise his true nature in association with others and that is possible only in society. For details see, hrcak.srce.hr/file/149950

Western Political Thought in Medieval Period: Religion, Feudalism, and Machiavelli

Medieval period of political of thought in the west were dominated by the religion, particularly Christianity. Feudalism with overlapping power and the authority between monarch on the one hand and warlords on the other, characterised the political arrangement in the medieval period.

Niccolo Machiavelli

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niccol%C3%B2_Machiavelli Accessed on February 03, 2015

The hold of church over the art, culture, laws and politics obstruct the growth of any innovative political thinking in the medieval period. However, towards the end of this period a treatise by Machiavelli, *The Prince*, re-established the supreme role of the politics in the affairs of the men. He even wanted his Prince

to observe religious teaching for the stability of the state. But he warned him not to be guided by it. According to Machiavelli the aim of politics is 'to ensure a collective, stable, prosperous and glorious life of the state'.[12]

Modern Western Political Thought: Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Social Contract Traditions

In the modern period, it was the Hobbes who first theorised the idea of the state, power, authority, sovereignty and political obligation of the individuals in a scientific and unambiguous language. When the feudal world was disappearing and modernity began to characterise the outlook of the individual and the society, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau tried to provide the centrality to the individual by developing social contract traditions of political philosophy. Although, they differed from each other radically, yet they focused on the individual and human nature as the central unit of their analysis. Now, in this tradition of thought, the consent of the individual was necessary for the government's legitimacy. Where the political thought of the Hobbes and Locke was the response to the English Civil War of the 17th century, Rousseau's philosophy contributed in the French Revolution of 1789. They also differ in their solutions to the political conflict. Hobbes talked about the all powerful *Leviathan*, where as Locke supported a limited form of the government. In Rousseau's thought the basis of government was '*general will*' of the people, which could be the will of the all people, or of few or even of the one individual, if his/her will is in the interest of the all. Thus, Rousseau's notion of '*general will*' was open to new interpretations.

| Value addition-know it more |
| --- |
| *Sapere Aude*: The motto of Enlightenment |
| *Sapere Aude* is a German term which becomes the motto of enlightenment thinking. It is translated as '*Dare to Know*' or 'Have courage to use your own reaosn'. It means that one should question and interrogate all the given and established ideas and practices. For details see, Kant, Immanuel, 1784, 'What is Enlightenment', http://www.allmendeberlin.de/What-is-Enlightenment.pdf |

Kant, Hegel, and Marx

Kant, Hegel and Marx were all German thinkers, whose contributions in political philosophy had tremendous influence on the people. It also influenced a great many thinkers and activists in the other parts of the world. Hegel was a critique of Kant, but both were idealist and rationalist. Marx was the revolutionary and a fierce critique of Hegel, although he shared many of the methods of the Hegel. So, we see an unbroken chain of dialogue among the political philosopher of the West.

---

[12] Ibid, p. 100

Immanuel Kant was one of the most influencing enlightenment thinkers, who gave the individual autonomy and freedom to devise his/her rule for himself/herself. He wanted the individuals to come out of their self imposed immaturity conditions and to undertake the task of knowing for themselves. This spirit of knowing and coming out of immaturity conditions for Kant defines the basic characteristic of the enlightenment. He also provided *a priori* maxim that is also called *Categorical Imperative*. This, he believed, will be a universal law and will guide the individual universally and in all condition. According to this law, individual is to act only on those principles which s/he wants other to follow in the same condition universally and unconditionally.

Immanuel Kant: Enlightenment Thinker
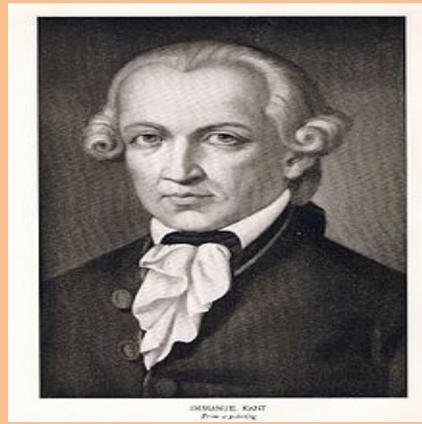
Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immanuel_Kant Accessed on February 03, 2015

For Hegel, Kant's conception of human freedom was an empty word. He theorised his own notion of freedom as self determining. That is not to be governed by the desire and impulses. These, according to Hegel, governs animals but for human being have the capacity to think and determine one's all aspect of the will, is an exercise of freedom. Hegel also talks of the state and civil society. He considered state as the highest form of community and civil society as a sphere, which is between the state and family or household. Individual's behaviour in the civil society, according to Hegel, was guided by their self-interests.

Karl Marx was one of the most influencing revolutionary thinkers of the nineteenth century. He was a thorough critique of German Idealism including that of the Hegel's. Although, Marx borrowed the method of dialectics in his interpretation of historical materialism from the Hegel, he was not in agreement with the Hegelian idea of state as a neutral agent, representing the interest of all. According to Marx, state, instead of working in the interest of common good, perpetuates the dominance and inequality, which exist in the realm of civil society. Marx considered state as the bourgeoisie institution, which works in the

interest of the whole bourgeoisie against the interest of the workers. Marx provided a materialist conception of the history and conceptualise a stage – *communism*, which will be a classless and stateless society. This, for the Marx, was the ideal and the final stage of Human progress.

Know it More		
Major Western Political Thinkers	**Period**	**Major Works**
Plato	428/427 or 424/423 – 348/347 BCE	*The Republic, Apology, Statesman, Laws*
Aristotle	384 – 322 BCE	*Politics, The Nicomachean Ethics, Metaphysics, Rhetoric*
Machiavelli	May 3, 1469 – June 21, 1527	*The Prince, Discourse on Livy, The Art of War*
Hobbes	April 5, 1588 – December 4, 1679	*Leviathan, Elements of Law, Natural and Politic, The Whole art of Rhetoric*
John Locke	August 29, 1632 – October 28, 1704	*Two Treatises of Government, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Essay Concerning Toleration*
Rousseau	June 28, 1712 – July 2, 1778	*The Social Contract, Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men, Emile, Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*
Immanuel Kant	April 22, 1724 – February 12, 1804	*Critique of Pure Reason, Critique of Practical Reason, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, Critique of Judgement, 'What is Enlightenment'* (Essay, 1784)
Hegel	August 27, 1770 – November 14, 1831	*Phenomenology of Spirit, Philosophy of Right, History of Philosophy, Philosophy of Religion, Philosophy of History, Science of*

		Logic
Karl Marx	May 5, 1818 – March 14, 1883	*The Communist Manifesto, The German Ideology, Economic and Philosophic Manuscript, Critique of the Hegel's Philosophy of Rights, The Poverty of Philosophy, Capital* Vol I – III

Indian and Western Political Thought: A Comparison

Now, we have a sense of the major traditions of thought in Indian and Western Political thought. We have seen that these two traditions of thought developed in two different contexts and responded to the circumstances and according to needs of their respective societies. So, one of the major concern that we need to take into account is that, political thought is a response to the growing demands of the social and political context and that can be best understood in the specificities of that context only.

Only in the modern times, these two traditions of thought have come into the closer contacts with each other. In this contact we find that how western theories and thought dominated not only the political activists in India but also the discipline of political science. Major concepts of political discourse, in most of the non-western countries, have its origin in the west. And it shows the parochialism on the part of western theorists as well. While the non-western societies have been historically open to the western ideas and it has adopted many of its institutional practices, same level of interests is usually not shown by the countries in the West. For a very long time, except the German Indologist there was very little appreciative work on the political thought in the non-western traditions in the 'West'. In fact, these traditions of thought remained in the denial mode by the western countries. However, in the contemporary times there have been serious attempts to engage with the political thought in the non-western traditions, particularly in the universities in the different parts of the world, including in the west.

In comparison to the western thinkers and theorists Indian thinkers and theorists have to perform a double task. That is, they have to be well versed not only in their own traditions of thought but they also need to be equally versed in the western traditions as well in order to communicate their own thought. So, there exists an asymmetry in the dialogue between western and Indian traditions of political thinking.

Value addition-know it more

Key concepts	
Indian Political Thought	**Western Political Thought**
• Dharma • Mukti • Rajneeti • Nyaya • Niti • Cosmopolitanism	• State • Sovereignty • Freedom and Equality • Justice • Power • Globalisation

Indian political theorisation differs from the western paradigm of politics as in comparison to the western focus on antagonisms and contradictions, Indian traditions of political thinking tend to focus on co-operations and harmony. According to V. R. Mehta, 'while Western thought works in terms of antagonisms, dichotomies and antinomies between spirit and matter, the individual and society, bread and culture, necessity and freedom, Indian thought has always considered such dichotomies as artificial and unreal'.[13] It is believed that while western political thought tries to legitimise the notion of atomistic individual, mindless competition and amoral politics, whereas, Indian traditions of political thought focuses on community, co-operation and social harmony. It also emphasized upon the role of ethics and morality in politics.

Acknowledging the importance of the east-west creative engagement and the role of modern Indian political thinkers Norman D. Palmer says 'the concepts of essential unity of mankind and of the philosophical ties which bind east and west have never been more profoundly held or more eloquently voiced than by the seminal thinkers of modern India'.[14]

Concluding Remarks

Thought and particularly political thought owe a particular allegiance to the society and culture in which it emerges. So, we have seen how the issues and concerns that interest the Indian and Western political thinkers were specific to their society. No thought, including the political thought, emerges in a vacuum. It can only emerge in a context. By taking into account the specificities of these contexts we can better understand the political thought of that society.

West has political and economic dominance over the rest of the mankind over the three hundred years. So, naturally in this period western philosophy not only became the dominant tradition of political thought, but it also shaped and refashioned the politics, society, culture of the non-west in its own terminology.

---

[13] Mehta, V. R. 1983. *Ideology, Modernisation and Politics in India*, New Delhi: Manohar, p. 74

[14] Palmer, Norman D. 1955. 'Indian and Western Political Thought: Coalescence or Clash?', American Political Science Review, Vol. 59, No. 3, Sept, p. 761

So, even the existence of the non-west was seen in terms of western terms. Therefore, to a great extent we see a large scale of borrowings of western concepts in the non western world, in order to make sense of the political discourse. Often, it is done without analysing its suitability in these contexts.

However, in the case of Indian political thinkers we see a continuous and un-breaking chain of political theorisations from the ancient times to the modern times. In the modern times the political thought of the Indian thinkers have the influence of the western thought and the imaginaries but they were also rooted in the Indian traditions as well. In fact, Gandhi was perhaps the first and theoretically most profound critique to western civilisation, when the whole world was following it more or less uncritically, that includes many modern Indian thinkers as well.

Glossary

Dharma: *Dharma* is one of the central themes in political, social and cultural life in India. It is one of the most amorphous terms used in discourses in and on India. However, the term stands for – *to uphold*. Usually, it is meant that upholding the Dharma stand for doing one's duty without transgression and following the righteous path. However, this term is defined in the variety of ways.

Karma: It is a notion which believed in rebirth and attributes the conditions of present life as the fruits of the deeds in the previous birth. Hence, this theory also believed that proper observance of duties in this birth will bore fruits in the next birth. It governed all aspects of individual life in ancient India.

Mukti: It is usually translated as salvation. But its connotation is different from the western conception of the term salvation. In, Indian philosophy it is considered as the ultimate and final state of realisation. It is moving beyond the cycle of birth and death, according to the Indian mythology.

Danda: *Danda* or 'the authority to punish' symbolised authority in the ancient India. The state, in order to maintain its specific status in the society, had the power to punish not only the offender of the social laws or *Dharma* but also to those who transgress it. *Danda* along with *Dharma* was the basis of state power in ancient India.

Nation: It is a form of political community based on an imaginary notion that all the inhabitants of a particular geographical territory share some common historical, cultural, social and political traits which binds them together in a singular identity in the forms of the nation.

Nationalism: It is an ideology which provides the foundation for the imaginings and creation of the nation and nationalities.

Rights: It is the claims of Individual against society which is legally recognised. Therefore, all the claims of individual cannot be considered as rights.

Self: Idea of self, or *atma* as it is used in Indian context, was foundational in Indian and Western political thought. It remained a basic unit of philosophical inquiry. Its origin, evolution, growth and fulfilment, constitute the basic premise of different traditions of political thought including the Indian and Western political thought.

State: It is a political entity which enjoys the monopoly over legitimate forms of violence. Hence, it is the most powerful institutions. The idea of state is different from the government. Government may come and go but state continues to exist. In modern times a definite territory, population, government and sovereignty are considered to be the four essential elements of the state.

Swaraj: *Swaraj* or self-rule is a term used prominently during the anti colonial struggle in Modern India. It is used by various leaders for a variety of purposes and it continues to dominate the political discourse in contemporary India. The term means not only the political freedom from the external or foreign rule but also one's capacity to govern oneself.

Exercises

Essay Type Questions

1. What are the basic characteristics of Indian Political Thought?
2. What are the main features of Western Political Thought?
3. Compare and contrast the basic features of Indian and Western Political Thought?
4. Discuss the concept of Dharma? How does this concept have shaped various traditions of political thought in India?
5. Briefly discuss the existence of various traditions of thought in Western political thought.
6. What are the central units of analysis in western political thought? Discuss any two of them.
7. Modern Indian political thought inevitably relies upon the ancient Indian political thought on the one hand and western political thought on the other. Explain.

Multiple Choice Questions

1. Who is considered as the father of modern Indian political thought?
   a. Mahatma Gandhi
   b. Raja Rammohan Roy
   c. Rabindranath Tagore
   d. Dada Bhai Naroji

   Answer: b
2. In ancient India who gave the *Mandal* and *Saptanga* theory of state?
   a. Manu
   b. Shankar
   c. Kautilya
   d. Charvak

   Answer: c
3. Who said man is a political animal?
   a. Hobbes
   b. Plato

    c. Aristotle
    d. Locke

    Answer: c
4. Who wrote the seminal text Hind Swaraj?
    a. Mahatma Gandhi
    b. Maharshi Dayanand
    c. Bal Gangadhar Tilak
    d. Savarkar

    Answer: a
5. Who propounded the notion of *Hindutva*?
    a. Vivekanand
    b. Bal Gangadhar Tialk
    c. Gandhi
    d. Savarkar

    Answer: d
6. *The Prince* a treatise on the arts of governing is written by –
    a. Machiavelli
    b. Aristotle
    c. Plato
    d. Hobbes

Answer: a

7. Who was the first thinker in the social contract tradition of thought in Western Philosophy?
    a. Locke
    b. Rousseau
    c. Hobbes
    d. Rawls

Answer: c

8. Who considered civil society as the realm of the individual self interest?
    a. Karl Marx
    b. Immanuel Kant
    c. Hobbes
    d. Hegel

    Answer: d
9. Who gave the notion of *Categorical Imperative* or *a priori* maxim?
    a. Hegel
    b. Karl Marx
    c. Immanuel Kant

d. Locke

Answer: c

10. Which tradition of thought in India focuses on the materialistic conception of life?
    a. Nitishastra
    b. Dharmashastra
    c. Charvaka
    d. Jainism

Answer: c

Exploratory Exercise

1. Classifications of political thought as essentially 'Indian' or 'Western' always have been a problematic enterprise. Do you agree? Give reasons in support of your answer.

References

Dalton, Denis. 1982. *Indian Ideas of Freedom: Political Thought of Swami Vivekananda, Aurobindo Ghosh, Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore,* Gurgaon: The Academic Press

Datta, Pradip Kumar and Sanjay Palshikar (ed.). 2013. Indian Political Thought, Delhi: ICSSR and Oxford University Press

Guha, Ramchandra. 2010. *Makers of Modern India*, Delhi: Penguin/Viking

Jha, Shefali. Western Political Thought From Plato to Marx, Delhi: Pearson

Khilnani, Sunil. 2004[1997]. *The Idea of India*, New Delhi: Penguin Books

Krishna, Daya. 1996. *The Problematic and Conceptual Structure of Classical Indian Thought about Man, Society and Polity*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press

Mehta, V. R. 1983. *Ideology, Modernisation and Politics in India*, New Delhi: Manohar

Mehta, V.R. 1992. *Foundations of Indian Political Thought – An Interpretation (From Manu to the Present Day)*, New Delhi: Manohar

Mehta, V.R. and Thomas Pantham (eds.). 2005. *Political Ideas in Modern India: Thematic Explorations*, New Delhi: Sage Publications

Nandy, Ashis. *The Intimate Enemy Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, Delhi: Oxford University Press

Palmer, Norman D. 1955. 'Indian and Western Political Thought: Coalescence or Clash?', *The American Political Science Review* , vol. 49, no. 3, September, pp. 747–61

Pantham, Thomas, Kenneth Deutsch (eds). 1986. *Political Thought in Modern India*, New Delhi: Sage Publications

Parekh, Bhikhu. 1986. 'Some Reflections on the Hindu Tradition of Political Thought', in Thomas Pantham and Kenneth Deutsch (eds), *Political Thought in Modern India*, New Delhi: Sage Publications

_____ . 2003. 'Non-Western Political Thought', in Terence Ball and Richard Bellamy (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Twentieth–Century Political Thought*, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, pp. 553–578

Ramanujan, A. K. 1989. 'Is there an Indian Way of Thinking? An Informal Essay', *Contribution to Indian Sociology*, Jan, 23:41, pp. 41–58

Roy, Kumkum. 2013. 'Revisiting Early Indian Political Thought Text, Practices, Material Culture' in Pradip Kumar Datta and Sanjay Palshikar (ed.) *Indian Political Thought*, Delhi: ICSSR and Oxford University Press, pp. 63–88

Sahai, Nandita Prasad. 2013. 'Revisiting Middle Period Political Thought Text, Practices, Material Culture', in Pradip Kumar Datta and Sanjay Palshikar (ed.) *Indian Political Thought*, Delhi: ICSSR and Oxford University Press, pp. 89–120

Singh, M.P. and Himanshu Roy. 2011. *Indian Political Thought: Themes and Thinkers*, Delhi: Pearson

Wolin, Sheldon S. 2004[1960]. *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press