

avert terrible cyclones and were regarded as one class of 'vyantara' gods. In most cases they were mentioned along with the 'Yaksas', 'Raksasas' and 'Pisacas'. The Puranic writers were hostile to Buddhism and Jainism. In order to malign them they tried to utilize the popular beliefs and sentiments regarding the demons and spirits. The epics were the main sources of Puranic demonology. Epic tales pertaining to the fights between the gods and the demons were elaborated and fabricated in the Puranas. Though the gods were defeated many times by the 'Asuras' they did not die because they were supposed to have drunk 'amrita', the

nectar of immortality which was in their possession only. In the Puranic demonology, the greatest importance had been attached to the demons of the 'Asura' category. The 'Raksasas' were less prominent. In fact, with the destruction of Ravana, 'Raksasas' began to receive diminishing importance. Most of the legends about the conflict between the gods and the demons as found in the Hari, Vishnu and Matsyas were basically Vaisnavite, where Visnu appeared to be the saviour of gods. The 'Bhutas' and 'Pisacas' were described in the Vayu. The 'Pisacas' were born of Kapisa. In the Puranas the demons and the spirits had seldom good qualities, and

unlike in the Buddhist and Jaina texts, they always remained evil natured.

Bhattacharyya, in fact, has come out with a wonderful and detailed description of the demons and evil spirits as perceived in our ancient texts. Throughout the work he has made a comparative study too of the Vedic, Buddhist, Jaina and Puranic concepts of these supernatural beings. The sources are mostly primary in nature and the opinions, not partial. The world of Indology and demonology at the same time is going to be enriched with this work in terms of the study and research on them.

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## A Dictionary of Moral Concepts in Gandhi

In the technical sense of the term Gandhi was not a philosopher but he was a socio-political genius of action of the 20th century. A genius is a man of extraordinary intellect who discerns the secrets of human life and determines purpose of human life. He is not a slave of traditions; he is their creator. He is not a man of the age, but of ages. Gandhi had these traits in his personality. He was much influenced by the *Bhagavadgita*. According to him it mirrors the philosophical spirit of the Vedic and the Vedantic Indian lore. Many thinkers of India interpreted it in their own ways. However, they only interpreted ancient Indian thought without taking cognizance of the fact that social and political conditions might have changed in the Indian tradition. The dynamic nature of tradition was not appreciated in accordance with the changed contemporaneous social realities.

In the medieval times the *Gita* had a negative impact on the Indian masses. The medieval ages developed an ascetic and pessimistic philosophy of world negation and life negation. The tendency of asceticism negated social realities. People withdrew from struggle in the social life which is the very spirit of the teachings of the *Gita*. They reneged on a dynamic view of life and closed their

eyes towards stark responsibilities of social life. This trend continued in the modern times as well. Gandhi tried to strike a balance between theory and practice which is the quintessence of the doctrine of *karma-yoga* in the *Gita*. In the medieval Bhakti movement the *bhaktas* and the Sikh Gurus dotted the 'i' and Mahatma Gandhi in modern times crossed the 't'. All of them tried to reconcile theory and praxis as existentialist voluntarist thinkers and social reformers. Gandhi's contribution lies in reinterpreting the *Gita* in the context of India's twentieth century socio-political milieu.

He was an actor in the drama of freedom struggle of India and not a spectator. He had it in his mind to translate his ideas into living reality. For this and in view he started his experiments with 'truth' in South Africa and finally continued the exercise on the soil of his motherland (India). He continued his efforts till he succeeded in freeing his motherland from the clutches of the British colonial rule. The British ruled over us due to weak will power of the Indians. The Indians could not peep into the mischievous designs of the British. They were victims of the British policy of "divide and rule". They were never united to give a collective fight to the

British colonizers. They could not transcend their narrow grooves of selfishness.

The original contribution of Mahatma Gandhi lies in applying the key tenets of the classical scripture to the contemporaneous socio-political scenario of the twentieth century India. He was successful in infusing the spirit of fearlessness into the castrated, weak and emaciated will of the Indian masses. He left no stone unturned to infuse life and invincible will in the freedom movement to achieve the target of independence of India. At last his struggle was crowned with success on 15 August 1947 when the English were forced to quit India forever.

His socio-political ideology is reflected in his seminal slim booklet *Hind Swaraj* or *Self Rule of India*. The underlying idea in *Hind Swaraj* is that the self-rule is possible only if people of India are strong-willed. In order to come out of the cocoon of *akrasia* he reinterpreted the voluntaristic ancient Indian concept of *ahimsa* (non-violence) which was used by Lord Buddha about 2500 years ago. His method of non-violence is a weapon of the strong-willed person. For Mahatma Gandhi Kurukshetra is not the battlefield in the present Haryana state of India. It is human body which is the

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Kurukshttra and wherein the eternal struggle between man's essential self and his sensual self is perpetually going on. It is to be resolved, in favour of the former, with a strong will power. This was central purpose of the *Gita* to steel human will. Mahatma Gandhi's concept of "Hind Swaraj" is founded on it. For the Mahatma the *Gita* is not a book of history, but a message for life. It is a book on socio-spiritual dynamic view of life. He historicised human action which reflects 'inner voice' of the self (*atman*). It is based on truth (*satya*). He was Indian both in thought and deeds though his views are deeply entrenched in the views of Ruskin, Tolstoy, Thoreau and others who had influenced his mind. He articulated his ideology of "Hind Swaraj" (1909), theory of non-violence (*ahimsa*), social justice (*savodaya*), feminist cause and other key concepts within spiritual framework of Indian philosophy. His continuous struggle for achieving truth was not to injure the feelings of another person, but to make him conscious that he was wrong. He

was successful in testing it for achieving freedom without bloodshed. His original, written ideas have been collected in a multi-volume work, *Collected Works of M.K. Gandhi* (CWMKG). Gandhi reinterpreted truth in the context of modern socio-political scenario and was ultimately successful in getting freedom for India on 15 August 1947 without bloodshed.

In addition to the above mentioned contributions, Gandhi has drawn our attention to the western technological and materialistic civilization and the colonial rule of the English in pre-Independence era. He is against mega cities. His central problem was emancipation of the downtrodden masses of the motherland of India. There are some vital issues which have been listed in the selection of entries in the present *Dictionary*. Quotations from the original sources are of immense use for the readers to reinterpret Gandhian thought. These entries will be handy for the readers to reckon on the concepts to understand threadbare Gandhi's

relevance in the present computer age.

The *Dictionary* under review is an anthology of the entries collected from original writings of Gandhi, which appeared in the journals, *Harijan* and *Young India*. The author has listed only most significant forty-five entries derived from the original work of Gandhi. I feel pained to point out that Mr. Gupta has belied the expectations of most readers in that he has denied them the benefit of his interpretations of the philosophical terms entered in the *Dictionary*. Some insightful, original interpretations should have been given by a professor of philosophy who has taught in the prestigious St Stephen's college of Delhi affiliated to the University of Delhi. It is one of the weakest aspects of the *Dictionary*. The present compilation of entries could be done by any ordinary compiler! I failed to find out any philosophical insight of the author.

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## Window on Socialist Thinkers

Today the concern of equality, human rights (particularly, minority rights), social justice and liberation of humanity from poverty, disease and ill health transcends ideology. At the turn of the century, nations were divided into communist and liberal democratic camps, based on ideological divides. With the end of the cold war, and the collapse of communism, these divisions have become redundant. Yet it is within the paradigms of the principles of socialism and democracy (which echo these concerns), that individuals seek their liberation, as do nations their prosperity and progress. The history of socialist thought, expressing the philosophy and principles in all its varieties is indeed a fascinating study.

The present book under review provides, in the authors' own words, "a detailed and critical account of the dominant schools and theories of

socialism." In the substantive part of the book, Mukherjee and Ramaswamy structure socialist thought into sections dealing with precursors (Thomas More and Harrington); early socialists, (utopianists—Saint Simon, Robert Owen, and Charles Fourier); 19th century Marxists (K. Marx, F. Engels and A. Bebel); socialist democratic (Lassalle, Bernstein, and Cole); and 20th century Marxists (Kautsky, Plekhenov, Lenin Luxemburg, Trotsky, Bukharin, Gramsci, and Marcuse). The book closes with a discussion of the ideas of W. Morris, G. Sorrel and Mao Zedong as 'unconventional Marxists'. Notable in their absence are the writings of L. Althusser, N. Polountzas, and Habermas, whose views deserved more than a passing reference in the text.

In their introduction, the authors trace the development of socialism from its beginnings to contemporary

developments in the post-communist phase and analyze the varied controversies within socialism. As someone once said there is no such thing as 'socialism'; there are rather 'socialisms' which often overlap other ideologies.

Common to all strands of socialism, point out the authors, is a commitment to equality, human solidarity, non-exploitative relationships and socialized humanity.

The controversy over reform or revolution divided socialists into two broad subsets. Revolution and the imminent collapse of communism was the moot point in Marxian revolutionary socialism. The central themes of post war ideology of social democracy were socialization of the means of production, planning, social citizenship and equality. The 1970s proved a watershed in the history of socialism. Communism—Marxist, Leninist-Stalinist, and

- A History of Socialist Thought
- From the Precursors to the Present
- Subrata Mukherjee and Sushila Ramaswamy
- Sage Publications, 2000, Rs.350