Left from his birth to death in 1960, Harold J. Laski was concerned mainly with the liberty and rights of the individual. As a progressive intellectual he insisted more on an experimental political philosophy based on a dynamic theory of state functions and a social psychology of the motives and desires of men than on abstract principles of politics. He always remained in search of a new faith, and came under the various influences which made him change his political ideas from time to time. At the successive stages of his career we find him as an ardent proponent of some sort of individualistic federalism, marxian socialism and democratic trade unionism. His activities as a political philosopher, teacher, party leader, public speaker and confidential adviser to public men were so numerous that he found no time to revise his political writings and give them a consistent statement. Nevertheless the corner stone of his political philosophy was his faith in the individual. To establish this we must examine carefully his career.

Harold Laski, the second son of Nathan and Sarah Laski, was born in a Jewish community on June 30, 1893. This was the period when different ideologies, such as Utilitarianism, Fabian Socialism and Communism were spreading with a view to reforming the various prevalent conceptions regarding sovereignty, parliamentary democracy and economic
and political liberties of the individual. Laski, the product of such a period, imbibed its spirit fully. As a young boy he spent most of his time reading books on science and liberalism. They predisposed him to oppose all orthodox opinions and dogmas regarding the social and political institutions.

It is interesting to note that the political movements which impressed young Laski in his undergraduate days, and to which he constantly referred in his early articles, were the women's Suffrage Movement, trade-union movement in France and the alliance between Ulster and a section of the Conservative Party to sabotage the Liberals' Home Rule Legislation for Ireland. These movements of the pre-war period were rooted in a violent outburst against the spirit of Victorian Liberalism. In this period the belief in the gradual progress in the status of women and the respect for constitutional procedures were rejected by the more violent Suffragettes and the radical trade unionists. It seemed as if the orderliness and respectability of the nineteenth century had become such a strain on the feelings of a number of men that they were trying to destroy the liberal world in which they lived. It was at this period that Laski spent his formative years in school and college, and he became a rebel against such
an atmosphere. He felt the need to dedicate his life to find out a new world with a view to relieving the down-trodden common man from want, ignorance and misery that were noticed as the common feature of the Victorian era. He took part in Suffragette Movement and helped the strike of chainmakers by collecting money. At this time, though he remained content with constitutional agitation, yet the idea of revolution was agitating his mind. He wrote a short book with the title "The Chosen People" (which remains unpublished) in which he told that we should welcome the ideas of Darwin and Marx in order to get rid of traditional outlook that had become outworn. Further, he maintained that social truth could only be discovered in an atmosphere of freedom.

Laski's first book was a translation of Leon Duguit's book Law in the Modern State on political pluralism from French. At the same time, he was greatly influenced by the writings of the late F.W. Maitland while studying history at Oxford. Ernest Barker was mainly responsible for it. Barker, his tutor, himself being interested in the academic revolt against Hegelism, encouraged him in his study of mediaeval lawyers. Gierke, Maitland and Figgis had justified the theory of corporate personality as applied to religious and industrial organizations in society. Laski drew inspiration from them, and his earlier writings were
devoted to the task of supporting the theory of corporate personality of religious bodies and guilds which were able to maintain their rights and independence against the state in the Middle Ages. He argued that trade unions should have a similar position in the modern society. But his theory of groups was different from that of Figgis, Gierke and Maitland. It was purely individualistic in essence, because he maintained it for safeguarding individual liberty. For this purpose he also made a special study of the legal system which protects the rights of associations and free speech in America.

Laski maintained this attitude towards the problem of liberty till the publication of Grammar of politics. After this, his attitude underwent some change. There was a great economic crisis in Europe which he ascribed to the inefficient capitalist system. He felt that even the British and American democracies were unable to tackle their economic problems of this period. As opposed to the failure of economic policies in capitalist democracies, the Soviet Union had made great economic progress and had directed its efforts towards the equalization of wealth and the establishment of economic security for all the citizens. The comparison of the British and the American systems with that of the Soviet Union convinced him that the democratization of state power was not the real solution of the problem,
and that individual liberty was merely a function of economic equality. Consequently, his faith in some sort of humanistic socialism, mainly rooted in his sense of social justice, which he had maintained from his young age became stronger. He himself had admitted that "I have, I suppose, been a socialist in some degree ever since the last years of my school days."¹ He also had recorded the influence exerted upon him while he was a schoolboy in Manchester by "a great schoolmaster who made us feel the sickness of an acquisitive society", by the books he had read, especially those of the Webbs, and by a speech in which Keir Hardie had described the labour struggles of the Scottish miners. He became sick of the old economic structure of society and gradually started looking towards marxism for an answer. While living under the influence of marxism, he called his early pluralism a half-way house to the real solution of the problem. For him "the pluralist attitude to the state and law was a stage on the road to an acceptance of the Marxian attitude to them."² His argument was that as the state was an "executive instrument" of the economically

dominant group in society, it was necessary to destroy first of all the class-structure of society before limiting the powers of the state. In a classless society, he thought, the purpose and the function of the state would automatically change. With this also changed his definition of individual liberty as found in the first edition of Grammar of Politics (1925). He asserted that liberty was not so much a positive thing as it was a negative condition. As such, the strong state action was essential both to protect the individual liberty and change the old economic structure of society.

Although Laski approved of a strong state in the period of transition from capitalism to socialism, he was never in favour of the method which Russia had applied in replacing her old economic system by a new marxist system. He also did not welcome the dictatorship in the Soviet Russia and the marxian identification of state with society. His fundamental belief was in the freedom of the mind, and he regarded society as federal in character. He always insisted upon the democratization of the state power. The groups, he said, must enjoy necessary freedom in their own sphere of action, and they should participate in the process of administration. Without this the state would become coercive, and the liberty of the individual would remain in danger. He firmly argued that the benefits of civil liberties could
not be sacrificed for the sake of a strong state for creating a new socialist state. That is why he shifted to his earlier idea of federal authority with full fervour when the economic depression in Europe was over after World War II. He again pleaded for the rights of the trade unions as strongly as he did in his earlier career and considered the state as some sort of democratic commonwealth in which the function of the government would be to organize and regulate the activities of various groups in society. The state, he concluded, is a means to attain social justice, and that it should work as an instrument of realising the multitudinous aims of society.

From the above analysis of Laski's career it can be stated that he was mainly concerned with the understanding of the problems of individual liberty in relation to the complexities of society and the restraining character of state authority. He did not discuss the claims of individual liberty, the nature of society and the character of state authority separately from an academic point of view. On the contrary, as a political philosopher he viewed them as the most urgent, practical and interconnected problems of the modern age. He sought to reconcile their claims within the frame-work of actual experiences rather than abstract principles.

He defined liberty in its both positive and
negative aspects. For its realization if, on the one hand, certain rights are deemed necessary which the state is to recognize, then, on the other, the state has to assure economic security to the individual. As such, liberty depends as much on one's own action as it depends upon the state action. Further, Laski argued that liberty could be really enjoyed by the individual in the company of his fellow-beings in society. A cast-away also enjoys liberty outside society, but that liberty is not worth its name. Thus he related the question of individual liberty to that of society and the state.

In the same way, Laski defined the authority of the state in view of its purpose in a federal society. As the demands of society change, the purpose of the state would also change. The state has no inherent right to superior authority over other voluntary groups. Its authority is to be determined by its purpose and achievements in society. It cannot coerce the individual and the voluntary groups. On the other hand, what it does, is to adjust its functions to the demands of the people in a complex society. Thus he regarded its authority as limited, and he was in favour of giving rights to the individuals and their voluntary groups to participate in the work of the government. He encouraged trade union activities very much during his last career and tried to limit the state power, as far as possible, by the rights.
of the individuals and their groups.

In this thesis I shall examine in detail Laski's views on individual liberty, federal society and the authority of the state, each in a separate chapter. In conclusion, I shall maintain that although his contribution was not significant as a political theorist, he achieved a distinction as a political philosopher, and his political philosophy recognised the changing functions of the state. Throughout the thesis I shall endeavour to show that in spite of shifts in his political ideas there is a logical consistency in them, and that he presented a well-argued thesis on individual liberty.