

BHIC - 113

HISTORY OF INDIA VIII

(c. 1857 - 1950)



“शिक्षा मानव को बन्धनों से मुक्त करती है और आज के युग में तो यह लोकतन्त्र की भावना का आधार भी है। जन्म तथा अन्य कारणों से उत्पन्न जाति एवं वर्गगत विषमताओं को दूर करते हुए मनुष्य को इन सबसे ऊपर उठाती है।”

— इन्दिरा गाँधी



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“Education is a liberating force, and in our age it is also a democratising force, cutting across the barriers of caste and class, smoothing out inequalities imposed by birth and other circumstances.”

— Indira Gandhi

History of India VIII

(C. 1857 - 1950)

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COURSE STRUCTURE

S. No.	UNITS	Page No.
Unit 1:	Effects of Imperialism	9
Unit 2:	Social and Religious Reforms in Nineteenth-century India	22
Unit 3:	The Non-Brahman Movements in Western and Southern India	31
Unit 4:	Formation of Indian National Congress	45
Unit 5:	Moderates and Extremists	61
Unit 6:	The Swadeshi Movement	75
Unit 7:	Non-cooperation and Khilafat Movements: 1919-1922	90
Unit 8:	Civil Disobedience Movement: 1930-34	103
Unit 9:	The Revolutionaries	116
Unit 10:	Constitutional Reforms	132
Unit 11:	Quit India Movement	150
Unit 12:	Azad Hind Fauj (Indian National Army)	161
Unit 13:	Popular Struggles in the Princely States	175
Unit 14:	Mahatma Gandhi – His Perspectives and Methods	190
Unit 15:	Nationalism and Culture: Nationalist Literature	207
Unit 16:	Left-wing Movements	221
Unit 17:	Growth of Trade Union and Peasant Movements	235
Unit 18:	The Capitalist Class and the Freedom Struggle	248
Unit 19:	Towards Independence: 1945-1947	259
Unit 20:	Communalism and the Partition of India	279
Unit 21:	Emergence of Independent India: The Establishment of Democratic Polity	291

COURSE INTRODUCTION

This course covers the period after the Revolt of 1857 up to the attainment of freedom in 1947 and the establishment of Indian Republic in 1950. It outlines the process of the consolidation of the British rule and its economic impact on India. The socio-religious reform movements and the subsequent emergence and growth of nationalism in India are discussed here in detail. It focuses on the nationalist movement undertaken to end the colonial rule. It describes the formation and development of the Indian National Congress, the main organization which led the pan-Indian national movement. The various movements launched under the inspirational leadership of Mahatma Gandhi are also discussed in detail. The course also takes into account various ideological trends which contested but also strengthened the mainstream of national movement. Finally, the establishment of the independent Indian state as a democratic republic is also discussed. This course has 21 Units to cover this entire spectrum of political and ideological developments during the late colonial period.

The decades after the end of the Revolt witnessed the consolidation of the British colonial rule in India on the one hand, and the rise of nationalist consciousness among the Indians on the other. The primary motive of the British in India was to take advantage of the economic resources of the country. The British rulers created an elaborate system to use the Indian economy for their advantage while claiming to benefit the Indians. This led to the development of two contrasting viewpoints on the effects of imperialism. **Unit 1** takes this debate into account. It also discusses the various effects of colonial rule on Indian economy and the Indian people.

In **Unit 2**, the socio-religious reform movements in nineteenth-century India has been discussed. We take into account the various strands of such movements and the different ideologies underlying them. In **Unit 3**, we have focused on another form of social reform movement, which is also known as the non-Brahman movement. It was mostly prominent in Maharashtra and South India, particularly Tamil Nadu. In these two regions, there emerged ideological protest movements which radically questioned the traditional hierarchy and sought to correct it in the direction of an egalitarian society. We also discuss the similarities and differences between these movements.

Unit 4 takes up political processes which resulted in the formation of the Indian National Congress which remained the most important organization of nationalist movement during the colonial period. It discusses the role of the earlier political organizations, Indian press, art and literature, and the educated Indians in the making of an all-India nationalist organization. It also discusses the controversies surrounding the foundation of the Congress.

From here onwards, we arrive in the mainstream of the nationalist struggle to free India from colonial subjugation. **Unit 5** is concerned with the role of the nationalist intellectuals known as the 'Moderates' and 'Extremists' in shaping the course of the nationalist movement. It is clear that both these trends, despite their differences and conflicts, contributed a lot in the growth of the nationalist movement. In **Unit 6**, the famous 'Swadeshi Movement' has been discussed in detail. The vengeful partition of Bengal by Curzon in

1905 resulted in a huge protest movement in Bengal whose reverberations were felt all over India and several of its legacies were retained in future struggles against colonial rule. One important result of this movement was the beginning of organized revolutionary nationalism with great impact on the minds of Indian youth.

Unit 7 focuses on the beginning of the Gandhian phase of great mass movements. The Non-cooperation Movement, along with the Khilafat Movement, resulted in the largest mobilization of Indians against British colonial rule. It shook the foundations of British imperialism which resorted to severe repressive measures to contain the movement. The people's reaction to government repression led to violence which forced Gandhi to withdraw the movement causing disappointment among his followers. This Unit looks at all these aspects of this great movement.

The mass nationalist movement attained even greater heights about a decade later with the Civil Disobedience Movement which witnessed even greater participation of Indians from all over the country. The most remarkable feature of this movement was the large participation of women in the movement. A lot of women volunteers were also imprisoned by the colonial government. In terms of both covered area and participation, the Civil Disobedience Movement was truly pan-Indian. The **Unit 8** deals with this movement in detail.

Unit 9 focuses on the revolutionary trends within the broader nationalist movement since the beginning. The organized revolutionary streams such as the Ghadar group, the HRA and the HSRA have been paid more attention to. Their ideologies and activities are discussed in detail. The revolutionary nationalist trends provided the nationalist movement with another kind of enthusiasm and fervour which both differed from and complemented the mainstream non-violent movement with mass participation.

The pressure exerted by the nationalist movements and the need of the colonial regime to accommodate the growing representative aspirations of the Indian led to a series of constitutional reforms. **Unit 10** traces the history of constitutional reforms since 1892 till the Government of India Act of 1935 which provided larger access for the Indians to the administrative positions.

However, the restricted nature of Indian representation in the colonial power structure as well as the unilateral decision of the British government to drag India into the Second World War without the consent of its leaders led to the resignation of the Congress ministries in most of the provinces. Finally, it led to the great Quit India Movement which involved a large number of people in various kinds of anti-government activities including declaration of freedom in a few areas. This movement was crushed by the British armed forces but it made a huge impression on the minds of the people. This whole process has been discussed in **Unit 11**.

A related development of nationalist upsurge against British rule during the Second World War was the formation of Indian National Army, also known as Azad Hind Fauj, led by legendary Subhas Chandra Bose. **Unit 12** discusses in detail the multiple attempts to form national armies to lead a rebellion against the British in India in order to free the country. Its

culmination in the formation of the Azad Hind Fauj in Southeast Asia under Subhas Bose, popularly known as Netaji, is the main subject of discussion in this Unit. The activities of Netaji and the Azad Hind Fauj in the campaign against British imperialism is described in this Unit and it also takes into account the popular upsurge at the time of the trial of the INA soldiers and officers in India.

Unit 13 deals with the popular struggles for democratization and nationalization in the princely states, particularly with reference to Rajkot and Hyderabad.

Unit 14 discusses the Gandhian ideology and methods of struggle as ingrained in Satyagraha. **Unit 15** focuses on the process of nation-making through the medium of literature.

Unit 16 deals with the left-wing movements in India during the colonial period. It discusses the Communist as well as the Socialist parties. Whereas the Communists mostly remained outside the Congress and were critical towards the nature of the nationalist movement led by the Congress, the Socialists were a part of the Congress and deeply involved in the nationalist struggle particularly during the 1930s and 1940s. **Unit 17** is concerned with the working class and trade union movements and its relationship with the nationalist movement. **Unit 18** focuses on the relationship of the capitalist class with the nationalist movement in general and the Congress in particular.

Unit 19 discusses the various processes, both peaceful negotiations and popular upsurges, which were responsible for the freedom of India. It focuses on the period following the Quit India Movement, the INA, and the end of the World War II. **Unit 20** is also concerned with this period dealing with the reverse side of freedom, which was partition of the country. The intensified communalism, particularly of the Muslim League, led to a division of the country along religious lines with terrible consequences. Lakhs of people were killed, abducted, and migrated as a result of partition which left a permanent scar on the polity and the psyche of the people of the subcontinent.

Unit 21 finally deals with the post-independence period in which Indian polity was constituted along constitutional and democratic lines. India emerged as a liberal democracy based on strong constitutional guarantees which balance between a centralized government and federalism.

Through all these Units, this course aims to provide a broad picture of modern India which includes the colonialism, nationalist movements, and attainment of freedom.

UNIT 1: EFFECTS OF IMPERIALISM*

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Theories of Colonialism
 - 1.2.1 European Views
 - 1.2.2 Indian Nationalist Views
- 1.3 Effects of Colonialism
 - 1.3.1 De-industrialization
 - 1.3.2 Famines in Colonial India
 - 1.3.3 Commercialization of Agriculture
 - 1.3.4 Impact of Commercialization on Rural Society
- 1.4 Modern Industry and Indian Capitalist Class
- 1.5 The Colonial State
- 1.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.7 Key Words
- 1.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

1.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit strives to explain the impact of Colonialism on Indian society in detail and spell out the economic, social and political effects of the British colonial rule in India. This Unit shows that the colonial state was a serviceable instrument not so much for the modernization of Indian economy and society as for maintaining the logic of colonial state. After reading this Unit, you will be able to learn:

- the various theories of colonialism, both European as well as those formulated by Indian nationalists,
- the impact of colonialism on Indian economy in terms of de-industrialization and commercialization of agriculture,
- how modern industry emerged in India and the role of capitalist class, and
- some of the political aspects of the colonial process.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the nature of colonialism and its economic, social and political impact on India, it is necessary to comprehend colonialism in a world perspective. If we look at India alone we shall fail to understand the structural logic of imperialism and a good deal of what happened might appear to be due to the “bad policies” or, from another point of view, “good policies” of certain individual figures among the British rulers and policy

* Adopted from Unit 2 of EHI-01.

framers in India. A great deal of historical criticism in the past has been done in these terms; how a misguided Governor General or a bad administrator or a negligent public opinion in England allowed or brought about bad things to happen to Indian People. The apologists for the empire have invariably repeated the same discourse on good or bad policies. Even the nationalist leaders of the early days were not entirely free from this type of superficial thinking about the empire. They were able to build a convincing case against the exploitative and oppressive aspects of British rule; but lacked the broader perspective which enabled the later-day critics to locate colonialism within the context of capitalist imperialism or the capitalist world system.

1.2 THEORIES OF COLONIALISM

Let us examine the various theories propounded by Europeans as well as Indian nationalists in relation to colonialism.

1.2.1 European Views

Hobson, who was a conventional British Labour Party intellectual, propounded a theory of imperialism. His major work *Imperialism* was published in 1902. He thought that capitalism was bound to engender such expansionism or imperialism. Capitalist system, he pointed out, means a very uneven distribution of income. Large profits accumulate in the hands of the capitalist and the wages of the worker are low. Thus the low level of income of the large mass of workers under capitalism keeps the level of consumption low. What is the result? On account of “under-consumption” all the industrial products that are produced cannot be sold within the country, for there are no buyers. What can the capitalist do under these circumstances? He can try to sell the excess produce that cannot be marketed within the country to foreign markets. If all capitalist countries follow this policy there will be a struggle to capture markets and to secure captive markets in the form of colonies. Thus colonial expansion and conflict between capitalists of different countries, according to Hobson, were inevitable outcomes of the capitalist system. Further, due to the above constraint of “under-consumption”, the opportunities for investment for the capitalist become limited in the long run. At the same time profit keeps on accumulating and there are savings waiting to be invested. This is what Hobson called “over-saving” which again tended to push the capitalists’ towards colonial expansion: acquisition of colonies would make investment of surplus capital possible. To sum it up Hobson’s theories of under-consumption and over-saving suggested that colonial expansion or imperialism was a logical corollary of the capitalist system.

Eight years after the publication of Hobson’s work, Rudolf Hilferding published (1910) another important analysis, focusing attention on Finance Capitalism. A social Democrat, a brilliant economist, and for a while the Finance Minister of Germany, Hilferding had to seek refuge in Paris after the rise of Hitler and Nazism in Germany; when Paris was occupied by the German invading army Hilferding was captured and killed by them. This heroic leader of the Central European socialist movement is known for his penetrating analysis of the ultimate phase of capitalism. During this phase, capitalism as Hilferding pointed out, is dominated by huge banks and

financial interests who act in close association with monopolist industrial business houses. This analysis of finance capitalism was further extended by V.I. Lenin in his tract on *Imperialism, The Last Stage of Capitalism* (1916). In 1913 Rosa Luxemburg also published her work on accumulation of capital and the stages of imperialist expansionism. She was a socialist leader who migrated from Poland to Germany. Intellectually and politically she left a mark on the European socialist movement and continued to play an important part until she fell a victim to the Nazi onslaught.

1.2.2 Indian Nationalist Views

Independent of this critique of Imperialism developed by Hobson, Hilferding and Lenin, the nationalists in India, in their scholarly and polemical writings, offered a sharp and telling criticism of the colonial economic impact on India. Through the works of Dadabhai Naoroji, Mahadev Gobind Ranade, Romesh Chandra Dutt and many others who developed a school of Economic Nationalist analysis which highlighted some important features of India's experience under British Rule. The main components of this analysis were as follows:

- i) The concept of Drain of Wealth evolved in the writings of Naoroji and Dutt. To them it meant the transfer of wealth from the late 18th century in the form of plunder and loot and illicit gains by servants of the East India Company and in the form of Home charges, i.e. the expenses incurred by the Government of India in England out of its income derived mainly from the taxation of the Indian people and finally, in the form of interests and profits and capital transfer from India to England on private account. Nationalist critics pointed out how drain in these different forms impoverished this country and increased the economic gap between India and England which was the destination of the drain of wealth.
- ii) They also pointed out how British regime brought about the destruction of the small-scale industries of India, a process that in more recent times has been called de-industrialization.
- iii) The idea of Free Trade and **laissez faire**, nationalists contended, led to a tariff and industrial policy which stifled the possibilities of growth of industries in British India. Consequently, India became "the agricultural farm" of industrial England, i.e. a source of raw materials and food-grains, dependent totally on industrial supplies from England.
- iv) The rate of taxation of agriculture was also criticised by R.C. Dutt who felt that the burden of land revenue was excessive in areas which were subjected to periodical temporary settlements. This, in his opinion, was the cause of frequent recurrence of famines in British India. Wealth of the countryside was drained away through the revenue collection machinery, making the economic viability of farming so precarious that the farmer could not withstand failure of rain and other natural disasters.
- v) Finally, an important part of the nationalist analysis of British economic policy in India was their criticism of government expenditure on the

army, the police and other apparatus of government. The expenditure was so excessive that developmental investments were neglected. For example, the low expenditure on irrigation works contrasted sharply with the generous expenditure on the British Indian army, the railways, etc.

We shall discuss the above issue later in detail. For the present, it may, however, be noted that most of the criticisms voiced by these two schools, the European Socialists as well as the Indian Nationalists, relate to the phases of colonialism that correspond to the stage of Industrial Capitalism and Finance Capitalism in Europe. Further, one may note that the Indian Nationalists' critique is naturally directed towards features characterising 'Formal imperialism', i.e. imperialism as witnessed in India under formal political subjugation of the colony under British Imperial power. The European Socialists like Hobson, Hilferding, etc. addressed themselves on the other hand, to a study of imperialism in a more general way, also taking into account 'informal imperialism' where political subjugation of the colony might not have occurred but economic colonialism characterised metropolitan colonial relations (e.g. in the case of China or the Latin American countries). Finally, we may also note that unlike the Indian Nationalists' approach developed by Naoroji, Ranade, R.C. Dutt etc., the Hobsonian or Leninist approach linked colonialism to the world system of capitalism. Colonial exploitation, to Hobson and others, was a natural systemic product of capitalism as it evolved in Europe, not merely an aberration caused by 'wrong policies' in Europe. On the whole the critique of imperialism offered by the Indian Nationalists was one of the most powerful instruments of building national consciousness among a subject people.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Read the following statements and mark (✓) or wrong (✗).
 - i) According to Hobson "under consumption" and "over consumption" led to colonial expansion.
 - ii) Hilferding and Rosa Luxemburg pointed out the positive aspects of colonialism.
 - iii) European theorists linked imperialism with the structure of capitalism.
 - iv) The early nationalists in their views were followers of the European scholars.
- 2) Write about the contribution of early nationalist leaders towards an understanding of colonialism.
- 3) What do you understand by the terms 'formal imperialism' and 'informal imperialism'?

1.3 EFFECTS OF COLONIALISM

But how did these stages affect the Indian economy? The artisan, peasant, worker and merchant practically all sections of the Indian society were affected by colonial policies. In this section we shall deal with the economic impact of colonialism.

1.3.1 De-industrialization

The destruction of traditional Indian industries was one of the earliest consequences of colonialism to be noticed and documented in this country. While it was evidently connected with the growth of modern factory industry in England, the beginning of the process of destruction of Indian cottage industries lay further back, in the 18th century, when the products of Indian industries were still prized as valuable items of commerce. In that early stage of mercantile capitalism the source of profit of the East Indian Company was the difference between the cost prices in India and the sale prices in England of the Indian Industrial products like cotton and silk textiles. This price difference, i.e. the profit rates of the English East India Company, could be increased if the Indian cost price at which East Indian Company purchased goods from the Indian artisans, could be lowered. So long as there was a competitive market in India, that is, so long as the English East Indian Company was competing in the Indian market, with other East India Companies of the French or the Dutch and with other merchants of Indian and Asian origin, the Indian artisans were in a good bargaining position. But in the last decades of the eighteenth century the British gradually eliminated most of their competitors, in particular the French and the Dutch. Moreover, by virtue of their military power and, in some regions (e.g. Bengal from 1765), their political and administrative position, the British established a hegemony which allowed them to become monopolists in the market.

The English Company's purchase together with the purchases of the servants of that company in their private capacity accounted for a very large portion of the marketed textiles of superior quality in Bengal. As we all know, a monopolist can influence the market to his own advantage. In the last three decades of the eighteenth century this was the advantage which enabled the English traders to reduce the prices paid to the native artisans in this country and thus to reap high profits from sale in the European market. This excessive exploitation of Indian artisans weakened the very basis of our handicraft industries by reducing the artisan to a low level of income. It also destroyed the possibility of accumulation of resources to invest in the industry and to improve its technology. As we know, accumulation of capital and a technological revolution occurred in England in the last decades of the eighteenth and early decades of the nineteenth century. This Industrial Revolution first of all wiped out the market for India's artisans in Europe, because the economies of large scale production in the new English factories made it impossible for artisanal products to compete with factory products. By the beginning of the 19th century the staple industrial exports, cotton textiles, began to decline and soon they ceased to be exported. Some other items, e.g. indigo and raw silk, continued to be exported-though from 1813 it was no longer the East India Company but private trade which became the agency for exports. Not only was the export market of the Indian artisans taken away by the foreign factories, but the home market began to be invaded by imported factory products.

Here we may pay attention to the debate that has taken place on the question of de industrialization in India in course of the 19th century. Romesh C. Dutt and Madan Mohan Malviya (in his note of dissent to the Indian Industrial Commission) used the statistics of import to prove their point.

They showed, for example, their import of Manchester cloth increased in value from 96 lakh sterling in 1860 to 27 crore sterling in 1900. Some recent authors, particularly Morris David Morris, argue that this evidence is not decisive; they argue that under Pax Britannica the population increased, the per capita income increased, the sale of cloth increased due to change in consumption habits, and thus it was possible for Indians to buy more foreign cloth, leaving the market for indigenous artisans unaffected. In short, Morris's argument is that the market expanded so that it was possible to accommodate both Manchester and Indian Weaver's produce. Manchester cloth, Morris maintained, did not displace indigenous weaver's cloth. This view of Morris is unacceptable because he does not produce any evidence to prove increase in population and per capita income during the 19th century. There is plenty of evidence put forward by recent economic historians like Sarda Raju for Madras, N.K. Sinha for Bengal, A.V. Raman Rao for Andhra, R.D. Choksey for Maharashtra and A.K. Bagchi for Bihar, etc. which lends support to the de industrialization thesis. The early nationalist economists did not have access to the sources and methods used by these recent economic historians but their conclusion regarding de-industrialization is confirmed by the findings of later researches. In the middle Gangetic region, according to Bagchi's estimate, the industrial decline can be measured with some accuracy: the weight of industry in the livelihood pattern of the people was reduced by half from 1809-13 to the census year 1901.

That the process of de-industrialization continued upto the last decade of the 19th century is established beyond question. Did the growth of new industrial activities in the last decade of the 19th century restore the balance? Daniel Thorner has put forward the controversial thesis that the census statistics available from 1881 do not suggest that de-industrialization was in progress from 1881 to 1931. At first sight, the census figures indicate that the male work-force in agriculture increased from 65% in 1881 to 72% in 1931, while the proportion in industry declined from 16% in 1881 to 9% in 1931. But Thorner believes that this categorization was erroneous and one should lump together agricultural work force with another category, general Labour's and likewise aggregate industrial work-force with 'Trade'. If that is done, the picture looks different. The increase in the compounded categories appears to be far less in the primary sector (only about 2% growth between 1881 and 1931). Similarly the decline in industry and trade put together is also much less (only about 3% decline in 1881-1931). Further, Thorner dismisses the data on female labour force on the ground that the data collected were inaccurate in the opinion of census officials. In this way Thorner arrives at the conclusion that the 1881-1931 census does not show any evidence of substantial de-industrialization.

In criticism of Thorner, one obvious point is that the process of de-industrialization had already done the damage well before the census operations began. The first reliable all India census was that of 1881. This much Thorner is himself willing to concede.

Secondly, he is perhaps wrong in dismissing the figures-regarding employment of women. These figures for 1881-1931 show an increase in employment in Agriculture by 13% and a decline in Industrial employment by 9%. In the Indian social context the employment of women is quite

significant, and it is likely that in case of decline in artisan's business the women of the household gave up industrial work (to take up household chores or agricultural labour) earlier than menfolk in the artisan families. Above all, there is the question: how reliable is the sectoral distribution of work-force as an index of industrialization or its reverse? The crucial index is the per capita productivity and the value of what is produced as a proportion of national produce, i.e. ratio to national income. J. Krishnamurthy has, on this ground cast doubts upon the use of demographic data, as in Thomer's argument, to answer the question, was there de-industrialization?

Lastly, we may note that there was also an important trend of imperialist apologists which frankly admitted the de-industrialization of India as a fact but argued that it was good for both India and Britain that the colony specialised in the production of agricultural goods. As late as 1911 John Maynard Keynes wrote that industrialising India was neither possible nor desirable. India could, in fact, attain greater prosperity by exchanging agricultural products for all the industrial goods that may be needed through imports from the West. This view goes back to the classical theory of comparative advantage and international division of labour, assigning to colonies like India the role of the agricultural farm of the industrialised imperial country. One of the real achievements of the nationalist economists was to defeat this view and to establish in the political agenda of the freedom struggle the economic programme of India's industrialization.

1.3.2 Famines in Colonial India

If colonialism meant destruction of old industries did it mean the growth of agricultural production? The answer is probably negative on the whole. It is decidedly negative when we consider per capita and per acre productivity in food-grains from 1698 to 1947. As for the earlier fifty years, the repeated occurrence of current famines tell its own story. From the middle of the 19th century a number of famines devastated India.

According to official estimates in these famines the total loss of life was at least 1 crore and 52 lakhs, and the total number of famine-affected people was 39.7 crores. These vast numbers indicate periods of subsistence crisis. The immediate cause for this undoubtedly was droughts and crop failure but the roots of the crises lay in what was the "normal" rate of agrarian production. Stagnation in agricultural technology, failure of investment to raise yield per acre, the drain of the agriculturists' resources into the hands of the revenue intermediaries and money lenders and dealers in agricultural commodities were undoubtedly important contributing factors. The sparseness of government investments in irrigation and other developmental investments, and the rapid rise in population from 1920s were also responsible for creating the colonial agricultural 'normalcy'. A significant index of the normal situation in respect of food supply is the per capita availability of food-grains in India. We have three estimates in this regard for the period 1901 to 1943. In these years, according to George Blyn's estimate for British India, per capita food-grain availability declines from 0.23 ton to 0.16 ton. According to Shivasubramanian's estimate for the whole undivided India the decline was from 0.2 ton to 0.14 ton. According to Alan Heston, the decline was from 0.17 ton (1901) to 0.16 ton (1946).

Thus all the estimates indicate that the supply of food grains declined in the last half-century of British rule though they differ on the extent to which it occurred.

1.3.3 Commercialization of Agriculture

As we have already seen, the food-grain production did not improve, but this was not true of some so-called 'cash crops'. Both the total and per acre output of non-food grain crops increased, and this was largely due to increased demand and rising prices of these both in the external and the internal market. The most dramatic increase of this sort was the Cotton Boom of the early 1860s which merits our special attention.

The emancipation of the black slaves by Abraham Lincoln and the consequent Civil War in U.S.A. led to a massive short-fall in the world supply of cotton in 1860-64. This led to the increase in cotton prices, export of cotton from India, and the growth on cotton cultivating acreage in India. This Cotton Boom brought the Indian peasants in Cotton growing areas within the ambit of the world capitalist system. The important export houses of Bombay, the wholesale traders in the big cities, the brokers and other middlemen in cotton export trade, down to the level of the village **bania** who advanced credit to the peasant for cotton cultivation, all profited enormously from the Cotton Boom. This profit, as well as the profit from the commercial crops developed even earlier, viz. opium and indigo, contributed to the accumulation of capital in the hands of some Indian businessmen. More important was the fact that the Cotton Boom marked the recruitment of India as a supplier of agricultural commodities and raw material needed by the industrialised West. Thus it complemented the process of de-industrialization. The role of the colony specialising in agriculture and of the industrialised metropolitan country in the West were demarcated clearly in the contemporary theory of international division of labour. This was characteristic not only of India and England, but also of other colonies and metropolises in the stage of industrial capitalist imperialism.

The statistics of agricultural production indicate a substantial increase in non-food grains output while foodgrain production shows an opposite trend. The per annum increase in population in 1891-1947 was 0.67% while total food-grain production increased by only 0.11% in this period. The per acre production of food-grains decreased by 0.18% per annum. On the other hand the increased demand in the market and the rising prices of highly commercialised non-food grain crops increased by 0.86% per annum and their total output by 1.31% per annum. The non-food grain crops were primarily cotton and jute but also included tobacco, sugarcane, oilseeds etc.

1.3.4 Impact of Commercialization on Rural Society

Commercialization of agriculture paved the way for the generation of usury and merchant capital in rural society and widened the levels of differentiation among the peasantry. The common cultivator's dependence on the village **bania** for advance of credit for the marketing of his crop, for loans during lean seasons for subsistence increased as commercialization progressed. In the payment of land revenue also the money lender-cum-trader played an important role in supplying cash. Finally, the village **bania** was also

an agent for the penetration of the rural market by the imported industrial consumer goods, particularly Manchester cloth.

While some of the poorer peasants were raising crops for the market virtually hypothecated in advance to the money lender, the better-off section of the peasantry was relatively free. The latter could store their goods, and wait for better prices than what prevailed during the glut in the market after harvest. They could also cart their crops to markets in towns to obtain a better price than what the village **bania** or itinerant **dalal** offered. Furthermore, they could make their own decision as to which crop to grow while the poorest farmer was virtually forced to raise crops as demanded by the village **bania**. In some regions, the rich peasants themselves became money lenders to poorer peasants and thus the process of differentiation was accentuated.

In course of this differentiation process and the operation of money-trading capital, an increasing number of peasants began losing their land and becoming 'de-peasanted' landless labourers. It must, however, be noted that landless labourers had existed in the pre-colonial-period too (particularly in the south of India in substantial numbers on account of servitude of some castes). It is the economic process of depeasanting and the significantly larger number of landless agriculturists which emerge as the characteristic features of the colonial period.

According to estimates based on the 1931 census we get the following picture of social strata in village India. At the bottom of the pyramid were the landless agricultural labourers (including bonded labourers) accounting for 37.8% of agriculturists. The stratum above them were the farmers with very small holdings of below 5 acres (9%) and various types of tenants-at-will and share croppers (24.3%). The layer above consisted of the better-off section of farmers with land above 5 acres in size (about 25.3%). Finally at the narrow top of the pyramid were members of the rent receiving class, many of whom did not actually cultivate land themselves (3.6%). The condition of the bonded labourers was the worst: they worked all their life, and sometimes for generations, for the 'master'. Efforts to improve the condition of this class of people and the tenants will be discussed later (Unit 29, Block 15).

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) On what grounds do Morris David Morris and Danial Thomer attempt to disprove the hypothesis of de-industrialization? Do you agree with their views?
- 2) Read the following statements and mark right (✓) or wrong (x).
 - i) J. Krishnamurthy feels that the demographic data can answer the question of de-industrialization.
 - ii) **R.C. Dutt** argued that there was no de-industrialization in India.
 - iii) The frequent famines in the 19th Century cannot be explained by the under-production of the food crops.
 - iv) Commercialization of Agriculture meant a sudden increase in the cultivation of cash crops.

- 3) Write short notes on the following terms:
- A) Cotton Boom
 - B) International Division of Labour

1.4 MODERN INDUSTRY AND INDIAN CAPITALIST CLASS

The pattern of industrial capitalist imperialism included an agenda of action by the colonial state for promoting the development of an economic infrastructure for the exploitation of the natural resources and raw materials of the colony. We shall turn to that aspect very soon. Suffice it to say that these infrastructural developments. Particularly the railways and transport system, created conditions of development not only for foreign capital in some sectors (e.g. jute factories, coal mines, tea and coffee plantations) but also for indigenous capital. The latter 'extended industrial investment first in cotton textiles, in the teeth of the opposition of Manchester interests and the inimical tariff policy of the British Indian Government. From 1854 when the first Indian mill was set up in Bombay till the World War I the progress of Indian industrial capital was painfully slow and halting. It was the War and the inter-war period which saw the rapid development and industrial diversification of Indian Capital. This development was in part the story of struggle against foreign capitalist domination (most pronounced in eastern India). It also involved a struggle against British business interests which exercised powerful influence on policy-making in England and also against the unsympathetic British Indian Government. This would explain the emergence of alliance between the Indian capitalist class and the nationalist leadership who fully supported national capital.

Within a colonial context the growth of national capital was obviously subject to severe limitations. The potentials of colonial industrial development were exceedingly limited. From Shivasubramanian's estimates of national income it is clear how small was the extent of industrial growth even in the last fifty years of British rule. On the average the ratio of industrial sector's share to the Net Domestic Product was 12.7% in 1900-1904, 13.6% in 1915-19, and 16.7% in 1940-44. That India virtually remained where it was, predominantly agricultural, is clear from the ratio of income generated in the primary sector to the total NDP: 63.6% in 1900-04, 59.6% in 1915-19, 47.6% in 1940-44. The Tertiary Sector alone showed a striking increase in its share: 23.7% in 1900-1904 compared to 35.7% in 1940-44.

In common with many other colonial and industrially backward countries, India was characterised by stagnation in the level of national income. In the early years of British rule we have no index of national income. In the 1860's, according to Dadabhai Naoroji's calculation, the per capita income of India was Rs. 20 per annum. We have already seen how Naoroji and others nationalists identified the Drain of Wealth from India as one of the causes of this poverty in India. About this time, 1870 to be exact, the per capita income in England (Mitchell and Deane's estimate) was £ 24.4 sterling. This was equivalent to Rs. 568.

The more recent estimates of Shivasubramanian suggest that in the last half century of British rule per capita income in India remained almost stagnant.

In 1900-04 it was Rs. 52, in 1915-19 it was Rs. 57.3 and in 1940-44 it was Rs. 56.6 (at constant price of 1938-39). This gives us an idea of the degree of underdevelopment and stagnation from which colonial India suffered.

1.5 THE COLONIAL STATE

The colonial state was obviously not devised for fashioning the economy of India in the manner demanded by British imperial interests; but it was the most important instrument in serving that purpose. The professed political ideology of late 19th and early 20th century British rulers has been described as '**laissez faire**' plus policeman. But departures from non-interventionism were frequent, and fundamental. So far as a colony like India was concerned the theory was that the country needed to be prepared through active intervention for making the 'civilizing mission' of the West effective.

Indian railways guaranteed interest to the European, mainly British, investors irrespective of profit and loss. This was evidently beneficial to British business interests. On the other hand **laissez faire** was insisted upon in the sphere of tariff policy: refusal to put any significant tax burden on imported Manchester cloth for instance, was good for British interests and bad for all Indian mill owners. **Again laissez faire** was invoked to absolve the government from any intervention in trade in food-grains (including export of grains) during the famines in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The political structure in Britain ensured that important business interests could influence policy-making in India through Parliament, the Secretary of State for India who was a member of British Cabinet, the Governor-General, and the higher bureaucracy in India. Till World War-I in particular this influence was clearly visible. However, the necessity, of making some compromise between 'Home' pressures and India's needs increasingly 'moderated the policies of the British Indian Government in the later period. The viability of rule over India, financial stability of the government, need to strike compromises with Indian capitalists and other important interests and nationalist pressures were some of the factors that modified British policies from the 1920s onwards. Subject to such qualifications one can say that the colonial state was a serviceable instrument not so much for the 'modernization' of Indian economy and society as for the colonialization of India from the middle of the 19th century to 1947.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) How would you explain the alliance between the Indian capitalist class and the nationalist leadership?
- 2) Write about the nature of the colonial state.

1.6 LET US SUM UP

The nature of colonial rule and its impact on the colony have been analysed differently by different scholars. The Indian nationalist scholars like Dadabhai Naoroji, M.G. Ranade and R.C. Dutt spoke mainly about the Indian context and pointed out the impact of the British rule on the Indian economy. They emphasised the drain of wealth and de-industrialization as the ill-effects of

the British rule. The European scholars on the other hand, made a general survey of colonialism, the world over and linked it up organically with the structure of capitalism. Scholars like Hobson, Hilferding, Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin considerably enhanced our understanding of colonialism.

Other aspects of colonialism in India were the commercialization of agriculture and a slow and uneven pace of industrialization. Indian economic advance was geared towards the requirements of colonialism and the colonial State played an active role in shaping the Indian economy so as to serve the imperial interests. It was precisely because of the unfavourable British policies towards the Indian business interests that led to a confrontation between the colonial state and the Indian business groups, resulting in the latter joining the Indian National Movement.

1.7 KEY WORDS

Dalal: Middleman.

De-peasanting: The process of land holding peasants losing their land and becoming agricultural labourers.

Differentiation: Break-up of the peasantry into classes as a result of certain sections prospering at the expense of others within the same class.

Demographic Data: Figures regarding population.

Imperialist Apologists: Scholars with a softer attitude towards imperialism. They underplayed the exploitative aspect of imperialism and tried to absolve it from any responsibility for the economic degeneration of India.

‘Laissez Faire’: Non-interventionism, or a policy of no intervention into the economic process of the country. The phrase plus policemen refer to the idea of a state responsible mainly for law and order, and refraining from economic intervention.

Net Domestic Product (NDP): Cumulative National Product from industry, agriculture and the service sector.

Output: Total volume of production.

Per Acre Production: Production divided by each acre of land under the plough.

Per Capita Income: Net National Income divided by population.

Per Capita Production: The rate of production after being divided by total population.

Primary Sector: Agriculture, fishery, animal husbandry and forest-produce.

Productivity: Producing capacity.

Share Croppers: A class of agriculturists who cultivated and managed other peoples' land and shared the crop, in return.

Tenants-at-will: The class of old peasant proprietors, now turned into tenants on the land of newly created Samindars who could now evict the former at their will for failing to pay the rent.

Tertiary Sector: Service Sector including trade and transport.

Village Bania: Class of rural money lenders who also sometimes acted as intermediaries between the cultivators and the market.

Effects of Imperialism

1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) (i) ✓ (ii) ✗ (iii) ✓ (iv) ✗
- 2) Read Sub-section 1.2.2
- 3) Find out from Sub-section 1.2.2

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Read Sub-section 1.3.1 carefully and write the answer in your own language.
- 2) (i) ✓ (ii) ✗ (iii) ✗ (iv) ✓
- 3) See Sub-section 1.3.3

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Find out from Section 1.4
- 2) Read Section 1.5 and write your own answer.

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UNIT 2: SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS REFORMS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY INDIA *

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 The Need for Reform
- 2.3 Reform Movements
- 2.4 Scope of Reforms
- 2.5 Methods of Reform
 - 2.5.1 Reform from Within
 - 2.5.2 Reform through Legislation
 - 2.5.3 Reform through Symbol of Change
 - 2.5.4 Reform through Social Work
- 2.6 Ideas
 - 2.6.1 Rationalism
 - 2.6.2 Religious Universalism
- 2.7 Significance
- 2.8 Weakness and Limitations
- 2.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.10 Key Words
- 2.11 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

2.0 OBJECTIVES

India in the 19th century witnessed a series of reform movements undertaken in various parts of the country. These movements were oriented toward a re-structuring of the Indian society along modern lines. This Unit presents a general and analytical view of these socioreligious reform movements. It also seeks to highlight the significance of these movements. Although it does not give a factual account of the ideas and activities of these movement and their leaders, it offers an analysis which would help you to understand these movements.

After reading this Unit, you will:

- learn why and how these reforms were initiated in India,
- understand who were the leading reformers and their ideas about the nature of the Indian society, and
- grasp the scope and methods of these reforms and highlight their shortcomings.

* Adopted from Unit 8 of EHI-01.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The conquest of India by the British during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries exposed some serious weaknesses and drawbacks of Indian social institutions. As a consequence several individuals and movements sought to bring about changes in the social and religious practices with a view to reforming and revitalizing the society. These efforts, collectively known as the Renaissance, were complex social phenomena. It is important to note that this phenomenon occurred when India was under the colonial domination of the British.

2.2 THE NEED FOR REFORM

An important question for discussion is about the forces which generated this awakening, in India. Was this a result of the impact of the West? Or was it only a response to the colonial intervention? Although both these questions are inter-related, it would be profitable to separate them for a clear understanding. Another dimension of this is related to the changes taking place in Indian society leading to the emergence of new classes. For this perspective, the socio-religious movements can be viewed as the expression of the social aspirations of the newly emerging middle class in colonial India.

The early historical writings on reform movements have traced their origin primarily to the impact of the West. One of the earliest books to be written on the subject by J.N. Farquhar (*Modern Religious Movements in India*, New York, 1924), held that:

The stimulating forces are almost exclusively Western, namely, English education and literature, Christianity, Oriental research, European science and philosophy, and the material elements of Western civilization

Several historians have repeated and further elaborated this view. Charles Heimsath, for instance, attributed not only ideas but also the methods of organization of socio-religious movements to Western inspiration.

The importance of Western impact on the regenerative process in the society in nineteenth century is undeniable. However, if we regard this entire process of reform as a manifestation of colonial benevolence and limit ourselves to viewing only its positive dimensions, we shall fail to do justice to the complex character of the phenomenon. Sushobhan Sarkar (in *Bengal Renaissance and Other Essays*, New Delhi, 1970) has drawn our attention to the fact that “foreign conquest and domination was bound to be a hindrance rather than a help to a subject people’s regeneration”. How colonial rule acted as a factor limiting the scope and dimension of nineteenth century regeneration needs consideration and forms an important part of any attempt to grasp its true essence.

The reform movements should be seen as a response to the challenge posed by the colonial intrusion. They were indeed important just as attempts to reform society but even more so as manifestations of the urge to contend with the new situation engendered by colonialism. In other words the socio-religious reform was not an end in itself, but was integral to the emerging anti-colonial consciousness.

Thus, what brought about the urge for reform was the need to rejuvenate the society and its institutions in the wake of the colonial conquest. This aspect of the reform movement, however, introduced an element of revivalism, a tendency to harp back on the Indian past and to defend Indian culture and civilization. Although this tended to impart a conservative and retrogressive character to these movements, they played an important role in creating cultural consciousness and confidence among the people.

2.3 REFORM MOVEMENTS

The earliest expression of reform was in Bengal, initiated by Rammohun Roy. He founded the Atmiya Sabha in 1814, which was the forerunner of Brahmo Samaj organized by him in 1829. The spirit of reform soon manifested itself in other parts of the country. The Paramahansa Mandali and Prarthana Samaj in Maharashtra and Arya Samaj in Punjab and other parts of north India were some of the prominent movements among the Hindus. There were several other regional and caste movements like Kayastha Sabha in U.P. and Sarin Sabha in Punjab. Among the backward castes too reformation struck roots. The Satya Shodhak Samaj in Maharashtra and Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Sabha in Kerala. The Ahmadiya and Aligarh movements, the Singh Sabha and the Rehnumai Mazdeyasana Sabha represented the spirit of reform among the Muslims, the Sikhs and the Parsees respectively.

The following features are evident from the above account:

- i) Each of these reform movements was confined, by and large to one region or the other. Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj did have branches in different parts of the country yet they were more popular in Bengal and Punjab respectively than anywhere else.
- ii) These movements were confined to particular religions or castes.
- iii) An additional feature of these movements was that they all emerged at different points of time in different parts of the country. For example in Bengal reform efforts were afoot at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but in Kerala they came up only towards the end of the nineteenth century. Despite this, there was considerable similarity in their aims and perspectives. All of them were concerned with the regeneration of society through social and educational reforms even if there were differences in their methods.

2.4 SCOPE OF REFORMS

The reform movements of the nineteenth century were not purely religious movements. They were socio-religious movements. The reformers like Rammohun Roy in Bengal, Gopal Hari Deshmukh (Lokhitavadi) in Maharashtra and Viresalingam in Andhra advocated religious reform for the sake of “Political advantage and social comfort”. The reform perspectives of the movements and their leaders were characterised by recognition of interconnection between religious and social issues. They attempted to make use of religious ideas to bring about changes in social institutions and practices. For example, Keshub Chandra Sen, an important Brahmo leader, interpreted the “unity of godhead and brotherhood of mankind” to eradicate caste distinctions in society.

The major social problems which came within the purview of the reform movements were:

- Emancipation of women in which sati, infanticide, child and widow marriage were taken up
- Removal of Casteism and untouchability
- Spread of education for bringing about enlightenment in society

In the religious sphere the main issues against which the reform movements were directed were as follows:

- Idolatry
- Polytheism
- Religious superstitions
- Exploitation by priests

2.5 METHODS OF REFORM

In the attempts to reform the socio-religious practices several methods were adopted. Four major trends out of these are as follows:

2.5.1 Reform from Within

The technique of reform from within was initiated by Rammohun Roy and followed throughout the nineteenth century. The advocates of this method believed that any reform in order to be effective had to emerge from within the society itself. As a result, the main thrust of their efforts was to create a sense of awareness among the people. They tried to do this by publishing tracts and organizing debates and discussions on various social problems. Rammohun's campaign against sati, Vidyasagar's pamphlets on widow marriage and B.M. Malabari's efforts to increase the age of consent are the examples of this.

2.5.2 Reform through Legislation

The second trend was represented by a faith in the efficacy of legislative intervention. The advocates of this method -- Keshub Chandra Sen in Bengal, Mahadev Govind Ranade in Maharashtra and Viresalingam in Andhra -- believed that reform efforts cannot really be effective unless supported by the state. Therefore, they appealed to the government to give legislative sanction for reforms like widow marriage, civil marriage and increase in the age of consent. They, however, failed to realize that the interest of the British government in social reform was linked with its own narrow politico-economic considerations and that it would intervene only if it did not adversely affect its own interests. Moreover, they also failed to realize that the role of the legislation as an instrument of change in a colonial society was limited because the lack of sanction of the people.

2.5.3 Reform through Symbol of Change

The third trend was an attempt to create symbols of change through non-conformist individual activity. This was limited to the 'Derozians' or 'Young Bengal' who represented a radical stream within the reform movement. The members of this group, prominent of them being Dakshinaranjan

Mukherjee, Ram Gopal Ghose and Krishna Mohan Banerji, stood for a rejection of tradition and revolt against accepted social norms. They were highly influenced by “the regenerating new thought from the West” and displayed an uncompromisingly rational attitude towards social problems. Ram Gopal Ghose expressed the rationalist stance of this group when he declared: “He who will not reason is a bigot, he who cannot is a fool and he who does not is a slave”. A major weakness of the method they adopted was that it failed to draw upon the cultural traditions of Indian society and hence the newly emerging middle class in Bengal found it too unorthodox to accept.

2.5.4 Reform through Social Work

The fourth trend was reform through social work as was evident in the activities of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Arya Samaj and Ramakrishna Mission. There was a clear recognition among them of the limitations of purely intellectual effort if undertaken without supportive social work. Vidyasagar, for instance, was not content with advocating widow remarriage through lectures and publication of tracts. Perhaps the greatest humanist India saw in modern times, he identified himself with the cause of widow marriage and spent his entire life, energy and money for this cause.

Despite that, all he was able to achieve was just a few widow marriages. Vidyasagar’s inability to achieve something substantial in practical terms was an indication of the limitations of social reform effort in colonial India.

The Arya Samaj and the Ramakrishna Mission also undertook social work through which they tried to disseminate ideas of reform and regeneration. Their limitation was an insufficient realization on their part that reform on the social and intellectual planes is inseparably linked with the overall character and structure of the society. Constraints of the existing structure would define the limits which no regenerative efforts on the social and cultural plane could exceed. As compared to the other reform movements, they depended less on the intervention of the colonial state and tried to develop the idea of social work as a creed.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Read the following statements and mark right (✓) or wrong (✗)
 - i) The reform movements of the 19th century were purely religious movements.
 - ii) Different reform movements emerged in different parts of the country at the same time.
 - iii) The initiative for these reform movements was taken in Bengal.
 - iv) Young Bengal represented the radical stream within the reform movement.
- 2) Name the various reform movements undertaken in various parts of the country in the 19th century.
- 3) What were the various methods of reform adopted by the 19th century reformers?

2.6 IDEAS

Two important ideas which influenced the leaders and movements were rationalism and religious universalism.

2.6.1 Rationalism

A rationalist critique of socio-religious reality generally characterized the nineteenth century reforms. The early Brahmo reformers and members of 'Young Bengal' had taken a highly rational attitude towards socio-religious issues. Akshay Kumar Dutt, who was an uncompromising rationalist, had argued that all natural and social phenomena could be analysed and understood by our intellect purely in terms of physical and mechanical processes. Faith was sought to be replaced by rationality and socio-religious practices were evaluated from the standpoint of social utility. In Brahmo Samaj the rationalist perspective led to the repudiation of the infallibility of the Vedas and in Aligarh movement founded by Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, to the reconciling of the teaching of Islam with the needs and requirements of modern age. Holding that religious tenets are not immutable, Sayyid Ahmad Khan emphasised the role of religion in the progress of society: if religion did not keep in step with the times and meet the demand of society, it would get fossilized as had happened in the case of Islam in India.

Although reformers drew upon scriptural sanction e.g., Rammohun's arguments for the abolition of sati and Vidyasagar's for widow marriage, social reforms were not always subjected to religious considerations. A rational and secular outlook was very much evident in positing an alternative to the then prevalent social practices. In advocating widow marriage and opposing polygamy and child marriage, Akshay Kumar was least concerned with searching for any religious sanction or finding out whether they existed in the past. His arguments were mainly based on their noticeable effects on society. Instead of depending on the scriptures, he cited medical opinion against child marriage.

Compared to other regions there was less dependence on religion in Maharashtra. To Gopal Hari Deshmukh whether social reforms had the sanction of religion was immaterial. If religion did not sanction them he advocated that religion itself be changed, as what was laid down in the scriptures need not necessarily be of contemporary relevance.

2.6.2 Religious Universalism

An important religious idea in the nineteenth century was universalism -- a belief in the unity of godhead and an emphasis on religions being essentially the same. Rammohun considered different religions as national embodiments of universal theism and he had initially conceived Brahmo Samaj as a universalist Church. He was a defender of the basic and universal principles of all religions -- monotheism of the Vedas and unitarianism of Christianity -- and at the same time he attacked the polytheism of Hinduism and trinitarianism of Christianity. Sayyid Ahmad Khan echoed almost the same idea: all prophets had the same din (faith) and every country and nation had different prophets. This perspective found clearer articulation in Keshub Chandra Sen who tried to synthesise the ideas of all major religions

in the breakaway Brahmo group, Nav Bidhan, that he had organized. “Our position is not that truths are to be found in all religions, but all established religions of the world are true.”

The universalist perspective was not a purely philosophic concern; it strongly influenced political and social outlook, until religious particularism gained ground in the second half of the nineteenth century. For instance, Rammohun considered Muslim lawyers to be more honest than their Hindu counterparts and Vidyasagar did not discriminate against the Muslim in his humanitarian activities. Even to the famous Bengali novelist Bankim Chandra Chatterji, who is credited with a Hindu outlook, dharma rather than specific religious affiliation was the criterion for determining the superiority of one individual over the other. This, however, does not imply that religious identity did not influence the social outlook of the people. In fact it did so very strongly. The reformer’s emphasis on universalism was an attempt to contend with this particularising pull. However, faced with the challenge of colonial culture and ideology, universalism, instead of providing the basis for the developing of a broader secular ethos, retreated into religious particularism.

2.7 SIGNIFICANCE

In the evolution of modern India the reform movements of the nineteenth century have made very significant contribution. They stood for the democratization of society, removal of superstition and abhorrent customs, spread of enlightenment and the development of a rational and modern outlook. Among the Muslims the Aligarh and Ahmadiya movements were the torch bearers of these ideas. Ahmadiya movement, which took a definite shape in 1890 due to the inspiration of Mirsa Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian, opposed jihad, advocated fraternal relations among the people and championed Western liberal education. The Aligarh movement tried to create a new social ethos among the Muslims by opposing polygamy and by advocating widow marriage. It stood for a liberal interpretation of the Quran and propagation of Western education.

The reform movements within the Hindu community attacked a number of social and religious evils. Polytheism and idolatry which negated the development of individuality or supernaturalism and the authority of religious leaders which induced the habit of conformity were subjected to strong criticism by these movements. The opposition to caste was not only on moral and ethical principles but also because it fostered social division. Anti-casteism existed only at a theoretical and limited level in early Brahmo movement, but movements like the Arya Samaj, Prarthana Samaj and Rama Krishna Mission became uncompromising critics of the caste system. More trenchant criticism of the caste system was made by movements which emerged among the lower castes. They unambiguously advocated the abolition of caste system, as evident from the movements initiated by Jotiba Phule and Sri Narayana Guru. The latter gave the call -- only one God and one caste for mankind.

The urge to improve the condition of women was not purely humanitarian; it was part of the quest to bring about the progress of society. Keshub Chandra Sen had voiced this concern: “no country on earth ever made sufficient progress in civilization whose females were sunk in ignorance”.

An attempt to change the then prevalent values of the society is evident in all these movements. In one way or the other, the attempt was to transform the hegemonic values of a feudal society and to introduce values characteristic of a bourgeois order.

2.8 WEAKNESSES AND LIMITATIONS

Though the nineteenth century reform movements aimed at ameliorating the social, educational and moral conditions and habits of the people of India in different parts of the country, they suffered from several weaknesses and limitations. They were primarily urban phenomena. With the exception of Arya Samaj, and the lower caste movements which had a broader influence, on the whole the reform movements were limited to upper castes and classes. For instance, the Brahmo Samaj in Bengal was concerned with the problems of the *bhadralok* and the Aligarh movement with those of the Muslim upper classes. The masses generally remained unaffected.

Another limitation lay in the reformers' perception of the nature of the British rule and its role toward India. They believed quite erroneously, that the British rule was God sent and would lead India to the path of modernity. Since their model of the desirable Indian society was like that of the 19th-century Britain, they felt that the British rule was necessary in order to make India Britain-like. Although they perceived the socio religious aspects of the Indian society very accurately, its political aspect, that of a basically exploitative British rule, was missed by the reformers.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Write five lines each on the following:
 - i) Rationalism
 - ii) Religious Universalism
- 2) Read the following statements carefully and mark right (✓) or wrong (✗).
 - i) Reformers' critique of the Indian socio-religious reality was not devoid of rationalism.
 - ii) Universalism managed to keep itself free from religious particularism.
 - iii) The Aligarh movement opposed polygamy.
 - iv) The impact of most reform movements was confined to upper caste and class.

2.9 LET US SUM UP

The 19th century reformers undertook a two-fold task. A critique of the Indian society was made. Institutions like caste, Sati, widowhood, child-marriage etc. came in for a sharp attack. Superstitions and religious obscurantism were condemned.

An attempt was made at the modernization of the Indian society and appeals were made to reason, rationalism and tolerance. The scope of their activities was not confined to religion only but included the society as a whole. Although they devised different methods and were also separated by

time, they showed a remarkable unity of perspective and objectives. They gave a vision of a prosperous modern India and subsequently this vision got incorporated in the Indian National Movement.

2.10 KEY WORDS

Revivalism: An attempt to revive and glorify the past.

Retrogressive: Backward.

Sati: The custom of the burning of a widow on the funeral pyre of her husband.

Idolatry: Practice of image worship.

Polytheism: Belief in many Gods.

Infanticide: The killing of an infant child.

Age of Consent Bill: A bill passed to increase the marriageable age of girls to 12 years. Bill was opposed by some Congressmen including Tilak.

Monotheism: Belief in one God a custom in some societies in which a woman can be married to more than one man at the same time.

Jihad: Religious war against the infidels.

Trinitarianism: Belief in the Christian Trinity i.e. the union of the father, son and holy spirit in one God.

2.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) i) ✗ ii) ✗ iii) ✓ iv) ✓
- 2) See Section 2.3
- 3) Read Section 2.5 and write your own answer

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Sub-sec. 2.6.1 and 2.6.2
- 2) i) ✓ ii) ✗ iii) ✓ iv) ✓

UNIT 3: THE NON-BRAHMAN MOVEMENTS IN WESTERN AND SOUTHERN INDIA *

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Social and Cultural Background
- 3.2 Cultural Struggle in Maharashtra
 - 3.2.1 Jotirao Govindrao Phule (1827-1890)
 - 3.2.2 Non-Brahman Movement in Early Twentieth Century
 - 3.2.3 Character of the Movement
- 3.3 Non-Brahman Movements in South India
 - 3.3.1 Self-Respect Movement in Tamil Nadu
 - 3.3.2 Justice Party and Non-Brahman Politics
 - 3.3.3 E.V. Ramasami Naicker (1879- 1973) and Self-Respect Movement
 - 3.3.4 Self-Respect Movement in Andhra
 - 3.3.5 Non-Brahman Movement in Kamataka
- 3.4 Comparative Analysis of the Movements
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.6 Key Words
- 3.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

3.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will learn about:

- the social and cultural struggle against the Western ideas as well as the traditional social order, in the west and south of India,
- the nature of the challenge these posed for both the British rule and traditional social order,
- the variations of the character and nature in these movements from region to region, and
- the basic limits of these movements.

3.1 SOCIAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

The social and cultural struggle in the nineteenth century was a resistance offered simultaneously against the ideological hegemony of the British colonial rule and the traditional, social and cultural order. With the formation of a “community of intellectuals”, at regional level and on the national place, there developed an awareness of the weaknesses of the traditional order, which could be combated with modern western ideas. The birth of modern ideas was however, influenced by the specific material, social and

* Adopted from Unit 20 of EHI-01.

political conditions under colonialism and in different parts of the country these ideas came up through different movements. The nineteenth century saw the emergence of a number of socio-cultural movements which sought to reform and regenerate Indian culture and traditional institutions.

Casteism, which produces inequality and social division, and inhuman practices like Sati and infanticide, were criticised with the help of new ideals of freedom, reason, toleration and human dignity. The English educated middle class were united in waging a series of social and cultural battles, against caste inequality and its hierarchy that went with it. They also worked for the general emancipation of women by taking up issues like widow marriage, female education and equal property rights. Rationalism and religious universalism were no doubt two important ideas used by the nineteenth century intellectuals which gave birth to radical social critiques like that of Jotiba Phule in Maharashtra. These intellectual struggles were informed by an ideology or a worldview which was broadly the same. Influenced as it was by western liberalism, this worldview resulted in the retreat of several ideas as is evident from the character of some recent radical social and cultural movements. This we shall see in the following sections.

3.2 CULTURAL STRUGGLE IN MAHARASHTRA

The traditional social stratification in Maharashtra was governed by *varnashrama dharma*, that is the division of society into an unequal hierarchical order comprising Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. The social interaction between different castes governed by this stratification was maintained by strict rules of pollution and purity. At the top, was the Brahman caste with many rights and privileges which maintained their social control over society by developing a religious ideology which gave legitimacy to many superstitions and inhuman practices. At the lowest end were the Ati-Shudras or untouchable outcastes deprived of education and all other rights.

In Maharashtra the Hindus were 74.8 per cent of the total population. According to the Census of 1881, the Kunbis or Marathas were the main community about 55.25 per cent of the total population. Kunbis were also economically powerful in rural society. Being a rich peasant class they controlled agricultural production. However, the influence of the traditional ideology and the institution of caste made them subservient to the Brahmans.

The Brahmans, on the other hand, exercised considerable influence over other castes due to their ritualistic power and monopoly over learning and knowledge. During the British period the Brahmans successfully adopted the new English education and dominated the colonial administration. The new intelligentsia therefore, came mostly from the already advanced Brahman caste, occupying strategic positions as officials, professors, lower bureaucrats, writers, editors or lawyers. This created apprehension among the non-Brahman castes.

It was this traditional social order which came under heavy fire both from The Christian missionaries and the nationalist intelligentsia that had imbibed western liberal ideas. We can divide the reform movements into two distinct strands. The early radical reforms like Jotirao Govindrao

Phule tried for a revolutionary reorganization of the traditional culture and society on the basis of the principles of equality and rationality. The later moderate reformers like Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842-1901), however, gave the argument of a return to the past traditions and culture with some modifications. It was the early radical tradition of Phule which gave birth to the non-Brahman movement in Maharashtra.

3.2.1 Jotirao Govindrao Phule (1827-1890)

Personality

Jotiba Phule was born into a Shudra Mali family in Poona in 1827. His father was a gardener or a flower merchant. Being a member of the oppressed Shudras, Phule could easily understand the problems of the Ati-Shudras, i.e., the untouchable Mahars and Mangs and identify himself with them. He received initial education in a mission school but had to discontinue it in 1833.

An incident in 1848 turned Phule into a social revolutionary. When he went to attend a Brahman friend's marriage, some orthodox Brahmans insulted him by calling him a Shudra and asked him to leave. This humiliation made Jotiba search for the roots of caste discrimination and the inhuman practice of untouchability.

Ideas on Society and Economy

In his quest for the truth, Phule read the *Vedas*, the *Manu Smriti*, the *Puranas*, the thought of Buddha, Baseshwar and Tirthankar and the medieval Bhakti saints extensively. He also acquainted himself with the western thought and the Christian and Islamic religions. Phule judged the whole culture and tradition through the spirit of rationality and equality. While the principle of equality called for a total rejection of caste system, authoritarian family structure and subordination of women, the principle of rationality demanded the removal of superstitions, ritualism and the traditional whole of cultural behaviour. This called for a complete rejection of the sacred Hindu texts and scriptures which sustained the iniquitous institutions. Like Dr. Ambedkar, Phule read the scriptures as he would read ordinary books, the object in the two cases being to find out the truth. He had radical views on social, religious, political and economic issues. Jotiba Phule considered the caste system as an antithesis of the principle of human equality. The existing caste system reserved a perpetual slavery for the Shudras, especially the untouchables. The untouchables were not allowed to walk on the streets during the sunrise lest their long shadows should pollute the houses of the Brahmans and other upper castes. This inhuman treatment of ati-Shudras by the upper castes and the denial of the common rights of humanity made Phule rebel against the caste system.

Interpreting the past history, Phule argued that the alien Aryans, after conquering the original inhabitants, imposed the unequal caste system. They then invented the supposed divine origin of caste divisions to perpetuate their exploitation of the natives branded as Shudras. Showing the egalitarian past of the united Shudras, he sought to raise the morale of the non-Brahmans and united them to revolt against the centuries-old inequality and social degradation.

Since Hindu religion justified and sanctioned caste system, Phule rejected it completely. He was an iconoclast through his satirical writings. Phule exposed the irrationalities in Hindu religion. He criticized idolatry, ritualism and priesthood, theory of Karma, rebirth and Heaven. For Phule, God is one and is impersonal. His religion rests on thirty-three principles of truth which include freedom and equality of men and women and dignity of labour.

“Brahmans hide Vedas from Shudras because they contain clues to understand how Aryas suppressed and enslaved them”, wrote Phule. Naturally he looked upon education of the masses as a liberating and revolutionary factor. In the words of Phule: No riches without vigour, no vigour without morality, no morality without knowledge, no knowledge without education. Unless ignorance and illiteracy of the masses are removed through education they would not rebel against their mental and physical slavery. He urged the British Government to impart compulsory primary education to the masses through teachers drawn from the cultivating classes.

Women and untouchables were the two worst sufferers in Hindu society. Phule argued that women's liberation was linked with the liberation of other classes in society. He regarded Brahmanism responsible for keeping women uneducated and slaves to men. He turned to break the hold of the authoritarian family structure. Equality between classes as also between men and women was pleaded by Phule. During marriages he asked the bridegroom to promise the right of education to his bride.

The pamphlet, *Isara* (warning), published in 1885 contains Phule's main ideas on economics of the agrarian classes. Aware of the problems of agricultural labourers and small peasant cultivators, Phule supported them in their struggles. For example, in Konkan, he stood by the tenant sharecroppers and criticized the Khots for exploiting them. Mostly concerned with the immediate issues like irrigation facilities, indebtedness, land alienation to moneylenders, burden of land revenue, etc., Phule however, failed to elaborate any coherent economic ideology.

Phule saw the British rule as an instrument in breaking the slavery of Shudras and hoped for a further revolutionary transformation of society under their rule. He was one of the first to introduce peasantry as a class in politics. He opposed the Indian National Congress, as, according to him, it failed to take up peasant problems. His concept of nation rested upon freedom and equality.

Activist

To propagate his ideas the means that Phule used were: publication of journals and magazines, pamphlets and books and the Marathi language both in speeches and writings. A journal, *Deen Bandhu*, in Marathi, was edited and published by Phule for disseminating his thought and exposing the oppressive character of the tradition. In his book, *Gulamgiri* (slavery), which appeared in 1873, Phule elaborated his conception of the historical roots of Shudras' slavery under previous Peshwa domination and compared it with the negro slavery in America. In *Setakaryancha Asuda* (The whipcord of the Peasantry), he elaborated on what the peasants can do about their misery and exploitation.

By 1870, the social reforms talked about by the liberals and those sponsored by Phule emerged on opposite lines. Unlike liberals, Phule's aim was a total reconstruction of the socio-cultural structure based on the principles of rationality, equality and humanism. The primary task of his struggle was to create an awareness of inequality in people's minds. Phule accomplished this by critically analysing and exposing the Brahmanical literature.

Phule also tried to translate his ideas into actual struggles. He started a girls' school in 1851 and one for Shudras. Widows were offered protection and shelter. A water tank was opened near his house, to provide drinking water for Shudras. To fight against conservative traditional ideology, Phule started the **Satya Shodhak Samaj** (Society for Finding Truth) in 1875. Phule also organized the poor tenants in Junnar against the extraction of heavy rents by landlord-moneylenders. This compelled government to impose ceiling on rentals.

Thus throughout his life, Phule took the side of down-trodden classes. He worked for the removal of unequal caste system and for the establishment of democratic justice. Jotiba Phule possessed an awareness of the relationship between caste inequalities and social subordination and material backwardness of Shudra castes. However, he failed to perceive the actual character of colonial rule and, like other liberals, believed in its historically progressive role. The type of social revolution envisaged by Phule could not be accomplished without radical changes in agrarian relations and without removing colonialism.

3.2.2 Non-Brahman Movement in the Early Twentieth Century

With the death of Jotiba Phule in 1890, his Satya Shodhak movement receded into the background. Even though the movement was revived by Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur (1874-1922), with the establishment of Satya Shodhak Samaj in July 1913 at Kolhapur, it acquired a narrow complexion. Shahu Maharaj no doubt furthered the cause of non-Brahman movement by starting educational institutions, hostels and scholarships for the students of the depressed classes. Between 1913 and 1922 he was also actively associated with several non-Brahman and Kshatriya caste conferences.

Under Shahu Maharaj, the non-Brahman movement passed into the hands of business and land-owning (feudal) upper caste non-Brahmans, who used it for their political gains. A major battle waged by Shahu Maharaj was for acquiring Kshatriya status within the Varnashrama Dharma for himself and his community. This was nothing but a deviation from Phule's ideology which left the lower Shudra castes to their social degradation and poverty.

After 1918, with Montague-Chelmsford reforms, Shahu Maharaj, along with the Justice Party in Madras, used the movement for demanding special political representation for backward classes in the Councils. Thus the Satya Shodhak movement deviated from its main path and turned into a movement for the benefit of the landowning upper caste non-Brahmans.

3.2.3 Character of the Movement

It is argued by historians like Anil Seal that the Brahmins, being a traditional literate caste, adapted themselves to the colonial system faster and began to

grab the opportunities in professions and bureaucracy. As a result, the non-Brahmans rose against this Brahman control. However, a deeper analysis of Jotiba Phule's social reforms reveals a wider consciousness of the system of caste inequalities and its relationship with the social subordination and material backwardness of the Shudras. For Phule vehemently argued for a fundamental change in Shudras' attitude towards their caste subordination. He established an ideological basis for a revolution in social and religious values.

Yet the movement was slowly diverted from its radical path because of some inherent weaknesses. Phule did not see the essential link between material conditions of the people and their culture. His support to British rule, obscured the colonial exploitation of the peasantry, and their interest in sustaining the old feudal social and economic order which generated and sanctified caste inequalities.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What is Varnashrama dharma? What was the position of ati-Shudras in it?
- 2) Why did Jotiba Phule turn into a social revolutionary?
- 3) What are the main ideas of Jotiba Phule?
- 4) What is Satya Shodhak Samaj?
- 5) How did Shahu Maharaj deviate from the original ideals of Jotiba Phule?

3.3 NON-BRAHMAN MOVEMENTS IN SOUTH INDIA

In the Madras presidency the Brahmans constituted 3.3% of Hindus. In the traditional society, they were considered superior to other castes. Traditionally being a literate caste, the Brahmans were quick in adopting English education and taking full advantage of the opportunities in professions and colonial bureaucracy. This aroused the envy and hostility of the non-Brahman communities, which in turn, resulted in a non-Brahman movement. However the Brahman and non-Brahman conflict which was aggravated by job opportunities, had much deeper social, economic and cultural roots.

3.3.1 Self-Respect Movement in Tamil Nadu

Recent historical works show that the Tamil renaissance had resulted in the growth of Dravidian consciousness, and its political manifestation was the starting of non-Brahman movement. Based on the Tamil classical works like *Pattupattu*, *Manimekalai*, *Cilappatikaram*, published between 1887 and 1904, Tamil scholars had elaborated on a picture of classical Dravidian civilization which was distinct from the Aryan and Sanskritic culture. Interestingly, the notion of independent existence of Tamil culture was first developed by a European scholar, Caldwell, and this was later elaborated by Tamil Scholars. The non-Brahman Tamil scholars also attempted to show that the Aryans had distorted the superior Dravidian religious systems like Saiva Siddhanta philosophy and imposed the teachings of the Vedas and the

caste system on the South Indian people. It was this rediscovered distinct cultural identity, which expressed itself in the non-Brahman movement after 1916.

3.3.2 Justice Party and Non-Brahman Politics

The non-Brahman resentment took a political form in 1916 in Madras city with the formation of South Indian Liberal Federation, known as the Justice Party, which claimed to represent the interests of all non-Brahmans in the Madras Presidency including Muslims, Christians and Untouchables. The founders of the organization were T.N. Nair, P. Tyagaraya Chetti and C. Natesa Mudaliar. The initial demand of the Justice leaders for reserved seats in the Provincial Legislative Council was slowly extended to include concessions in education, public appointments and nomination to local boards.

The development of a non-Brahman section of the professional middle class and the creation of the Justice Party to express its political views, dominated the political scene till the late 1930s. However, the social base of the Justice Party being the non-Brahman leading samindars and the urban business groups, it served the political interests of these feudal and commercial classes.

Understandably in the 1920s, there arose a conflict within the Justice Party. Some felt that the party should be working for the reform and regeneration of non-Brahman society and culture, and should not remain confined to a quest for jobs and offices. This urge for social uplift through cultural reform, could not be satisfied, by the narrow social and political perspective of the feudal and commercial leadership. On the other hand, the increasing mass character of the national movement, after 1920-22, started drawing most of the non Brahman peasant groups within its fold. Especially after 1927-28, the mass national movement overshadowed the Justice Party. At this juncture the non-Brahman intellectuals like E.V.R. Naicker, who came out of the Indian National Congress due to disillusionment, launched a separate popular movement, called the Self-Respect Movement, giving a new twist and lease of life to the non-Brahman movement in Madras.

3.3.3 E.V. Ramasami Naicker (1879-1973) and the Self-Respect Movement

E.V. Ramasami Naicker, popularly known as Periyar, was born in Erode in 1879. Even at an early age he rebelled against the rules of caste purity and participated in inter-caste dining. As a Gandhian, he became a hero of Satyagraha at Vaikom, Kerala, when he vehemently supported the 'Harijans'. By 1922, while still a member of Congress, Periyar abandoned Hindu mythology. He felt convinced that it represented a corrupting influence. He went to the extent of advocating the burning of *Manu Dharma Shashtra* and *Ramayana*. With the starting of his paper, *Kudi Arasu*, in 1925, he turned into a radical social reformer. In fact, Periyar resigned as Secretary of the Madras Provincial Congress Committee over an incident in which Brahman and non-Brahman eating facilities were segregated in a gurukul (school) run by Congress. When he left the Congress in 1925 he declared "hereafter my work is to dissolve the Congress". In 1927 he broke off even with Gandhi

on the issue of *Varnashrama dharma*. After a visit to the Soviet Union, Periyar added his version of Marxism to the Dravidian ideology. In an article published in *Kudi Arasu*, in May 1933, he wrote that the correct path for the Self-Respect Movement was to “take as our problem the destruction of the cruelties of capitalists and the cruelties of religion....that is the only way to solve these problems”.

Ideas on Society

Periyar attacked the supremacy of the Brahmans in religion and society. Like Phule in Maharashtra, he attacked the caste system. He propagated the concept of equality and the basic dignity of all human beings. He was the only reformer who extended his concept of equality and human dignity to women, one of the most oppressed sections in our society. The Self-Respect Movement under Periyar sought to change the subordinate position of women in family and society. He attempted through his *Kudi Arasu* to popularize an ideology that allowed women the dignity which comes out of a recognition of their freedom and autonomy in every field of life. Let us now take a closer look at Periyar’s radical ideas.

Periyar argued that religion and *Shastras* went against rationalism. He held religion mainly responsible for the low social position of non-Brahman groups and women. The non-Brahmans were encouraged to do away with the services of priests in birth, death and marriage ceremonies. The ‘self-respect marriages’, without the Brahman priest, had become popular. In such marriages the groom and the bride took a simple vow that they accept each other as equal partners in life, exchanged garlands, and the elders present blessed them. Interestingly, several such marriages were inter-caste marriages.

Like Jotiba Phule, Periyar did not differentiate between caste and religion. Social disparity, structured by the caste system, was seen as a stronger impediment than the class division brought about by wealth.

Activist

The Self-Respect Movement saw women’s subordination in relation to the prevailing caste system. By rejecting religion and scriptures as the guiding principles for social organization, Periyar called for the creation of a society based on equality and justice. He emphasized vocational training and education for women as necessary means for their economic independence.

The social radicalism of Periyar was reflected in his stand on the issues of widow marriage and birth control. He challenged the right of man and the *Shastras* to decide whether or not widows should marry. As for the right to divorce, Periyar saw that as a woman’s prerogative. “All our marriage laws”, declared Periyar, “are designed to enslave women. Rituals are meant only to cover this fact”. Periyar strongly supported the right to divorce as conducive to happiness, dignity and freedom of women. As for birth control, Periyar saw it as central to women’s freedom. He called on the people to employ suitable methods for birth control even if the government did not approve of it. The Self-Respect Movement disbursed literature on the subject to mould public opinion in favour of birth control. Periyar also attacked the patriarchal notion of women’s chastity or *Karpur*.

Limits

The social base of Periyar's movement was confined to the upper non-Brahman castes, despite its geographical extension to small towns and rural areas. That was the basic limitation of his social radicalism and his war against religion, the caste system and his championship of the cause of women.

Thus the Self-Respect Movement, which intervened to bring about structural changes in culture and society and sponsored Dravidian's freedom from the "slavery of the mind", could not make a wider impact. Periyar decided to achieve his goals by extending his social struggle to the political arena and merging the Justice Party with the Self-Respect League in 1944 to form the Dravida Kazhagam. This changed the character of Periyar's earlier social reform movement. The Dravidian or non-Brahman movement, was henceforth, increasingly engaged in narrow electoral politics. This weakened the ideological struggle against the Brahmanical culture and caste system, initiated by Periyar earlier.

3.3.4 Self-Respect Movement in Andhra

In Andhra, *Brahmanetharodyamamu* which literally means the movement launched by those other than the Brahmans, was basically for cultural reform and social uplift of the non-Brahman groups like Kammas, Reddis, Balija and Velamas. These peasant groups, with their substantial landownership and economic dominance, lacked modern English education or the traditional ritual status on the basis of which they could claim a high social status in society. Naturally, they attacked the Brahman dominance over ritual status and the government jobs.

This movement had its origin in their perceived sense of social and cultural deprivation. The non-Brahman section of the landowning and rich upper class suffered on account of being clubbed into a Shudra category. Some specific incidents acted as a stimulus for the movement. It was alleged that the Brahman teachers denied Kamma students the right to study the Vedas. At Kothavaram village, Krishna district, the Brahmans protested against the use of suffix "Chowdary" in the place of "Dasa" by members of the Kamma caste. In Krishna district the Brahmans filed a registered notice that the Kammas should not be allowed to study Sanskrit. Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chowdary (1887-1943), a prominent non-Brahman leader, refers to several such incidents. In one incident he was rebuffed for his interest in Sanskrit literature by a Brahman teacher. It was this social and cultural environment which strengthened the self-respect movement, especially with an event like the one that which occurred at Kollur in 1916.

The English educated upper caste Hindu non-Brahmans called a conference in Kollur, Guntur district, to decide the meaning of the term 'Shudra' in 1916. They went so far as to question the symbols of Rama, Krishna and other epic heroes. In the process of defining 'Shudra' category as a socially higher category than the Brahmans, they re-interpreted the epics, emphasizing social and ritual injustice imposed by Aryans on the Dravidians.

The ideas developed by leaders like Tripuraneni were almost similar to the basic ideas put forward by Phule and Periyar. Tripuraneni challenged

the authority of the sacred texts. He argued that as aliens the Aryans had imposed their socio-cultural and religious system on the indigenous Dravidians. The caste system, which was sustained by religion, was the handiwork of Aryans. The non-Brahman leaders also highlighted the fact that, even though a minority group, the Brahmans had monopolized Western education, jobs and professions. They demanded the “non-Brahmanization of services”.

Tripuraneni, an eminent scholar, spent his entire life propagating the self-respect movement in Coastal Andhra. He attacked ‘Brahmanism’ but not the Brahmans as individuals. He interpreted several sacred texts and epics to show how Shudras were kept servile to Brahmanism through the popular religious classics. In *Kurukshetra Sangraman*, Tripuraneni argues that the Kauravas were in fact more upright than the Pandavas, and that the latter had no right to rule. His *Sambuka Vadha*, exposes the power politics of Aryans against Shudras. Encouraged by Vasishtha, the King, Rama in the name of preserving the *Varnashrama dharma*, killed the Shudra sage, Sambuka, as he was spreading the sacred knowledge.

Tripuraneni tried to change the consciousness of the people through his literature. He stood for the emancipation of women and Shudras from the “Slavery of Shastras”. He sought to transform the then “priest ridden Hindu sect to a broad free society”. The most successful reform carried out by him was the system of traditional marriage. The Kammas started performing *swasanotha pouruhityam*, i.e., marriage services by their own community priests. Tripuraneni’s book, *Vivaha Vidhi*, explains marriage rites in Telugu, for most of Sanskrit mantras were unintelligible to the common people.

The self-respect movement in the 1920s and 30s played a vital role in developing intercaste dinners, inter-caste widow marriages and modern education. In this attempt at breaking the traditional social and ritual domination, there emerged caste politics and non-Brahman political awareness. At a general level, the bulk of non-Brahman intellectuals and peasant classes supported the national movement. Tripuraneni, for instance, was a well known nationalist.

To sum up, the Self-Respect movement in Andhra was a cultural response of the non-Brahman intellectuals to the traditional social and spiritual domination. The intellectual leaders embarked upon the reinterpretation of the sacred texts. One drawback, however, was that the movement addressed only the problems of upper caste non-Brahmans, and left out the ‘harijans’ in the lower order. It aimed at restructuring the caste system with the upper caste non-Brahmans on the top, rather than fighting for its complete abolition as in Maharashtra.

3.3.5 Non-Brahman Movement in Karnataka

The Vokkaligas, among the dominant castes in Karnataka, had suffered subdivisions before being listed as a single unified caste by the Census of 1901. This categorization, argued one historian, “provided the leaders of the non-Brahman movement with a significant base for collective mobilization”. Serious solidarity efforts were also made internally by different caste associations. The Lingayats established the Mysore Lingyat Education

Fund Association in 1905, while the Vokkaligas formed the Vokkaligara Sangha in 1906. However, it was the non-Brahman movement, which provided these caste associations with a common platform, and held these social groups together.

The non-Brahman movement in Karnataka took its birth around 1918 and it was spearheaded by Vokkaligas and Lingayats. A delegation of non-Brahman leaders called on the Maharaja of Mysore in 1918 and protested against the discrimination practised against non-Brahmans. This resulted in the appointment of a committee headed by Sir Leslie Miller, who submitted his report in 1919. On the recommendation of Miller, the Government passed an order for an equitable communal representation in the public services.

With the emergence of the Congress movement in Mysore State, the non-Brahman movement was slowly drawn towards the national liberation struggle and it finally merged with the Congress in 1938. When secular politics also recognizes the caste based demands, however genuine they might be, what follows is an ascendancy of caste associations to voice the secular demands. This was what happened to the non-Brahman movement in Karnataka. During the 1930s and 40s, the non-Brahman groups began to lose their cohesion and each caste category began to demand separate representation for itself both in the Representative Assembly and in Government services. Thus, the non-Brahman movement was transformed into a Backward classes movement from the 1940s. The two dominant groups, the Vokkaligas and the Lingayats, began to fight between themselves for a share of political power in the newly emerging representative political system, especially after 1950.

3.4 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE MOVEMENTS

A comparative analysis of the non-Brahman movements of Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Andhra and Karnataka shows different levels of perception with regard to the system of caste inequalities and its relationship with socio-cultural subordination and material backwardness of several castes. Of course, there were some crucial social and religious elements which were perceived as common to the oppression of the non-Brahman groups in all these regions. Let us look at these commonalities and differences. Religious conservatism of high castes and the rigid caste structure were perceived as the main reasons for the socio-cultural backwardness of non-Brahman peasant groups and the main obstacles to their programme of radical social reform. Unlike in other regions, Jotiba Phule in Maharashtra put forward a deeper analysis of social inequalities and vehemently argued for a fundamental change in the attitude of non-Brahmans towards their status as Shudras. He totally rejected the existing religious ideology and caste system. Unlike the nineteenth century social reformers, Phule saw no possibility of reforming them internally. It was in establishing an ideological basis for a revolution in social and religious values that Phule displayed his greatest talent. He projected a new collective identity for all the lower castes of Maharashtra. In his bid to discover the identity of Shudras, Phule drew on the existing symbols from Maharashtra's warrior and agricultural tradition and gave them a powerful new meaning. One drawback, however, was

Phule's support to the British rule. He failed to understand the real nature of the colonial rule. Even his social reform got distracted under Maharaja of Kolhapur, because the emphasis was on Kashatriya status for his caste and electoral politics. Emphasis on English education, larger representations in provincial Legislative Councils and local boards and reservation in government services could also be seen in the case of Justice Party in Madras and non-Brahman movement in Karnataka. However, educational development was central to the self-respect movements in Tamil Nadu and Andhra.

In Tamil Nadu it was Periyar who articulated new radical ideas for the uplift of women and non-Brahman groups. Unlike in other regions, the Self-Respect Movement under Periyar sought to integrate the emancipation of women and Shudras by reforming the system of marriage and rejecting the caste system. When compared to Maharashtra, the social base of Periyar's movement was confined to the rural landowning classes and urban based business groups and he failed to mobilize the untouchables.

Similarly in coastal Andhra the self-respect movement was dominated by upper caste non-Brahmans: Kammas, Reddis and Velamas. The non-Brahman category failed to encompass the untouchable Malas and Madigas who constituted the most oppressed class of agricultural labourers. The movement only aimed at the upward social mobility of the landowning upper caste non-Brahmans. It never questioned the rationale of the caste system. Instead of rejecting the hierarchical principle itself, they drew heavily on it to restate their position. This was in contrast to the Maharashtra scene in the 19th century where Phule had rejected the *Varnashrama dharma*. The result was a cleavage among the non-Brahmans, who split into different caste groups and started articulating their immediate demands like better education, government jobs and representation in politics. One of the negative trends, as witnessed in Karnataka, was the increasing use of caste category even to put forward secular demands. This negative trend became more pronounced after India had attained her independence in 1947.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) In what way were Periyar's ideas radical?
- 2) What were the main contours of self-respect movement in Andhra?
- 3) Write a brief note on non-Brahman movement in Karnataka.
- 4) Make a comparative analysis of the following:
 - A) Non-Brahman movements in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.
 - B) Non-Brahman movements in Tamil Nadu and Andhra.
 - C) The Justice Party in Tamil Nadu and in Karnataka the non-Brahman movement.

3.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, you learnt:

- the background of oppression and backwardness of the traditional social order (like caste, oppression of women, etc.) from which the non-Brahman movement emerged,

- how its distinct radical tones of change were watered down by the later politics in Maharashtra or the politics of Dravida Kazhagam (in which Justice Party and Self Respect movement merged) in south,
- that this watering down happened because of the increase in the influence of landed non-Brahman castes and the way they used the movement to gain social and economic status,
- consequently, the weak understanding of the British rule as a perpetrator of oppressions of traditional order, never changed. The non-Brahman movement never developed an independent nationalist strategy,
- that the strength of these movements varies from region to region. In Madras, it never reached the untouchables, while in Maharashtra, Phule was able to project a new collective identity for lower castes.

3.6 KEY WORDS

Ideological Hegemony: Domination of a particular world view and its ideas.

Rationalism: Belief in application of reason in all aspects of life.

Iconoclast: A person who is against idols in a religion.

Authoritarian Family Structure: Here referred to in its role in keeping women subordinated and 'in their place'. The family structure is kept together by multiple economic, kinship and social ties. It becomes authoritarian or dictatorial when these ties are moulded to facilitate the domination of patriarchs (or the male members). This is done by denying property rights or stringent divorce laws. Besides, the attitudes and beliefs are shaped in such a way as to facilitate the domination by men and to reduce women to objects.

3.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See section 3.2, first para. Your answer should focus on division of society into four varnas i.e. Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudras. You should also include the kind of purity and pollution interaction which developed because of this system.
- 2) See sub-sec. 3.2.1, first para. Your answer should include Phule's personal experiences.
- 3) See 'Ideas on Society and Economy' in sub-sec. 3.2. 1. Your answer should include Phule's ideas on (i) caste, (ii) women, (iii) religion (iv) ideology (v) economy and agrarian problems (vi) British rule."
- 4) See sub-sec. 3.2. 1. Your answer should include the meaning of the word.
- 5) See sub-sec. 3.2.2. Your answer should include (i) the role of Shahu Maharaj (ii) the role of business and landowning castes.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See sub-sec. 3.3.3. Your answer should include (i) Marxism's influence on Periyar, (ii) his position on women, (iii) his emphasis on rationalism vis-a-vis religion, (iv) his emphasis on relation between caste and religion.
- 2) See sub-sec. 3.3.4. Especially paras 4-7. Focus on the challenge to sacred texts, cause of women and attempts to break ritual domination.
- 3) See sub-sec. 3.3.5. Your answer should include the relation between caste associations and their relation to Congress.
- 4) See especially section 3.4, for all the three sub questions. Focus on:
 - A) Phule's emphasis on building in ideological basis for a revolution in social and religious values. Periyar's special emphasis on emancipation of women and Shudras. Social base of Periyar confined to landed classes. Phule's influence down to lower castes.
 - B) In Andhra lack of radical thrust as compared to Periyar's movement in Tamil Nadu.
 - C) Use of caste category to put forward secular demands in Karnataka. The Justice Party's focus remained to upper castes but there was an attempt to fight and restructure the caste system.

UNIT 4: FORMATION OF INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS*

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Milieu
 - 4.2.1 The New Leaders
 - 4.2.2 Art and Literature
 - 4.2.3 Newspapers and Journals
- 4.3 Political Associations Before 1885
- 4.4 Imperial Response
 - 4.4.1 Lytton
 - 4.4.2 Ripon
- 4.5 The Role of the Educated Indians
- 4.6 Foundation of the Congress
 - 4.6.1 First Meeting
 - 4.6.2 Presidential Speech
 - 4.6.3 Participation
 - 4.6.4 Proceedings and Resolutions
- 4.7 Controversies Relating to its Origin
 - 4.7.1 Official Conspiracy Theory
 - 4.7.2 Ambitions and Rivalries of Indian Elite
 - 4.7.3 Need for an All India Body
- 4.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.9 Key Words
- 4.10 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In the previous Unit, you have seen how the formulation and spread of modern ideas led to an intellectual awakening in India in the 19th century. One of its major consequences was the formation of the Indian National Congress, which has played a very important role in the history of modern India. This Unit deals with its background and focuses on the factors responsible for its formation. After reading this Unit, you will:

- get an idea of the milieu in which the Indian National Congress was founded,
- understand the role played by the educated Indians in its formation,
- get some details about the first Congress meeting, and
- became familiar with some of the controversies surrounding its origin.

* Adopted from Unit 9 of EHI-01

4.1 INTRODUCTION

On Monday, 28 December 1885 seventy-two persons met in the hall of Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College in Bombay. They were attending the inaugural session of the Indian National Congress. Since then this body went on to play a pivotal role in India's struggle for liberation from British rule. This Unit deals with the formation of the Indian National Congress as the political organizational consequence of the spread of national consciousness in India.

4.2 MILIEU

As the British extended their sway over India, a sullen feeling of resentment grew amongst the people. It was based on their perception that the new rulers were responsible for their economic hardships. They also felt that they were being looked down upon in their own country and their way of life was being threatened. The opportunities available to them for advancement were insufficient. The lower strata of social and economic hierarchy expressed their resentment by sporadic uprisings. These were often directed against immediate exploiters -- the samindars, moneylenders and tax collectors. But, broadly speaking, these were protests against the system built by the British. The intensity of discontent against foreign rule became visible through these uprisings. The great Revolt of 1857 itself, in a way sprang up as an outburst of accumulated discontent of masses in different parts of the country.

4.2.1 The New Leaders

The failure of this Revolt revealed the inadequacy of the traditional method of protest. It also showed that the old aristocratic classes could not be the saviours of Indian society. The English educated middle class seemed to be the hope of the future. The agitation carried on by this class was of a completely different character. This class was conscious of the benefits India had derived from the British connection. It was also familiar with European liberal ideas of that period. At the same time it had a sense of pride in the country's glorious past and gradually developed the conviction that foreign domination was inherently opposed to the fulfillment of legitimate hopes and aspirations of the Indian people. A perception of identity in the interests of people inhabiting different parts of the Indian sub-continent was also growing. The educated Indians believed for some time that their grievances would be redressed by the benevolent rulers if they could draw their attention to them. Therefore, in the beginning, the middle class agitation was confined to the ventilation of some specific political and economic grievances and demands. This stage was, however, to be left behind after some time.

4.2.2 Art and Literature

During this period, ideas of nationalism and patriotism were given popular form in songs, poems and plays. Many of the songs were composed for the Hindu Mela which was organized for some years from 1867 onwards by a group of Bengali leaders. The purpose was to spread nationalist ideas and promote indigenous arts and crafts. In the process British policies were

blamed for deteriorating the economic conditions of the people. The need to use swadeshi goods was also emphasised. These ideas found expression in some drama performances also. In a play that became popular around 1860s entitled *Neel Darpan*, atrocities committed by indigo planters were highlighted. The most important name in this context is that of Bankim Chandra Chatterji who wrote historical novels highlighting the tyranny of the rulers. His most well known work is *Anandmath* (1882) which also contains his immortal song 'Bande Matram' composed a few years earlier (1875). Similar patriotic feelings can be found in the literature in other languages. Bhartendu Harishchandra, who is regarded as the father of modern Hindi, in his plays, poems and journalistic writings, put forward a plea for using swadeshi things. Similar trends can be seen in Marathi literature also where there was tremendous increase in the number of publications -- from three between 1818-1827 to 3,284 between 1885-1896.

4.2.3 Newspapers and Journals

The newspapers and journals played a creditable role in building up public opinion in favour of Indian national interests and against the excesses and inequities of the colonial administration. Some well-known English language papers of this period were *Amrita Basar Patrika*, *Hindoo Patriot* and *Som Prakash*, published from Calcutta, *Indu Prakash* and *Native Opinion* from Bombay and *The Hindu* from Madras. Some important papers published in Hindi were *Hindustan*, *Bharat Mitra* and *Jagat Mitra*. *Jam-e-Jahan Numa* and *Khushdil Akbhar* were well known Urdu newspapers.

Signs of growing political awakening and feeling of oneness were obvious to perceptive contemporary British observers. For example, writing confidentially to the Government of India in 1878, W.B. Jones, the Commissioner of Berar wrote: "Within the 20 years of my own recollection, a feeling of nationality, which formerly had no existence, or was but faintly felt, has grown up Now we are beginning to find ourselves face to face, not with the population of individual provinces, but with 200 millions of people united by sympathies and intercourse which we have ourselves created and fostered. This seems to me to be the great political fact of the day."

Check Your Progress I

- 1) In the quotation you have just read, what has been described as the great political fact of the day?
- 2) Adjust the name of the newspapers against the place of its publication

i) Hindu Patriot	a) Bombay
ii) Native Opinion	b) Madras
iii) Hindu	c) Calcutta
- 3) Read the following statements and mark right (✓) or wrong (✗)
 - i) The revolt of 1857 revealed that the traditional methods of protest could succeed.
 - ii) The songs, poems and plays helped in popularising ideas of nationalism in this period.

- iii) Bhartendu Harishchandra made an appeal for using swadeshi things.
- iv) The newspapers and journals helped in spreading imperialist ideas during this period.

4.3 POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS BEFORE 1885

The Indian National Congress was not the first political association to be established in India. Various associations had been established earlier. The beginning of organized political activity in India generally dates back to the establishment of landholders' society in 1837. It was an association of landholders of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and its principal objective was to guard its class interests. In 1843, another association was formed which was named Bengal British India society. Its objective was wider, i.e. to protect and promote general public interests. The landholders' society represented the aristocracy of wealth, the Bengal British India society represented the aristocracy of intelligence. In 1851 the two associations were merged, giving rise to a new one, named the British Indian Association. This was the time when the Charter of the British East India Company was due for renewal and a need was felt to make the views of Indians known to the authorities in London. Associations were also formed about this time in Bombay and Madras. These were called the Bombay Association and the Madras Native Association respectively and were established in 1852. All these associations were dominated by wealthy landed gentry. Similar, but lesser known associations were established in other parts of India too. Deccan Association can be mentioned as one of them.

The three Presidency associations sent petitions suggesting changes in East India Company's Charter. These suggestions give us a fairly good idea of the attitude of the publically conscious classes in India at that time. Broadly speaking, the petitioners wanted that Indians should be appointed to the legislative bodies. Company's monopoly of salt and indigo should be abolished and the state should give aid to indigenous industry. It was also stated that the local governments should have greater powers and Indians should have bigger share in the administration of their country. So far as agrarian issues were concerned, a desire was expressed for the preservation of existing interests in land. Each petition also expressed concern about the need to improve the condition of peasants. In the petition sent by members of the British Indian Association it was stated that while Indians acknowledged 'the blessings of an improved form of government', they could not but feel that they had 'not profited by their connection with Great Britain to the extent which they had a right to look for'. Many of their demands were later taken up by the Congress.

During the 1860s and 1870s ideas of nationalism and patriotism were very much in the air. A number of political associations were established in different parts of the country during this period to propagate the cause of reform in various spheres of administration and to promote political consciousness among various sections of people. Of these, the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, established by M.G. Ranade, G.V. Joshi, S.H. Chiplunkar and his associates in 1870, proved to be the most important. This Sabha brought out a journal from 1878 which did much for arousing political consciousness. To carry

on political propaganda in England, some Indians like Pherozeshah Mehta, Badruddin Tyabji, Dadabhai Naoroji and Manmohan Ghose founded the East India Association in December, 1866.

The half century from the establishment of Landholders' Society in 1837 was more a period of aspirations than of achievements. But the state was set during this period for the emergence of a national body. The need for a national platform began to be keenly felt. In Calcutta, dissatisfaction with the British Indian Association had been growing. Its subscription was Rs.50 per annum which was too high for the middle class. (According to Lord Curzon's estimate per capita income in British India in 1898 was Rs. 30 per annum.) Its membership was, therefore, confined to the wealthy people. In 1876 the Indian Association was founded in Calcutta. The membership fee was kept at five rupees, per annum. It soon became very popular amongst the educated people and became a major force in Bengal and subsequently in Indian politics. Surendranath Banerjea, a young member of the middle class who had been ejected from the Indian Civil Service on what appeared to be insufficient grounds, was mainly responsible for its establishment. The aims of the Indian Association included developing a strong public opinion, promoting Hindu-Muslim friendship, establishing contact with masses and generating wider awareness amongst the Indian people. These are certainly ingredients of a broad-based nationalist movement. Surendranath Banerjea said that the new association was based on the conception of united India derived from the inspiration of Mazzini -- the main architect of the Italian Unification.

Many other political bodies were established in other parts of India, like the Madras Mahajan Sabha, the Bombay Presidency Association, the Allahabad People's Association, the Indian Association of Lahore etc. Many of these bodies had branches in the Mofussil towns. After 1885 these became the regional arms of the Congress.

4.4 IMPERIAL RESPONSE

Needless to say, all these activities of the educated Indians did not go unnoticed. The British Government took a note of the growing political discontent and quickly went on the offensive. This was reflected in the policies pursued by Lord Lytton who came to India in 1876.

4.4.1 Lytton

Lytton followed openly reactionary and anti-Indian policies. These afforded excellent opportunities to the Indian Association to organize a number of all-India political agitations. Lytton sent an expensive expedition of Afghanistan which was financed out of Indian revenues. He removed import duties on cotton textiles to benefit British cloth industry at the cost of the nascent Indian textile industry. These steps were resented by politically conscious Indians. In domestic policy the Viceroy patronised those sections like the ruling princes and landholders who played a vital role in the continuance of the British rule. He viewed the aspirations of educated Indians with contempt. During his period the maximum age for appearing in the Indian Civil Service examination was reduced from 21 to 19 years. Since the examination was held only in London, it was in any case difficult for the

Indians to take this examination. The lowering of the age was looked upon as a step calculated to prevent Indians from appearing in this examination. The Indian Association took up the issue and launched an agitation over it in the country. Surendranath himself undertook a tour of different parts of the country in 1877-78 and acquired all India fame. The Association also sent a well-known Bengali barrister, Lal Mohan Ghose, to England to present a memorial.

Public meetings were organised to protest against the passing of the Vernacular Press Act and the Arms Act. The former imposed restrictions on the newspapers and journals printed in Indian languages. This caused deep resentment among the Indian societies. *Amrita Basar Patrika*, which was published in Bengali till then, changed overnight into an English medium paper so as to escape the restrictions imposed under this Act. Under the Arms Act, Indians were made to pay a license fee in order to possess a weapon but Europeans and Eurasians were exempted from doing so. Special concessions were also given to landholders. During the agitation on these issues huge mass meetings, attended at some places by ten to twenty thousands people were organized in district towns.

4.4.2 Ripon

Lord Lytton was succeeded by Lord Ripon in 1880. Ripon's approach was different. He held that the educated Indians possessed legitimate aspirations in keeping with their education and the pledges given by the British Parliament from time to time in this regard should be honoured. Lytton's administration, he argued, had given the impression 'rightly or wrongly' that the interests of the natives of India were in all ways to be sacrificed to those of England. He wanted to harness the talents of the educated classes for strengthening British Rule. He repealed the Vernacular Press Act, promoted local self-government institutions, encouraged the spread of education and brought the Afghan War to an end. His policy, however, could not proceed beyond certain limits on account of the constraints imposed by the very character of British rule in India.

A bitter agitation directed at Ripon and his pro-Indian policies erupted over the so-called Ilbert Bill among the Anglo-Indians who had been annoyed by him. The Criminal Procedure amendment Bill, or the Ilbert Bill as it came to be called after the name of the Law Member in Viceroy's Council was in essence a measure putting Indian Judges on the same footing as Europeans in dealing-with all cases in the Bengal Presidency. Its purpose was to enable qualified Indians in the mofussil to try Europeans for criminal offences (in Presidency towns they were already allowed to do so). The Bill was brought forward because Indians were now rising in the ranks of the judicial service. It involved the possibility of trial of Europeans by Indian judges for criminal offences without a jury. It also gave right to Europeans to appeal to the High Court if they were not satisfied. But this provoked a storm of angry criticism amongst the Anglo-Indians. Ripon found that even the civil service was in sympathy with the opposition. In the press and in public meetings Indian character and culture were severely criticised. Ultimately the Government had to bow before this hostile opinion and the Bill was amended in such a manner that its very purpose was defeated.

The entire controversy has an important place in the circumstances leading to the emergence of an All-India body. It is often said that Indians learnt their first lesson in political agitation from Anglo-Indians on this occasion. This is not really true. Indians had already realised the importance of this method and had organized an all-India agitation on the question of Civil Service Examination. In fact they had already learnt from experience that Anglo-Indians would not make a common cause with them in their demands for more power and better privileges. The reaction of Indians throughout the country on the issue of agitation against the bill was the same. The Indian press made it clearly known that educated Indians valued the principle underlying the bill and would bitterly resent its abandonment. After the main principle was abandoned, the Indian press began to talk of an urgent need for national unity, greater organization and self-reliance.

During the early 1880s the idea of a national organization had become an important topic for discussion in the Indian press. The Ilbert Bill controversy seemed to reinforce this need. In July 1883, the Indian Association held a meeting which was attended by some 10,000 persons. Here it was decided that 'a national fund' with the aim of securing the political advancement of the country by means of agitation in England and in India, should be created. This proposal was widely acclaimed. However, in some quarters there was criticism on the ground that the Indian Association had failed to secure the support of other political associations in the country. The drive for national fund yielded only Rs. 20,000. But it sparked off widespread debate in the press. It was repeatedly pointed out during this debate that coordinated political action was called for and representatives of different political associations should meet annually in big cities of the country. In December 1883 an International Exhibition was scheduled to be held in Calcutta. The Indian Association decided to take advantage of this event and invited prominent public men and associations in different parts of the country to meet and discuss questions of general concern. Such a Conference was held from 28 to 31 December 1883 and was called the National Conference.

It was not a very representative or influential gathering. But it is significant that the programme adopted here was very similar to the one adopted by the Indian National Congress later. It provided an opportunity to educated Indians from about forty-five different places to meet and exchange views. It has rightly been described as the precursor of the Indian National Congress or 'the dress rehearsal' for it.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Make a list of five steps taken by Lord Lytton which tended to offend the Indians.
- 2) Which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (✗)
 - i) Lord Ripon followed an approach, different from Lytton.
 - ii) The Ilbert Bill enjoyed the support of the Anglo-Indians.
 - iii) It is true that the Indians learnt the first lesson of political agitation from the Anglo Indians.

iv) The Indian National Congress has been rightly described as the precursor of the National Conference.

3) What do you understand by the Ilbert Bill controversy?

4.5 THE ROLE OF THE EDUCATED INDIANS

Here an obvious question arises: which sections of the society were taking the initiative in organizing political activities during this period? We shall now take up this question.

Lead in organizing political activities was taken by what historians have described as the 'educated middle classes', the 'professional classes', the 'English educated elite' or the 'intelligentsia'. It is important to indicate some of the traits and attributes of this section of Indians. Broadly speaking, reference here is to those people who had acquired knowledge of English, had grown under the impact of British rule and who had taken to professions like law, teaching and journalism or had secured government jobs. Originating in Presidency towns of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, they had spread like a thin covering over the whole country.

Inspired by national consciousness and a pride in the glory of the past the middle class started constitutional agitation for political rights. Its growth was so gradual that it was hardly noticed at the initial stages. Its social and economic roots did not lie in industry or commerce. Instead, this class had its roots in tenurial landholding, government service or professions. This section took pride in calling itself the middle class, i.e. a section of society which was below the zamindars but above the toilers. It looked forward to playing the same role which the middle class had played in the west, that of spearheading the transition from the feudal to a 'modern' society through Renaissance, Reformation, democratization of political institutions and rapid industrialization.

The members of the middle class belonged to that section of society which could not be called poor and they were normally from higher castes. It should, however, be noted that all high caste people did not enjoy a high economic status in society. For example, in Bengal and many other parts of India it was customary for well-to-do families to employ Brahmans as cooks. Similarly in Bombay, according to figures collected in 1864, 10,000 beggars were listed as Chitpavan or Saraswat Brahmans.

This section of society may be called an elite in the sense that it seemed to be the select part or pick of the society. But unlike an 'elite', the ideology of this class was not one of defending its own privileges either in terms of education or in terms of social status. Their one great asset was English education. Far from confining English education to themselves, many of the educated Indians devoted themselves to spreading this type of education. Later they were to take up with great zest the demand for the introduction of compulsory elementary education. Similarly they did not hesitate to take up such social reforms which could affect their privileges adversely.

In the Indian context, during our period of the term 'educated middle class' stood for groups which acquired western education and began to assert some kind of regional or national leadership. The social composition and outlook

of these groups was significantly different from these of the princes, chiefs and samindars who had earlier led resistance movements against the British. During the nineteenth century this class made a significant contribution to Indian life by championing the cause of religious and social reforms, writing patriotic songs, plays and novels, preparing economic critique of British rule and establishing political organizations.

Lord Dufferin, the Viceroy, once remarked that it was 'a microscopic minority'. This remark has been quoted time and again by different historians. It was a minority no doubt. But it was a minority which could not be ignored, as Dufferin himself knew. It was a minority that had common ideals and used similar idiom and could take a broad all-India view. It should also be remembered that in history it is the dynamic minorities which have usually determined the shape of nations. Here a reference may be made to another saying that had gained some currency. British officials used to argue that this class did not represent the masses and it were the British who looked after their interests or were the 'ma bap' of the Indian masses. This argument was advanced because it served the imperial interest of justifying the perpetuation of British Raj. To a certain extent educated people in all countries are cut off from the masses. In India this alienation was compounded by the foreign medium of modern education. But knowledge of English did not mean that people ceased to know their own language. It is significant that as a class the educated Indians could never be bought over by the Government.

4.6 FOUNDATION OF THE CONGRESS

In this section we shall take up some relevant issues related to the foundation of the Congress, its initial scope and activities, resolutions passed and the extent of the participation by various sections.

4.6.1 First Meeting

The credit for organizing the first meeting of the Indian National Congress goes to A.O. Hume. He was a retired Government servant who had chosen to stay back in India after retirement. He was on very good terms with Lord Ripon and shared his view that the emergence of the educated class should be accepted as a political reality and that timely steps should be taken to provide legitimate outlets to the grievances of this class and efforts be made to satisfy its ambitions. He laboriously consolidated the network of contacts that he had established. Early in December 1884 he reached Bombay to bid farewell to Ripon. He stayed on there for three months and during this period he discussed with the leaders who were influential in the Presidency, the programme of political action to be adopted by the educated Indians. In March 1885 it was decided that a conference of the Indian National Union (initially it was this name that was adopted) would be convened at Poona during the Christmas week. Initially Hume and his group considered Calcutta as the most likely place for the conference. But later they decided upon Poona, because it was centrally located and the Executive Committee of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha expressed readiness to make arrangements for the conference and provide necessary funds.

However, fate deprived Poona of the opportunity to host the first session of the Indian National Congress. The venue had to be shifted to Bombay because of the outbreak of cholera in Poona. The first meeting was held on Monday, 28 December 1885 in Gokaldas Tejpal Sanskrit College, Bombay. It was attended by 100 men of whom 72 were nonofficials and were recognized as members. The honour of being the first ever Congress President belonged to W.C. Bonnerjee of Bengal. He was one of the first four Indian Barristers and one of the foremost legal luminaries in his day. His election established the healthy precedent that the President should be chosen from a province other than the one in which the Congress was being held.

4.6.2 Presidential Speech

The Presidential Speech of the first Congress President was aimed at stating explicitly the scope, character and objectives of the Congress. Moreover, the presidential speech also sought to remove many apprehensions and misgivings which might have arisen in the mind of the people about the exact intentions of the Congress.

The aims and objects of the Congress were defined very clearly by the President. He described the objectives as:

- promotion of personal intimacy and friendship amongst the countrymen;
- eradication of all possible prejudices relating to race, creed or provinces;
- consolidation of sentiments of nation unity;
- recording of the opinions of educated classes on pressing problems of the day; and
- laying down lines for future course of action in public interest.

Besides these demands the President enumerated the blessings conferred by the British on India. He assured that the educated Indians were thoroughly loyal and consistent wellwishers of the Government. He clarified that their purpose in organizing the Congress was to represent their views to the ruling authorities and it was wrong to condemn them as a nest of conspirators and disloyalists. They accepted Hume's leadership because most of the members of the British community in India distrusted educated Indians. Finally, the President specified in cautious words what the Congress wanted.

All that it wanted was that the basis of the Government should be widened. Such a policy would help not just the Government but also 'the people at large'. This also shows that the Congress was demanding a share in the government not to serve the interest of its own class but thought of the interests of all Indians in this context. In fact no aspiration was more keenly expressed than the one for national unity.

The Congress leaders had tremendous faith in what they described as the British sense of justice. They were not thinking in terms of expelling the British. All they wanted was that the policies adopted by the Government of India should aim at the welfare and good of Indians which meant really the advancement of their interests. For this purpose they wanted greater share

in running the government. This was to be done through the development of representative institutions and appointment of Indians to higher posts.

4.6.3 Participation

It is often argued that the lawyers predominated in the Congress. For example, a noted historian Anil Seal points out that over half the delegates at the first Congress -- 39 out of 72 -- were lawyers and that during the decades to come, more than one-third of the delegates to every Congress session belonged to the legal professions. The old aristocracy -- people like rajas, maharajas, big samindars and very wealthy merchants -- were conspicuous by their absence. Nor did the peasants or artisans feel attracted towards it. The fact that the lawyers predominated cannot be denied. But this is more or less true of political organizations and legislatures everywhere. In India the problem became compounded by the fact that very few careers were open to educated Indians. Therefore, a very big number adopted the legal profession. The old aristocratic class did not participate in the Congress proceedings because it felt threatened by new liberal and nationalist ideas. Though the question of poverty of India had been discussed for sometime by various leaders, especially Dadabhai Naoroji, no attempt was made to associate the masses with the movement at this stage.

When the Congress came to discuss the condition of the people, it resolved that the first step should be the granting of representative institutions. Given the tactics adopted by the Congress--that of petitioning and drawing attention to grievances by public discussions, this was natural.

4.6.4 Proceedings and Resolutions

The proceedings of the Congress were conducted in the most orderly and efficient manner. The resolutions were moved, discussed and passed in accordance with strict parliamentary procedure. Each resolution was proposed by a member belonging to one province, then seconded by a member belonging to another province and was supported by members from other provinces. The speeches were marked by moderation, earnestness and expressions of loyalty to the Crown.

The first congress adopted nine resolutions. Some of them are as follows:

- In one resolution demand was put forward for the appointment of a Royal Commission for enquiring into Indian affairs on which Indians would be adequately represented.
- The other resolution demanded the abolition of the Indian Council of the Secretary of State for India. The Congress wanted that the Secretary of State should be responsible directly to the British Parliament. This demand was based on the idea that the British people were just and fair and, if properly informed, they would never deviate from the right path.
- There was also a resolution on foreign policy which condemned the annexation of Upper Burma.
- Other resolutions covered subjects such as liberalising the Constitution and functions of the Central and Provincial Legislative Councils,

holding of simultaneous examination for the Civil Service in Britain and India and the need to reduce expenditure on the army, etc.

Before dispersing, the Congress took two more decisions:

- i) first was that an attempt should be made to get the resolutions passed at the Congress session ratified by political associations throughout the country.
- ii) second, the next Congress would meet at Calcutta on 28 December, 1886.

These decisions are important. These show that the leaders did not look upon the Congress as an isolated event but as the beginning of a movement. In the above discussion you might have noticed that the question of social reforms was not touched upon. Some of the members insisted that it should be taken up. But in view of the fundamental differences of opinion on this issue, this was not done. However, some members took advantage of the presence of so many people to discuss issues like infant marriage and enforced widowhood at a public meeting which was held at the same venue after the formal Congress session was concluded.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Which sections of the society did the educated Indians come from?
- 2) List the aim and objectives of the Congress as defined by its first President.
- 3) Mention four resolutions passed by the first Congress.

4.7 CONTROVERSIES RELATING TO ITS ORIGIN

Since the Indian National Congress has played an important role in India's history, it was natural that contemporary opinion as well as subsequent historians should have speculated about the reasons which led to its establishment. In fact this question has been discussed ever since the Congress was founded. Many scholars have made diligent attempts to identify the efforts of an individual or individuals or the particular circumstances which can be considered as the principal immediate factors behind the event. But the evidence is conflicting. We shall see how far the foundation of the Indian National Congress can be explained in terms of the alternative positions of:

- official conspiracy theory,
- ambitions and rivalries of Indian elites, and
- growth of the feeling that there should be an all-India political body.

4.7.1 Official Conspiracy Theory

If a body like the Indian National Congress had been founded by an Indian, it would have been accepted as something normal and logical. But the fact that the idea of an all-India political organization was given concrete and final shape by an Englishman – A.O. Hume - has given rise to many speculations. Why should an Englishman take the initiative?

Moreover, Hume was not just any Englishman: he belonged to the Indian Civil Service. It is said that while in service he had come across a mass of material which suggested that as a result of the sufferings of the masses and alienation of intellectuals, much discontent had accumulated and this could pose a threat to the continuance of British rule. The memories of the great revolt of 1857 were still fresh. Moreover, Hume himself had said that his aim was to provide, to use his own expression, a “safety valve” providing control to the “great and growing forces generated by” the British themselves. This has been juxtaposed with W.C. Bonerjee’s statement that Hume was acting under the direct advice of Dufferin. These two facts studied together gave rise to the argument that the Indian National Congress grew out of the British conspiracy, the aim of which was to provide a peaceful and constitutional outlet to the discontent amongst the educated Indians and thus provide against the threat to me Raj.

But historians are now disinclined to accept this view and several reasons are offered for this. People had exaggerated ideas about the influence which Hume was supposed to wield in official circles. Private papers to Lord Dufferin, the Governor-General, are now available and they show that Hume’s views were not taken very seriously by British officials. Secondly, Hume’s motives were nobler than just creation of a ‘safety valve’ with a view to provide safe outlets to educated Indians discontent. He possessed a genuine human sympathy for India, and worked tirelessly for many years to make the Congress a viable and continuing organization. From 1885 to 1906 he was the general secretary of the Congress and helped in guiding, shaping, coordinating and recording its activities. For Hume there was nothing inconsistent in working for the regeneration of the Indian people and at the same time accepting an ‘enlightened’ distant imperialism from which Indian people could substantially benefit for their social and cultural regeneration. Finally, because of other developments to which a reference has been made, the need for establishing an all-India organization was being keenly felt and some efforts had in fact been made in this direction. Hume was by no means responsible for bringing about changes in the social and political milieu, which, in a broader sense, made the foundation and survival of a national organization possible. The formation of the Congress cannot be described only to the initiative of an individual. There were other factors, as has already been pointed out. Hume was only a strong means for the realization of the aspirations of the fairly large and articulate middle class that was clamouring for sharing positions of responsibility with the British in the running of administration in the country.

In this context a question can arise. Why is it that educated Indians accepted Hume’s leadership? Considering that some of them had been very active in their field for almost a decade, this question becomes all the more relevant. One reason could be that being an Englishman he was free from regional prejudices. But it seems that the more important reason was that Indian leaders wanted to proceed cautiously lest their efforts invite official wrath. Coming from a British ex-civil servant, such an effort was less likely to arouse hostility in official circles. They had a fairly correct and realistic estimate of what was possible. Under the circumstances, they wanted to consolidate and ventilate their views without arousing suspicion in the

minds of their rulers. In his speech the President mentioned this in clear terms. He remarked: 'On more than one occasion remarks have been made by gentlemen', who should have been wiser, in condemning the proposed Congress as if it were a nest of conspirators and disloyalists'. If the founder was an Englishman, there was less likelihood of inviting distrust. In this context a remark of the great Moderate leader G.K. Gokhale is often quoted:

No Indian could have started the Indian National Congress If the founder of the Congress had not been a great Englishman and a distinguished ex-official, such was the distrust of political agitation in those days that the authorities would have at once found some way or the other of suppressing the movement.

4.7.2 Ambitions and Rivalries of Indian Elite

During the last two decades many historians, mainly centred at Cambridge, have argued that the Indian National Congress was, in some ways, not really national, that it was a movement of self-interested individuals and that it functioned as a vehicle for the pursuit of their material interests and parochial rivalries. (Anil Seal has been the most influential historian to express this view). But this view has been challenged in India. It is true that lust for power or desire to serve one's interests cannot be totally ignored. But at the same time the general factors cannot be brushed aside. Such an explanation ignores the feeling of hurt caused by racial discrimination, feeling of pride in the achievements of fellow-countrymen and also the slowly growing perception that interests of their countrymen would be better served if relations between Britain and India were restructured. The feeling that Indians shared common culture and fundamental economic and political interests had been growing.

Identity in aspirations and frustrations under an alien rule had strengthened these bonds. The founders of the Indian National Congress and various other organizations were inspired by idealism and loftiness of a nationalist vision because of which the interests of self, family, caste and community were subordinated to the interests of the Indian nation. They continued to look for ways of translating this national vision into a reality. The first generation of Congress leaders remained extremely conscious of the fact that they were being ruled by the British who had brought to India many liberal values and a complete break with them might not be in the interest of their countrymen. On the other hand, they thought of ways of making this structure serve the interests of their countrymen.

4.7.3 Need for an All India Body

Viewed in a larger context, the founding of the Indian National Congress was a response to the then existing political and socio-economic conditions which had resulted from long subjection to the alien rule. During the 1880s, as we have seen, the idea of a national organization was very much in the air. In fact, during the last ten days of 1885 as many as five conferences were held in different parts of the country. The Madras Mahajan Sabha held its second annual conference from 22 to 24, December. It was so timed as to enable the

members of the Sabha to attend the Congress at Poona. The Second Indian National Conference, convened by the Indian Association, met at Calcutta. Early in December 1885 when the plan to hold a conference at Poona was announced, attempt seems to have been made to persuade Surendranath Banerjea to cancel his conference. But he expressed his inability to do so at that stage. It merged with the Indian National Congress in 1886. Two other conferences held during the same period were the conferences organized by Eurasians at Jabalpur and by Prayag Central Hindu Samaj at Allahabad. Given the emergence of a countrywide educated class, the idea; they expressed and the organizational developments that had taken place, it was only a matter of time before a national body was created. The Indian National Congress represented the culmination of an awareness amongst educated groups of the need to work together for political purposes. It marked the culmination of a long process of evolution of political ideas and a process of organization which had started from 1830s onwards.

It is interesting to note that the contemporaries-both participants and observers-showed a consciousness about two things. One was that they were making history and second that the Congress was a symbol of the growth of feeling of nationhood. The verdict of history has confirmed their opinion.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) What do you understand by Safety Valve Theory?
- 2) Which of the theories regarding the origin of the Congress, mentioned above, do you find acceptable? And why?

4.8 LET US SUM UP

The establishment of the Indian National Congress in 1885 thus marked the advent of a new era destined to see the fulfillment in a little over sixty years of the nation's urge for liberation, sovereignty and self-reliance. It was a visible symbol of the growing sense of Unity amongst the Indian people. It is true that in the beginning Congress was not a well-knit political organization, it had no regular membership or a central office, its views were very mild and moderate. But as someone has rightly said, great institutions have often had small beginnings.

4.9 KEY WORDS

Elite: The section belonging to the upper stratum of the society.

Mofussil: A sub-division of a district.

Presidency Towns: Centres of initial British occupation like Calcutta, Madras and Bombay.

Renaissance: A process of cultural awakening, and social transformation having occurred in Western Europe between the 14th and the 16th centuries.

Reformation: Religion reforms; an important step in the process of modernization; followed Renaissance in Western Europe in the 15th century.

4.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Read Section 4.2
- 2) i) c ii) a iii) b
- 3) i) ✗ ii) ✓ iii) ✓ iv) ✗

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Sub-sec. 4.4.1
- 2) i) ✓ ii) ✗ iii) ✗ iv) ✗
- 3) See Sub-sec. 4.4.2

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Write your answer from section 9.5
- 2) See Sub-sec. 4.6.2
- 3) See Sub-sec. 4.6.4

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) See Sub-sec. 4.7.1
- 2) Read the entire Section 4.7 and write your own answer.

UNIT 5: MODERATES AND EXTREMISTS*

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Composition of the Congress
 - 5.2.1 Middle Class Organization
 - 5.2.2 The Methods of Work
- 5.3 The Moderates
 - 5.3.1 The Demands and Programme
 - 5.3.2 Evaluation of Work
- 5.4 The Extremists
 - 5.4.1 Ideological Basis of Extremism
 - 5.4.2 Extremists in Action
- 5.5 The Moderates and Extremists: An Analysis
 - 5.5.1 Differences
 - 5.5.2 Personality Clash
 - 5.5.3 Open Conflict and Split
 - 5.5.4 The Consequences of the Split
- 5.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.7 Key Words
- 5.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

5.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we will discuss the evolution of Indian National Congress and role of early nationalist leadership. After reading this Unit, you should be able to:

- describe the character of the early Congress,
- learn how two diverse viewpoints, belonging to the Moderates and Extremists emerged in the Congress,
- know the main points of differences between the two groups,
- learn how the differences in Moderates and Extremists led to the split of Congress in 1907, and
- know how this split affected the Congress and the national movement.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The Indian National Congress came into existence in 1885. The declared aims of the Congress were:

* Adopted from Unit 10 of EHI-01

- the promotion of friendly relation among political workers hailing from different parts of the country,
- development and consolidation of the feeling of national unity irrespective of caste, creed, or region, and
- the education and organization of public opinion for the welfare of the country.

The early years (1885-1905) saw the evolution of Indian National Congress. During this period the Congress was dominated by Moderate leaders. Gradually, a section emerged which did not agree with the Moderate policies and believed in aggressive action. Due to their aggressive posture this group was called the Extremists. Both the groups believed in different political methods to oppose the British rule. Their differences led to the split in Congress in 1907. In this Unit we will study these developments in the Congress and how they affected the national movement.

5.2 COMPOSITION OF THE CONGRESS

Beginning with its first session at Bombay in 1885, the Congress became by 1886 (second session at Calcutta) 'the whole country's Congress'. In 1885, only 72 delegates had attended the Congress session, whereas at Calcutta (1886) there were 434 delegates elected by different local organizations and bodies. Here it was decided that the Congress would henceforth meet annually in different parts of the country.

5.2.1 Middle Class Organization

Representing as it did the entire nation, the Congress could be only a platform of all the races, castes, creeds, professions, trades and occupations, as well as or provinces. But this broad sweeping description does not give a correct picture. As a matter of fact there was a great disparity in the representation of various castes, creeds, races, professions, trades and provinces. Among the classes, the educated middle class had the largest share. The legal profession was most heavily represented among the professions. The Brahmans among the castes were comparatively larger in number. Among the provinces, as Anil Seal has shown in his book, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1968) the presidencies Bombay, Calcutta and Madras took the leading part. The masses were conspicuous by their absence. So was the case with the landed class. So the Congress was by and large an entirely middle class affair. A look at the figures of the members who attended the early sessions of the Congress will bear out this statement.

Table 1: Composition of the Members of Indian National Congress, 1885-1888

Place of Session	Year	Lawyers	Journalists	Doctors	others	Total
Bombay	1885	39	14	01	18	72
Calcutta	1886	166	40	16	212	432
Madras	1887	206	43	08	350	607
Allahabad	1888	435	73	42	698	1248

As is clear from Table 1, over half the delegates at the first Congress were lawyers, and for decades to come more than a third of the delegates continued to belong to this profession in most of the sessions of the Congress. Journalists, doctors and teachers formed an overwhelming majority. There were only two teachers at the first session but their number increased to 50 at the fourth. Many who were not directly represented also sympathised with the movement. Though the old aristocracy was not interested in public affairs, the Congress tried to enlist its support as well. The idea behind this move was that the support from the princes and aristocracy would demonstrate the unity of British and princely India. This was likely to impress the conservatives in Britain and also help in financing the movement.

5.2.2 The Methods of Work

Early Congressmen had an implicit faith in the efficacy of peaceful and constitutional agitation. The press and the platform at the annual sessions were their agencies. However, the press was the only agency through which the Congress propaganda was carried out throughout the year. Many leaders, in fact, were editors of either English or Indian language newspapers and wielded their pen powerfully. The holding of the annual session was another method of Congress propaganda. At these meetings the Government policy was discussed, and resolutions were passed in a forceful manner. The annual sessions attracted the attentions of both the educated sections of the middle class, and the Government. But the gravest drawback was that the Congress sessions lasted only for three days a year. It had no machinery to carry on the work in the interval between the two sessions.

The Congressmen's belief in the essential sense of justice and goodness of the British nation was strong. They worked under the illusion that all would be well if the British could be acquainted with the true state of affairs in India. They thought that it was only the bureaucracy which stood between the people and their rights.

So their aim was to educate Indian public opinion and making it conscious of its rights. It also intended to inform British public about the problems faced by the Indians and remind it of its duty towards India. To fulfil the latter aim, deputations of leading Indians were sent to Britain to present the Indian viewpoint.

In 1889, a British Committee of Indian National Congress was founded. To carry on its propaganda the Committee started its organ *India*, in 1890. It was to present the Indian viewpoint to the British authorities that Dadabhai Naoroji spent a major part of his life in England. He got elected to the British House of Commons and formed a strong Indian lobby in that House.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) List three main aims of the Congress at the time of its formation.
 - i)
 - ii)
 - iii)

- 2) Was Congress a middle class organization in the early years? Write in eight lines.

5.3 THE MODERATES

The Congress programme during the first phase (1885-1905) was very modest. It demanded moderate constitutional reforms, economic relief, administrative reorganization and defence of civil rights.

5.3.1 Demands and Programme

The more important of the demands were:

- the organization of the provincial councils,
- simultaneous examination for the I.C.S. in India and England,
- the abolition or reconstitution of the Indian Council,
- the separation of the Judiciary from the executive,
- the repeal of the Arms Act,
- the appointment of Indians to the commissioned ranks in the Army,
- the reduction of military expenditure, and
- the introduction of Permanent Settlement to other parts of India.

The Congress expressed opinions on all the important measures of the Government and protested against the unpopular ones. These demands were repeated year after year, although there was hardly any response from the Government. During the first twenty years (1885-1905) there was practically no change in the Congress programme. The major demands were practically the same as those formulated at the first three or four sessions.

This phase of the Congress is known as the Moderate phase. During this period the leaders were cautious in their demands. They did not want to annoy the government and incur the risk of suppression of their activities. From 1885 to 1892, their main demand continued to be expansion and reform of the Legislative Councils, the membership of the Councils for elected representatives of the people and also an increase in the powers of these Councils.

The British Government was forced to pass the Indian Councils Act of 1892, but the provisions of this Act failed to satisfy the Congress leaders. They demanded Indian control over the public purse and raised the slogan that had earlier been raised by the Americans during their War of Independence, 'No taxation without representation'. By 1905 the Congress put forth the demand for Swaraj or self-rule for Indians within the British Empire on the model of the self-governing colonies like Australia or Canada. This demand was first referred to by G.K. Gokhale in 1905 (at Banaras) and later explicitly stated by Dadabhai Naoroji in 1906 (at Calcutta).

Economic Drain of India

A strong point made by the nationalists during this phase was about the economic drain of India. Dadabhai described the British rule as 'an everlasting and every day increasing foreign invasion' that was gradually destroying the country. In the nationalist opinion, the British

were responsible for the destruction of India's indigenous industries. The remedy for the removal of India's poverty was the development of modern industries. The Government could promote it through tariff protection and direct government aid. However, after seeing the failure of the Government in this regard the nationalists popularised the idea of Swadeshi or use of Indian goods and boycott of British goods as a means of promoting Indian industries. They demanded:

- end of India's economic drain,
- the reduction of land revenue in order to lighten the burden of taxation on the peasants,
- improvement in the conditions of work of the plantation labourers,
- abolition of the salt tax, and
- the reduction in the high military expenditure of the Government of India.

They also fully recognized the value of the freedom of the press and speech and condemned all attempts at their curtailment. In fact, the struggle for the removal of restrictions on press became the integral part of the nationalist struggle for freedom. The progressive content of these demands and their direct connection with the needs and aspirations of the Indian middle class is clear by these demands.

Most of them opposed on grounds, both economic and political, the large-scale import of foreign capital in railways, plantations and industries and the facilities accorded to these by the Government. By attacking expenditure on the army and the civil service, they indirectly challenged the basis of British rule in India. By attacking the land revenue and taxation policies, they sought to undermine the financial basis of British administration in India. The use of Indian army and revenue for British imperial purposes in Asia and Africa was identified as another form of economic exploitation. Some of them even questioned the propriety of placing on Indian revenues the entire burden of British rule itself. In the form of the drain theory, they impressed upon the popular mind a potent symbol of foreign exploitation of India.

The Indian leaders were concerned with the problem of economic development as a whole rather than economic advance in isolated sectors. The central question for them was the overall economic growth of India. Developments in different fields were to be considered in the context of their contribution to the economic development of the country. Even the problem of poverty was seen to be one of lack of production and of economic development.

Nature of Economic Demands

As we have noted earlier, even though their political demands were moderate, their economic demands were radical in nature. The Indian leaders advocated basically anti-imperialist economic policies. They laid stress on basic changes in the existing economic-relations between India and England. They vehemently opposed the attempts of foreign rulers to convert India into supplier of raw materials and a market for British

manufacturers. They criticised the official policies on tariff, trade, transport and taxation. These were regarded as hampering rather than helping the growth of indigenous industry.

5.3.2 Evaluation of Work

Whatever may be the drawback in the demands put forward by the Congress, it was a national body in true sense of the term. There was nothing in its programme to which any class might take exception. Its doors were open to all classes and communities. Its programme was broad enough to accommodate all interests. It may be said that it was not a party, but a movement.

It must be said to the credit of the nationalist leaders that though they belonged to the urban educated middle class, they were too broad-minded and free from narrow and sectional class interests. They kept in mind the larger interests of the people in general. Their economic policies were not influenced by the short sighted vision of a job-hungry middle class. Their challenging critique of the financial foundations of the Raj was a unique service that the early Congress leadership rendered to the nation.

The British Hostility

The political tone of the Indian National Congress might have been mild but from the fourth session of the Congress onwards, the government adopted a hostile attitude towards it. Time passed and nothing substantial was conceded to the Congress. Elements hostile to the Congress were encouraged by the British. For example they encouraged the Aligarh movement against the Congress. As the century was drawing to its close, the British attitude became more hostile to the Congress under Lord Curzon. His greatest ambition was to assist the Congress to a peaceful demise. However he took certain steps which only fanned the nationalist discontent. In an autocratic manner he tried to control the university education and decreed the partition of Bengal. This led to a strong national awakening.

During this period general impression grew that they (the Moderates) were political mendicants, only petitioning and praying to the British Government for petty concessions. In fact, the Moderates had played an important role at a critical period in the history of Indian nationalism.

The flowering of the Moderate thought was the culmination of a tradition which can be traced back to Raja Rammohun Roy, who stood for the rational, liberal tradition of contemporary Europe. His ideas of reforms ultimately provided the basis for the demands put forward by the early Congress. As with Rammohun, so with the early Congress leaders, the presence of the British administration was important for continued political progress. Quite understandably, their language was cautious and their expectation moderate. But with changing times, the Moderates also began to alter their position. By 1905 Gokhale had started speaking of self-rule as the goal and in 1906 it was Dadabhai Naoroji who mentioned the word Swaraj as the goal of the Congress.

Even so, the Moderates found themselves in a tight corner with the emergence of Extremist leadership within the congress. The British authorities also doubted their bonafides. The Extremists were attracting

youthful section among the political activists. The well-meaning, loyal, but patriotic, Moderates could no longer cut ice before the manoeuvring of the British bureaucracy. In the changed situation Extremists came to the centre stage of the Congress.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) List 5 main demands of the Congress during 1885-1905.
 - i)
 - ii)
 - iii)
 - iv)
 - v)
- 2) What was the critique of economic policies of the Raj put forward by early nationalists?

5.4 THE EXTREMISTS

Extremism in the Indian National scene did not spring up all of a sudden in the first decade of the twentieth century. In fact it had been growing slowly but invisibly since the Revolt of 1857 itself.

5.4.1 Ideological Basis of Extremism

The nationalist ideas behind the Revolt of 1857, according to the Extremists, were Swadharma and Swaraj. Attachment to rationalism and western ideals had almost alienated the 'Liberal' (the Moderate) school from the masses in India. That is why despite their high idealism, they failed to make any effective impact on the people. In due course a section was bound to come to fill this gap. In the place of adoration and imitation of all things Western, there was a movement by the eighties of the nineteenth century urging people to look to their ancient civilization. An under-current of this type had existed earlier but during the Revolt of 1857 it had suddenly burst into open. However, the English educated community by and large had kept itself aloof from the main current of Indian life and remained untouched by this trend. The historic task of bridging the gulf between the educated few and the general people was accomplished by Paramahansa Ramakrishna and his English educated disciple, Swami Vivekananda. Swami Dayananda, who was well-versed in Vedic literature, and the Arya Samaj founded by him also played a vital role in this direction. The Eclectic Theosophical Society of Annie Besant too made a contribution. These social reform movements gave impetus to political radicalism. There was instinctive attachment to native culture, religion and polity. The political radicals who derived inspiration from their traditional cultural values were ardent nationalists who wanted to have relations with other countries in terms of equality and self respect. They had tremendous sense of self respect and wanted to keep their heads high. They opposed the Moderates who were considered by them to be servile and respectful to the British. To the Extremists, emancipation meant something much deeper and wider than politics. To them it was a matter of invigorating and energising all departments of life. They thought that a trial of strength between the ruler and the ruled was inevitable, and

argued for building a new India of their dreams in which the British had no contribution to make.

There were three groups of the Extremists -- the Maharashtra group, headed by B.G. Tilak; the Bengal group represented by B.C. Pal and Aurobindo, and the Punjab group led by Lala Lajpat Rai. The Bengal Extremists were greatly influenced by the ideas of Bankim Chandra, who was a liberal conservative like Edmund Burke. He wanted no break with the past which, he thought, might create more problems than it would solve. He was opposed to precipitate reforms imposed from above. In his view, reforms should wait on moral and religious regeneration which should be based on fundamentals of religion. Bankim blazed the trail for the Extremists in his contemptuous criticism of the Moderates.

This nationalism of the Extremists was emotionally charged. The social, economic and political ideals were all blended in this inspiring central conception of nationalism. Carrying this message to the West Vivekananda generated tremendous self-confidence and willpower. Aurobindo even raised patriotism to the pedestal of mother worship. He said in a letter, "I know my country as my mother. I adore her. I worship her."

Aurobindo was very much attracted by the teachings of Dayananda who was hardly influenced by any ideas from the West. He credited Dayananda with more definite work for the nation than any other reformer. Bankim Chandra, Dayananda and Vivekananda had thus prepared the ideological ground on the basis of which the Extremists drew up their political programme.

5.4.2 Extremists in Action

Tilak resented any interference by an alien government into the domestic and private life of the people. He quarreled with the reformers over the Age of Consent Bill in 1891. He introduced the Ganapati festival in 1893. Aurobindo published 'New Lamps for Old' in the *Indu Prakash* between 1893 and 1894. Tilak threw a challenge to the National Social Conference in 1895 by not allowing it to hold its session in the Congress pavilion in Poona. The National Social Conference was under the influence of Moderate Wing. In the same year the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha was captured by the Extremists from the Moderates. The Shivaji festival was first held on 15 April, 1896, with the foundation of the Deccan Sabha on November 4, 1896, the division between the Extremists and the Moderates in Maharashtra was complete, but it was not so all-over India. Pal, for example, the leader of the Bengal Extremists was still in the camp of the Moderates. He wrote in 1897 "I am loyal to the British Government, because with me loyalty to the British Government is identical with loyalty to my own people and my own country; because I believe that God has placed this Government over us, for our salvation". Only in 1902, he could write, "The Congress here and its British Committee in London, are both begging institutions".

Because of the soft and vacillating policy it pursued, Lajpat Rai also was not interested in Congress programme. Between 1893 and 1900 he did not attend any meeting of the Congress. He felt during this period that the Congress leaders cared more for fame and pomp than for the interests of the country.

While one disillusionment after the other demoralised the Moderates and weakened their cause, the victory of Japan over Russia (1904-05) sent a thrill of enthusiasm throughout Asia. Earlier in 1896 the Ethiopians had defeated the Italian army. These victories pricked the bubble of European superiority and gave to the Indians self-confidence.

5.5 THE MODERATES AND EXTREMISTS : AN ANALYSIS

There was much in common between the Moderates and the Extremists. But they also shared certain differences in political perspective and methods. In this Section we will deal with the differences which existed between the Moderates and Extremists, culminating in the Surat split in 1907, and how this affected the National Movement.

5.5.1 Differences

Tilak remarked that the Old (Moderate) and New (Extremist) parties agreed on the point that appeals to the bureaucracy were useless. But the Old party believed in appeals to the British nation, the New Party did not. Like the Moderates, Tilak also believed that under the British rule, the industries had been ruined and wealth drained out of the country, and Indians reduced to the lowest level of poverty. But the way out was not, Tilak affirmed, through petitioning. The Extremists believed that Indians should have the key of their own house and Self Government was the goal. The New Party wanted the Indians to realise that their future rested entirely in their own hands and they could be free only if they were determined to be free.

Tilak did not want Indians to take to arms; rather they should develop their power of self-denial and self-abstinence in such a way as not to assist the foreign power to rule over them. Tilak advised his countrymen to run their own courts, and to stop paying taxes when time came. He asserted, "Swaraj is my birthright and I will have it".

The philosophical radicalism of Aurobindo went even further. According to him the existing condition of the Government in India suffered from corrupt western influences. To escape it, she must get rid of these conditions and seek refuge in her own superior civilization. The work of nationalism, he added would be to:

- i) win Swaraj for India so that the existing unhealthy condition of political life, full of germs of the social and political malaise which was overtaking Europe, might be entirely and radically cured, and
- ii) ensure that the Swaraj when gained would be a Swadeshi Swaraj and not an importation of the European variety. This is why, in his opinion, the movement for Swaraj found its first expression in an outburst for swadeshi sentiment directed not merely against foreign goods, but against foreign habits, dress, manners and education and sought to bring the people to their own civilization.

From the foregoing it may appear that through the Extremists used much stronger and sharper language, but as far as the goals were concerned they were substantially not very different from the Moderates. As referred earlier, Gokhale in his Presidential Address (Benaras, 1905) and Dadabhai Naoroji

in his Presidential speech (Calcutta, 1906) had respectively advocated self-government and Swaraj as the goal of the Congress. The differences were related to the methodology for achieving the goals.

5.5.2 Personality Clash

Besides these differences of attitude and emphasis mentioned above, the controversy between the Moderates and the Extremists raged round the personality of Tilak. Both Tilak and Gokhale hailed from Poona. Tilak was militant who would use any stick to beat the Government with. He wielded a powerful pen and exerted great influence on public opinion through his paper, the *Mahratta* and the *Kesari*.

Gokhale was gentle and soft-spoken. He had wonderful mastery over Indian financial problems, and was at his best in the imperial Legislative Council being an expert in exposing the hollow claims of the Government. He was Hon'ble Mr. Gokhale (Mahanama Gokhale). He had established at Poona the Servants of India Society with a view to training a band of dedicated workers who were expected to give their all to the service of the motherland. The members of the Society had to take an oath of poverty, had to observe strict code of conduct. They were given only a subsistence allowance and had to perform hard duty.

The difference between Gokhale and Tilak may be traced back to an earlier period. There had been intense clash of personalities at Poona from the beginning of the nineties of the last century. A quarrel ensued between Tilak and G.G. Agarkar although they had been coworkers in the Deccan Education Society. Ultimately Tilak was pushed out of the Society. Thereafter there had been a constant tussle between the followers of Tilak on the one hand and his opponents on the other. The opponents rallied round Mahadev Govind Ranade and Gokhale, backed in Congress affairs by Pherozeshah Mehta from Bombay. Gokhale enjoyed the support of the Congress establishment. As the Moderates were losing their popularity and the Extremists were capturing the imagination of the country because of the growth of the new spirit, the conflict between the two contending groups in Maharashtra and Poona also became more pronounced.

There was ferment all over India. The *Bande Mataram* under Aurobindo was not only challenging the right of the British Government to rule India, but also the right of the veteran leaders to speak for India. Outside Bengal Tilak was the first to recognize the potential of the ferment in Bengal. The Partition of Bengal was to him not so much a British blunder as Indian opportunity to build up strength. He extended support to the anti-partition movement and encouraged the emerging Extremist leaders in Bengal. Gokhale had seen this alliance growing since the Benaras Congress (1905). This Tilak-Pal alliance caused a deep concern not only to the Government, but also to many Congress Leaders. Tilak was regarded as a dissident, if not a rebel. Pherozeshah Mehta, D.E. Wacha and the whole Bombay Group distrusted him since the controversies raging in the 1890s. The differences were partly temperamental. For at least 15 years there had been a cold war between the Congress Establishment headed by Mehta on the one hand and Tilak on the other.

- 1) What was the ideological basis of the rise of extremism?
- 2) What was the political programme of the Extremists?

5.5.3 Open Conflict and Split

Tilak was unpopular with the Moderate group in Bombay. He was a shrewd tactician waiting for the opportunity to show his hand. The unity forged at the Benaras Congress (1905) with the Bengal Extremists proved advantageous to Tilak at the Calcutta Congress (1906). Gokhale also had his premonitions about the Calcutta Congress. He apprehended trouble. This mutual distrust did not augur well for the Congress.

To begin with there was controversy over the Presidentship. Pal and Aurobindo wanted Tilak to be the President, but the Moderates were in no mood to accept him. To have their way the latter resorted to an extraordinary manoeuvre, and without consulting the Reception Committee, wired Dadabhai Naoroji to accept the presidentship. After the latter's acceptance, the Extremists were presented with a *fait accompli*. Thus having failed in their attempt to get Tilak installed as President, the Extremists -- Tilak, Aurobindo, Pal, Ashwini Kumar Dutt, G.S. Khaparde etc. -- formed themselves into a pressure group to press their points. The Extremists were in majority and they had substantial local support. There was much heat in the atmosphere and the meeting of the Subjects Committee was stormy. Resolutions were discussed and amended under pressure from the Extremists. Pherozeshah Mehta was the target of their special fury. Mehta, M.M. Malaviya and Gokhale were heckled and booed. Ultimately a compromise was hurriedly made, and the resolutions on the partition of Bengal, Swadeshi and Boycott were re-phrased and secured a smooth passage in the open session. There was however, no union of the minds and hearts among the antagonists. The danger was averted for the time being but a festering sore was left.

Though the Extremists had failed to get Tilak elected the President of the Calcutta Congress (1906), they were satisfied with what they had achieved there. They had emerged as a strong, coherent and powerful force. They had thwarted what they believed to be determined attempts to water down the Congress programme. The Moderates left Calcutta with mixed feelings of bewilderment, humiliation and dismay. What worried them most was the "rough behaviour" adopted by the Extremists.

Both the Moderates and the Extremists participated in the Swadeshi movement, but there were real differences between the views of the Moderates and Extremists on Swadeshi. To Tilak, Pal and Aurobindo, the boycott had double implications. Materially it was to be an economic pressure on Manchester, producing thereby a chain reaction on the Government of India. Spiritually it was a religious ritual of self-punishment. Swadeshi had primarily an economic message for Gokhale the message of industrial regeneration which he had imbibed from Ranade. To Surendranath the Swadeshi movement was in spirit a protectionist movement. It appealed to the masses because they had the sense to perceive that it would "herald the dawn of a new era of material prosperity for them". To Tilak and Lajpat Rai it was a moral training in self-help, determination and sacrifice as well as a

weapon of 'political agitation'. To Aurobindo Swadeshi was not 'secularity of autonomy and wealth', but a return to the faith in India's destiny as the world-saviour. This Swadeshi had a far richer and meaningful content for the Extremists than for the Moderates.

Differences of temperament and ideology and clash of personalities were to create bitter feelings among the rival groups. Persistent criticism by the Extremists alarmed the Moderates. The latter were afraid that the former had already captured Bengal, Maharashtra, Berar and the Punjab, and there was danger of the rest of the country also being lost to them. So they were desperate.

At Calcutta, it has been decided to hold the next session of the Congress at Nagpur where the Moderates thought that they would be in majority. The election of the Congress President for the ensuing session (1907) developed into an occasion for trial of strength between the Moderates and the Extremists. The Moderates were determined not to allow Tilak to hold the presidential chair. This attitude was an ominous sign and betrayed the determination of the Moderate to wreck of Congress if Tilak got elected as President and the Extremists had an upper hand.

The Moderates were unanimous on the exclusion of Tilak but not on who should be elected. Gokhale had his eyes fixed on Rash Behari Ghosh, a renowned lawyer and powerful orator. But the Moderates found themselves unnerved at Nagpur and Pherozeshah Mehta changed the venue to Surat where he thought he would have his way. The Extremists did not like this. The tense atmosphere and the intemperate language used by both sides pointed to the inevitability of the coming crisis at Surat. Rash Behari Ghosh was elected the Congress President. The relations between the two groups worsened still further. In the meeting there was open conflict to the proposal of Ghosh being elected as President. Tilak was not allowed to express his views in the matter. This was a signal for pandemonium. There were shouts and counter-shouts, brandishing of sticks and unrolling of turbans, breaking of chairs and brushing of heads. There were allegations and counter-allegations as to who was responsible for this episode. But the fact that the internal conflict had taken this form should have been a matter of concern for all.

5.5.4 Consequences of the Split

But whoever may be responsible for the split and whatever may be its cause, it was a great national calamity. Gokhale was aware of this great disaster. The British bureaucracy was in jubilation. Lord Minto, the Viceroy, exultingly told Lord Morley, the Secretary of State that the 'Congress Collapse' (Surat split) was 'a great triumph for us'. But Morley knew better. Almost prophetically he told the Viceroy that, their immediate collapse notwithstanding, the Extremists would eventually capture the Congress. The split did immense harm to the Congress in particular and the national movement in general. It can be said that the Moderates were the brain of the Congress and the nation and the Extremists were the heart; the former were the 'law' and the latter 'impulse'. The unified action of the two was absolutely necessary for the proper functioning of the organization and growth of national movement. With the Extremists in the wilderness, the

Moderates were to achieve little. For about a decade, the Moderates were not in a position to show the kind of strength that was needed to seriously oppose the British. It was only after 1916, with the re-entry of the Extremists in the Congress and exit of the Moderates from it (1918) that the Congress could be reactivated. But then it was a new story. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Gokhale's political disciple, with his emphasis on the synthesis of the reason and faith, law and impulse as representing the abiding strength of the Indian people was to activate and rejuvenate the Congress and carry a new phase of action.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) What led to the split in Congress in 1907 at Surat?
- 2) How did Surat split hamper the growth of National Movement?

5.6 LET US SUM UP

The first twenty-five years of Congress were very important in so much as they witnessed the articulation of the major demands of the National Movement. Initially the Congress started with moderate demands and sought to realise these demands through mild constitutional methods. The early leaders analysed how the British were draining India's wealth in a systematic manner. They realised that this drain was increasing the poverty of the masses. Within few years a section of the Congressmen felt that the moderate methods were of little help. This section wanted more vigorous action against the British rule and put forward Swaraj (self-rule) as the major demand. This internal conflict led to the split in Congress in 1907. The split weakened the organization for the short while. However, the biggest achievement of Congress in its early phase was that it could mobilize the significant sections of the Indian population against the British through Swadeshi Movement (launched against the partition of Bengal).

5.7 KEY WORDS

Aristocracy: Big zamindars, big landlords, princes etc.

Arms Act: An act according to which Indians had to pay a tax for possessing arms.

Dissident: A person who doesn't agree.

Electic: Taking up just one aspect of an idea or philosophy.

Executive: Organ of government looking after legal matters and justice.

Indian Councils Act of 1892: According to this act the Governor General's legislative-Council was to have nominated members thus a representative principle was introduced into the councils, the functions of councils were enlarged, and although the official majority remained but the act marked a notable step forward in Indian participation in governmental functioning.

Radical: Left of centre.

Self-abstinence: Self-denial.

Tariff Protection: Imposing a tax on imported goods so as to protect to own industry.

5.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Section 5.1
- 2) See Sub-sec. 5.2.1

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Sub-sec. 5.3.1
- 2) See Sub-sec. 5.3.2

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See Sub-sec. 5.4.1
- 2) See Sub-sec. 5.4.2

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) See Sub-sec. 5.5.3
- 2) See Sub-sec. 5.5.4



UNIT 6: THE SWADESHI MOVEMENT*

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 The Plan for the Partition of Bengal
- 6.3 The Motive behind the Plan
- 6.4 The Partition
- 6.5 The Miscalculation of the Government
- 6.6 Boycott, Swadeshi and National Education
- 6.7 The Samitis and the Political Trends
- 6.8 The Concept of Mass Movement : Workers and Peasants
 - 6.8.1 Workers
 - 6.8.2 Peasants
- 6.9 The Communal Tangle
- 6.10 The Rise of Revolutionary Nationalism
- 6.11 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.12 Key Words
- 6.13 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

6.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit attempts to place before you the factors which prompted the British to partition Bengal in 1905. It also gives an account of the intense nationalist reaction the move evoked and spells out the changes Swadeshi movement brought about in the content and forms of the Indian struggle for freedom. After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- explain the background in which the Indian nationalists and the British authorities confronted each other,
- identify the motives behind the scheme for partitioning Bengal,
- discuss how the Swadeshi movement grew, and what political trends and techniques it developed,
- appreciate the strength of the movement, as well as the difficulties it encountered, and finally, and
- make an over-all assessment of the historic phenomenon.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The enthusiasm of the articulate representatives of the educated middle class – the newly acclaimed leaders of Indian Society – appears to have considerably diminished by the close of the 19th century.

* Adopted from Unit 11 of EHI-01

Personalities like Gladstone in Britain and Lord Ripon in India, who realized the importance of the educated Indians and sympathised with their aspirations, were no longer at the helm of affairs. Instead, men who distrusted them without exception, and who disliked any relaxation of Britain's imperialist hold over India, were in charge of the governance of India. The authorities tended to ignore the Indian opinions and turned a blind eye to acts of racial arrogance by the officials. They even tried to undermine those nominal concessions which had grudgingly been conceded to Indians from time to time in the earlier period. The hostility of the Raj was becoming apparent even to the earlier nationalists. Many of them had realised by 1900 the futility of their petitioning and praying to the Government. Their very modest demands for jobs in the Indian Civil Service and some reforms in the Legislative Councils had practically been disregarded. Their appeal for a just British rule in India in place of the prevailing "un-British" misrule fell on deaf ears. Their demands for constitutional concessions that had repeatedly been made from the Indian National Congress platform for about two decades produced only the paltry reforms of 1892. The situation was considerably worsened in the early years of the 20th century due to the presence in India of a Viceroy like Lord Curzon, who wanted to treat the Congress as an "unclean thing", reject all its leaders' pleas with "frigid indifference" and consider the Civil Service as one "specifically reserved for Europeans". Like all staunch imperialists, Curzon was an unqualified racist, proclaiming that "the highest ideal of truth is to a large extent a Western concept" and speaking of Indians in his benevolent moods in tones "one normally reserves for pet animals". (S. Gopal, *British Policy in India, 1858-1905*, Cambridge, 1965, p. 227).

Alarmed and ruffled by the Curzonian presence as the earlier nationalists were, they were not so dispirited as to swallow every humiliation or to lie ignominiously low. They had grown in stature in the eyes of their own people, learnt from their social reformers and ideologue to have faith in themselves, and acquired sufficient amount of self-respect to ask for civilized treatment and natural justice. A confrontation between Curzon and the educated middle class nationalists, therefore, was bound to take place. It eventually did in Bengal - where the Indian intelligentsia was most assertive and where Curzon was at his offensive worst.

Curzon was the first to start his attack in Bengal. As early as 1899 he reduced the number of elected members in the Calcutta Corporation. This measure was intended primarily to satisfy the European business interests in the city, who often complained of delays in the grant of licenses and similar other facilities. The consideration behind the action was obvious, and its undemocratic nature was unmistakable. The Calcutta citizens felt deeply offended and wronged. However, before they could digest this wrong, Curzon launched an assault on the autonomous character of Calcutta University -- the pride of the educated sections in Bengal. Armed with the recommendations of Indian Universities Commission, whose sole Indian member (Gurudas Banerji) disagreed wholly with others, Curzon passed the Universities Act (1904). The objective used as a pretext was "to raise the standard of education all round". The act cut down the number of elected senate members (mostly Indians) and transferred the ultimate power of

affiliating colleges and schools, as well as giving them grants-in-aid, to the Government officials. This piece of legislation left the outraged members of the educated middle class in no doubt about the Viceroy's determination to hurt them and break their spirit in every conceivable way. They naturally had to prepare themselves mentally for the worst, and think in terms of offering resistance. The worst, as it turned out, came rather quickly and dramatically in July 1905 when Curzon announced the partition of Bengal.

6.2 THE PLAN FOR THE PARTITION OF BENGAL

The province of Bengal under a Lieutenant Governor was an unwieldy territory of diverse population, using various languages and dialects and differing widely in terms of economic development. Apart from Bengal proper (i.e. Bengali-speaking western and eastern Bengal), it originally comprised the whole of Bihar, Orissa and Assam. Earlier, too, the British authorities did occasionally think of reducing the size of the province for administrative convenience. In 1874 they actually separated Assam from Bengal by making it a Chief Commissioner's province, and adding to it, despite some local opposition, the predominantly Bengali-speaking area of Sylhet. Assam was further extended in 1897 by the transfer for the time being of South Lushai hill tracts from Bengal. Such piece-meal reductions, however, had not conclusively solved the British difficulty in managing a province of the proportion of Bengal with all its attendant problems. From the administrative point of view, as well as from the angle of equal developmental opportunities for all the areas, some sort of territorial reorganization of the province of Bengal was therefore needed. Curzon did not appear to be thinking unreasonably when he talked of 'readjustments' of Bengal early in 1904. If he had ever thought of streamlining the province by disassociating the linguistically divergent, Orissa and Bihar from it, as it was so aptly and repeatedly advocated by the nationalists themselves, Curzon's policy would probably have been hailed as a principled and far-sighted one. Instead, he and his main advisors -- Sir A. Fraser, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, and H.H. Risley, Secretary, Home Department, Government of India -- were determined to use the plea for territorial readjustment to throttle the voice of nationalism. The move was calculated to hurt chiefly those who spearheaded the national movement in the eastern part of India, namely, the Bengali-speaking educated middle class. Having been the first to be brought under the British rule, the Bengalis were among the pioneers in taking to English education, imbibing Western Liberal ideas and airing nationalistic and patriotic views. This annoyed the imperialist authorities and they decided to take action.

6.3 THE MOTIVE BEHIND THE PLAN

In the eyes of Curzon and others like him Bengal was the most vulnerable point in the entire British Indian empire. In their view the Bengalis were "a force already formidable, and certain to be a source of increasing trouble in the future". To meet the growing nationalist challenge in eastern India Curzon and his advisors searched for an effective answers, and eventually found it in the division of the Bengali-speaking people. The official

assessment was: “Bengal united is a power, Bengal divided will pull in several different ways”. Curzon and Company were determined “to split up and thereby weaken a solid body of opponents” to the British rule. The splitting up operations, or the arrangement for giving effect to the maxim “divide and rule”, had to be done in such a manner as to make the Bengalis suffer physical as well as mental division. This Curzon wanted to achieve by creating a situation of mutual suspicion and jealousy between the two major communities in Bengal - the Hindus and the Muslims.

Curzon and his advisors knew that their opponents in Bengal came largely from among the Hindus, who had benefited more than their Muslim brethren by taking socio-economic and educational advantage of the British rule. Majority of the Muslims being agriculturists could not manage to take a similar advantage. By shrewdly suggesting that his Government wished to stand by the Muslims in their race for advancement with the Hindus, and secure them from any threat of Hindu domination, Curzon planned to take away from Bengal those territories where Muslims were more numerous, and join these with Assam to form a new province with Dacca as its Capital. The new province, Curzon hoped, “would invest the Mohammedans in Eastern Bengal with a unity which they have not enjoyed since the days of the old Mussalman viceroys and kings”. He also expected Dacca “to acquire the special character of a Provincial Capital where Mohammedan interest would be strongly represented if not predominant”. By partitioning Bengal, therefore, Curzon and his lieutenants wanted to set up Dacca as a parallel political centre to the nationalistically oriented Calcutta. To make use, of the Muslims to counter-balance the Hindus they intended to create out of Bengal a Muslim-majority province (where 15 million Muslims would live with 12 million Hindus and reduce the Bengali speaking people into a minority in what would remain as Bengal (where 19 million Bengali speaking persons would be outnumbered by 35 million speakers of Hindi, Oriya and other languages). This mischievous game was being played, above all, to cripple the educated Indian middle class nationalists.

6.4 THE PARTITION

The Curzonian scheme to partition Bengal took a concrete shape gradually from the time the Viceroy wrote his minute on Territorial Redistribution on 1 June, 1903 to the day the final scheme of division was despatched to the home authorities in London for sanction on 2 February, 1905. On 19 July, 1905 the Government of India announced its decision to form the new province of “Eastern Bengal and Assam”, comprising the Chittagong, Dacca and Rajshahi divisions, Hill Tippera (Tripura), Maida and Assam. The province came into existence on 16 October, 1905, by breaking up Bengal and its 41.5 million Bengali speaking people.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Which of the following statements are correct (✓) or wrong (✗)
When Bengal was being partitioned
 - i) Lord Curzon was the Viceroy of India.
 - ii) Sir A. Fraser was the Secretary, Home Department, Government of India.

- iii) H.H. Risley was the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal.
 - iv) Bihar and Orissa were separate provinces.
- 2) What was Curzon's real motive in partitioning Bengal?

6.5 THE MISCALCULATION OF THE GOVERNMENT

Even while dividing Bengal most impudently, and with contempt for the Bengalis, Curzon and his men made their own calculations about the kind of resistance they may have to face. They knew about the worries of the babus in eastern Bengal over the prospect of clerical jobs. They were also aware of the difficulty the Bengali Zamindars (having estates in both eastern and western parts) had to face over the increased expenses for engaging two sets of agents and pleaders. The Calcutta High Court lawyers, they knew, will feel concerned over the loss of practice because of a separate High Court in the new province. They would think of the anxieties of the jute and rice trading interests near the port of Calcutta over the challenge that Chittagong might pose as an alternative outlet. They also knew how Calcutta nationalists might feel disturbed on account of the loss of a considerable portion of their audience and following. But they expected all worries to subside in course of time, or at the most, to lead for a while only to protest meetings and processions that could easily be tolerated and ignored.

The Government had no idea whatsoever of the stormy political movement which the Partition would cause, breaking it away from traditional ways of respectful resentment, generating unprecedented militancy and turning it rapidly into a battle for swaraj (self-rule). The authorities grossly underestimated the Bengali dislike for authoritarianism which had been produced among them by their long history of virtual independence from nominal central powers. They also failed to grasp the Bengali feeling for unity and pride in their attainments, at least among the literates which had been fostered by intense educational, intellectual and cultural activities during the whole of the 19th century. Apart from its being the centre of economic and political affairs, the metropolis of Calcutta -- the capital of British India -- had already become the nerve-centre of Bengali consciousness. It drew students from all parts of Bengal, sent out teachers, professionals (engineers and doctors) and petty officials to every nook and corner of the province, often far beyond it. Calcutta had made a significant contribution to the growth of a powerful literary language. The city had an increasing number of high-level newspapers and periodicals as well as a band of writers who were producing developed modern literature.

With their gravitational point in Calcutta, the educated Bengalis were at the beginning of the 20th century inspiring large parts of the country by their achievements in literature (led by Rabindranath Tagore), in science (led by Jagadish Chandra Bose and Prafulla Chandra Roy), in politics (led by Surendranath Banerjee and the up-coming Bepinchandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghosh), and in religion (typified by Swami Vivekananda). Almost at the same time they were making careful note of the chinks that the Boer war had revealed in the so called impenetrable British armour. They also felt greatly elated and assured when much under-rated Oriental

Japan defeated in 1904-05 the over-rated Occidental Czarist Russia. Their rising self-confidence was matched by the growing abhorrence with which they looked down upon all acts of racial intimidation and discrimination.

The educated middle class Indians in Bengal, like their counterparts in the rest of the country, were severely critical of the “drain of wealth” from India to Britain, and of the ravages which India suffered on account of frequent recurrence of famines and plague. They themselves were hard-hit economically, partly because of over-crowding in the professions, and partly due to the unremunerative fragmentation through inheritance of their landed properties. To make matters worse, there was a sudden rise in the prices of all commodities that affected everybody, including the members of the middle class, the rise being “steepest between 1905 and 1908—precisely the years of maximum political unrest”. (Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885-1947*, Delhi, 1983 p.109). In sum, one could say that Bengal and the Bengali middle class in 1905 were by no means in a mood to surrender to the Curzonian assault. But Curzon himself did not seem to be adequately aware of it.

6.6 BOYCOTT, SWADESHI AND NATIONAL EDUCATION

The anti-partition agitation began in Bengal on the conventional moderate nationalist lines, though with a great deal of noise and angry protestations. There were sharp press campaigns against the partition scheme, numerous public meetings in opposition to it and the drafting of petitions to the Government for its annulment. Big conferences were held at the Town Hall, Calcutta, where delegates from districts came to participate and gave vent to their injured sentiments. All this was impressive, making the educated middle class’ case against the partition loud and clear. But it made no effect on the indifference of the authorities in India and Britain. The evident failure of these methods, therefore, led to a search for new techniques from the middle of 1905 and resulted in the discovery of the boycott of British goods as an effective weapon. The boycott suggestion first came from Krishnakumar Mitra’s *Sanjivani* on 3 July, 1905, and was later accepted by the prominent public men at the Town Hall meeting of 7 August, 1905. The discovery was followed by the calls of Rabindranath Tagore and Ramendra Sunder Trivedi, respectively, for the observance of raksha-bandhan (the tying of thread wristlets on each other’s hands as a symbol of brotherhood) and arandhan (the keeping of the hearth unlit at all the homes as a sign of mourning) on the day the partition was put into effect. With these measures the movement gained a new fervour.

The boycott of British products was followed by

- the advocacy of swadeshi or exhorting purchasers to buy indigenously produced goods as a patriotic duty,
- Charkha (the spinning wheel) came to typify the popular concern for the country’s economic self-sufficiency, and
- the holding of swadeshi melas or fairs for selling handicrafts and other articles became a regular feature.

A considerable enthusiasm was created for undertaking swadeshi or Indian enterprises. A number of exclusively Indian industrial ventures, such as the Calcutta Potteries, Bengal Chemicals, Bange Lakshmi Cotton Mills, Mohini Mills and National Tannery were started. Various soap, match box and tobacco manufacturing establishments and oil mills, as well as financial activities, like the swadeshi banks, insurance and steam navigation companies also took off the ground under the impetus generated by the movement.

Meanwhile, the picketing before the shops selling British goods soon led to a boycott of the officially controlled educational institutions. The British threat to the student-pickers in the form of the withdrawal of grants, scholarships and affiliations of the institutions to which they belonged (through the infamous circular of 22 October, 1905 issued by Carlyle, the Chief Secretary of the Government of Bengal, known otherwise as the “Carlyle Circular”) and the actual imposition of fines and rustication orders on them resulted in the decision by large number of students to leave these schools and colleges of “slavery”. Boycott of schools and colleges forced the leaders of the Swadeshi movement to think in terms of running a parallel system of education in Bengal. Soon appeals were made, donations collected and distinguished persons came forward to formulate programmes for national education. These efforts resulted in the establishment of the Bengal Technical Institute (which was started on 25 July, 1906, and which later turned into the College of Engineering and Technology, Jadavpur -- the nucleus of the present day Jadavpur University), the Bengal National College and School (which was set up on 15 August, 1906 with Aurobindo Ghosh as its Principal) and a number of national, primary and secondary schools in the districts.

6.7 THE SAMITIS AND THE POLITICAL TRENDS

For aiding the cause of national education, and for spreading the messages of boycott and swadeshi, a large number of national volunteer bodies or *samitis* sprang up in Calcutta and the districts. Some of the distinguished among them were the Dawn Society (named after the famous journal of the time -- *Dawn*), the Anti-Circular Society (formed initially to protest against the “Carlyle Circular”), the Swadeshdhandhav, the Brati, the Anushilan, the Suhrid and the Sadhena samitis. These samitis preached the essentials of swadeshi and boycott, took up social work during famines and epidemics, imparted physical and moral training, organised crafts and national schools and set up arbitration committees and village societies. They encouraged folk singers and artistes (notably persons like Mukunda Das, Bhusan Das and Mufizuddin Bayati) to perform on the swadeshi themes in local dialects. These efforts served to supplement at the rural level the spate of patriotic compositions by literary stalwarts like Rabindranath Tagore, Rajanikanta Sen, Dwijendralal Roy, Girindramohini Dasi, Sayed Abu Mohammed, or playwrights like Girishchandra Ghosh, Kshirodeprasad Vidyavinode and Amritalal Bose. The ideologies of samitis ranged from secularism to religious revivalism, from moderate politics to social reformism (through constructive economic, educational and social programmes), and included within their range political extremism.

As a matter of fact several trends of political thinking were competing with one another for popular acceptance during the swadeshi days in Bengal:

- i) The moderate nationalist opinion (which was represented by persons like Surendranath Banerjea, Krishnakumar Mitra and Narendra Kumar Sen) still had abiding faith in the British sense of justice, and were not in favour of stretching the agitation too far. Its advocates actually pinned their hopes on the Liberal Morley's appointment as Secretary of State for India in Britain. Their lukewarmness was so obviously out of tune with the prevailing militant mood against the British authorities that the moderates rapidly and conclusively lost their popularity.
- ii) The second or the social reformist creed of "constructive swadeshi"- as it was termed - aimed at gathering national strength through a persistent movement of self-help and self-reliance (or *Atmashakti* according to Rabindranath Tagore) by organising indigenous enterprises, nationalistic educational processes and setting up village uplift societies to bridge the gulf between the rural and urban people. All those who did not see eye to eye with the moderate nationalists supported the cause of "constructive swadeshi" in the beginning. Satishchandra Mukherji, Aswini Kumar Dutta, Rabindranath Tagore, Prafulla Chandra Roy and Nilratan Sircar were its prime adherents.
- iii) Even though the programme recommended by the social reformists was significant in some ways, it was too arduous, unostentatious and unexciting to have wide appeal for

Bepinchandra Pal, Aurobindo Ghosh and Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya, or to satisfy the impatient, adventurous youth of Bengal. In such circumstances, the appearance of political extremism – the third trend – was natural. It found expression in periodicals like *New India* (edited by Bepinchandra Pal), *Bande Mataram* (edited by Aurobindo Ghosh), *Sandhya* (edited by Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya) and *Yugantar* (edited by Bhupendranath Dutta). The political extremists demanded self-government for India, not under British tutelage or British Paramountcy (as the moderates wished), but by severing all British connections, and wiping off all British influences.

The extremist political leaders gave a clarion call for the establishment of swaraj and attempted to find the ways and means for achieving it. They speedily came to the conclusion that the techniques of boycott should be escalated from British goods and educational institutions to other spheres, such as the British administration, the British courts of law and the British services, shaking the foundation of British authority in India. Bepinchandra Pal described such escalation as "passive resistance" or refusal "to render any voluntary or honorary service to the Government". Aurobindo Ghosh improved upon the strategy further in a series of articles in *Bande Mataram* in April 1907, and came out with the theory of "organised and relentless boycott" of British goods, British system of education, judiciary and executive, and the social boycott of the loyalists and civil disobedience of unjust laws.

If British repressions surpassed the limits of Indian endurance, Aurobindo Ghosh was prepared to embark upon an anti-British armed struggle. How

could British rule in India continue, Brahmabhandav Upadhyaya asked, if the chowkidar, the constable, the deputy, the munsiff and the clerk, not to speak of the sepoy, resigned their respective functions?

The fervour with which the exponents of political extremism brought the issues of swaraj and its attainment through passive resistance to the fore, relegated all other points to the back-ground, including the very question that occasioned the agitation, that is the partition of Bengal. In comparison with the importance of the struggle for swaraj, the unification of Bengal seemed only a secondary issue -- “the pettiest and narrowest of all political objects” (Aurobindo Ghosh’s article in *Bande Mataram*, 28 April, 1907) Such nationalization of a regional issue, and the clarification of the national goal accompanying it, marked the most extraordinary advancement that Indian nationalists were able to make within a brief animated span of merely two years.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Match the following periodicals with the names of their editors.

i) Bande Mataram	a) Bepin Chandra Pal
ii) Sandhya	b) Aurobindo Ghosh
iii) New India	c) Brahmabhandav Upadhyaya
- 2) Discuss the circumstances leading to the Swadeshi Movement.
- 3) Write the techniques which evolved during the Swadeshi movement.
- 4) What were the political trends which developed during the Swadeshi Movement?

6.8 THE CONCEPT OF MASS MOVEMENT, WORKERS AND PEASANTS

The national goal of swaraj, and the means to achieve it through boycott in all spheres, or through the method of passive resistance as it was then formulated necessitated not only a widespread awakening of the masses, but also their whole-hearted participation in well organised anti-British mass movements. The educated middle class had by and large awakened with the progress of the Swadeshi movement and even some members of the landed aristocracy and the representatives of commercial and mercantile interests were becoming sympathetic to the national cause. But the vast majority of the poorer classes, especially the working class and the peasantry, had not yet been brought in the thick of the struggle.

6.8.1 Workers

Some of the swadeshi activists (notably Aswini Coomar Banerji, Prabhat Kusum Roychoudhury, Apurba Kumar Ghosh and Premtosh Bose) did, however, try to organise workers in Bengal, and direct their economic grievances into political channels.

The lead in this direction came from 247 clerks of Burn Company in Howrah who struck work in September 1905 in protest against a derogatory new work regulation. This was followed by strikes in the tramways in Calcutta, in the jute mills and railway workshops. Coolies, carters and sweepers also

took recourse to strikes in Calcutta to voice their economic demands. Such greater politicization was noticed among the more militant printing press, jute mill and railway workers. A bitter strike in the Government owned presses resulted in the formation of the first real labour union, namely the Printers' Union in October 1905.

A similar struggle of the employees of the Eastern Indian Railway saw the organization of a Railwaymen's Union in July 1906. There were attempts on the part of the swadeshi leaders like Bepin Chandra Pal, Shyamsundar Chakrabarthy and Liakat Hussain to organise agitated railway workers in Asansol, Ranigunj and Jamalpur, which ended up in police firing at the Jamalpur Workshop 27 August, 1906. The jute mill workers, who agitated almost on similar lines from 1905, were led by Aswini Coomar Banerji to form an Indian Millhands' Union at Budge-Budge in August 1906. However, all these unions later on suffered a setback in the face of the hostility of the Government. Not being ideologically committed to the cause of the workers, the enthusiasm of the nationalists in activating them steadily subsided after 1907.

6.8.2 Peasants

If the leaders of Swadeshi movement made some efforts towards the mobilization of the workmen, they practically refrained from rallying the peasants. Although the samitis had numerous branches in the rural areas (like the Swadeshbhandhav Samiti which alone had 175 village branches in Barisal district), preaching passive resistance to the masses, they failed to stir up the peasants' imagination. To the bulk of the impoverished kisans, their patriotic calls remained vague, distant and even abstractly rhetorical. The reason was the lack of genuine interest among these leaders in improving the agrarian situation, or in formulating concrete programmes for the betterment of the peasant masses. The members of the middle class in Bengal, whether professionals, clerks or businessmen, depended substantially for their economic well-being on the rentals from their ancestral lands. Their rentier character had, therefore, placed them into an exploitative category vis-à-vis the exploited peasantry, and had perpetuated a contradiction between their interests and the peasants' aspirations. Already the Bengali middle class did not generally approve of the meagre tenurial rights which the Government had conceded to the cultivators in the Tenancy Act of 1885. Its representatives had often been intolerant of the "insolvent raiyats", and as *Bhadraloks* (gentlemen), they were contemptuous of the *Chhotoloks* (Lowly men).

The Swadeshi movement did not raise any voice of protest against the peasant's burden of debts, his periodic eviction from land or against his continued subjection to begaar (unpaid forced labour). No Samiti gave any call to the cultivators for launching an agitation on the issues of exorbitant tax and rent. Even a radical spokesman of the stature of the Aurobindo Ghosh expressly ruled out such campaigns lest they should hurt the interests of patriotic Samindars (Aurobindo Ghosh's articles in *Bande Mataram*, April 1907). What was worse, the strong religious overtone that the Swadeshi movement acquired in course of time - its undue emphasis on the Hindu revivalistic symbols and idioms - largely discouraged the Muslim peasants

(who formed the bulk of the peasantry in east Bengal) from taking a lively interest in the great commotion.

6.9 THE COMMUNAL TANGLE

In traditional societies religion has often been used as a convenient means to arouse an indigenous and popular brand of nationalism, and it has usually led to unfortunate consequences. The experience of the Swadeshi movement was no different. The political capital that the leaders in Bengal tried to make out of Hinduism and Islam contributed in effect to the widening of the gulf between the two major communities there. Dividing the land and the people of Bengal, and playing the Hindus and Muslims against each other, were the known British imperialist ideas. These were taken up in 1905 by Curzon, Andrew Fraser and Herbert Risley, and their successors like Lord Minto (who replaced Curzon as the Viceroy), Bampfylde Fuller (who was appointed as the first Lieutenant Governor of East Bengal and Assam) and Lancelot Hare (who came in place of Fuller) devoutly clung to the same methods. While Minto was convinced of the necessity for the “diminution of the powers” of the Bengali politicians, Fuller actually started “playing one of the two sections of the population (Hindus and Muslims) against each other”, and Hare thought of giving extraordinary advantages to the Muslims in matters of Government jobs over the Hindus.

Simultaneously with the wooing of the educated Muslims, the authorities encouraged the aristocratic elements among them to think in terms of Muslim political power and to form in October, 1906 the Muslim League, under the leadership of Nawab Salimullah of Dacca, to protect the “separate” interests of the Muslims. Besides in the eastern Bengal countryside the obscurantist mullahs and maulavis wielded much influence and often projected the contradiction between ‘Samindars’ (majority of whom happened to be Hindus) and cultivators (majority of whom happened to be Muslims) in terms only of religious antagonism.

Despite all this, however, eloquent pleas were heard during the Swadeshi movement in favour of communal harmony (such as the writings in *Sanjivani*). Great scenes of Hindu-Muslim fraternization were witnessed (such as the joint procession of 10,000 students in Calcutta on 23 September, 1906). Some distinguished Muslim public men took up leading roles in the agitation (such as Liakat Hussain, Abdul Hakim, Ghaznavi, Abdul Rasul, Maniruzsaman, Ismail Hussain Siraji, Abul Hussain and Din Mahomed). But much of the effect of these positive developments was neutralised by the educated middle class nationalists’ attempts at utilising the rites, images and myths of Hindu orthodoxy as a morale-booster for their rank and file, and as a medium of communication between the leaders and the led.

The stridently Hinduised exhortations of the nationalist organs like *Bande Mataram*, *Sandhya* and *Nabshakti*, the uncritical glorification of Hindu past, the nostalgia for the lost Hindu *rashtra* (nation), the practice of taking a pledge of swadeshi (for not using British goods) before a Hindu deity, the vow of self sacrifice before the goddess Kali and the constant references to the *Gita* did not help the political leaders in bringing the Muslims closer to the Hindus. Rather, these contributed to a hardening of attitudes on the

part of both the communities. The observance of *Birashtami* (in memory of the eight Hindu heroes of the medieval past), the emphasis on traditional Hindu values in programmes for national education, the use of *Pauranic* images on public platform, the insistence on the goddess Durga's being "the visible representation of the eternal spirit" of the Bengalis harmed the movement considerably by the projection of its content in religious forms. Bepinchandra Pal justified such representation on the ground that religion and national life were inseparable, and that "to separate national life from religion would mean the abandonment of religious and moral values in personal life also" (Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908*, Delhi, 1977, p. 76). Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya went a step further, and urged his audience: "whatever you hear, whatever you learn, whatever you do, remain a Hindu, remain a Bengali...." Aurobindo Ghosh went to the farthest point when he discovered germs of democracy, of even socialism, in the caste rules of Hindu society ("Caste and Democracy" *Bande Mataram*, 21 September, 1907). Such Hindu revivalistic propaganda at the height of the agitation, and that, too, by its leading figures, actually incited Nawab Salimullah's men and the mullahs to spread communal hatred among the Muslims in accordance of course, with the Curzonian expectations.

It was comparatively easy in such circumstances for the communalists to take recourse to communal violence. The eastern part of Bengal saw a series of communal riots, first in Ishwargunj in Mymensingh district in May 1906, followed by disturbances in Comilla, Jamalpur, Dewangunge and Bakshigunj in March 1907, and then again in Mymensingh in April-May 1907. The rioters were encouraged by the rumours, spread by communalists, of a British decision to hand over the charge of administration in Dacca to Nawab Salimullah.

The riots also revealed a submerged agrarian character, since the targets were often found to be Hindu Samindars and Mahajans (moneylenders). Although they were alarmed by these untoward developments, the nationalists would not try to understand the entire phenomena correctly. They seemed to be in a hurry to brand the rioters merely as British-hired trouble makers, without any serious effort at understanding the depth of the malaise. As a result, their religious fervour continued to increase rather than decrease.

6.10 THE RISE OF REVOLUTIONARY NATIONALISM

A large-scale participation of the masses in the struggle for Swaraj -- the essential precondition of a successful passive resistance -- was not, however, realized. With little success among the workers, total failure in respect of the cultivators and sad mismanagement of the communal tangle, the Swadeshi movement was unable by the second half of 1907 to rise to its full potential, or assume the character of a mass upheaval. Besides, as an anti-imperialist agitation of great intensity, it had to bear continuously the repressive measures of its powerful opponent. The authorities prohibited the shouting of the slogan "Bande Mataram" in public places, disqualified from the Government employment all those who took part in the agitation in any form and expelled and fined student participants of the movement. Bands of

Gurkha soldiers were sent to Barisal and other places to teach the agitators a lesson, and the police and the officials were given a free hand to heap indignities and launch physical assaults on them. The climax was reached in April 1906 when the delegates attending the provincial conference at Barisal were lathi-charged by the police. Then followed measures like exemplary caning of the picketers and institution of cases against them, banning of public meetings and processions, and innumerable arrests and convictions of persons, including that of Bepinchandra Pal and Liakat Hussain. The question of meeting force with force naturally came to the forefront.

The violent method also appealed to the romantic recklessness of the middle class youth of Bengal, who sought solace in heroic individual acts when mass actions did not materialize and who pinned their hopes on secret societies when open politics could not overwhelm the Government. The cult of violence was also attractive to those who were in a desperate hurry and whose patience had practically run out. "If we sit idle and hesitate to rise till the whole population is goaded to desperation", *Yugantar* argued in August 1907, "then we shall continue idle till the end of time...." The alternative was for the advanced elite section to take up arms against the oppressors, strike terror in the hearts of the hated British officials and their henchmen, and arouse the masses by death-defying examples. Soon some of *samitis* grew exclusive inner circles, hatched conspiracies for selective assassinations and committed political robberies for raising funds to buy arms and ammunition. These revolutionary proceedings were spearheaded by the Yugantar group in Calcutta and the Anushilan Samiti in Dacca.

Prafulla Chaki died and Khudiram Bose, a boy of 18, was hanged for their attempt on the life of a notorious British Magistrate Kingford who escaped unhurt. It also led in April 1908 to the discovery of a secret bomb-manufacturing factory in the Manicktala area of Calcutta, and to the sensational arrests of some revolutionaries, including Aurobindo Ghosh. Revolutionary nationalism, however, took this setback in its stride. It continued to operate, and even spread in other parts of India and abroad, as the clandestine legacy of the momentous, uproarious Swadeshi movement.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Why did the peasants not participate in the Swadeshi movement in a big way?
- 2) Why do you think the communal situation worsened in 1906-07?
- 3) How did "Revolutionary nationalism" emerge in 1907-08?

6.11 LET US SUM UP

The growth of revolutionary nationalism had certainly disturbed the British in India, but it could not challenge their authority as the open politics of swadeshi did, nor could it seriously threaten their rule as an ever-expanding mass mobilization might have done. Swadeshi movement's failure to assume the stature of a mass upsurge, and the fact of its being eventually cornered into a secretive position, were manifestations of the presence of some of its weaknesses and limitations. But despite its many weaknesses, the degree of success it achieved at the levels of ideology, organization and techniques of

political struggle was not only astounding, but also innovative and in some respects far in advance of its time.

Swadeshi movement marked a total reversal of the earlier nationalist approach of “petitioning and praying” to the Raj for concessions, as well as a virtual rejection of the moderate political programme. It set before the Indian people the goal of swaraj or independence, and committed them to the task of doing away with Britain’s imperialist stranglehold over India. For attainment of swaraj, it charted out for the nation the path of “passive resistance” or civil disobedience of British authority, and relegated constitutionalism to a secondary position. The success of such resistance being conditional on extensive participation of the masses, the Swadeshi movement struggled hard to gain a popular base, and despite its failure to become a full-fledged mass upsurge, it nevertheless succeeded in leaving behind for the posterity the ideal of wide-spread mass struggle. With all these, and also with its scheme for “constructive swadeshi”, the movement clearly anticipated the Gandhian mass struggles of the post-first world war period. Barring the principle of non-violence, Gandhiji’s inspiring call from 1920 onwards for achieving swaraj through “non-cooperation,” “civil disobedience” and “constructive programme” resembled closely the “boycott”, “passive resistance” and “constructive swadeshi” of the Bengali political scenario preached and practised fifteen years ago. The Swadeshi movement had put up the stiffest Indian resistance to the Government of an arch-imperialist like Curzon, and after his departure from India in November 1905, to the succeeding Government of Minto. It became a contributing factor in the resignation of Fuller, the Lieutenant Governor of East Bengal and Assam, in August 1906, and forced the authorities eventually to annul the partition and re-unify Bengal in 1911. However there were hardly its major achievements in the larger nation-wide context. Its chief success lay in giving Indian nationalism a new imaginative direction, and in raising the state of nationalist unrest to the high plane of bitter anti-imperialist struggles.

As it invariably happens in all cases of political and social turmoil, the swadeshi movement also left its deep marks on the cultural and intellectual activities of Bengal; and its influence spread over different parts of the country. Apart from a rich crop of patriotic compositions, playwritings and dramatic performances, it generated the Bengal School of Painting under the leadership of Rabindranath Tagore, kindled scientific enquiries under the supervision of Jagadish Chandra Bose and Prafulla Chandra Roy, revived interest in the folk traditions through the labours of Dinesh Chandra Sen and invigorated historical research with the help of the findings of Rakhaldas Banerji, Hariprasad Shastri and Akshay Kumar Maitra.

6.12 KEY WORDS

Authoritarianism: A phenomenon in which authority is imposed without taking into account the popular will.

Ideologues: People who are involved in propagating certain ideology.

Political Extremism: A phenomenon in which relatively militant methods are used to solve political problems.

Politicization: A process by which politics becomes a part of the way people think about life.

The Swadeshi Movement

Racial Arrogance: Feeling of racial superiority over others.

Religious Revivalism: A phenomenon in which the religious past is totally evoked to justify certain present objectives or notions.

6.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) i) ✓ ii) ✗ iii) ✗ iv) ✗
- 2 See Section 6.3

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) i) b ii) c iii) a
- 2) See Section 6.5
- 3) See Section 6.6
- 4) See Section 6.7

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See Section 6.8
- 2) See Section 6.9
- 3) See Section 6.10

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UNIT 7: NON-COOPERATION AND KHILAFAT MOVEMENTS: 1919-1922*

Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Background
- 7.3 The Issue of Khilafat
- 7.4 Towards Non-Cooperation: Calcutta to Nagpur
- 7.5 Main Phases of the Non-Cooperation Movement
- 7.6 Peoples' Response to the Movement
- 7.7 Spread of the Movement: Local Variations
- 7.8 The Last Phase
- 7.9 Causes of Withdrawal
- 7.10 Impact
- 7.11 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.12 Key Words
- 7.13 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

7.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the reasons for launching the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat movements,
- familiarize yourself with the programme of action adopted in these movements,
- learn about the response of the Indian people towards these movements, and
- learn about the impact of these movements.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

During 1920-21 the Indian National Movement entered into a new phase, i.e. a phase of mass politics and mass mobilization. The British rule was opposed through two mass movements, Khilafat and Non-Cooperation. Though emerging out of separate issues both these movements adopted a common programme of action. The technique of non-violent struggle was adopted at a national level. In this Unit, we will discuss the reasons for the launching of these movements, the course of the movements, and the role of leadership and the people. This Unit also analyses the regional variations and the impact of these movements.

* Adopted from Unit 18 of EHI-01

7.2 BACKGROUND

The background to the movements was provided by the impact of the First World War, the Rowlatt Act, the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre and the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms.

- i) During the post-First World War period the prices of daily commodities increased sharply and the worst sufferers were the common people. The volume of imports which declined during the First World War again increased towards the end of the war. As a result the Indian industries suffered, production fell, many factories were closed and the workers became its natural victims. The peasantry was also under the heavy burden of rents and taxes. So the economic situation of the country in the post-war years became alarming. In the political field the nationalists were disillusioned when the British did not keep their promise of bringing in a new era of democracy and self-determination for the people. This strengthened the anti-British attitude of the Indians.
- ii) The next important landmark of this period was the passing of the Rowlatt Act in March 1919. This Act empowered the Government to imprison any person without trial and conviction in a court of law. Its basic aim was to imprison the nationalists without giving them the opportunity to defend themselves. Gandhi decided to oppose it through Satyagraha. March and April 1919 witnessed a remarkable political awakening in India. There were hartals (strikes) and demonstrations against the Rowlatt Act.
- iii) The same period witnessed the naked brutality of the British Imperialists at Jallianwala Bagh, in Amritsar. An unarmed but large crowd had gathered on 13 April 1919 at Jallianwala Bagh to protest against the arrest of their popular leaders, Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlu and Dr. Satyapal. General Dyer, the military commander of Amritsar, ordered his troops to open fire without warning on the unarmed crowd, in a park from which there was no way out. Thousands were killed and wounded. This shocked the whole world. The famous poet Rabindranath Tagore renounced his Knighthood in protest.
- iv) The introduction of another constitutional reform act which is known as the Government of India Act, 1919 further disillusioned the nationalists. The reform proposals failed to satisfy the rising demand of the Indians for self-government. The majority of the leaders condemned it as “disappointing and unsatisfactory.”

All these developments prepared the ground for a popular upsurge against the British Government. The Khilafat issue gave an added advantage to get the Muslim support and the final touch to it was given by Gandhi's leadership. We will discuss now the Khilafat issue which provided the immediate background to the movement.

7.3 THE ISSUE OF KHILAFAT

During the First World War Turkey allied with Germany and Austria against the British. The Indian Muslims regarded the Sultan of Turkey as their

spiritual leader Khalifa. So, naturally their sympathies were with Turkey. After the war, the British removed the Khalifa from power in Turkey. Hence, the Muslims started the Khilafat movement in India for the restoration of the Khalifa's position. Their main demands were:

- Khalifa's control should be retained over the Muslim sacred places,
- In territorial adjustments after the war the Khalifa should be left with sufficient territories.

In early 1919, a Khilafat Committee was formed in Bombay. The initiative was taken by Muslim merchants and their actions were confined to meetings, petitions and deputation in favour of the Khalifa. However, there soon emerged a militant trend within the movement. The leaders of this trend were not satisfied with a moderate approach. Instead they preached for the launching of a countrywide movement. They advocated, for the first time, at the All India Khilafat Conference in Delhi (22-23 November 1919), non-cooperation with the British Government in India. It was in this conference that Hasrat Mohani made a call for the boycott of British goods. The Khilafat leadership clearly spelt out that in case the peace terms after the war were unfavourable to Muslims they would stop all cooperation with the Government. In April 1920, Shaukat Ali warned the British that in case the Government failed to pacify Indian Muslims, "we would start a joint Hindu-Muslim movement of non-cooperation." Shaukat Ali further stressed that the movement would start "under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi, a man who commands the respect of both Hindus and Muslims".

The Khilafat issue was not directly linked with politics in India but the Khilafat leaders were eager in enlisting the support of Hindus. Gandhi saw in this an opportunity to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity against the British. But in spite of his support to the Khilafat issue and being the president of the All India Khilafat Committee, Gandhi till May 1920 had adopted a moderate approach. However, the publication of the terms of the Treaty with Turkey, which were very harsh towards Turkey, and the Publication of the Hunter Committee Report on 'Punjab disturbances' in May 1920, infuriated the Indians and Gandhi now took an open position.

The Central Khilafat Committee met at Allahabad from 1st to 3rd June 1920. The meeting was attended by a number of Congress and Khilafat leaders. In this meeting a programme of non-cooperation towards the Government was declared. This was to include:

- boycott of titles conferred by the Government,
- boycott of civil services, army and police, i.e. all government jobs, and
- non-payment of taxes to the Government.

August 1st, 1920 was fixed as the date to start the movement. Gandhi insisted that unless the Punjab and Khilafat wrongs were undone, there was to be non-cooperation with the Government. However, for the success of this movement, Congress support was essential. Therefore, Gandhi's efforts now were to make the Congress adopt the non-cooperation.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Which of the following statements are correct or wrong (Mark ✓ or ✕).
 - i) The First World War had no adverse effect on Indian economy.
 - ii) The Rowlatt Act was passed mainly to suppress the Indian nationalists.
 - iii) The Jallianwala Bagh massacre exposed the true character of the British Imperialism.
 - iv) The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms fulfilled the expectations of the Indian Nationalists.
 - v) Gandhi became the President of the All India Khilafat Committee.
- 2) What was the Khilafat issue ?

7.4 TOWARDS NON-COOPERATION: CALCUTTA TO NAGPUR

It was not an easy task for Gandhi to get the entire Congress to approve his programme of political action. According to Prof. Ravinder Kumar, Gandhi “made a concerted bid to convince Tilak of the virtues of Satyagraha and of the expediency of an alliance with the Muslim community over Khilafat”. However, Tilak was “sceptical of Satyagraha as an instrument of politics.” He was also not in favour of having an alliance “with Muslim leaders over a religious issue.” The basis of cooperation between Hindus and Muslims, argued Tilak, should be a secular one like the Lucknow Pact (1916). A lot depended on Tilak’s attitude whether hostile or neutral, but unfortunately he passed away on 1st August 1920. Lala Lajpat Rai and C.R. Das vehemently opposed the Gandhian idea of boycotting council elections. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote in his autobiography that “almost the entire old Guard of the Congress opposed Gandhi’s resolution of non-cooperation.”

The programme of non-cooperation and boycott was then placed before the Provincial Congress Committees (PCC) for their opinions. The PCC of the United Provinces after prolonged debate approved of the principle of non-cooperation, and gradual boycott of government schools and colleges, government offices, British goods. But there were reservations about the boycott of the legislative councils.

The Bombay PCC approved of non-cooperation as the legitimate method of agitation, but it objected to boycott of council and only recommended boycott of British goods as a first stage. The Bengal PCC agreed to accept the principle of non-cooperation but disagreed with the idea of council boycott. The Madras PCC approved the policies of non-cooperation but rejected Gandhi’s programme.

While this was the attitude of the ‘traditional’ bases of Indian politics to Gandhi’s programme, the comparatively ‘non-traditional’ areas in Indian politics like Gujarat and Bihar fully backed Gandhi’s programme. The Andhra and Punjab PCC’s approved of non-cooperation but deferred a decision on Gandhi’s programme until the special Congress session. The dilemma of some of the provincial Congress leaders in supporting Gandhi’s

programme was because of the future uncertainty of Gandhi's movement and their unwillingness to boycott the council elections.

It was under these circumstances that a special session of the All India Congress Committee was held at Calcutta in September 1920. Lala Lajpat Rai was its president. A strong opposition to Gandhi's programme was expected at this session. But contrary to the intentions of most established political leaders before the sessions began, Gandhi managed to get his proposals accepted at the open session of the Congress by the majority of 1000 vote.

Among Gandhi's supporters were Motilal Nehru, Saifuddin Kitchlew, Jitendralal Banerjee, Shaukat Ali, Yakub Hasan and Dr. Ansari; while his opponents included Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Annie Besant, etc. Gandhi's success came mainly because of the support from the business groups and the Muslims.

The Calcutta Congress approved a programme of:

- surrender of titles,
- boycott of schools, courts, foreign goods and councils, and
- encouragement of national schools, arbitration courts and Khadi.

The Congress supported Gandhi's plan for non-cooperation with Government till the Punjab and Khilafat wrongs were removed and Swaraj established. The final decision was left for the Nagpur session of the Congress to be held in December 1920. However, the precise nature of the Swaraj at which Gandhi aimed was not clear to contemporaries. Although Gandhi said that it was "Parliamentary Swaraj in accordance with the wishes of the people of India", Jawaharlal Nehru admitted that it was a "vague swaraj with no clear ideology behind it."

In November 1920, following the reformed franchise the council elections were held. All the Congress candidates boycotted the elections. Gandhi's call for boycotting elections got massive response from different Indian provinces. This was an alarming sign for the British Government. Only 27.3 per cent of the Hindu voters and 12.1 per cent of the Muslim electorate participated in urban areas. In the rural areas 41.8 per cent of the Hindus and 28.3 per cent of the Muslims voted.

In the midst of lot of controversies and debates over the Gandhian programme, the Congress session started at Nagpur from 26 December 1920. The Nagpur Congress saw the dramatic change of C.R. Das of Bengal from a critic of Gandhi's programme to the mover of the non-cooperation resolution at Nagpur. It endorsed the non-cooperation resolution which declared that the entire scheme, beginning with the renunciation of all voluntary association with the Government at one end and refusal to pay taxes at the other, should be put into force at a time to be decided by the Congress. Resignation from the councils, renunciation of legal practice, nationalization of education, economic boycott, organization of workers for national service, raising of a national fund and Hindu-Muslim unity were suggested as steps in the programme. The Nagpur session also brought a revolutionary change in the congress organization. The changes were:

- formation of a working committee of 15 members,
- formation of an All India Committee of 350 members,
- formation of Congress Committees from town to village level,
- reorganization of Provincial Congress Committees on a linguistic basis, and
- opening of Congress membership to all men and women of the age of 21 or more on payment of 4 annas as annual subscription.

This was the first positive move on the part of the Congress to make it a real mass based political party. This period also witnessed a fundamental change in the social composition of the party as well as in its outlook and policies. Gandhi with a novel weapon of Satyagraha emerged as the mass leader in the Congress party.

From the above discussion it becomes clear that the programme of the Non-Cooperation Movement had two main aspects:

- i) constructive, and
- ii) destructive.

Under the first category came:

- the nationalization of education,
- the promotion of indigenous goods,
- the popularization of Charkha and Khadi, and
- the enrollment of a volunteer corps.

In the later category figured the boycott of:

- law courts,
- educational institutions,
- elections to the legislature,
- official functions,
- British goods as well as the surrender of honours and titles conferred by the British.

7.5 MAIN PHASES OF THE NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENT

The campaign for non-cooperation and boycott started with great enthusiasm from early 1921. However, we find some changes in the central emphasis of the movement from one phase to the other. In the first phase from January to March 1921, the main emphasis was on the boycott of schools, colleges, law courts and the use of Charkha. There was widespread student unrest and top lawyers like C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru gave up their legal practice. This phase was followed by the second phase starting from April 1921. In this phase the basic objectives were the collection of Rs. one crore for the Tilak Swaraj Fund by August 1921, enrolling one crore Congress members and installing 20 lakh Charkhas by 30 June. In the third phase, starting from July, the stress was on boycott of foreign cloth, boycott of the forthcoming

visit of the Prince of Wales in November, 1921, popularization of *Charkha* and *Khadi*, and *Jail Bhara* by Congress volunteers.

In the last phase, since November 1921, a shift towards radicalism was visible. The Congress volunteers rallied the people and the country was on the verge of a revolt. Gandhi decided to launch a no-revenue campaign at Bardoli, and also a mass civil disobedience movement for freedom of speech, press and association. But the attack on a local police station by angry peasants at Chauri Chaura, in Gorakhpur district of U.P., on 5th February 1922, changed the whole situation. Gandhi, shocked by this incident, withdrew the Non-Cooperation Movement.

7.6 PEOPLES' RESPONSE TO THE MOVEMENT

The leadership of this movement in the initial stages came from the middle class. But the middle class had a lot of reservations about Gandhi's programme. In places like Calcutta, Bombay, Madras which were centres of elite politicians, the response to Gandhi's movement was very limited. Their response to the call for resignation from government service, surrendering of titles, etc. was not very encouraging. However, the economic boycott received support from the Indian business group, because the textile industry had benefited from the nationalist emphasis on the use of Swadeshi. Still a section of the big business remained critical of the Non-Cooperation Movement. They were particularly afraid of labour unrest in the factories following the Non-Cooperation Movement. Besides the elite politicians, the comparative newcomers in Indian politics found expression of their interests and aspirations in the Gandhian movement. Leaders like Rajendra Prasad in Bihar, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in Gujarat, provided solid support to Gandhian movement.

The response from the students and women was very effective. Thousands of students left government schools and colleges and joined national schools and colleges. The newly started national institutions like the Kashi Vidyapeeth, the Gujarat Vidyapeeth and the Jamia Millia Islamia and others accommodated many students although several others were disappointed. Students became active volunteers of the movement. Women also came forward. They gave up *Purdah* and offered their jewellery for the Tilak Fund. They joined the movement in large numbers and took active part in picketing before the shops selling foreign cloth and liquor.

The most important landmark of this movement was the massive participation of the peasants and workers in it. The long-standing grievances of the toiling masses against the British, as well as the Indian masters got an opportunity through this movement to express their real feelings. Although the Congress leadership was against class war, the masses broke this restraint. In rural areas and some other places, the peasants turned against the landlords and the traders. This gave a new dimension to the movement of 1921-22.

7.7 SPREAD OF THE MOVEMENT: LOCAL VARIATIONS

The call for non-cooperation and boycott no doubt got massive response from different parts of India. The years 1921 and 1922 were marked by

massive popular protests against the British Raj in India. However, the movement was shaped in most places according to local conditions. It was the local grievances of the people which found expression through this movement, and the instructions of the Congress leadership were not always followed. Let us take a brief look at different regions in relation to the Non-Cooperation Movement.

Bengal: Mass participation in the Gandhian method of protest was less enthusiastic in Bengal. Rabindranath Tagore appreciated Gandhi for bringing to the masses a new consciousness. But he attacked what he called Gandhi's 'narrowness, obscurantism' and Charkha. Elites of Calcutta were critical of some Gandhian ways. But the non-cooperation movement brought about unique communal unity and awakening in the urban and rural masses. Hartals, strikes and mass courting of arrest greatly pressurized the British Government to change its attitude towards India.

In the countryside, an intense propaganda was carried on and as a Government report said, "The things that are said and done in Gandhi's name would make that gentleman shudder, if ever he heard of fraction of them." The villagers in Midnapur district opposed the newly created Union Boards and the tax imposed by them. The people refused to pay taxes or agricultural rent to the Government or private landlords in the outlying districts of North Bengal.

Bihar: In Bihar the local issue of the right to graze cattle on common government wastelands and the confrontation between the "lower and upper castes" on the issue of the former taking the sacred thread got merged with the Non-Cooperation Movement. The issues of cow protection and the rights of Kisans were also focused upon. Because of this linkage, North Bihar, especially Champaran, Saran, Muzaffarpur and Purnia districts, became the storm centres of the movement by November 1921. Looting of the *Hat* (village market) and confrontation with the police became frequent.

U.P.: The United Provinces became a strong base of the Gandhian Non-Cooperation Movement. Organized non-cooperation was an affair of cities and small towns. In the countryside it took a different form. Here the movement got entangled with the kisan movement. Despite the repeated appeal for non-violence from the Congress leadership, the peasants rose in revolt not only against Talukdars but also, against merchants. Between January and March 1921 the districts of Rae Bareilly, Pratapgarh, Fyzabad and Sultanpur witnessed widespread agrarian riots under the leadership of Baba Ram Chandra. The major demands were:

- no nazarana (extra premium on rent)
- no eviction from holdings, and
- no *begaar* (forced labour) and *rasad* (forced supplies), etc.

In late 1921 there was another strong peasant outburst which is known as the 'Eka' movement under a radical leader Madari Pasi. The basic demand here was the conversion of produce rents into cash. Another significant event was the destruction of thousands of acres of reserved forests in the Kumaon Division in July 1921 by the hill-tribes as they disliked the forest regulations.

Punjab: In Punjab the response to this movement was not very remarkable in the city areas. But here the powerful Akali movement for reform and control of the Gurdwaras got closely identified with non-cooperation. Although Gandhi gave it only guarded approval, his non-cooperation tactic was consistently used by the Akalis. It showed a remarkable communal unity between the Sikhs, the Muslims and the Hindus.

Maharashtra: In Maharashtra non-cooperation remained relatively weak because the Tilakites were unenthusiastic about Gandhi, and Non-Brahmans felt that the Congress was a Chitpavan-led affair. The higher castes disliked Gandhi's emphasis on the elevation of the depressed classes and their participation in the Non-Cooperation Movement. However, there were some sporadic local outbursts. At Malegaon in Nasik district a few policemen were burnt to death following the arrest of some local leaders. In the Poona area some peasants tried to defend their land-rights though Satyagraha.

Assam: Non-Cooperation received massive support in the distant province of Assam. In the gardens of Assam the coolies rose in revolt with shouts of "Gandhi Maharaj Ki Jai" for higher wages and better condition of work. There were also signs of a no-revenue movement among peasants.

Rajasthan: Peasant movements in the princely states of Rajasthan strengthened the Non-Cooperation Movement, as they did in Bihar and U.P. The peasants protested against cesses and *begaar*. The Bijolia Movement in Mewar and the Bhil Movement under Motilal Tejawat acquired impetus from the Non-Cooperation Movement.

Andhra: In Andhra the grievances of tribal and other peasants against forest laws got linked to the Non-Cooperation Movement. A large number of these people met Gandhi in Cudappa in September 1921 to get their taxes reduced and forest restrictions removed. Forest officials were boycotted. To assert their right they sent their cattle forcibly, into the forests without paying the grazing tax. In the Paland area on the periphery of forests, Swaraj was declared and police parties were attacked. Gandhi-Raj, the protesters believed, was about to come. A powerful movement for non-payment of land revenue also developed in Andhra between December 1921 and February 1922. The Non-Cooperation Movement attained great success in the Andhra delta area. In the same period Alluri Sitaram Raju organised the tribals in Andhra and combined their demands with those of the Non-Cooperation Movement.

Karnataka: Karnataka areas remained comparatively unaffected by the movement and the initial response of the upper and middle class professional groups in several areas of the Madras presidency was limited. Out of 682 title holders only 6 returned their honours and 36, lawyers gave up their legal practice. In the entire presidency 92 national schools with 5,000 pupils were started. The labour in the Buckingham and Carnatic textile mills went on strike from July to October 1921. They were given moral support by the local Non-Cooperation leaders.

Similar responses were there in many other regions. For example in Orissa the tenants of the Kanika Raj refused to pay *Abwabs*. But in Gujarat the movement went on purely Gandhian lines.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What was the programme of the Non-Cooperation Movement?
- 2) Discuss in brief the response of the peasantry to the Non-Cooperation Movement.
- 3) Which of the following statements are correct or wrong (Mark ✓ or ✗).
 - i) The Nagpur session of the AICC brought some revolutionary changes in the Congress organization.
 - ii) Gandhi's programme got no response from rural areas.
 - iii) The Non-Cooperation Movement was shaped in most places according to local conditions.

7.8 THE LAST PHASE

The Government very carefully observed the developments and collected secret reports from the provinces about the progress of the movement. When the movement ultimately started, the Government took recourse to repression. The Congress and the Khilafat volunteer organizations were declared unlawful. Public assemblies and processions were banned. At many places the police fired on the satyagrahis. Arrests and Lathi charge became a common scene. By the end of 1921 all important leaders except Gandhi were imprisoned. Alarmed by Hindu-Muslim unity, the Government also tried to create a split between the Congress and the Khilafatists. Thus the Government machinery was fully geared to crush the movement.

The repression by the British strengthened the determination of the Indians to continue the movement with greater vigour. Meanwhile the viceroy tried to negotiate with the Congress leaders through Madan Mohan Malaviya and offered to recognise the National volunteers and to release the political prisoners. In mid-January 1922 Gandhi explained the position of the Non-Cooperation Movement at the All Parties Conference and there was a general agreement on his assessments. On 1st February, he sent an ultimatum to the viceroy that he could start mass civil disobedience if the political prisoners were not released and repressive measures not abandoned. Since the whole country was not fit for civil disobedience he decided to launch it on 5th February in Bardoli. Congress volunteers were fired at by the police at Chauri Chaura in Gorakhpur district in U.P. In retaliation the infuriated mob killed 21 policemen. This violent incident shocked Gandhi and he suspended the Non-Cooperation Movement. He also postponed the proposed civil disobedience at Bardoli. Many Congressmen were shocked and surprised by Gandhi's decision. They vehemently protested against it. Subhas Chandra Bose called it a "national calamity". Jawaharlal Nehru expressed his "amazement and consternation" at the decision. Explaining his position Gandhi replied to Jawaharlal Nehru:

"The movement had unconsciously drifted from the right path. We have come back to our moorings, and we can again go straight ahead."

On 12 February 1922 the Congress Working Committee meeting at Bardoli condemned the inhuman conduct of the mob at Chauri Chaura. It endorsed the suspension of the mass civil disobedience movement. The same day

Gandhi started his five day fast as a penance. Thus, the first non-cooperation virtually came to an end. Gandhi was arrested on 10 March, 1922 and was sentenced to six years' imprisonment.

The Khilafat issues also lost its relevance when Kemal Pasha came to power in Turkey. The Sultan of Turkey was stripped of all political power. Kemal Pasha wanted to modernize Turkey and to make it a secular state. The Caliphate was abolished. Naturally it led to an end of Khilafat movement.

7.9 CAUSES OF WITHDRAWAL

Explaining the causes of withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation Movement, Gandhi said that the Chauri Chaura incident had forced him to withdraw the movement. The incident proved that the country still had not learnt the lesson from the non-violence. To quote Gandhi, "I would suffer every humiliation, every torture, absolute ostracism and death itself to prevent the movement from becoming violent."

As far as the peasants were concerned the Non-Cooperation Movement was gradually turning into a no-rent movement against the Zamindars. But the Congress leadership was in no way interested in attacking the legal rights of the Zamindars. Gandhi's aim was of a "controlled mass movement" involving different Indian classes, and not a class revolution. So he was against the continuation of this movement which might turn into a class revolution. He made it quite clear that he was against any kind of violent or radical movement at that stage. In spite of an objective revolutionary situation existing in India there was no alternative revolutionary leadership. If the movement was not suspended it might have led to chaos because the leadership had no control over local movements.

7.10 IMPACT

In spite of its failure the Non-Cooperation Movement has great significance in Indian history not only in relation to political spheres but in terms of social aspects also. Gandhi emphasised the need of removing evils like caste barriers, communalism, untouchability, etc. In the processions, meetings and in jails people of all castes and communities worked together and even ate together. This weakened the caste separateness and accelerated the pace of social mobility and reform. The lower classes could raise their head high without fear. This movement showed remarkable unity between the Hindus and the Muslims. At many places it was difficult to distinguish Non-cooperation from the Khilafat or Kisan Sabha meeting.

The economic boycott in 1920-22 was more effective than the Swadeshi Movement in 1905-08 after the partition of Bengal. As against 1,292 million yards of British cotton piece goods imported in 1905-08, only 955 million yards could be imported in 1921-22. This naturally created panic among the British capitalists. The Indian textile industry had immensely benefited by the boycott of foreign goods. Indian millowners' influence increased considerably. On the other hand, recurrent labour strikes 1921 created panic among these millowners. The popularization of Charkha and Kargha village reconstruction programme through self-help and through Panchayats brought about economic revival, and handloom cloth production went up.

In the political field the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat movements involving all the communities and all classes added a new dimension to the National Movement. The National movement had been strengthened in more than one way. A new nationalist awareness was generated and the National Movement reached the remotest corners of the land. The common people for the first time became an integral part of the mainstream of the National Movement. Self-confidence and self-esteem among the Indian people developed tremendously. It brought a real feeling of freedom in place of frustration and helplessness. It boosted the morale of the people and raised national dignity.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Discuss the impact of Non-Cooperation Movement in Indian history.
- 2) Why was the movement suspended?
- 3) Mark the statements correct (✓) or wrong (✗).
 - i) The British Government tried to create a split between the Congress and the Khilafatists to check the Non-Cooperation Movement.
 - ii) The Chauri Chaura incident had no effect on Gandhiji.
 - iii) The Khilafat Movement was withdrawn at the call of Congress.
 - iv) The Non-Cooperation Movement for the first time brought the masses in the mainstream of Indian politics:

7.11 LET US SUM UP

The Non-Cooperation Movement was undoubtedly a landmark in the history of Indian struggle for independence. The introduction of the Rowlatt Act the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre and the Khilafat issue provided the background of Non-Cooperation Movement.

Gandhi wanted to use the Khilafat issue for a united Hindu-Muslim movement against the British Government. In spite of initial objections by some Congress leaders to the merger of the Khilafat issue with the nationalist movement, Gandhi finally persuaded them to launch a non-cooperation movement against the British Raj.

The programme of the movement included boycott of government and educational institutions, lawcourts, legislatures, use of Charkha and Khadi, etc. The movement got massive support from different parts of India. The most remarkable feature was the participation of the common people on a large scale for the first time in the national movement.

The movement, however, gradually went out of control of the Congress leadership, particularly in the rural areas, by the end of 1921. Finally the Chauri Chaura incident shocked Gandhiji and he withdrew the movement.

True, the movement failed to achieve its main objectives: the restitution of the Caliphate and the attainment of Swaraj. But, the struggle between what Gandhi called 'the soul force' and 'the material force' brought a new awakening to the masses for their political rights. Gandhi rightly said that this movement had achieved in one year what could not be done in thirty

years by earlier methods. In spite of the reservations expressed about the Non-Cooperation Movement, we have to admit that these two years constituted a stormy period of Indian nationalism when about the whole of India for the first time stood up against the mighty British Raj.

7.12 KEY WORDS

A.I.C.C.: All India Congress Committee

Kargha: Handloom

Khadi: Hand-spun cloth

Khalifa: Successor to the Prophet

Panchayat: Traditional Indian court of arbitration

PCC: Provincial Congress Committee

7.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) i) ✗ ii) ✓ iii) ✓ iv) ✗ v) ✓
- 2) Your answer should include humiliation of the Khalifa by the British. Major demands were restoration of Khalifa's control, retention of Khalifa's territory, etc. See Section 7.3.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Boycott of schools, colleges, councils, etc, and use of Charkha, Khadi, etc.
See Sec. 7.4.
- 2) You have to write about the spontaneous response of the peasantry giving reasons for their participation and the reference of two or three areas like U.P., Bihar, etc.
See Sec. 7.6 and 7.7.

- 3) i) ✓ ii) ✗ iii) ✓

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Your answer should include the social, economic and political impact of this movement. See Sec. 7.11
- 2) You have to write about the explanations given by Gandhi and others
See Sec. 7.10
- 3) i) ✓ ii) ✗ iii) ✗ iv) ✓

UNIT 8: CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT: 1930-34*

Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Background
- 8.3 Civil Disobedience, 1930-March 1931
 - 8.3.1 Gandhi's Efforts
 - 8.3.2 Beginning of the Movement
 - 8.3.3 Movement Spreads
 - 8.3.4 Response of Different Sections
 - 8.3.5 Regional Variations
- 8.4 The Truce Months: March-December 1931
- 8.5 1932-34: Civil Disobedience Again
- 8.6 Aftermath
- 8.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.8 Key Words
- 8.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercise

8.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit, seeks to discuss the Civil Disobedience Movement launched by the Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi during 1930-34. After reading this Unit, you will be able to understand:

- the circumstances leading to the Civil Disobedience Movement,
- how the movement was started and what was its programme,
- why the movement was temporarily suspended,
- why it failed to achieve its goal, and
- the importance of this movement in Indian history.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In the earlier Unit, you read about the Non-Cooperation Movement started by the Congress. Though this movement failed to achieve its goals yet it succeeded in involving millions of people in the movement against the British Raj. After a gap of about eight years in 1930, the Congress again gave the call for a mass movement known as the Civil Disobedience Movement. The developments in the Indian situation since the withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation Movement, and the unchanging attitude of the British Government to the Indian Question, prepared the ground, the stage-

* Adopted from Unit 25 of EHI-01

wise development, and finally the failure and consequences of the Civil Disobedience Movement.

8.2 BACKGROUND

The abrupt withdrawal of Non-Cooperation Movement by Gandhi after the Chauri Chaura incident of February 1922 had demoralizing effect on many Congress leaders and led to a sharp decline in the national moment. The all India Congress membership went down to 106,000 in March 1923, and was only 56,000 in May 1929. The Swarajist programme of wrecking dyarchy from within petered out into council and municipal politicking. The 'No Changer' group which emphasised upon Gandhian Constructive Work in villages remained scattered and kept themselves aloof from the political developments. The remarkable Hindu-Muslim unity of the Non-Cooperation-Khilafat days dissolved into widespread communal riots in the mid-1920s. For example, there was a violent anti-Hindu outburst at Kohat in the N.W. Frontier Province in September 1924. Three waves of riots in Calcutta between April and July 1926 killed about 138 people. In the same year there were communal disturbances in Dacca, Patna, Rawalpindi, Delhi and U. P. Communal organizations proliferated. Negotiations with Jinnah over the Nehru Report plan for an alternative constitution broke down in 1927-28 largely because of Hindu Mahasabha opposition and Jinnah's obstinacy in relation to it.

The Hindu-Muslim Unity of 1919-22 was never regained. However, there were many signs of the growth of anti-imperialist movement from 1928 onwards. These signs were visible in:

- demonstrations and hartals in towns in the course of the boycott of the Simon Commission,
- militant workers' movement in Bombay and Calcutta which alarmed Indian businessmen and British officials and capitalists alike,
- the revival of revolutionary groups in Bengal and Northern India (with Bhagat Singh's HSRA introducing a new secular and socialistic tone),
- peasant movements in various regions, particularly the successful Bardoli Satyagraha led by Vallabhbhai Patel in Gujarat in 1928 against the enhancement of land revenue.

During this period, when the Congress Left was emerging under Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose, slogans of Purna Swaraj rather than of only Dominion Status were voiced. After much hesitation, Gandhi accepted this change in Congress creed at the Lahore session in December 1929, setting the stage for the next major round of countrywide struggle in 1930-34.

You would like to know how this new upsurge became possible, considering the extent of decline and fragmentation of the immediately preceding years. Historians of the 'Cambridge School' have tried to explain it by suggesting a direct causal link between the British policies and the ups and downs of the national movement. The appointment of the Simon Commission revived a "moribund nationalism". Irwin gave the Congress importance by talking with Gandhi on a level of equality. But a closer look raises doubts about this entire thesis because the British policies often changed

in response to nationalist pressures rather than vice-versa. For example, the all-white Simon Commission had planned a retreat even from the Montagu-Chelmsford framework in respect of the demands of Indians. But the mass upsurge of 1930 forced the British to make a promise of some sort of responsible government at the centre. Further, it was the pressure from the national movement and the heroic self-sacrifice of people which again forced Irwin to negotiate with Gandhi in February-March 1931.

Throughout 1928 and 1929 we find that political and economic tensions between British domination and a variety of Indian interests increased:

- Contradictions were enormously sharpened by the impact of the World Depression which set in from late 1929. Business groups were not happy with the British tariff policy. Lancashire textile imports were going up again, and there were growing conflicts in Calcutta between the Birlas and British jute interests, and in Bombay over coastal shipping.
- The workers facing large scale retrenchment started agitations with unprecedented militancy and organization.
- Rural tensions were sharpened by stagnation in agricultural production and by British efforts to enhance land revenue in raiyatwari areas in the late 1920s, till the Bardoli victory halted such endeavours permanently.

But socio-economic tensions did not necessarily or automatically take an anti-British turn, for the immediate oppressors would most often be Indian Zamindars, moneylenders, or millowners, groups which could have nationalist connections, or which nationalists generally tried to keep on their side. Yet a massive country-wide upsurge did take place in 1930. Let us see, why and how it happened.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What were the developments in Indian politics from 1928 onwards that prepared the stage for the Civil Disobedience Movement?
- 2) Which of the following statements is right (✓) or wrong (✗)
 - a) During the post-Non-Cooperation period a Congress Left was emerging under Subhas Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru's initiative.
 - b) The resolution for Purna Swaraj was taken at the Lahore Session of the Congress Committee in 1929.
 - c) The socio-economic tensions automatically led to anti-British agitation.

8.3 CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE, 1930 – MARCH 1931

The Lahore Congress (1929) had left the choice of the precise methods of non-violent struggle for Purna Swaraj to Gandhi. It was resolved that a Manifesto or pledge of Independence would be taken all over India by as many people as possible on 26 January 1930. On this date civil disobedience was supposed to commence. It was declared Independence Day.

8.3.1 Gandhi's Efforts

Gandhi was still not sure of his plan of action. Before launching the movement he once again tried for compromise with the Government. He placed eleven points of administrative reform and stated that if Lord Irwin accepted them there would be no need for agitation. The important demands were:

- 1) The Rupee-Sterling ratio should be reduced to 1s 4d,
- 2) Land revenue should be reduced by half and made a subject of legislative control,
- 3) Salt tax should be abolished and also the government salt monopoly,
- 4) Salaries of the highest grade services should be reduced by half,
- 5) Military expenditure should be reduced by 50% to be begin with,
- 6) Protection for Indian textiles and coastal shipping,
- 7) All political prisoners should be discharged.

To many observers this charter of demands seemed a climb-down from Purna Swaraj. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote in his Autobiography:

What was the point of making a list of our political and social reforms when we were taking in terms of Independence. Did Gandhiji mean the same thing when he used this term as we did or did we speak a different language?

The Government response to Gandhi's proposal was negative. Still Gandhi was hesitant. He wrote to the Viceroy:

But if you cannot see your way to deal with these evils and my letter makes no appeal to your ear, I shall proceed, with such co-workers of the Ashram as I can take, to disregard the provisions of the salt laws. I regard this tax to be the most ubiquitous of all from the poor man's standpoint.

The Viceroy gave a brief reply in which he regretted that Gandhi was "contemplating a course of action which was clearly bound to involve violation of law and danger to the public peace".

Gandhi in his rejoinder said, "on bended knees I asked for bread and received a stone instead. The English nation responds only to force and I am not surprised by the Viceregal reply".

8.3.2 Beginning of the Movement

Gandhi took the decision to start the movement. On 12 March 1930 Gandhi started the Historic March from his Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi beach accompanied by his 78 selected followers. There Gandhi and his followers broke the law by manufacturing salt from the sea. The Programme of the movement was as follows:

- a) Salt law should be violated everywhere.
- b) Students should leave colleges and government servants should resign from service.
- c) Foreign clothes should be burnt.
- d) No taxes should be paid to the government.
- e) Women should stage a Dharna at liquor shops, etc.

The choice of salt as the central issue appeared puzzling initially. Events quickly revealed the enormous potentialities of this choice. "You planned a fine strategy round the issue of salt", Irwin later admitted to Gandhi. Salt was a concrete and a universal grievance of the rural poor, which was almost unique in having no socially divisive implications. With regard to food habits, the salt was a daily necessity of the people. It also carried with it the implications of trust, hospitality, and mutual obligations. In this sense it had a far-reaching emotional content. Moreover the breaking of the salt law meant a rejection of the Government's claims on the allegiance of the people. In coastal areas where over the previous century indigenous salt production had been ruined by British imports, illegal manufacture of salt could provide the people a small income which was not unimportant. The manufacture of salt also became a part of Gandhian methods of constructive work like Khadi production. Rural Gandhian bases everywhere provided the initial volunteers for the salt satyagraha. Above all, the Dandi March and the subsequent countrywide violation of the salt law provided a tremendously impressive demonstration of the power of non-violent mass struggle.

What came to be undermined was the entire moral authority of the government and its self-image of being the paternalistic 'ma-baap' of the poor. An additional District Magistrate reported from Midnapur (Bengal) in November 1930 that even old villagers were talking "insolently -- the ordinary cultivator simply squatted on his haunches and laughing sarcastically said, 'We know how powerful the Sarkar is.'"

8.3.3 Movement Spreads

Social boycott of police and lower-level administrative officials led to many resignations. That the British realized the gravity of the threat was revealed by the sheer brutality of repression, as "unresisting men – (were) methodically bashed into a bloody pulp", in the world of the American journalist Webb Miller. But the spectacle of unarmed, unresisting satyagrahis standing up to abominable torture aroused local sympathy and respect as noting else could have done. The brutal repression invoked memories of innumerable acts of petty oppression by police and local officials, linking up the all India struggle with the lived day-to-day experience of the villagers. Sympathy quickly turned into participation, spreading the movement far beyond the fairly narrow confines. And such participation often took violent forms, with crowds of villagers attacking police parties. The Gandhian restraints had been weakened, anyway, by the early removal of most of the Congress cadres by arrests.

- i) On 18 April 1930, Bengal revolutionaries inaugurated one of the most powerful and heroic epoch in the history of the revolutionary nationalist movement by seizing the Chittagong armoury, and fighting a pitched battle on Jalabad hill on 22 April. Revolutionary nationalism accompanied the whole history of Civil Disobedience in Bengal, with 56 incidents in 1930 (as compared to 47 for the decade 1919-1929). The Chittagong leader Surya Sen managed to remain underground in villages till as late as 1933, and there was the evidence of a new level of peasant sympathy. For the first time Muslims were also included in what had been a movement of educated middle class Hindu youth alone.

- ii) In Peshawar on 23 April 1930, the arrest of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan provoked a massive upsurge, and a platoon of Garhwali Rifles (Hindu soldiers facing a Muslim crowd) refused to open fire, an instance of patriotic self-sacrifice, non-violence, and communal unity which deserves to be better remembered.
- iii) The industrial city of Sholapur in Maharashtra in early May 1930 saw a textile workers' strike, attacks on liquor shops, police outposts and government buildings, and even something like a parallel government for a few days.

The onset of the monsoon made illegal salt manufacture difficult and the Congress switched over to other forms of mass struggle, all characterised by a similar pattern of careful choice of socially non-divisive issues, followed by their broadening and radicalization through a variety of populist initiatives. The Working Committee in May 1930 sanctioned non-payment of land revenue in raiyatwari areas, an anti-chowkidari (village police) tax in zamindari regions (not, significantly enough, no-rent), and 'forest satyagraha': peaceful violation of forest laws restricting age-old tribal and poor peasant rights to free fodder, timber and other forest produce. The government struck back at no-tax movements through large-scale confiscations of property, yet thousands of peasants heroically stood their ground, at times migrating *en masse* to neighboring princely states. Rural movements repeatedly went beyond the prescribed Gandhian bounds, through violent confrontation with the police at many places, and massive tribal invasions of forests in Central Provinces, Maharashtra and Karnataka. The rumour spread that the British Raj was coming to an end.

8.3.4 Response of Different Sections

Urban intelligentsia's support for Gandhian nationalism was perhaps less in evidence in 1930 than during the Non-Cooperation Movement and there were few instances of lawyers giving up practice or students leaving official institutions to join national schools. Militant urban educated youth tended to be attracted more by revolutionary nationalism in Bengal, and in north Indian towns, Bhagat Singh's popularity briefly rivaled that of Gandhi himself. The most obvious weak point of nationalism as compared to 1919-22, was of course Muslim participation which remained low, on the whole, except in Badshah Khan's NWFP and places like Delhi; for example only 9 out of 679 Civil Disobedience prisoners in Allahabad between 1930 and 1933 were Muslims. Social discontent turned communal in Dacca town and Kishoreganj village in May and during Gandhi-Irwin Pact. Unlike Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience did not coincide with any major labour upsurge. There were frequent hartals in town, but the Congress did not include industrial or communication strikes in its programme, much to the relief of British officials.

Such lags were largely made up by the massive peasant mobilization and considerable support from business groups, at least during the early months of Civil Disobedience. The movement, unlike Non-Cooperation, implied violations of law, arrests, and beating-up right from the beginning, and the number of jail goers was 92,214; more than three times the 1921-22 figure. Support from Ahmedabad mill owners, Bombay merchants and

petty traders (industrialists in the city being less enthusiastic), and Calcutta Marwaris headed by GD Birla can be cited as example of the solidarity of the Capitalists with the national movement at this stage. For example, the merchants in many towns took a collective pledge to give up import of foreign goods for some months. Combined with picketing and the overall impact of the Depression, there was a spectacular collapse of British cloth imports, from 1248 million yards in 1929-30 to only 523 million yards in 1930-31.

A novel and remarkable feature of the Civil Disobedience Movement was the widespread participation of women. The handful of postgraduate women students in 1930s still went to class escorted by their teachers, and yet there were women from far more socially conservative professional, business or peasant families, picketing shops, facing lathis, and going to jail. A U.P. Police official felt that “the Indian woman is struggling for domestic and national liberty at the same time” However, this sudden active role of women in politics did not produce any significant change in the conditions of women in or outside the family. Gandhian non-violence, after all, did not entail any drastic violation of the traditional image of women; rather, it was male action that had in some ways been ‘feminized’, through the emphasis upon self-sacrifice, acceptance of suffering, etc. The deeply religious ambience of Gandhi’s saintly image was perhaps even more crucial: joining the Congress movement was a new religious mission, and certain transgressions were permitted or even glorified in such a context, just as Mira had come to be venerated as a saint centuries back. The one form of women’s participation which came to be quite sharply condemned was an active role in direct revolutionary nationalist action, including assassination as happened several times in Bengal. Even Rabindranath Tagore, usually much in advance of others in questions of women’s roles, then wrote a novel – *Char Adhyay* (1934) – condemning such ‘unfeminine’ behavior.

8.3.5 Regional Variations

The recent spate of regional studies of Civil Disobedience has brought to light interesting variations and internal tensions. Gujarat - more specifically, Kheda district, Bardoli taluka of Surat, Ahmedabad, and the Gujarati business-cumprofessional community of Bombay City - had become the classic heartland of controlled mass mobilization through Gandhian satyagraha. Gandhian strategies and controls fitted in well with the interests of substantial landholding peasants like the Patidars of Kheda and Bardoli, where in the absence of big zamindaris, rent was not much of an issue. Rural movements tended to be more uninhibited where Congress organization was weaker, or where internal zamindar-peasant divisions were quite sharp. Thus in Central Provinces, Maharashtra or Karnataka, where Non-Cooperation had made little inroads, the Gandhian ideas had the flavour and vagueness of novelty, a near millenarian flavour could still be seen, absent in the well-established strongholds like Gujarat, coastal Andhra or Bihar. In the United Provinces, District-level comparisons have brought out clearly this inverse relationship between organization and militancy. Parts of Agra district, with a strong Congress organization and few big zamindars, followed the Bardoli pattern; talukdar-dominated Rae Baraeli saw powerful pressures from the

peasants. In Bara Banki, where khadi or charkha were little in evidence, local activists were preaching that land was a gift of God and could not belong to zamindars alone. In Bengal, with its relatively weak and faction-ridden Congress, a near-coincidence of class with communal divisions in the eastern districts, and the presence already of a left alternative, the pattern was even more complex. There were powerful Gandhian rural movements in parts of West Bengal like Midnapur, Arambagh sub-division, and Bankura; a Praja movement was developing among Muslim rich peasants which was aloof or hostile regarding Civil Disobedience; and in one Muslim-majority district, Tippera, Congress activists were combining agrarian radicalism with nationalism in ways branded as 'rank Bolshevism' by Government officials and local Hindu landlords.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What was Gandhi's proposal to Lord Irwin before starting the movement? What were its consequences?
- 2) What was the programme of the Civil Disobedience Movement?
- 3) Why was salt chosen as the central issue of the movement? Answer in about fifty words.
- 4) Give your answer in one sentence.
 - i) What do you understand by Forest Satyagraha?
 - ii) What was the Government response to 'no-tax' movements?
 - iii) What was the basic difference between the Non-Cooperation and the Civil Disobedience Movement?

8.4 THE TRUCE MONTHS: MARCH-DECEMBER 1931

Around September-October 1930, Civil Disobedience entered a second, more contradictory, phase. Pressures for no-rent were mounting as the Depression began having its major impact, and the UP Congress had to reluctantly sanction non-payment of rent in October. Incidents of poor peasant and tribal militancy and violence multiplied in many areas. At the same time, official reports began speaking of a marked decline of enthusiasm and support among urban traders, many of whom started breaking earlier pledges not to sell imported goods. Thakurdas warned Motilal Nehru that "the capacity of the commercial community for endurance" had reached its limits, and industrialists like Homi Mody denounced the "frequent hartals which dislocated trade and industry". Possibly the enthusiasm of substantial peasants in the face of ruthless British seizure of property had started flagging too. Almost all leading Congress leaders were put behind bars. This was probably the context for Gandhi's rather sudden retreat. He initiated a talk with Irwin on 14 February 1931, which culminated in the Delhi Pact of 5 March. The pact is popularly called Gandhi-Irwin pact. The salient features of this accord were:

- i) The agreement arrived at the First Round Table Conference shall further be deliberated upon in another Round Table Conference.

- ii) The Indian National Congress will withdraw the Civil Disobedience Movement immediately and effectively in all respects.
- iii) The boycott of British goods would also be withdrawn forthwith.
- iv) The Government agreed to withdraw ordinances promulgated in relation to the Civil Disobedience Movement. Those political prisoners against whom there were no allegations of violence were to be set free and penalties that had not been realised were to be remitted. Indemnities would be paid to those who had suffered in the movement.
- v) The Government was neither to condone breach of the existing law relating to salt administration nor would the salt Act be amended. Nonetheless, government was to permit the collection and manufacture of salt freely to the people living within a specified area from the sea-shore.

The Congress working committee was divided when it met on 5 March, 1931 to discuss the results of the talks. Many people hailed it as a victory because the Viceroy had to negotiate a settlement. Others were not happy. Gandhi agreed to attend the Round Table Conference, more or less on British terms, in sharp contrast to his stand till the end of January 1931. Even Gandhiji's request for remitting the death sentence on Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru was turned down by the Viceroy, and they were executed on 23rd March. Civil Disobedience had died a sudden death, ending "not with a bang but a whimper", as Nehru wrote in his *Autobiography* a few years later.

The Gandhi-Irwin Pact had ambiguous consequences. Many others besides Nehru felt dismayed by the unexpected halt, long before attaining the proclaimed goal of Purna Swaraj, and peasants who had sacrificed land and goods at the Congress behest must have felt particularly let down. There was even a black flag demonstration against Gandhi when the Karachi Congress opened a few days after the execution of Bhagat Singh. The session, however, ratified the new policy, with Nehru, having spent some sleepless nights, moving the key resolution accepting the Delhi agreement. More fundamentally, it can be argued that the truce meant the loss of some crucial months during which the Congress restrained no-tax and no-rent movements precisely when rural discontent was at its height, with the Depression having its initial impact, and when sheer economic distress had not as yet ruined the potential for large-scale struggle. The Congress did give the call for no-tax again, in January 1932, but by that time the psychological moment had gone.

Gandhi's entry into the Second Round Table Conference also proved a virtual fiasco. The first Conference, in January 1931, with Civil Disobedience still at large and the Congress boycotting it, had been marked by Ramsay Macdonald's novel offer of responsible government at the centre. But its two characteristics were a Federal assembly on which princes who joined would nominate their own members, and a series of "reservations and safeguards" to maintain British control over defence, external affairs, finance, and economy. Having accepted this as the framework for discussion, Gandhi as sole Congress representative at the second RTC found himself

involved in endless squabbles with Muslim leaders, the Scheduled Caste representative Ambedkar who had started demanding separate electorates for untouchables, and the princes. The British watched this gleefully. The Congress had clearly been outmanoeuvred.

Yet the impact of the Pact and truce months was not entirely negative. The British, after all, had to negotiate with Gandhi on terms of equality and courtesy for the first time, and this was something deeply resented by many die-hard officials. The released Congressmen seem to have gone back to their villages and towns with undiminished confidence, almost as victors. The Congress organization expanded rapidly in the countryside, and the general mood was quite different from the fragmentation and decline after 1922. The Congress in fact was seeking to establish itself as the alternative, more legitimate centre of authority, starting arbitration courts to settle local disputes, and trying to mediate in zamindar-raiyat conflict. Meanwhile popular pressures were also building in the United Provinces, which the provincial congress eventually permitted in December 1931. A powerful anti-Maharaj movement in Kashmir under Sheikh Abdulla was an indication that political unrest was reaching out to princely states (there was to be a revolt in Alwar two years later), even though the Congress leadership still refused to intervene in princely India.

This was the overall context for the British decision of a pre-emptive strike against the Congress, before it got any stronger, taken by the new Right-Wing National Government and Viceroy Willingdon in late 1931. The new policy has been described as one of Civil martial law – sweeping ordinances banning all Congress organizations on 4 January 1932 (272 of them in Bengal alone), abrogating all civic freedom without formally declaring military rule, in order to force the Congress to wage an unequal and defensive battle. On 4 January 1932, a fresh batch of Congress leaders including Gandhi and Sardar Patel were arrested. Now attempts to treat political prisoners as common criminals became more common than ever before.

8.5 1932-34: CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AGAIN

Outmanoeuvred and facing repressive measures on an entirely unprecedented scale, the national movement still fought on valiantly for about a year and a half. 120,000 people were jailed in the first three months - an indication, however, not so much of a more extensive movement than in 1930, but of more intense and systematic repression, for the figures soon began to decline fairly fast. Bombay city and Bengal were described as the “two black spots” by Willingdon in April 1932: Gujarati small traders were still staunchly with the Congress, and Bengal remained a nightmare partly because of sporadic agrarian unrest and more due to revolutionary nationalist activities (104 incidents, the highest ever, in 1932; 33 in 1933). Rural response seems to have been less on the whole than in 1930, though a village like Ras in Kheda was still withholding revenue in 1933, despite confiscation of 2000 acres, public whipping, and electric shocks.

As the mass movement gradually declined in face of ruthless repression, political ‘realism’ combined with economic calculations of certain sections of Indians pushed Indian big business towards collaboration with the British.

Bombay millowners concluded the Lees-Mody Pact in October 1933, aligning with Lancashire out of fear of Japanese competition. Ahmedabad businessmen and GD Birla bitterly denounced this betrayal, but Birla and Thakurdas from 1932 onwards were themselves pressing the Congress for a compromise.

Gandhi in jail not unnaturally began to think in terms of an honourable retreat. He suspended Civil Disobedience temporarily in May 1933, and formally withdrew it in April 1934. The Mahatma decided to make Harijan work the central plank of his new rural constructive programme. This was his answer to the British policy of Divide and Rule which found expression in the official Communal Award declared early in 1932 by Ramsay Macdonald. The Award provided for separate Hindu, 'Untouchable', and Muslim electorates for the new Federal legislatures, treating Hindus and Harijans as two separate political entities. Gandhi opposed this Award. He demanded reservation of more seats for Harijans within the Hindu electorate. Ambedkar accepted Gandhi's stand. Another section of Congress preferred to go back to Council politics, and so the scenario of the mid 1920s appeared to be repeating itself. The 1935 Government of India Act was considerably more retrogressive than earlier drafts, for it was drawn up at a point when the British seemed triumphant.

8.6 AFTERMATH

That the Government's sense of victory' had been largely illusory was, quickly revealed, however, when the Congress swept the polls in most provinces in 1937. The Congress had been defeated by superior brute force, but its mass prestige was as high as ever. The Left alternatives emerged from the logic of Civil Disobedience itself, for the Movement had aroused expectations which Gandhian strategy could not fulfill. At the level of leadership, Nehru (and, less consistently, Bose) voiced the new mood, emphasising the need to combine nationalism with radical social and economic programmes. Some Congress activists formed a socialist ginger-group within the party in 1934. Kisan Sabhas with anti-zamindar programmes developed rapidly in provinces like Bihar and Andhra. The Communists, too, were recovering from the Meerut arrests and their own folly of keeping away from Civil Disobedience, and a significant section of disillusioned revolutionary nationalists and some Gandhian activists were moving towards them.

In this changed situation, the dominant groups within the Congress were able to retain control only by a series of adjustments and openings towards the left, though usually at the level of programmatic statements and not action. Thus land reforms directed towards curbing and eventually abolishing zamindari were coming to be included in the official Congress programme by the mid-1930s, in total contrast to all earlier pronouncements. An early indication of such a shift was the Karachi declaration on fundamental rights and economic policy, made significantly just after the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. This declaration was very moderate in content, yet reductions were promised, for the first time, not only in revenue but in rent, and living wages and trade union rights also entered the Congress programme. Peasant upsurges which had constituted so much of the real strength of Civil Disobedience like the

labour unrest of the late 1920s, had not been entirely futile. Though crucial political controls within the national movement remained elsewhere, much of the Congress language and rhetoric, and some actual policies, did have to take a leftward direction as a consequence of the growing assertiveness of these sections of Indian society.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) What was the Gandhi-Irwin Pact? What was its effect?
- 2) How did the Government respond to the Civil Disobedience Movement after the failure of the Second Round Table Conference at London?
- 3) Which of the following statements is right (✓) or wrong (✗).
 - a) The Congress boycotted the First Round Table Conference.
 - b) The Gandhi-Irwin Pact paved the way for the participation of the Congress in the Second Round Table Conference.
 - c) Political unrest was spreading in the Princely States also during this period.
 - d) Gandhi had full control over the mass upsurge during the Civil Disobedience Movement.

8.7 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have discussed the history of Civil Disobedience Movement from 1930 to 1934. In spite of Gandhi's earnest efforts, the non-compromising attitude of the British compelled Gandhi to start the movement in 1930.

The movement got spontaneous response from various regions of the country and peasants took part in it with their own class demands. However, when the movement was in progress, it was temporarily suspended because of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact in 1931. Gandhi went to London to attend the Second Round Table Conference but the mission failed.

The movement was renewed in 1932 but it lost the earlier spirit. The British Government tightened its repressive machinery to crush the movement. In view of this situation the movement was finally withdrawn in 1934. Thus, another heroic struggle of the people came to an end without achieving its immediate goal. But the sacrifice of the people had not been in vain. A change in favour of the peasants economic demands came in the Congress programme, and finally the formation of Congress ministries in the provinces signaled the victory of people movement.

8.8 KEY WORDS

Cambridge School: A particular group of historians, mainly based at Cambridge, which denied Indian nationalism on the basis of sectional interests, faction, etc. It believed in colonial benevolence and discussed the relationship between the British and the Indians as one of patron-client type.

Civil Disobedience: Peaceful violation of government laws.

Diarchy: Dual government, in which power is divided into two parts, reserved and transferred.

Lahore Congress: In 1929, at the Lahore session of the Indian National Congress the pledge for Purna Swaraj was taken. It was also resolved that henceforth 26th January would be observed as India's Independence Day. Jawaharlal was the president of this session.

Civil Disobedience Movement:
1930-34

8.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Following points should be considered: Boycott and Hartals following the Simon Commission, peasant and working class movement under the Communist leadership, revival of revolutionary nationalism, emerging socialist idea within the Congress, etc. See Sec. 8.2.
- 2) a) ✓ b) ✓ c) ✗

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Before starting the movement Gandhi gave a proposal to Lord Irwin for his consideration, which included abolition of salt tax, release of political prisoners, etc. Government response was negative, Gandhi gave the call for the movement. See Sub-sec. 8.3.1.
- 2) Violation of salt law, boycott of colleges and government offices, burning of foreign clothes, etc. See Sub-sec. 8.3.2.
- 3) Salt was chosen because it was the essential food, universal grievance of the rural poor, with socially divisive implications. It linked up with other Gandhian methods of constructive work, etc. See Sub-sec. 8.3.2.
- 4) i) Peaceful violation of forest laws.
ii) Imprisonment, confiscation of property, etc.
iii) Direct violation of government law.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Pact between Lord Irwin, the Viceroy of India and Gandhiji. Your answer should include dissatisfaction among many nationalists over the terms of the agreement, goal of Purna Swaraj and non-fulfilment of the peasant demands. See Section 8.4.
- 2) The Government through repressive measures wanted to force the Congress to take a defensive position. For example it banned all Congress organizations, property of the Congress members was confiscated. Also read Section 8.4.
- 3) a) ✓ b) ✓ c) ✓ d) ✗

UNIT 9: THE REVOLUTIONARIES*

Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Early Revolutionary Trends
 - 9.2.1 Factors Leading to Early Revolutionary Trends
 - 9.2.2 Early Activities
 - 9.2.3 Decline of the Early Revolutionary Trend
- 9.3 The Ghadar Movement
 - 9.3.1 Background of the Movement
 - 9.3.2 Early Activities
 - 9.3.3 Towards Organization
 - 9.3.4 Strategy and Action
- 9.4 Ghadar Movement: The Main Events
- 9.5 Achievements and Weaknesses
- 9.6 Hindustan Republican Association (HRA)
- 9.7 The Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA)
- 9.8 Ideological Development of the North Indian Revolutionaries
 - 9.8.1 The HRA
 - 9.8.2 Bhagat Singh and the HSRA
- 9.9 Revolutionary Nationalists in Bengal
- 9.10 The Chittagong Armoury Raid
- 9.11 Decline of the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement
- 9.12 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.13 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

9.0 OBJECTIVES

In the early years of the twentieth century a new dimension was added to the Indian National Movement. This was the emergence of revolutionary nationalism as a political weapon. After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- identify the factors that contributed to the emergence of revolutionary nationalism,
- know about the activities of revolutionaries and the causes of their decline,
- describe the objectives and ideology of these revolutionary organizations,
- analyse how the revolutionary organizations underwent ideological transformation,

* Adopted from Units 15 and 24 of EHI-01

- understand the strategy of the revolutionary movements
- discuss the achievements of the revolutionary movements, and
- learn about their contribution in the National Movement.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The first major attempt at a country-wide mass movement -- the Swadeshi Movement -- all but died out by 1907; the next major effort came after the First World War. In the intervening years, the national movement was to witness three different experiments in political action, all of which contributed in their own way to the furthering and deepening of national consciousness. The first experiment of revolutionary nationalism synchronized with the end of the mass phase of the Swadeshi movement, while the Ghadar Movement spanned the years of the First World War.

In the later period, the two broad strands of revolutionary nationalism developed in India after 1922. The revolutionaries were mainly active in Punjab, U.P., Bihar, Madhya Pradesh (old central provinces) and Bengal.

Dissatisfaction with Gandhi's leadership and his strategy of non-violent struggle after the suspension of Non-Cooperation Movement gave impetus to the revolutionary nationalist movement. The ideal of freedom which inspired the revolutionary nationalists inculcated the spirit of building a new society free from passion and exploitation. We will discuss all these issues in this Unit.

9.2 EARLY REVOLUTIONARY TRENDS

Revolutionary nationalism was the form of political action adopted by a generation of highly motivated nationalist youth whose creative energies failed to find adequate room for expression within the existing political trends.

9.2.1 Factors Leading to Early Revolutionary Trends

The Extremists' critique of Moderate politics had convinced the youth of the futility of trying to convert the British rulers by petitioning and reasonable argument. They had participated actively in the Swadeshi movement in the hope and belief that Extremist methods of agitation such as boycott, passive resistance, etc., would take the national movement out of its elitist groove. They expected that this movement would bring the British Government to its knees. The Swadeshi movement was only partially successful in mobilizing vast sections of the masses. It also could not secure the reversal of the partition of Bengal. It led to a growing sense of impatience and frustration among the youth who began to feel that perhaps something even more dramatic was needed to arouse the people.

The inability of the Extremist leadership to either adequately analyse the weaknesses of the movement or to suggest new ways out of the impasse further strengthened this trend. Some sections of the leadership, such as Aurobindo Ghosh, in fact supported the new trend. Those who did not quite agree preferred to remain silent rather than come out in open criticism, perhaps out of a feeling that this would be playing into Government hands.

Another factor that helped the growth of the trend of revolutionary nationalism was the brutal repression of the Swadeshi movement by the Government. For example the police made the unprovoked assault on the peaceful crowd at the Barisal Political Conference on 27th April, 1906 which had led the nationalist paper *Jugantar* to give the call “Force must be stopped by force”. The Government’s ability to repress was considerably enhanced by the split that took place in the Indian National Congress at Surat in 1907 between the Moderates and the Extremists, since it removed or at least reduced the danger of alienating the Moderates in the event of repression of the Extremists. Luring the Moderates with promises of constitutional reforms, the government proceeded to launch an all-out attack on the Extremists. Tilak was sentenced to six years of exile in Burma, Aurobindo Ghosh was arrested in a revolutionary conspiracy case. During this period a whole generation of nationalist youth, especially in Bengal, were:

- angered by repression
- convinced of the futility of the moderate path and
- impatient with the inability of the extremists to either extract immediate concessions from the government or to achieve a full scale mobilization of the masses.

This young generation turned to the path of individual heroic action or revolutionary nationalism. Though believing in the necessity, in the long-run, of an armed mass revolt by the people in order to overthrow imperialism, the daunting nature of this task as well as of attempts to subvert the loyalty of the army left them with only one choice for immediate action: assassination of individual British officials, especially the unpopular ones. This was done:

- in order to strike terror among officialdom;
- remove the fear and inertia of the people; and
- arouse their nationalist consciousness.

9.2.2 Early Activities

Though the trend of revolutionary nationalism acquired a real force only around 1907-8, there had been earlier examples as well:

- As early as 1897 Damodar and Balkrishna Chapekar of Poona had assassinated two British officers.
- In Maharashtra again, by 1904, V.D. Savarkar and his brother Ganesh had organized the Mitramela and the Abhinav Bharat as secret societies.
- After 1905, many newspapers and individuals started advocating this form of political action. In 1907, there was an attempt, though unsuccessful, on the life of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal.

The real launching of the new trend is, however, identified with the throwing of a bomb in April 1908 by Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki on a carriage in which they believed Kingsford, the unpopular district judge of Musaffarpur, to be travelling. But unfortunately, the carriage was carrying two British ladies who were thus inadvertently killed. Prafulla Chaki shot himself dead

rather than be arrested, but Khudiram Bose was arrested and later hanged. The government also used the opportunity to involve Aurobindo Ghosh, his brother Barin, and many others in a conspiracy case in which Aurobindo himself was acquitted but his brother and many others were sentenced to deportation and harsh prison terms.

The repression by the British triggered off the formation of secret societies and a spate of assassinations and what were termed as 'swadeshi' dacoities to raise funds for buying arms, etc. In Bengal, which became the main centre of revolutionaries, the organization of revolutionary activities was spearheaded by the Anushilan and Jugantar societies. In Maharashtra, Poona, Nasik and Bombay became centres of revolutionary activity. In Madras, Vanchi Aiyar of the Bharata Matha Association assassinated an official who was responsible for firing on a crowd that was protesting the arrest of the Extremist leader Chidambaram Pillai. In London, Madan Lal Dhingra killed Curzon Wylie, an India Office official and Rashbehari Bose organised a daring attempt on the life of the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, as he entered Delhi on 23rd December, 1912. Other revolutionaries, such as Shyamji Krishna Varma, Lala Har Dayal, V.D. Savarkar, Ajit Singh and Madame Cama established centres in Europe from which they could continue to spread the revolutionary message and render assistance to comrades at home. In all, it was estimated that 186 revolutionaries were either killed or convicted in the years 1908-1918.

9.2.3 Decline of the Early Revolutionary Trend

Stern repression facilitated by a series of draconian laws and the lack of a popular response led to the gradual decline of this wave of revolutionary nationalism. Individual heroic action undoubtedly earned the revolutionaries a great deal of popular adulation and sympathy, and many of them such as Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki became folk heroes. By its very nature, however, this form of political action could only be emulated by a few individuals, and not by the mass of people, who still awaited a movement that could accommodate their weaknesses and make effective use of their strengths.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Give two important causes for the growth of revolutionary nationalism in early period.
- 2) Write three main actions undertaken by the revolutionary nationalists.

9.3 THE GHADAR MOVEMENT

The First World War broke out in 1914 and to many Indian nationalists it appeared that once-in-a-lifetime opportunity had arrived to take advantage of Britain's difficulty. Being embroiled in the War, it was felt, Britain would not be in a position to effectively answer a nationalist challenge. The Ghadar Movement was one such important revolutionary trend.

9.3.1 Background of the Movement

The Ghadar revolutionaries were recruited largely from the ranks of Punjabi immigrants who had settled on the West Coast of North America at least

since 1904. They were mostly debt-ridden and land-hungry peasants from the crowded areas of Punjab, especially Jullundur and Hoshiarpur, many of whom had served in the British Indian Army and had thus acquired the confidence and the means necessary for emigration. The hostile attitude of the local population including of the white labour unions, the increasingly restrictive immigration laws, helped by the active complicity of the Secretary of State for India -- all pushed the Indian community to the realization that they must organize themselves if they were to resist the blatant racial discrimination being imposed on them. For example, Tarak Nath Das, an Indian student who was one of the first leaders of the Indian community in North America and responsible for starting a paper called *Free Hindustan* understood very well that while the British government encouraged Indian labourers to go to work to Fiji where they were needed by British planters it discouraged their emigration to North America for they feared that they might get infected by the current ideas of liberty.

9.3.2 Early Activities

The first stirrings of political activity among Indian immigrants became evident as early as 1907 when a *Circular-e-Azadi* (Circular of liberty) was brought out by Ramnath Puri, a political exile, in which he pledged support to the Swadeshi movement. Tarak Nath Das started the *Free Hindustan* and G.D. Kumar brought out a Gurmukhi paper *Swadesh Sevak* advocating social reform and asking Indian troops to rise in revolt. By 1910, Das and Kumar had set up the United India House in Seattle in the USA and began lecturing every week to a group of Indian labourers. They also developed close links with the Khalsa Diwan Society which resulted in 1913 in a decision to send a deputation to meet the Colonial Secretary in London and the Viceroy and other officials in India. They failed to meet the Colonial Secretary, despite a wait of a month, but succeeded in securing an audience with the Viceroy and the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab. Their visit to Punjab became the occasion for a series of public meetings in different Punjab towns and enthusiastic support from the people and the press.

Meanwhile, in early 1913, Bhagwan Singh, a Sikh priest who had worked in Hong Kong and the Malay states, visited Vancouver in Canada and openly preached the violent overthrow of British rule. Such was the effect of his exhortations that he was externed from Canada after three months, but his ideas had fired the imagination of his audiences.

9.3.3 Towards Organization

Disappointed with the lack of response from the Indian and British governments, convinced that their inferior status in foreign lands was a consequence of their being citizens of an enslaved country, and aroused to nationalist consciousness and a feeling of solidarity by the consistent political agitation, the Indian community in North America felt the acute need for a central organization and a leader. The leader they found was Lala Har Dayal, a political exile from India, who had come to the U.S. in 1911 and had been lecturing at Stanford University as well as to the various American groups of intellectuals, radicals and workers on the anarchist and syndicalist movements but had not shown much interest in the affairs of Indian immigrants. His attitude changed with the news of the bomb attack

on the Viceroy in Delhi in December 1912 which convinced him that the revolutionary spirit was still alive.

He assumed leadership of the immigrant Indian community and, in May 1913, the need for a central organization was met with the setting up of the **Hindi Association** in Portland, which later changed its name to **Hindustan Ghadar Party**. Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna was elected the President, Lala Har Dayal the General Secretary and Pandit Kanshi Ram Maroli the Treasurer at the first meeting of the Association which was also attended by others including Bhai Parmanand and Harnam Singh 'Tundilat'. A sum of \$ 10,000 was collected on the spot and decisions were taken to set up a headquarter by the name of **Yugantar Ashram** in San Francisco and start a weekly paper, the **Ghadar**, for free circulation.

9.3.4 Strategy and Action

The plans of political action outlined by Lala Har Dayal and accepted by the Hindi Association were based on the understanding that British rule could only be overthrown by armed revolt and that for this to happen it was necessary that Indian immigrants go to India in large numbers and carry this message to the masses and the soldiers of the Indian army. He also believed that the freedom available in America should be used to fight the British and not the Americans, for in any case Indians would never be accepted as equals abroad till they were free in their own land. Basing themselves on this understanding, the militant nationalists launched a vigorous propaganda campaign, touring factories and farms where Indian immigrants worked.

The paper *Ghadar* was launched on the first of November, 1913; the first issue was in Urdu followed a month later by the Gurmukhi version. The format of the *Ghadar* paper was designed to convey the message of nationalism in simple and bold terms. Its very name meant revolt, thereby leaving no doubts about its intentions. On its masthead was inscribed the caption: *Angrezi Raj Ka Dushman* or 'An Enemy of British Rule'. Besides, the front page of each issue carried the 'Angrezi Raj Ka Kacha Chittha' or 'An Expose of British Rule', which consisted of 14 points enumerating the negative effects of British rule. This *Chittha* was in effect a summary of the entire nationalist critique of British rule on the issues of drain of wealth, high land revenue, low per capita income, recurrence of famines which killed millions of Indians, high expenditure on Army and low expenditure on health, the policy of divide and rule by pitting Hindus and Muslims against each other. The last two points of the *Chittha* also pointed to the way out by highlighting the small number of Englishmen present in India as compared to the crores of Indians and by suggesting that the time had come for another revolt since already fifty-six years had lapsed since the last one in 1857.

The *Ghadar* was, of course, circulated widely among Indian immigrants in North America, but it soon reached immigrants in the Philippines, Hong Kong, China, Malay states, Singapore, Trinidad and the Honduras as well as Indian regiments stationed in many of these centres. It was sent to India as well. The response it generated among immigrant communities was tremendous, groups were formed to read it and discuss the issues it raised and contributions poured in.

9.4 GHADAR MOVEMENT: THE MAIN EVENTS

The subsequent course of the Ghadar Movement was, however, determined by three major events in 1914: the arrest, jumping of bail and flight to Switzerland of Lala Har Dayal, the fateful voyage of the ship Komagata Maru, and the beginning of the First World War.

In March, 1914 Har Dayal was arrested. The most likely reason was the pressure exerted by the British government who for obvious reasons would like to see him removed from the leadership of the Ghadar Movement, but the stated reason was his anarchist activities. He was released on bail and it was decided that he would jump bail and go to Switzerland.

Meanwhile, in an attempt to defy Canadian immigration laws which forbade entry to all except those who made a “direct passage in their own ship,” Gurdit Singh, an Indian contractor living in Singapore chartered a ship, the Komagata Maru, and, with 376 Indian passengers originating from various places in East and South East Asia, set sail for Vancouver. On the way, Ghadar party mobilizers visited the ship, gave lectures and distributed literature. Receiving prior intimation of the intended immigration, the Press in Vancouver warned of the ‘Mounting Oriental Invasion’ and the Canadian government prepared to meet the challenge by tightening its laws.

On arrival, the ship was not allowed into the port and was cordoned off by the police. Despite the strenuous efforts of the “Shore Committee” in Vancouver led by Husain Rahim, Sohan Lal Pathak and Balwant Singh and a powerful campaign in the USA led by Barkatullah, Bhagwan Singh, Ram Chandra and Sohan Singh Bhakna, the Komagata Maru was forced out of Canadian waters. Before it reached Japan, the First World War broke out and the British government ordered that no passenger was to be allowed to leave the ship till it reached Calcutta. Its return journey triggered off a wave of resentment at every port of call among the communities of immigrant Indians and heightened anti-British feelings. When the ship reached Budge Budge near Calcutta, the hostile attitude of the police led to a clash which resulted in the death of 18 passengers. 202 were arrested and the rest succeeded in running away.

The third and most important event that brought about a dramatic change in the situation was the outbreak of the First World War. This was the opportunity that the Ghadarites had been waiting for to seize and to make the best of Britain’s difficulty. It came earlier than they had expected, and their preparations were still in a rudimentary stage. Nevertheless, a special meeting of the leading workers of the party met and decided that the time had come for action and that their biggest weakness, lack of arms, could be made good by persuading the Indian soldiers to revolt. The Ghadar party accordingly issued its *Ailan-e-Jung* or ‘Proclamation of War’, which was circulated among Indians living abroad. Ghadar activists also embarked on tours exhorting people to return to India and organize a revolt. The response was tremendous, with large numbers offering themselves and their entire belongings to the cause of the nation. Encouraged by this the Ghadar party began the exodus to India, and batches of revolutionaries began to arrive in India by different routes in the latter half of 1914.

The Government of India was lying in wait, armed with the new Ingress into India Ordinance. Returning immigrants were carefully scrutinized, and of an estimated 8,000 who returned, 5,000 who were considered 'safe' were allowed to go unhindered. Of the remaining, some were interned in their villages, others detained. Nevertheless, many hardcore activists succeeded in reaching Punjab. Ghadar activists toured the villages, cyclostyled and distributed party publications, addressed gatherings at melas and made every effort to persuade the people to rise in revolt. But the Punjab in 1914 was very different from what they had expected, and the people were in no mood to embark upon the romantic Ghadar adventure. They had also to contend with the active hostility of loyalist elements such as the Chief Khalsa Diwan who declared them to be apostates or fallen Sikhs and criminals and cooperated fully in the government's efforts to crush them.

Disappointed with the popular response, the Ghadar revolutionaries next attempted to spread their message among the soldiers and engineer a mutiny. Attempts at revolt in November 1914 failed for lack of proper organization and centralized leadership. Another, more organized, attempt was made in February 1915 after Rash Behari Bose had been contacted and entrusted the task of leadership and organization. But this too proved abortive as the government succeeded in penetrating the organization and taking pre-emptive measures. Bose managed to escape, but most of the other leaders were arrested and the Ghadar movement effectively crushed.

The repression that followed was the heaviest possible: 42 were sentenced to death and 200 to long prison terms. As a consequence, an entire generation of the nationalist leadership of Punjab was politically beheaded. Efforts by Indian revolutionaries in Berlin to use German help and organize mutinies among Indian troops stationed abroad and by Raja Mahendra Pratap and Barkatullah to enlist the aid of the Amir of Afghanistan proved equally abortive. Violent rebellion to overthrow British rule was not fated to have much success.

9.5 ACHIEVEMENTS AND WEAKNESSES

In this section we will discuss the achievements and failures of the Ghadar movement.

Achievements: The Ghadarites succeeded in popularizing nationalist ideology -- especially the critique of colonialism and the understanding that Indian poverty and backwardness was a consequence of British rule--among vast masses of Indians in India and abroad. They created a cadre of highly motivated nationalists and, though many of these were lost through repression, some permanently and others for a number of years, continued to play an important role in building up the national and later the left and peasant movements in Punjab and other parts of India for many decades to follow.

Ghadar ideology was also strongly egalitarian and democratic in content. Their aim was to set up an independent republic in India. Har Dayal, deeply influenced as he was by the anarchist and syndicalist movements, also imparted to the movement an egalitarian outlook. His constant references to the Irish, Mexican, and Russian revolutionaries also helped in saving the

movement from a chauvinist nationalism and in giving it an internationalist character.

But perhaps the most important achievement of the Ghadarites was that, despite the fact that the vast majority of their followers were recruited from amongst Punjabi Sikh immigrants, they never betrayed any communal tendencies and were, on the contrary, strongly secular in their outlook.

Weaknesses: The Ghadar movement inevitably had its share of weaknesses as well, the chief of which was its over-estimation of the level of readiness of the movement. One might say that they sounded the bugles of war without stopping to examine the state of their own army. The response that they evoked in the immigrant Indian community, whose nationalist consciousness was aroused by daily experiences of racial insult, alienation produced by living in unfamiliar surroundings, and whose small numbers made the task of its organization relatively easier, misled them into thinking that the vast mass of Indians in India were also in a similar state of readiness. They also underestimated the might of the British rulers, the strength of the ideological foundations of their rule, and thought that all that the people of India needed was a call to revolt. The cost that had to be paid for this crucial weakness not only by the Ghadar movement but by the entire national movement was heavy indeed, for it is not unlikely that if the major part of the Ghadar leadership had not been removed from the scene, the political complexion of the national movement, certainly in Punjab, would have been very different indeed as the Ghadarites with their committed nationalist and secular ideology would inevitably have played a critical role in checking the communal tendencies that were to raise their head in later years.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What were the aims of Ghadar Party?
- 2) What was the main achievement of the Ghadar movement?

9.6 HINDUSTAN REPUBLICAN ASSOCIATION (HRA)

The Sudden suspension of the Non-Cooperation Movement in early 1922 after the Chauri-Chaura incident led to a wave of disappointment and discontent among the young participants in the movement. Many of them were disenchanted with Gandhi's leadership and began to question the very basic strategy of non-violent struggle. Once again they turned to the idea of violent overthrow of British rule. In this respect they also drew inspiration from the revolutionary movements and uprisings in Russia, Ireland, Turkey, Egypt and China. While the old revolutionary leaders revived their organizations, many new revolutionary nationalist leaders emerged from the ranks of enthusiastic non-cooperators. Thus Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee, Sukhdev, Bhagwati Charan Vohra – all had participated in the Non-Cooperation Movement.

Two broad strands of revolutionary nationalism developed after 1922: One in Punjab, U.P., Bihar and Madhya Pradesh (old Central Provinces) and the other in Bengal. Both the strands came under the influence of new social ideological forces.

- One such influence was the growth of socialist ideas and groups all over India.
- Second was the rise of a militant trade union movement.
- And the third was the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the consequent rise of the Soviet Republic.

Revolutionaries of northern India began their reorganization under the leadership of Sachindranath Sanyal, Jogesh Chatterjee and Ramprasad Bismil. In October 1924, they met at Kanpur and founded the Hindustan Republican Association (HRA) and set out the objective of organization an armed revolution against colonial rule and establishing a Federal Republic of the United States of India with a government elected on the basis of adult franchise.

To finance their organization and with the objective of propaganda and collection of arms, etc., the HRA leaders decided to organize dacoities against the Government. The most important of these was the Kakori robbery. On 9th August, 1925, ten revolutionaries held up the 8-Down train from Saharanpur to Lucknow at Kakori, a small village station near Lucknow and looted its official railway cash. The Government, however, succeeded in arresting a large number of HRA members and leaders involved in the dacoity. They were tried in the Kakori conspiracy case. The prisoners were subjected to cruel treatment in the jails; and in protest they had to take recourse to hunger strikes several times. Asfaquallah Khan, Ramprasad Bismil, Roshan Singh and Rajendra Lahiri were hanged, four others were sent to Andamans (Kala Pani) for life, and 17 were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.

9.7 THE HINDUSTAN SOCIALIST REPUBLICAN ASSOCIATION (HSRA)

The Kakori case decimated the revolutionary ranks, but soon a new batch of young persons came forward to fill the gap. Bejoy Kumar Sinha, Shiv Verma and Jaidev Kumar in U.P. and Bhagat Singh, Bhagwati Charan Vohra and Sukhdev in Punjab started the reorganization of the HRA under the leadership of Chandrashekhar Azad. They also came under the influence of socialist ideas. Finally, the representative revolutionary nationalists of northern India met at Ferozeshah Kotla Ground in Delhi on 9th and 10th September, 1928. They accepted Socialism as their official goal and changed the name of the party of Hindustan Socialist Republican Association.

The leadership of the HSRA was rapidly moving towards the idea of mass-based armed struggle and away from individual heroic action. But when Lala Lajpat Rai, one of the greatest of nationalist leaders, died as a result of a brutal lathi-charge when he was leading an anti-Simon Commission demonstration at Lahore on 30 October, 1928, the angry and romantic youth felt that it was necessary to avenge this grave insult to the nation. This compelled them to take recourse once again to the earlier practice of individual assassination. And so, on 17th December, 1928, Bhagat Singh, Chandrashekhar Azad and Rajguru assassinated Saunders, a police official involved in the lathi-charge.

As a part of their advance from positions of individual heroic action, the HSRA leaders now decided to propagate their political thinking among the people so that a mass revolutionary movement could be organized. Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt were deputed to throw bombs in the Central Legislative Assembly on 8 April 1929 to protest against the passage of the Public Safety Bill and the Trade Disputes Bill, which would reduce civil liberties in general and curb the right of workers to organize and struggle in particular, and against the “wholesale arrests of leaders of the labour movement”. The aim was not to kill, for the bombs were relatively harmless. The objective was, as the leaflet they threw into the Assembly proclaimed, “to make the deaf hear”. Bhagat Singh and Dutt made no attempt to escape. Their intention was to get arrested and to use the trial court as a forum for propaganda so that the programme and ideology of the HSRA could get widely propagated among the people.

Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt were tried in the Assembly Bomb Case. Then the police was able to uncover the details of the Saunders assassination and Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, Rajguru, and several others were tried in the ‘Lahore Conspiracy case’. Bhagat Singh and his comrades turned the court into a forum of propaganda. Their statements were published in the newspapers and widely discussed by the people. Their defiant and courageous conduct in the court won them the admiration of the people. Even believers in non-violence loved them for their patriotism. Every day they entered the courtroom shouting “Inquilab Zindabad”, “Down, Down with Imperialism” and “Long Live the Proletariat” and singing patriotic songs. Bhagat Singh became a household name in the land.

The country was also stirred by the prolonged hunger strike the revolutionaries on trial undertook as a protest against the horrible conditions in jail. They demanded that they should be treated not as ordinary criminals but as political prisoners. On 13th September, 1929, Jatin Das, a frail young man possessing an iron-will, died fasting. The entire nation was massively stirred. Thousands came to pay him homage at every station as the train carried his body from Lahore to Calcutta. In Calcutta, a two-mile long procession of more than six lakh people carried his coffin to the cremation ground.

A large number of revolutionaries were convicted in the Lahore Conspiracy Case and other similar cases and sentenced to long-terms of imprisonment. Many of them were sent to the Cellular Jail in the Andamans. Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were sentenced to be hanged. The sentence was carried out on 23rd March, 1931. As the news of their hanging spread, a death-like silence engulfed the entire country. All over the country, millions of people shed tears and fasted and refused to attend schools or carry on their daily work. Bhagat Singh soon became a legend in the country. His photographs adorned homes and shops. Hundreds of song were composed and sung about him. His popularity rivaled that of Gandhiji.

9.8 IDEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE NORTH INDIAN REVOLUTIONARIES

The HRA and HSRA developed a radical social ideology and thought to guide their activities and the forms of revolutionary struggle too were better defined.

9.8.1 The HRA

The HRA had already started evolving a programme within a broad secular, democratic and socialist framework. In 1925, its manifesto had set forth its objective as the establishment of “a Federal Republic of the United States of India by an organized and armed revolution”. The basic principle of the Republic was to be “universal suffrage and the abolition of all systems which make any kind of exploitation of man by man possible”. HRA’s founding council, in its meeting in October 1924 had decided “to preach social revolutionary and communistic principles”. It had decided “to start labour peasant organization”. It advocated nationalization of the railways and large-scale industries such as steel, ship-building and mines.

9.8.2 Bhagat Singh and the HSRA

A major shift in the ideological development of the revolutionary nationalists occurred when young leaders such as Bejoy Sinha, Shiv Varma, Sukhdev, Bhagwati Charan Vohra and Bhagat Singh turned to Socialism and Marxism. This shift is best epitomized in the life and thought of Bhagat Singh, many of whose letters, statements and writings have now become available.

Bhagat Singh was born in 1907 in a famous patriotic family. His father was a Congressman and his uncle was the famous revolutionary Ajit Singh. Bhagat Singh was deeply influenced by the Ghadar hero, Kartar Singh Sarabha. Bhagat Singh was a voracious reader and had read extensive literature on socialism, the Soviet Union and revolutionary movements the world over. At Lahore he and Sukhdev organized study circles for young students. The HSRA leaders carried on intensive political discussion among themselves. After his arrest he studied intensively in the jails. This devotion to intensive reading was also true of other leaders such as Bejoy Sinha, Yashpal, Shiv Varma and Bhagwati Charan Vohra. Chandrashekhar Azad knew little English, but he too fully participated in political discussions and followed every major turn in the field of ideas.

Bhagat Singh had already before his arrest in 1929 had come to believe that broad popular mass-based movements alone could liberate India and mankind from servitude. As he put it, revolution could only be achieved “by the masses for the masses”. That is why he helped found the Naujawan Bharat Sabha in 1926 to carry out political work among the youth, peasants, and workers. He became its founding secretary. It was expected to open branches in the villages. Bhagat Singh and Sukhdev also organized the Lahore Students’ Union for open political work among students. In fact, Bhagat Singh never identified revolution with the cult of the bomb.

In the course of their statements and manifestoes from 1929 to 1931, Bhagat Singh and his comrades gave repeated expression to their growing conviction that revolution meant arousing the masses and organizing a mass movement. Just before his execution, Bhagat Singh declared that “the real revolutionary armies are in the villages and in factories”. Bhagat Singh and his comrades also redefined the scope and meaning of Revolution. Revolution was no longer equated with mere militancy or violence. Its first objective was national liberation and then the building of a new socialist society. In their statement in the court at Delhi in the Legislative Assembly

Bomb Case they made a clear statement of what they meant by revolution: “Radical change, therefore, is necessary, and it is the duty of those who realize this to reorganize society on a socialistic basis”. What was necessary was to end “exploitation of man by man and of nation by nation”.

9.9 REVOLUTIONARY NATIONALISTS IN BENGAL

In Bengal too the revolutionary nationalists began reorganization after 1922. They resumed large-scale propaganda in the press and developed their underground activities. At the same time they continued to work in the Congress organization from the village to the provincial levels. This was because they realized that the Congress had developed under Gandhiji’s leadership a mass base, and work inside the Congress enabled the revolutionaries to get access to the masses, in particular the youth. At the same time their role within the Congress enabled it to acquire active workers in the small towns and rural areas. In many ways, C.R. Das acted as an emotional link between the revolutionaries and the Congress. After his death, the Congress leadership gradually got divided into two wings, one led by Subhas Chandra Bose and the other by J.M. Sengupta. The revolutionaries too got divided. The Yugantar joined forces with the Bose wing and the Anushilan group with the Sengupta wing.

Already, by 1924, major revolutionary nationalists had understood the utter inadequacy of individual heroic action, and intellectually and programmatically accepted the strategy of national liberation through armed seizure of power by mass uprisings. But, in practice, they still relied upon small scale ‘actions’, in particular dacoities and assassination of officials. One of the several such ‘actions’ was Gopinath Saha’s attempt in January 1924 to assassinate Charles Tegart, the hated Police Commissioner of Calcutta. Even though the attempt failed, Gopinath Saha was arrested, tried and hanged on 1 March 1924 despite massive popular protest. The Government now took alarm and started large scale repression. It arrested a large number of revolutionary leaders and activists under a newly promulgated ordinance. Moreover, a large number of Congressmen, including Subhas Bose, suspected of being sympathetic to the revolutionaries were also arrested. Nearly all the major leaders being in jail, revolutionary activity suffered a severe setback.

Revolutionary activity also suffered because of factional and personal quarrels within the ranks of the old revolutionary leaders. Quarrels on the basis of Jugantar vs. Anushilan were endemic. However, after their release after 1926 many of the younger revolutionaries, critical of the older leaders, began to organize themselves into a large number of new groups which came to be known as Revolt Groups. These groups tried to base themselves on the experience of Russian and Irish revolutionaries. Learning from the past experience, the new Revolt Groups developed friendly relations with the active elements of both the Anushilan and Jugantar Samitis. Among the new groups, it was the Chittagong group led by Surya Sen that acquired great frame and prominence.

9.10 THE CHITTAGONG ARMOURY RAID

Surya Sen gathered a large band of revolutionary youth including Anant Singh, Ganesh Ghosh, Ambika Chakravarty and Loknath Paul. In early 1929 they formed a plan to organize an armed rebellion, even though on a small scale, to demonstrate that British rule could be challenged through arms. In order to equip themselves adequately with arms, they planned to raid armouries in several districts. They also started a vigorous propaganda campaign.

The first action was to be in Chittagong. Their action-plan was carefully prepared and included the occupation of the two main armouries in Chittagong and the arming of a large band of revolutionaries with the seized arms. The telephone, telegraph and the railway communication systems between Chittagong and the rest of the Bengal were to be disrupted. The young band of revolutionaries, who were to participate in the armoury raid, were selected and trained with great care. The plan was put into operation at 10 O'clock on the night 18 April 1930. Six young men, led by Ganesh Ghosh, captured the police armoury shouting "Inquilab Zindabad", "Down with Imperialism" and "Gandhiji's Raj has been established". Another group of revolutionaries captured the Auxiliary Force Armoury. The raid was undertaken in the name of Indian Republican Army, Chittagong Branch. All the revolutionary groups gathered outside the Police Armoury. Surya Sen was formally declared the President of the Provisional Revolutionary Government. The Union Jack was pulled down and the National Flag was hoisted instead among slogans of "Bande Matram" and "Inquilab Zindabad".

Since it was not possible to fight the British forces which were expected to arrive soon, the revolutionary band took its positions on the Jalalabad hill where on 22 April they were surrounded by thousands of enemy troops. After a fierce and heroic fight in which 12 revolutionaries died, Surya Sen decided to abandon frontal warfare and launch instead guerilla warfare from the neighbouring villages. Despite severe suppressive measures, the revolutionaries survived for nearly three years because of shelter and support provided by the villages, most of them Muslim. Surya Sen was finally arrested on 16 February 1933, tried and hanged on 12 January 1934.

The Chittagong Armoury Raid had an immense impact on the people of Bengal. Consequent upon the Armoury Raid, there was a major revival of revolutionary activity. In Midnapore alone, three British magistrates were assassinated. Two Inspector-Generals of Police were killed and attempts were made on the lives of two Governors. The Government responded with massive repression. It armed itself with 20 repressive acts. In Chittagong, it burnt several villages and imposed punitive fines on many others. It arrested the revolutionaries indiscriminately.

The new phase of revolutionary nationalism in Bengal had certain new aspects. One was the large-scale participation by young women. It also showed that, unlike the older Bengal revolutionaries and the northern Indian revolutionaries, the Revolt Groups in Bengal had moved into group action aimed at an armed uprising. Though they failed to organize an armed uprising on a significant scale, the direction of their activities was clear.

9.11 DECLINE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY NATIONALIST MOVEMENT

The revolutionary nationalist movement gradually declined in the 1930s. This was for several reasons. The mainstream of the national movement, led by Gandhiji, was opposed to violence even when its leaders admired the heroism of its youthful practitioners and defended them in the courts and condemned the police repression directed against them. Government's strong action also gradually decimated the revolutionary ranks. With the death of Chandrashekar Azad on 27 February 1931 in an encounter with the police in a public park at Allahabad, the revolutionary movement in northern India came to a virtual end. Surya Sen's martyrdom marked the virtual collapse of revolutionary nationalism in Bengal. Revolutionaries in jail or in Andamans started a serious rethinking about their politics. A large number of them turned to Marxism as Bhagat Singh and many of his comrades had already done in the 1920s. Many joined the Communist Party, the Congress Socialist Party, the Revolutionary Socialist Party and other left parties and groups. Others joined the Gandhian wing of the Congress.

Even though the revolutionary nationalists of the 1920s and 1930s failed in their stated objective of leading a mass-based armed struggle or failed even to establish contact with the masses, they made a major contribution to the ongoing national struggle against colonialism. Their courage and sacrifice and their deep patriotism aroused the Indian people, especially the youth and gave them pride and self-confidence. In north India, Bhagat Singh and his comrades also sowed the seeds of socialist thought and movement.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Discuss the ideology and strategy of HRA and HSRA.
- 2) Discuss the main activities of revolutionary nationalists in Bengal.
- 3) What were the factors responsible for the decline of revolutionary nationalist movement in India?

9.12 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have seen how revolutionary trends emerged within the National Movement. The Anushilan and Jugantar societies were important trends in the early revolutionary movement. The Revolutionary activities were not confined to any one region of the country and at times they even crossed the boundaries of India. The Ghadar Party is the best example of this. The Government suppressed these movements with an iron hand. And yet these movements were successful in generating and adding to the anti-British consciousness. However, their major weakness was their isolation from the masses in general.

You also studied the two broad strands of revolutionary nationalism in the later period which developed in India after 1922 – one in Punjab, U.P., Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and the other in Bengal. In both regions in this period, the revolutionaries were moving away from the idea of individual heroic action to the idea of mass based armed struggle. Although the movement failed in its stated objective of leading a mass-based armed struggle but it made a

major contribution to the ongoing national struggle against colonialism. The courage, sacrifice and patriotism of the revolutionary nationalists inspired the Indian youth and restored their pride and self-confidence.

The Revolutionaries

9.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See sub-section 9.2.1
- 2) See sub-section 9.2.2

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See sub-section 9.3.1 and 9.3.2
- 2) See section 9.5

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See section 9.6 and 9.7
- 2) See section 9.9
- 3) See section 9.11



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UNIT 10: CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS*

Structure

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Background
- 10.3 The Indian Councils Act, 1892
- 10.4 Morley-Minto Reforms
 - 10.4.1 Need for Constitutional Changes
 - 10.4.2 Changes in the Composition of Legislative Bodies
 - 10.4.3 Changes in Functions
- 10.5 Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms
 - 10.5.1 Circumstances Leading to Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms
 - 10.5.2 Changes in the Central Government
 - 10.5.3 Changes in the Provincial Government
 - 10.5.4 Observations on the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms
- 10.6 Reform Proposals between 1920 and 1927
- 10.7 Simon Commission
- 10.8 All Parties Conference and Nehru Report
- 10.9 The Round Table Conferences
- 10.10 Communal Award and Poona Pact
- 10.11 The Government of India Act Of 1935
- 10.12 Let Us Sum Up
- 10.13 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

10.0 OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this Unit is to introduce you to the main stages in the evolution of legislative bodies in India between 1892 and 1935. After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- trace the growth in size and functions of legislative bodies during this period,
- learn about the factors which prompted the British to introduce these changes,
- know how the basic character of the Constitution of Free India (the democratic republic with a parliamentary system of government) has evolved gradually,
- explain how the struggle for freedom and the constitutional reforms went together and were complementary to each other, and
- appreciate the efforts of Indian masses and their leaders in facing the challenge of communal and minority problems in relation to constitutional reforms.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit an attempt is made to familiarize you with the constitutional developments between the period 1920 and 1935. This Unit discusses the factors which led to the passing of the Indian Councils Act of 1892. The main provisions of the act as well as its achievements and limitations have been dealt with. It further refers to the background of the Morley-Minto (1909) and Montagu-Chelmsford (1919) Reforms and also discusses the changes these reforms introduced in the various organs of the Government. Finally the weaknesses and achievements of the reforms have been pointed out to enable you to arrive at an objective analysis.

Here we also analyse the effects of 1919 Reforms Act and the circumstances leading to the appointment of Simon Commission. The Nationalist response to the appointment of Simon Commission as well as the recommendations of the Nehru Report is also discussed. It also takes into account the British initiatives for a compromise with the nationalists through the Round Table Conferences. Finally the main features and limitations of Government of India Act of 1935 are enumerated.

10.2 BACKGROUND

Under the Charter Act of 1833 a fourth member, known as the Law Member, was added to the Executive Council of the Governor-General. He was entitled to sit and vote in the Council of the Governor-General only when it met for legislative purposes. Thus for the first time a separation was introduced between the Executive and legislative functions of the Central Government. Another change introduced by this Act was that the Presidency Governments were deprived of their independent legislative power.

Twenty years later, in 1853, another Charter Act was passed under which the Law Member was given full rank as a Member of the Council of the Governor-General. The Legislative Council, in 1854, laid down an elaborate procedure for the transaction of business. In addition to making laws, it became a body for inquiring into various grievances. Moreover, the provincial governments resented the centralization of the law making process. The Revolt of 1857, however, provided an urgent reason for British Government's desire to make further changes in the set-up. It was felt that a major cause of the revolt was lack of contact and understanding between Indians and the authorities. An Act known as the Indian Councils Act was passed in 1861 which reflected this thinking. For purposes of legislation, the Governor-General's Council was reinforced by Additional members, not less than six and not more than twelve in number to be nominated by the Governor-General and holding office for two years. An important innovation was introduced by providing that, of these Additional Members, not less than one half were to be non-officials, i.e. persons not in the Civil or military service of the Crown. Under this provision three Indians were usually nominated. Further, the functions of the Council for Legislative purposes were confined strictly to legislation. The Act also restored to the Governments of Bombay and Madras the power of legislation and provided for the establishment of Legislative Councils in other provinces. Such

Councils were established in Bengal in 1862, Punjab in 1886 and the North Western Province in 1887.

For the first twenty years the power to nominate the non-official members was used as a means of distributing official patronage. Only Princes, their divans or big landholders were nominated and amongst these too, only those who had helped the British during the Revolt of 1857-58. Still the decision to nominate non-officials was significant. It amounted to a tacit recognition that Indian opinion was worth listening to, that the British officials were not the best interpreters of the wishes of Indians, and that not even an authoritarian colonial government could work in complete seclusion.

10.3 THE INDIAN COUNCILS ACT, 1892

From the point of view of the Government, the Act of 1861 worked satisfactorily. But the period which followed saw a remarkable growth of national consciousness in India. A feeling rapidly developed that the people inhabiting the country had common interests, aspirations and destiny. In its very first session the Congress passed a resolution demanding expansion of Central and provincial Legislative Councils by addition of elected members and enlargement of their functions. These demands were reiterated in subsequent years.

On the other hand, the primary objective of the Government of India was to safeguard and further British imperial interests. In this situation, the British needed to enlarge the basis for their support in India and they could do this by satisfying the aspirations of those Indians who were ready to confine their demands within a narrow constitutional framework. By introducing changes in the constitutional structure dissatisfaction of educated Indians could be obviated without adversely affecting Government's all-embracing autocracy. It was with this objective that a new Indian Councils Act was passed in 1892.

The Indian Councils Act of 1892 was an amending Act. Consequently the basic constitutional provisions remained the same as under the Act of 1861. Mainly two types of changes were introduced:

- i) Changes in the composition of legislative bodies
- ii) Enlargement of functions

Under the Regulations finally adopted, the Central Legislative Council was to consist of nine ex-officio members (the Governor-General, six members of the Executive Council, the Commander-in-Chief and the head of the province in which the Council met, i.e. Lieutenant Governor of Bengal or Punjab), six official Additional Members and ten nonofficial members of the Legislative Councils of Bengal, Bombay, Madras and the North Western Province.

So far as the functions were concerned, besides discussing legislative proposals, the members were allowed to discuss the annual Financial Statement presented by the Government. However, the Financial Statement was presented as an unalterable document. Members could only present their observations which could have influence on the budget in subsequent years, not on the budget of the year under consideration. In the case of provinces

the discussion was limited to those branches of revenue and expenditure which were under the control of Provincial Governments. The members were also allowed to put questions on internal matters. Supplementary questions were not allowed. In spite of this limitation it was a significant innovation because even in the British House of Commons till that time Question Hour had not fully evolved.

This Act was criticised at the 1892 and 1893 sessions of the Indian National Congress mainly because principle of direct-election had not been introduced. But the regulations proved liberal enough to enable many of the nationalist leaders like Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Lalmohan Ghosh, W.C. Bonnerji, Surendranath Banerjee and Pherozeshah Mehta to enter the legislatures. The non-official members gave a good account of themselves in respect of their debating skills and their ability as legislators and took advantage of each opportunity to put forward the Indian point of view. On the whole it seems that the provisions of the Act satisfied the aspirations of the nationalist leaders because between 1894 and 1900 the demand for Council reform were not very prominent in the agenda of the Congress Sessions. However the effect was short-lived because the same years saw the first stirrings of Extremism and by 1904 the Congress as a whole was again demanding a further big dose of legislative reform.

10.4 MORLEY-MINTO REFORMS

The promulgation of the Morley-Minto Reform of 1909 is to be seen in the background of a phase of turmoil and militant activities that followed the Indian Council Act of 1892.

10.4.1 Need for Constitutional Changes

Outside the Congress the one and a half decade following 1892 saw growing impatience with the goal and methods of the Congress itself. During 1885-1906 the number of students passing the matriculation in India increased from 1286 to 8211. Though by today's standards the number appears ridiculously small, this amounted to an almost sevenfold increase in terms of numbers. The number of newspapers and journals published and their total circulation also shows a similar trend. This does indicate that the number of those Indians who were likely to be conscious of their rights as citizens and of the duties of a government, and also of those who had begun to understand the disadvantages of being under alien rule increased substantially. These years also saw the beginning of what has been described as 'extremist' and revolutionary streams of the Indian National Movement to which, among other things, Curzon's policies substantially contributed.

Some of the Moderate leaders, especially in Bengal, came out openly in support of the boycott and Swadeshi programme of the Extremists. But they soon retreated and returned to the method of appeals and petitions. They wanted the government to make some liberal gesture. The Moderate leaders became more hopeful when at the end of 1905 the Liberals came to power in Britain and John Morley, a man known for his Liberal views, became the Secretary of State for India. A little earlier a conservative, Lord Minto had succeeded Curzon as Governor-General. The names of Morley and Minto became associated with the changes introduced under the Indian Councils

Act of 1909 which, together with some other changes, became known as Morley-Minto Reforms.

The 'new departure' was the introduction of changes in the composition and functions of the legislative bodies. This way they could rally the Moderates to the Empire because this was one of the primary demands they had been making. However, in addition to making an attempt to win over this section of the people, the British also raised other pillars of support for their regime in India.

Meanwhile, a deputation of some Muslim leaders met the Viceroy at Simla in October 1906. They demanded that the position accorded to the Muslims in any kind of representation should be commensurate with the numerical strength and political importance of their community. The British saw in these demands a promising alternative. They could create a counterpoise to the increasing demands of the Congress leaders by patronizing this section of Muslims. As we shall see, Muslims got weightage as well as separate electorates. It cannot, therefore, be denied that the British encouraged communal separatism as a means of continuing their rule. This is the reason why, with a comparatively weak organization, the League achieved notable success within a short time after its foundation.

The first suggestion for introducing constitutional changes was made in the summer of 1906 and the Indian Council act was passed in May 1909 after long and painstaking deliberations. Like the earlier Indian Council Act of 1892, the Act of 1909 was also an amending Act. Like its predecessor, it also introduced changes in the size and functions of the Councils of the Governor-General and Governors for the purpose of making Laws and Regulations.

10.4.2 Changes in the Composition of Legislative Bodies

This Act increased the strength of the Central as well as Provincial Councils. The number of additional members in the Central Council was increased to sixty while the number of additional members in Provincial Councils was to be between thirty and fifty. This number does not include the ex-officio members. The additional members were to be of two kinds – official and non-official. At the Centre, the official members (including ex-officio members) were to be in a majority. In the provincial legislatures non-official majorities were conceded. This was done because of the understanding that the non-official members would represent such diverse interests and classes that it would be difficult for them to take a joint stand. Moreover, if the eventuality of their passing an undesirable bill did come up, these bills could conveniently be vetoed.

In the Central or Imperial Legislative Council there were 37 official (9 ex-officio+ 28 additional official members) and 32 non-official members. The Act of 1909 became a landmark because of the manner in which non-official seats were distributed and filled. Of these 32 non-official seats 5 were filled by nomination by the Government. The remaining 27 seats were distributed as follows:

- | | | |
|----|--|----|
| 1) | By non-official members of the Provincial Legislative Councils | 13 |
| 2) | By landholders of six provinces | 6 |

- | | |
|---|---|
| 3) By Muslims of five provinces | 5 |
| 4) Alternately by Muslim landholders of U.P. or of Bengal | 1 |
| 5) Chambers of Commerce of Calcutta and Bombay | 2 |

Similar provisions were made for forming Provincial Legislative Councils with variations depending on their peculiar conditions. The Muslims and landlords were given weightage not with reference to any advantages verified by actual practice but in anticipation of them.

These seats were to be filled in by elections. For thirteen 'open seats' doubly indirect system of elections was introduced. The tax-paying citizens in a town or village elected representatives for municipal committees or local boards and they, in turn, elected representatives for provincial Legislative Councils. These non-official members of the Provincial Councils, in their turn, elected representatives to the Supreme Legislative Council. Thus some 200 non-official members of Provincial Legislative Councils filled 13 unreserved seats. This size was ludicrously small. The representatives of landholders and Muslim were elected directly even to the Central legislature. This made the discrimination between Muslims and non-Muslims seem all the more invidious and unjust. While Muslim landlords, rich traders, graduates and professional men got a right to vote directly for election to the Provincial and even Central Legislatures, non-Muslims, howsoever rich or qualified, had no such right unless they were members of municipal committees or district boards.

Further, Muslims were to be elected by separate electorates, that is to say, the electorates consisting of Muslims only. Separate registers were prepared containing the names of Muslim voters only. Muslims were also given weightage i.e. more seats were given to them than the number warranted by their proportion in the local population. They were also given the right to compete on equal terms with the other communities in the general electorates. In the elections for the Central Legislative Council held in 1909 Muslims were able to win four seats which were open to others too and so had in all 11 out of 30 non-official seats (two seats assigned to Chambers of Commerce which were filled by non-Indians have been excluded here). It should, however, be noted that though both officials and Muslim leaders always talked in terms of entire Muslim community, in practice, only some specific elite groups like landlords, government servants etc. were preferred. The aim of the Government in giving preferential treatment to the Muslims was not to correct imbalances in Indian society but to bind some Muslim leaders to the Government with 'silken chains of gratitude'.

10.4.3 Changes in Functions

The Act did not make any alteration in the legislative powers of these Councils. It simply extended their functions. The members of the Legislative Councils were given the right to move resolutions on matters of general public interest subject to certain limitations. These resolutions were to be in the form of recommendations to the Government which the latter might or might not adopt. Elaborate rules were laid down for discussing the Financial Statement presented in the house by the Finance member. Opportunity for discussing the statement and moving resolutions was given before

the budget in its final form was presented. The right to ask questions was extended by giving the member, who asked the original question, a right to put supplementary questions also.

From the above discussion it is clear that the Government had two aims in introducing the so-called Constitutional Reforms:

- i) to strengthen the Raj by rallying the moderates to the empire
- ii) to encourage divisions amongst politically active Hindus and Muslims or in other words, it was designed as a milestone in the 'divide and rule' strategy.

However, it soon became obvious that the Government of India was not able to achieve either of these objectives. In the long run, however, the introduction of weightage and separate electorates for Muslims proved to be the master stroke of imperialist strategy. Once religion was inserted as a political factor, pursuance of interests along religious lines became the accepted norm necessitating appeal to religious sentiments to get seats and to retain them.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What were the main provisions of the Act of 1892?
- 2) Discuss the circumstances leading to the Morley-Minto 'Reforms'?
- 3) What were the main features of the Morley-Minto 'Reform'?

10.5 MONTAGU-CHELMSFORD REFORMS

By 1916 all parties in India as well as Britain began to think that some changes in the structure of government were necessary. The aspirations of the Indians had also increased during this period. As a response to the political pressure in India during the war years and to buy support of Indians the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme was introduced by the British.

10.5.1 Circumstances Leading to Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms

Morley and Minto could hardly have imagined that the scheme of constitutional 'Reforms', which they had evolved after three and a half years of painstaking consultations at different levels, would cease to satisfy barely seven years later. By 1916 all parties in India, as well as Britain, began to think that some changes in the structure of the Government of India were necessary. This was largely the result of the conditions produced by the outbreak of the World War in August, 1914. The war did not pose any immediate threat to India. But being part of the British Empire, India became automatically involved. Actually fighting shoulder to shoulder with European soldiers had given new self-confidence to the Indians. They wanted recognition of their ability to rule themselves. This aspiration was reinforced by the ideas generated during the war. The American President, Woodrow Wilson had said that the war was being fought to make the world safe for democracy. A hope emerged that this would at least mean that India would be put on the road to self-government.

In this background of raised expectations, many schemes of constitutional changes were suggested. Indians themselves put forward a number of

schemes. The most significant one, however, was the scheme that was worked out and adopted at Lucknow. At Lucknow, the Moderates and the Extremists, as also the Home Rulers and the Muslim League, came together and unanimously adopted the agreement known as the Lucknow Pact (December 1916). They also jointly prepared a scheme of constitutional reforms. Amongst the British, an influential group discussed the question of structure for the government of India. Its members came forward with the idea of introducing dyarchy in the provinces. The 'dyarchy' is a form of government in which two persons, states, or bodies are jointly vested with supreme power.

The devolution of increased political power and responsibility on the Indians was simply a response to political pressure in India. It was a device to buy support of Indians. It was in these circumstances that on 20 August 1917 Lord Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, made the declaration about new constitutional reforms. It was also made clear that progress in the realization of this goal was to be made by successive stages and substantial steps in this direction were to be undertaken immediately. The time and manner of each advance was to be decided by the British Parliament. The action of Parliament in such matters would be determined in the light of the performance of Indians.

In November 1917, Montagu visited India and conferred with Chelmsford, the Viceroy, the officials of the central and provincial governments and Indian leaders. On the basis of these deliberations the Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms, which came to be known as Montagu-Chelmsford Report or simply as Montford Report was published in July 1918. The Declaration of August 1917 had on the whole been welcomed in India. But the scheme put forward in this Report fell far short of the expectations of Indian leaders except some Moderate leaders. Annie Besant denounced its provision relating to gradual transfer of power as 'unworthy to be offered by England or to be accepted by India.'

In August 1918 a special session of the Congress was called at Bombay to consider this report. In this session a resolution was passed by the Congress condemning the scheme as 'inadequate, unsatisfactory and disappointing.' The Moderate leaders, on the other hand, were convinced that the proposals marked a substantial advance upon the then existing conditions and that there should be sincere appreciation of the good faith shown therein. It was on the basis of the Montford Report that the Government of India Bill was drafted and introduced in the British Parliament. It became an Act in December 1919. The Preamble of this Act was based on August 1917 Declaration.

10.5.2 Changes in the Central Government

The chief executive authority remained vested in the Governor-General who remained responsible to the British Parliament through the Secretary of State and not to the Indian Legislature. The constitution of Governor-General's executive Council was slightly modified while substantial changes were made in the composition of the Indian Legislature. But it was made clear that the aim was not to increase its powers but merely to make it more representative and increase opportunities of influencing the Government.

To implement the policy of increasing association of Indians in every branch of administration, it was provided that, of the six members of the Executive Council of the Governor-General, three would be Indians. It should however be noted that these members were given portfolios of lesser significance like Law, Education, Labour, Health or Industry. They were accountable to the Governor-General and through him to the Secretary of State and not to the Legislature.

The Act provided for a bi-cameral legislature at the centre. The two Houses were the Council of State and the Legislative Assembly. The Council of State was to consist of 60 members of whom at least 33 were elected members. Not more than 20 nominated members could be officials. The Legislative Assembly was to consist of 145 members of whom 104 were to be elected members. Of these 52 were to be returned by general constituencies, 30 by Muslims, 2 by Sikhs, 7 by landholders, 9 by Europeans and 4 by the Indian Commercial Community. The communal electorates were extended to include the Sikhs also. It should be noted that these seats were distributed amongst the Provinces not on the basis of their population but their so-called importance. The life of the Assembly was to be three years. But it could be extended by the Governor-General.

The powers and functions of this legislature continued more or less as before. The only significant change was that it became necessary to obtain the previous sanction of the Governor-General before introducing any bill relating to matters enumerated in the provincial list. The power of the Governor-General was extended. In addition to the power to veto any bill, the Governor-General was given the power of certification also, i.e. he could secure the enactment of a bill whose passage in the form considered to be necessary was refused by the legislature. He could do so by certifying that the bill was essential for the safety, tranquility or interests of British India or any part thereof. The scope of interrogative functions was enlarged by extending the right to put supplementary questions to all the members.

Under the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme partial responsible government was introduced in the provinces. Because of this, demarcation between the spheres of Central and Provincial governments became necessary. Hence two lists were drawn up. This division was created on the principle that matters concerning the whole of India or more than one province should be placed in the Central list while those concerning the provinces should be placed in the provincial list. The central subjects included 'foreign and political relations, the public debt, tariff and customs, patents, currency, communications etc. The subjects in the provincial list were local self-government, health, sanitation, education, public works, agriculture, forests, law and order, etc. The residual powers were vested in the Governor-General in Council.

It was felt that even partial transfer of power to Indians could be meaningful only if the provinces were not dependent on the Indian government for the means of provincial development. Hence the Act provided for complete separation of the sources of revenue between the central and provincial governments.

10.5.3 Changes in the Provincial Government

Under the Government of India Act of 1919 responsibility for certain functions of the Government in the provinces was transferred while control over others was reserved in British hands. Under this division the subjects were divided into two halves called 'Reserved' and 'Transferred'. Accordingly, the provincial government was also to consist of two halves. The Governor and the members of his Executive Council were to administer the reserved subjects. The transferred subjects were to be administered by the Governor acting with ministers. This novel distribution of executive powers in the provinces came to be known as 'dyarchy'. Each side of the Government was clearly differentiated from the other in its composition and its constitutional relations with the Governor and the Legislative Council.

Broadly speaking four heads i.e. local self-government, health, education and some departments relating to agriculture were included amongst transferred subjects. All other subjects were reserved subjects. These included police, justice, control over printing presses, irrigation, land revenue, factories etc.

The Governor and the members of the Executive Council were appointed by the British Government and were jointly responsible to the Governor-General and the Secretary of State for India. The number of Executive Councilors was not to exceed four. The Ministers who were entrusted with the Transferred subjects were appointed by the Governor. He generally chose ministers from amongst the leading elected members of the Legislature. In practice there were two or three ministers in each province. According to the letter of the law, the ministers held office during the pleasure of the Governor. But, in practice, they were allowed to continue as long as they retained the confidence of the legislature. The basis of relations between the provincial governors and ministers was laid down in the Instrument of Instructions which was issued to Governor.

This Instrument of Instructions also defined special responsibilities of the Governor which gave him wide powers to override the decisions of his ministers. The idea that the ministers should be jointly responsible for their actions was discussed at that time. But finally the observance of this principle was not made binding.

The Government of India Act was applied originally to eight provinces -Madras, Bombay, Bengal, United Provinces, Punjab, Bihar and Orissa, Central Provinces and Assam. In 1923 its provisions were extended to Burma and sometime later to North Western Frontier Province. In each of these provinces a unicameral legislature, called the Legislative Council, was created. It was to consist of the Governor's Executive Council, elected members and nominated members. It was further provided that at least 70 per cent of the members of a Council should be elected members and not more than 20 per cent could be official members. The size of these legislative bodies was considerably increased. It varied from province to province. The maximum number was 140 for Bengal and minimum was 53 for Assam.

The elected members were to be elected by direct election, i.e., the primary voters elected the member. Franchise was based primarily on property qualifications. In 1920 out of a total population of 241.7 millions, only

5.3 millions got the right to vote which amounts to less than five percent. Women were not given the right to vote or to stand in elections.

After examining the question of separate electorates the authors of the Montagu-Chelmsford Report concluded that they were 'a very serious hindrance to the development of self-governing principle'. They also described these as contrary to the teachings of history and added that these perpetuated class divisions and stereotyped existing relations. Still they did not recommend that these should be given up. They extended these to the Sikhs in Punjab. Later the demand of the Justice Party for reservation of seats for non-Brahmans was accepted. Separate electorates were also provided for Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians and Europeans.

10.5.4 Observations on the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms

The whole conception of dyarchy was based on a faulty principle. It is very difficult to divide the functions of a state into water-tight compartments. The problem was confounded by the illogical division. While agriculture was a transferred subject, land revenue and irrigation were reserved subjects.

A system like this could work if there was basic trust between the two halves. While ministers were there to further the interests of their countrymen, the members of the Executive Council and generally of the civil service were there to safeguard British imperial interests. Ministers had no control over civil servants even in the 'transferred' departments. The secretaries of departments had direct access to the Governor which placed the members in a disagreeable position. Further, the minister had to serve two masters. He was appointed by the Governor and could be dismissed by him. But he was accountable to the legislature. Above all, the so-called nation-building departments were entrusted to ministers who could show results only if money was available. The ministers complained that the reserved departments got all the money they wanted before requirements of transferred departments were considered.

The scheme of constitutional changes introduced in 1919 became so unpopular that it became fashionable to deride it. Yet it has its own significance in the evolution of parliamentary democracy in India. It should be noted that the changes introduced in 1919 went far beyond the schemes suggested in 1916. Moreover, the Government had made a declaration of the aim of constitutional changes. Henceforth it would become impolitic to go back on that promise. In other words, this declaration made further concessions inevitable. This Act created elected Legislative bodies at the centre and in the provinces. In these bodies Indian opinion was constantly and articulately expressed. These debates tended to further weaken the ideological defences of the Raj and intensify the rapidly growing anti-imperialist feeling. At the same time the holding of elections and debates familiarized Indians with parliamentary phraseology and institutions and have thus contributed to the successful functioning of parliamentary democracy here.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What were the basic features of the Montagu-Chelmsford Scheme?
- 2) What were the problems in the working of dyarchy?

10.6 REFORM PROPOSALS BETWEEN 1920 AND 1927

The reforms introduced by the government of India Act of 1919 disillusioned the Indian nationalists and contributed to a great extent to the growth of nationalist movement in 1920-1921. During the period after the withdrawal of Non-Cooperation movement a political vacuum developed which the Swarajists attempted to fill up. The Gandhian No-changers on the other hand concentrated on constructive work in villages.

In the period between 1920 and the formation of Simon Commission many reform proposals were put forward by the Indians. A non-official resolution was introduced in the Central Legislative Assembly in 1921. The resolution demanded establishment of full responsible government in the provinces. Two other non-official resolutions were introduced in 1923 but to no avail. After entering the assembly the Swarajists introduced a non-official resolution. It recommended to the Governor-General in Council the overhauling of Government of India Act of 1919 to establish self-governing Dominion Status within the British Empire and provincial autonomy in the provinces. The government rejected this proposal.

Swarajists led by Motilal Nehru introduced an amendment in 1924. They demanded the framing of an Indian Constitution by an Indian Constituent Assembly. As a response the government appointed the Reforms Enquiry Committee under the chairmanship of Sir Alexander Muddiman, the Home Member in the Executive Council. The Committee published a majority and minority Report. Majority Report declared that Dyarchy had not been established. Minority Report stated that Act of 1919 had failed. However, the official point of view stated that the Act of 1919 could be improved upon by adopting the suggestions of the Majority Report. But Motilal Nehru stood by his earlier resolution. He asked for the summoning of a Round Table Conference of all Indian (including minority), European and Anglo-Indian interests.

10.7 SIMON COMMISSION

Lord Birkenhead, Secretary of State for India announced the appointment of a Statutory Commission under the Chairmanship of Sir John Simon in November, 1927. The aim of the Commission was to inquire into the working of provincial government, to examine how far the representative institutions were functioning satisfactorily and to draft the outlines for the future progress in establishing responsible government.

All the seven members of the Commission were Englishmen who were members of British Parliament. Irwin declared that Indians had been excluded from the membership of Commission because they could not give an accurate picture of their capacity to govern to the Parliament and their judgement was bound to be coloured.

The announcement of the all-white commission shocked almost all Indians. It was greeted with strong protest by all parties, i.e., the Congress, a section of the Muslim League, Hindu Mahasabha, Liberal Federation, etc., proving that on the issue of Indian representation there was unanimity amongst

almost all sections of Indian public opinion. Through the boycott, the Congress tried to revive the Non-Cooperation spirit. Indian revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh and others opposed the Simon Commission on the ground that only Indians should have a say in framing the constitution of India.

The popular resentment against the Commission reflected the feeling that the future constitution of India should be framed by the people themselves. The Congress called an All Parties Conference in February, 1928 and on 19 May appointed a Committee under Motilal Nehru to draft a Constitution.

The Commission paid two visits to India (February-March 1928, October 1928-April 1929). Each time it faced boycott. It made extensive tours and prepared a Report which was published in May, 1930.

10.8 ALL PARTIES CONFERENCE AND NEHRU REPORT

At the 1927 Madras Congress Session a resolution boycotting the Simon Commission was passed. The Working Committee was authorized to prepare a constitution for India in consultation with other organizations. Congress representatives as well as representatives of other organizations such as Muslim League, Hindu Mahasabha, etc. met at a conference in February, 1928. This came to be known as the All Parties Conference. This Conference was presided over by Dr. M.A. Ansari. It was agreed that in framing the Constitution of India, the principle of full Dominion responsible self-government should be kept in mind.

In May 1928 a Committee was appointed with Motilal Nehru as President. The Nehru Committee appointed by nationalists was their response to the appointment of Simon Commission and the challenge given by Lord Birkenhead to Indians asking them to frame a Constitution on which the Indian opinion was united. The Committee's Report was adopted in August. At the Calcutta Congress Session it was stated that the Report had contributed to a great extent in solving India's political and communal problems.

The Committee's Report was an outline draft of a constitution which was based on the principle of fully responsible government on the model of the constitution of self-governing dominions. The establishment of full responsible government was not to be considered as a remote but as an immediate step. Apparently it was different from the principle of gradual advancement as envisaged by the Act of 1919. This draft is commonly known as the Nehru Committee Report.

Within the Congress the younger section led by Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose criticized the Nehru Report because of its acceptance of Dominion Status. As has been stated earlier, although the Congress was pledged to the goal of complete independence, which meant secession from the British Empire but it made a compromise and accepted Dominion Status as its goal in order to rally all parties behind a common plan. However, due to the opposition of the younger section the Calcutta Congress Resolution (1928) added that if the British government did not accept the Nehru Report on or before 31 December, 1929, or spurned it before that date, the Congress would start another mass movement. Lord Irwin showed no signs of taking

some concrete steps in the direction of establishing full Dominion Self-Government, as he had announced, in his declaration of 31 October 1929. Therefore, the Congress declared on 31 December, 1929, that the Nehru Report had ceased to be valid.

In May 1930 the Simon Commission Report was published. It did not recommend the establishment of either responsible government or Dyarchy at the centre. Separate electorates were retained. It proposed reservation of seats for depressed classes. It recommended scrapping of Dyarchy in the provinces and establishment of responsible unitary government in provinces. It stated that in order to cope with the diversity of the country the ultimate character of the Indian government had to be federal. It declared that the establishment of responsible government at the centre was to wait indefinitely i.e., it was to be established somewhere in the future. Simon Commission's observations regarding Dominion status were not very clear. It recommended that a Greater India consisting of British India and the Princely States as a federal association was to be established in the future but the clause of British Paramountcy (with Viceroy as the agent of Paramount power) was to remain. The report was rejected by almost all Indian Parties and the Indian masses enthusiastically participated in Civil Disobedience Movement.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Discuss the background against which the Simon Commission was appointed in 1927.
- 2) Enumerate the main recommendations of the Nehru Report.

10.9 THE ROUND TABLE CONFERENCES

Before the Simon Commission submitted its Report the Labour Party came to power in England. Lord Irwin's declaration of October 1929 disclosed the Labour Government's intentions to draw a new constitution after ascertaining various shades of Indian political opinion at a Round Table Conference to be held in London.

Three sessions of the Round Table Conference were held in London. The Indian National Congress did not participate in the first and the third sessions. When the preparations for holding the First Round Table Conference were underway, the Indian National Congress was deeply involved in the Civil Disobedience Movement.

The first session of the Round Table Conference opened on 12 November 1930. In all 89 persons were invited to attend the Conference. Of these 16 represented British Political parties. The British Indian delegation comprised 58 members which represented various parties and interests in India.

In spite of the fact that the Conference included some prominent leaders, luminaries and rulers, it was a gathering of men who could not be considered real representatives of the Indian people whose destiny the Conference had to decide. In spite of this handicap from the point of view of constitutional reforms, the Conference took initiative in favour of two positive points. It recommended the formation of an All India Federation of the British Indian Provinces and the Indian States. It also proposed to establish a responsible

government at the centre with certain safeguards for the transitional period. However, to the disappointment of the nationalists, the period of transition was not clearly specified.

In spite of the fact that the government stand did not show much change, Gandhi agreed to participate in the Second Round Table Conference after concluding a pact with the Viceroy, known as the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of March 5, 1931. The Congress suspended the Civil Disobedience Movement and it was decided that Gandhi would be the sole representative and spokesman of the Congress at the second session of the Round Table Conference. The Congress reiterated *Purna Swaraj* as its ultimate political goal.

The Congress scheme tabled by Gandhi was the same as had been suggested earlier by the Nehru Committee Report. The proceedings of the conference were bogged down by the communal issues. Gandhi was aware of the fact that the communal problem was so complex that it defied all immediate solutions. He suggested that the communal settlement be kept pending till the constitutional settlement had been arrived at. The suggestion not only displeased the representatives of the minorities but even hardened their attitude. The Muslim representatives insisted on separate electorates. The second session thus concluded in an atmosphere of bitterness and anxiety.

10.10 COMMUNAL AWARD AND POONA PACT

Apprehending a fresh wave of national agitation, the government arrested Gandhi on 4th January, 1932, that is, only a week after his arrival in India, and unleashed a reign of terror. The communal problem gripped the nation's attention. The Indian National Congress had formulated a definite plan on this issue which was based on a thinking opposed to that of the government. The Congress reiterated that the proposed constitution would include in the fundamental rights a guarantee to the minorities of protection of their culture, religion and language. Rejecting separate communal electorates, it insisted on the principle of universal franchise. But meanwhile on 16 August, 1932 MacDonald announced the proposal on minority or minority representation, known as the 'Communal Award'.

Gandhi reacted strongly to the proposal of granting the right of separate electorate to the 'Depressed Classes'. He regarded the 'Depressed Classes' as an integral part of Hindu society. He had pinned his hopes for their welfare in the firm belief that the Hindus would extend full social justice to that section of society whom they had exploited for centuries and would fully integrate them within their fold. To persuade Ambedkar to accept his viewpoint on this question, Gandhi, then in the Yerwada Jail, resorted to a fast unto death. In an anxiety to save his life, the Poona Pact was concluded between Hindu leaders and Ambedkar, and approved by Gandhi, on 25 September 1932 which dispensed with the separate electorates for the 'depressed classes' but almost doubled the number of reserved seats allotted to them.

10.11 THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA ACT OF 1935

After the third Round Table Conference, a White Paper on the new constitution of India was prepared. The White Paper prepared by the British

Government contained three major proposals, namely Federation, Provincial Autonomy and safeguards which vested special powers in the central and provincial executives. As it fell far short of complete independence, the White Paper was criticised and rejected by all the political parties of India. Published in March, 1933, the White Paper was submitted for consideration to the Joint Parliamentary Committee of both the Houses, which submitted its report on 22 November, 1934. A bill based on this report was passed on 2 August 1935 and after receiving the Royal assent it became the Government of India Act of 1935. Its most significant points were as follows:

- The introduction of provincial autonomy. For the first time the Act recognized provinces as having separate legal entity. This was so designed as to give full freedom to provinces from the control of the Central Government except in certain specific areas.
- Dyarchy in Provinces introduced by the Act of 1919 was to be abolished.
- Separating Burma from India, the Act suggested the creation of two new provinces of Sind and Orissa. Orders to this effect were issued on 3 March, 1936.
- The Act provided for introducing responsible government in all the eleven provinces including Sind and Orissa. Among them Bombay, Bengal, Madras, the United Provinces, Bihar and Assam were to have bicameral legislatures.
- The franchise was based on property qualifications. The number of voters, however, increased from 5 million in 1919 to 30 million in 1935.
- There was no change in the principle of allocation of seats. Separate electorates and the system of weightage were retained.
- The governors in provinces were invested with special executive powers. They could exercise discretion in matters like law and order, interests of minorities and the people of backward areas, the protection of the British commercial interests and those of the rulers of states.

The Act prescribed federal structure for the Government of India. It was to comprise provinces and states, with federal central and provincial legislatures. Dyarchy was introduced at the centre, and department of Foreign Affairs and Defence were reserved for the Governor-General and the subjects transferred to the elected ministers were subjected to safeguards.

The central legislature was to consist of two houses. The Council of States i.e., the Upper House, was to consist of 156 members from British India and 104 from the Indian States.

Dominion Status was not introduced by the Act of 1935. Therefore, the Act was an arrangement for the interim period of transition from responsible government to complete independence. And the provisions regarding the safeguards and special responsibility were also made for that period of transition.

The Act of 1935 was based on two basic principles, namely, federation and parliamentary system. Although the federation principle was introduced

with a built-in unitary bias yet the provinces were invested with a coordinate and not a subordinate authority. No doubt, the federal character was seriously distorted by the provisions of safeguards and special responsibility which gave extraordinary powers to the executive head at the centre and the provinces. An important point to be noted is that fully responsible government was not introduced at the centre. The provincial autonomy envisaged under the Act was also placed under serious limitation. The Dominion Status for India was still a distant dream. The incorporation of safeguards was a clever constitutional device to delay the introduction of a fully responsible government. Although these provisions were made for the transition period, the extent of the period of transition was not defined.

The Indian National Congress rejected the provision of safeguards and repudiated the idea of transition. It suspected that there were sinister motive behind them and they were bound to have an adverse effect on the national movement. The Act was criticised and rejected by the Congress on the ground that in formulating it the people of India were never consulted, and as such it did not represent their will. Congress charged the government of formulating the Act in such a way as to stall the introduction of responsible government, perpetuate their rule, and exploit the Indian masses. In spite of its recognition of the aspirations of the Indians to have a responsible government, the Act of 1935 did not fulfill those aspirations. It did not concede the right to vote to all the adults. The property qualifications, the system of separate electorates, the provisions of safeguard were violative of democratic rights of the people. The Act was, therefore, denounced as undemocratic in spirit, offensive to people's sovereignty and institutionally unworkable. The Liberals criticised the Act but were willing to work the reforms as a step towards responsible government. The Muslim League also criticised the Act but was ready to give it a trial. On the whole the Congress condemned the Act but hesitated that they might be prepared to work the provincial part under protest. Thus, the Congress participated in the elections in 1937 and formed provincial ministries.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Write a short note on Poona Pact.
- 2) What were the main provisions of the Government of India Act 1935?

10.12 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have discussed the constitutional changes introduced by the British in India between 1892 and 1935. The British realized that in order to defend British rule in India it was important to satisfy the aspirations of those Indians who were prepared to confine their demands within the narrow constitutional framework. Keeping this in view the Indian Council Act of 1892 was passed by which councils were enlarged (but the officials' majority remained), elective principle was introduced (though indirect), and councils were given the right to discuss the budget.

Between 1885 and 1906, various factors contributed to the growth of feeling of dissatisfaction with British government. Against this background Morley-Minto 'Reforms' were introduced by which the number of indirectly elected members of the councils was increased and a system of separate

electorates of Hindus and Muslims was introduced which in the long run encouraged separatist tendencies. Conditions produced by the outbreak of World War I provided the background to the passing of the Government of India Act of 1919 known as Montagu-Chelmsford 'Reforms'. The most important change it introduced was the system of Dyarchy under which the provincial governments were given more power but Governor retained complete control over finances while the ministers in charge of public health, education etc. were responsible to the legislature. Central government had unrestricted control over the provincial governments and the right to vote was severely restricted. These periodic reform schemes were just an expression to conciliate and suppress the anti-imperialist movement which had become a perennial feature of India.

During 1920-1935 several advances were made in relation to constitutional reforms. The British had their own notions of reforms which were challenged by the Indian nationalism. However, there was a section of Indian like the Liberals which wanted to go ahead with the reforms the way they were offered by the British. The nationalists gave only conditional support to these reforms. It is from this point of view that we have to understand the attitude of constitutionalists within the Indian National Congress. The nationalist forces had to face the challenge to communal representation, the position of princely states, etc. No doubt, these constitutional reforms with all limitation helped India move towards parliamentary democracy.

10.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See section 10.3
- 2) See sub-section 10.4.1
- 3) See sub-section 10.4.2

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See sub-section 10.5.2 and 10.5.3
- 2) See sub-section 10.5.4

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See section 10.7
- 2) See section 10.8

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) See section 10.10
- 2) See section 10.11

UNIT 11: QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT*

Structure

11.0 Objectives

11.1 Introduction

11.2 1939 to 1941

11.2.1 Attitude towards War

11.2.2 Individual Satyagraha

11.3 Towards Quit India Movement

11.3.1 Cripps Proposals

11.3.2 Background to the Quit India Movement

11.4 The Movement

11.4.1 Spread of the Movement

11.4.2 Responses and Trends

11.4.3 Repression

11.5 Let Us Sum Up

11.6 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

11.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- know about the circumstances leading to the beginning of the Quit India Movement,
- explain the attitude of the various sections of Indian people towards this movement,
- learn about the response to this movement in different regions of the country,
- know about the repressive methods adopted by the British to crush the movement, and
- understand the characteristics and the significance of this movement.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit, an attempt is made to familiarize you with the main political currents in the freedom struggle during the Quit India Movement. We discuss here the chain of events which led to the launching of the Quit India Movement. The Congress had hardly planned for directing or organizing the movement when the Government unleashed repression to nip it in the bud. However, the calculations of the Government were falsified because the people, after the arrest of the Congress leadership, decided their own course of action and challenged the British in a way which to an extent could be compared to the struggle of 1857. New leadership emerged at local levels and their role was at variance with the Gandhian form of struggle.

* Adopted from Unit 34 of EHI-01

Non-violence was no more a guiding principle and all over there were attacks on Government property. Though the Government was able to crush the movement, its intensity had made it clear that the British would not be able to rule over Indian for much longer. This was also demonstrated through the formation and actions of the Indian National Army under the commandership of Subhas Chandra Bose. The Indians were not only capable of, but had actually confronted the British in armed struggle and formed the Azad Hind Government.

11.2 1939 TO 1941

You would be interested to know the sequence of events and the circumstances during the period 1939-1941 which led to the Quit India Movement.

11.2.1 Attitude towards War

Generally speaking the attitudes of Indians towards the World War can be categorized as follows:

- i) Since Britain was in trouble, Indian should seize the opportunity to gain freedom. This was to be done by:
 - opposing the British efforts to mobilize India's resources for the war.
 - launching a strong movement against the British.

The prime concern of the proponents of this view was to achieve India's freedom and they were not concerned about the international situation.
- ii) India should not seek advantage of Britain's problems. It should cooperate with the British in their war efforts unconditionally. Those who supported this view hoped that after the war the British would adopt a lenient view towards India in the light of her services, and suitably reward her.
- iii) There were many who considered Fascism as a greater threat to mankind, and wanted to help Britain in the War. But this help was to be conditional. The conditions were India's independence in the future and an interim government of Indians for the moment.
- iv) There were also certain sections whose attitude changed according to the changing war situation. There were also sections who maintained a neutral position.

What did the Congress do in such a situation? Practically all of attitudes mentioned above were visible within the Congress, and it was a difficult task to steer towards a definite line of action. The Congress, at this juncture, offered full cooperation in the war, provided some sort of a responsible government was established at the centre immediately. As for the future, the Congress demanded a Constituent Assembly to frame the constitution of free India. Thus, it is clear that the section which was in favour of launching a movement against the British at this time was not heard by the Gandhian leadership. Gandhi questioned the British, "Will Great Britain have an unwilling India dragged into the War or a willing ally co-operating with her in the prosecution of a defence of true democracy?" He further stated, "The

Congress support will mean the greater morale asset in favour of England and France”.

Though Gandhi supported the Congress Working Committee Resolutions of conditional support he himself was not for it as he stated later: “I was sorry to find myself alone in thinking that whatever support was to be given to the British should be given unconditionally.” Gandhi, in his personal capacity, was repeating his attitude towards the British of the First World War days i.e. cooperation. But now things were different and one had to come above one’s personal views. Gandhi realized that his silence might turn out to be a “distinct disservice to both India and English” and he stated:

If the British are fighting for the freedom of all, then their representatives have to state in the clearest possible terms that the freedom of India is necessarily included in the war aim. The content of such freedom can only be decided by Indians and them alone.

How did the Government react? Well, the British were not prepared either to make any concessions immediately or make promises about the future – except a vague talk of dominion status. Defence of India Rules were promulgated in order to check defiance of British authority and exploit Indian resources for the War effort.

11.2.2 Individual Satyagraha

There were two opinions in Congress about the launching of civil disobedience. Gandhi felt that the atmosphere was not in favour of civil disobedience as there were differences and indiscipline within the Congress. Those advocating civil disobedience were attempting to convince Gandhi that once a movement was launched differences would disappear and all would work for its success. But Gandhi would not agree. The Congress Socialists and the All India Kisan Sabha were in favour of immediate struggle. N.G. Ranga even suggested that the AIKS should sever links with Congress and launch an independent movement. He was, however, checked by P. Sundarayya from doing so. It was in such an atmosphere that the Congress met at Ramgarh in March 1940 under the Presidentship of Maulana Azad who declared:

India cannot endure the prospect of Nazism and Fascism, But she is even more tired of British imperialism.

The Ramgarh Congress called upon the people to prepare themselves for participating in a Satyagraha to be launched under Gandhi’s leadership. But the Socialists, Communists, Kisan Sabhaites and those belonging to the Forward Bloc were not happy with the resolution. They held an anti-compromise conference at Ramgarh and Subhas Chandra Bose urged the people to resist compromise with imperialism and be ready for action.

In August 1940 the Viceroy announced an offer which proposed:

- expansion of Governor-General’s Council with representation of the Indians, and
- establishing a War Advisory Council.

In this offer he promised the Muslim League and other minorities that the British Government would never agree to a constitution or government in

India which did not enjoy their support (we should remember here that the Muslim League had demanded Pakistan in its Lahore session of 1940). The Congress rejected this offer because:

- i) There was no suggestion for a national government.
- ii) It encouraged anti-Congress forces

The government was systematically putting under preventive arrest many Congress workers – particularly those with Socialist or Left leanings. All local leaders were under observation, while many labour leaders and young persons were taken into custody.

Convinced that the British would not modify their policy in India (Gandhi had long meetings with the Viceroy at Simla in September 1940), Gandhi decided to start the Individual Satyagraha. The very reason for confining the movement to individual participation was that neither Gandhi nor the Congress wished to hamper the War effort, and this could not have been the case in a mass movement. Even the aim of the Satyagraha was a limited one i.e. to disprove the British claim of India supporting the War effort whole heartedly.

On 17 October 1940, Acharya Vinoba Bhave inaugurated the Satyagraha by delivering an anti-war speech at Paunar –a village Wardha. Bhave had been personally selected by Gandhi for this. His two other nominees Vallabhbhai and Nehru were arrested before they could offer Satyagraha. Between November 1940 and February 1941 many prominent Congressmen went to jail, but due to the limited nature of participation and restrictions imposed on Congressmen by Gandhi the movement could not achieve much. In some cases even the Congressmen were not very willing. For example, in Bihar, many Congressmen selected to offer Satyagraha were reluctant to relinquish the positions they held in municipal bodies. They either refused or “were extremely slow to court arrest”.

In December 1941, the Congress Working Committee decided to suspend the movement. By this time the war had taken a new turn. The British were facing defeat after and the Japanese forces had over run South-East Asia. USSR had been attacked by the Nazis and there were pressures on the British from USSR, USA and China to reconsider their India policy. The Government released many political prisoners. After the fall of Rangoon to the Japanese the British decided to send the Cripps Mission to India.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Discuss the attitude of Indians towards the War.
- 2) Which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (✗)
 - i) Gandhi felt sorry that he was the only one who wanted to give unconditional support to the British during the War.
 - ii) Gandhi agreed to give support to the British for the War effort.
 - iii) Defence of India Rules were meant to defend the interests of the Congress.
 - iv) Congress was opposed to Fascism and Nazism.
 - v) Congress accepted the August offer.
 - vi) The individual Satyagraha continued till 1947.

11.3 TOWARDS QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT

The unfavourable War situation and international pressures had compelled the British to seek an amicable settlement with India and obtain her active support in the War. Sir Strafford Cripps landed in India with a set of proposals and negotiated with leaders of various political parties.

11.3.1 Cripps Proposals

Some of the Cripps proposals, embodied in a Draft Declaration, were:

- Dominion Status would be granted to India immediately after the War with the right to secede.
- Immediately after the cessation of hostilities, a constitution-making body would be set up. It will consist of members from British India as well as Native States.
- The constitution so framed after the War would be accepted by the British Government on the condition that any Indian province could, if so desired, remain outside the Indian Union and negotiate directly with Britain.
- The actual control of defence and military operations would be retained by the British Government.

This Declaration was rejected by almost all the Indian parties. The Congress did not want to rely on future promises. It wanted a responsible Government with full powers and also a control over the country's defence. Gandhi termed the proposal "as a post-dated cheque on a crashing bank." The Muslim League demanded a definite declaration by the British in favour of the creation of a separate state for the Muslims, and also seats for the Muslim League on a 50:50 basis with the Congress in the Interim Government. The Depressed Classes, the Sikhs, the Indian Christians and the Anglo-Indians demanded more safeguards for their communities.

Thus, the Cripps Mission failed to pacify the Indians. The British had merely taken up this exercise to demonstrate to the world that they cared about Indian sentiments; rather than to actually do something concrete.

11.3.2 Background to the Quit India Movement

The Congress had to decide its course of action in the wake of:

- the failure of the Cripps Mission;
- the arrival of Japanese armies on Indian borders;
- the rising prices and shortages in food supplies, and
- the different opinions within the Congress.

The Congress Working Committee adopted a resolution calling for complete non-violent non-cooperation with any foreign forces invading India (in May 1942). Rajagopalachari and a few other Congressmen from Madras attempted to get a resolution passed which proposed that in case the Madras Government invited them the Congress should form a ministry there. The resolution was rejected, but the very proposal demonstrated that there were certain Congressmen who wanted to cooperate with the government.

Rajagoplachari was following an independent path. He had favoured the Pakistan demand, and was urging the Congress to support the War effort.

In May 1942 Gandhi told a gathering of Congressmen at Bombay that he had made up his mind to ask the British to quit India in an orderly fashion. If they did not agree, he would launch a Civil Disobedience Movement.

Many of the Congress leaders had reservations about the launching of a movement. Nehru was particularly concerned about the choice between fighting imperialist Britain and letting USSR and China down in their struggle against fascist powers. Eventually, he decided in favour of launching the movement. The Congress made it clear that the quit India demand did not mean that the British and the allied armies had to withdraw from India immediately. However, it meant an immediate acknowledgment of India's Independence by the British. On July 14 the Congress Working Committee adopted the Quit India Resolution which was to be ratified at the Bombay AICC meeting in August.

On 8 August 1942 the AICC passed the Quit India Resolution. After deliberating at great length on the international and national situation the Congress appealed to the people of India:

They must remember that non-violence is the basis of this movement. A time may come when it may not be possible to issue instructions or for instructions to reach our people, and when no Congress Committee can function. When this happens every man and woman who is participating in this movement must function for himself or herself with in the four corners of the general instructions issued.

Gandhi told the British to quit and "leave India in God's hand". He exhorted all sections to participate in the Movement and stressed "every Indian who desires freedom and strives for it must be his own guide". His message was 'do or die'. Thus started the Quit India Movement.

11.4 THE MOVEMENT

The Congress gave the call for ousting British but it did not give any concrete line of action to be adopted by the people. The Government had been making preparations to crush the Movement. On the morning of 9 August all prominent Congress leaders including Gandhi were arrested. The news of leaders' arrest shook the people and they came to streets protesting against it. K.G. Mashruwala, who had taken over as editor of *Harijan* published his personal opinion as to the shape the protest should take:

In my opinion looting or burning of offices, bank, granaries etc., is not permissible. Dislocation of traffic communications is permissible in a non-violent manner -- without endangering life. The organization of strikes is best Cutting wires, removing rails, destroying small bridges, cannot be objected to in a struggle like this provided ample precautions are taken to safeguard life.

Mashruwala maintained that "Gandhiji and the Congress have not lost all hope of goodwill being re-established between the British and the Indian nations, and so provided the effort is strong enough to demonstrate the nations will, self-restraint will never go against us".

Let us have a look at the spread of the movement and the response it evoked from various sections.

11.4.1 Spread of the Movement

Before his arrest on 9 August 1942 Gandhi had given the following message to the country:

Everyone is free to go the fullest length under *Ahimsa* to complete deadlock by strikes and other non-violent means. Satyagrahis must go out to die not to live. They must seek and face death. It is only when individuals go out to die that the nation will survive, *Karenge Ya Marenge* (do or die).

But while giving this call Gandhi had once again stressed on non-violence:

Let every non-violent soldier of freedom write out the slogan 'do or die' on a piece of paper or cloth and stick it on his clothes, so that in case he died in the course of offering Satyagraha, he might be distinguished by that sign from other elements who do not subscribe to non-violence.

The news of his arrest along with other Congress leaders led to unprecedented popular outbursts in different parts of the country. There were hartals, demonstrations and processions in cities and towns. The Congress leadership gave the call, but it was the people who launched the Movement. Since all the recognised leaders -- central, provincial or local -- had been arrested, the young and more militant cadres -- particularly students - with socialist leanings took over as leaders at local levels in their areas.

In the initial stages, the Movement was based on non-violent lines. It was the repressive policy of the government which provoked the people to violence. The Gandhian message of non-violent struggle was pushed into the background and people devised their own methods of struggle. These included:

- attacks on government buildings, police stations and post offices,
- attacks on railway stations, and sabotaging rail lines,
- cutting off the telegraph wires telephones and electric power lines.
- disrupting road traffic by destroying bridges, and
- workers going on strike, etc.

Most of these attacks were to check the movement of the military and the police, which were being used by the government to crush the Movement. In many areas, the government lost all control and the people established Swaraj. We cite a few such cases:

- In Maharashtra, a parallel government was established in Satara which continued to function for a long time.
- In Bengal, Tamluk Jatiya Sarkar functioned for a long time in Midnapore district. This national government had various departments like Law and Order, Health, Education, Agriculture, etc., along with a postal system of its own and arbitration courts.
- People established Swaraj in Talacher in Orissa.

- In many parts of eastern U.P. and Bihar (Azamgarh, Ballia, Ghazipur, Monghyr, Muzzaffarpur, etc.) police stations were overrun by the people and government authority uprooted.

The Movement had initially been strong in the urban areas but soon it was the populace of rural areas which kept the banner of revolt aloft for a longer time. The Movement got a massive response from the people of Bombay, Andhra, U.P., Bihar, Gujarat, Orissa, Assam, Bengal, Karnataka, etc. But the response in Punjab, Sindh, NWFP, etc, were weak.

11.4.2 Responses and Trends

“Quit India” and “Do or Die” were the slogans of the day, and yet there were varied responses to the Movement. The Working Class in many industrial centres went on strike. Some of these centres were Bombay, Cawnpore, Ahmedabad, Jashedpur and Poona. In Delhi the strike on 9 August was a result of the workers coming to the streets. But in most of these centres the strikes did not last long, except in Ahmedabad where it continued for about 3 months.

In Bihar, Patna was cut off from the rest of the areas as a result of mass actions and on the Northern side, the Sub-Division Officer of Begusarai reported:

... the school students started the movement; they were joined by all sections of Congress Workers. The sober section of Congress tried to keep the movement under control, but when they allowed the village mass to join, it became an economic question: the vast properties, especially food grains at railway stations attracted them. ... the poor labourers took prominent part in the loot. The merchant class in outlying stations were at the mercy of the Congress the sober sections did not approve it but they had no hold at the time.

This reflects the level of participation by the rural people and the constraints of Gandhian leaders (described as sober section) in direction the Movement. A similar situation existed in eastern U.P. The account kept to R.H. Nibblet of what happened at Madhuban Police Station in Azamgarh district shows the fury of the revolt in that area. Nibblet has mentioned how the police station was attacked in an organized manner from three sides. The people from one side reaching earlier, waited at a distance for the people to reach from the other sides. The police fired 119 rounds to check the attack which lasted about two hours. In Orissa the government used aeroplanes to check the advance of peasant guerillas towards Talcher town. In Maharashtra the battles were long drawn in the Satara region.

Besides mass action there emerged another trend in the movement. This was the trend of underground revolutionary activity. On 9 ovember 1942, Jaiprakash Narain and Ramnandan Misra escaped from Hazaribagh Jail. They organized an underground movement and operated from the regions bordering Nepal.

Similarly, in Bombay, the Socialist leaders continued their underground activities under leaders like Aruna Asaf Ali. The most daring act of the underground movement was the establishment of Congress Radio with Usha Mehta as its announcer. This radio carried broadcasts for a long time.

Subhas Bose, speaking over Berlin radio (31 August 1942) described this movement as “Non-violent guerilla warfare”. He suggested that:

The object of this non-violent guerilla campaign should be a two-fold one. Firstly, to destroy war production in India, and, secondly, to paralyze the British administration in the country. Keeping these objects in view, every section of the community should participate in the struggle.

There was massive participation by the students who spread to the countryside and played a role in guiding the people there. The Movement did not evoke much response from the merchant community. In fact most of the capitalists and merchants had profited heavily during the War. In certain cases, the capitalists did appeal to the government (through FICCI) to release Gandhi and other leaders. But their argument was that Gandhi alone could check attacks on government property. They were worried that if such attacks continued they may get converted into attacks on private property. The Muslim League kept aloof from the Movement, the Hindu Mahasabha condemned the Movement, and the Communist Party of India, due to its “people’s war” line, opposed the movement. The princes and the landlords were supporting the War effort and did not sympathize with the movement. There were also Congress leaders like Rajagopalachari who did not participate in the movement and supported the War efforts.

However the intensity of the Movement can be gauged from the following figures:

- In U.P. 104 railway stations were attacked and damaged according to a government report. About 100 railway tracks were sabotaged and the number in case of telephone and telegraph wires was 425. The number of post offices damaged was 119.
- In Midnapore 43 government buildings were burnt.
- In Bihar 72 police stations were attacked; 332 railway stations and 945 post offices damaged.
- Throughout the country there had been 664 bomb explosions.

How did the government react to this massive upsurge? This is the question which we shall deal in the following section.

11.4.3 Repression

The Government had geared all its forces to suppress the popular upsurge. Arrests, detention, police firings, burning of Congress offices, etc. were the methods adopted by the Government.

- By the end of 1942, in U.P. alone 16,089 persons were arrested. Throughout India the official figures for arrests stood at 91,836 by end of 1943.
- The number of people killed in police firings was 658 till September 1942, and by 1943 it was 1060. But these were official figures. Many more had died and innumerable wounded.
- In Midnapore alone, the Government forces had burnt 31 Congress camps and 164 private houses. There were 74 cases of rape, out of which 46 were committed by the police in a single day in one village on 9 January 1943.

- The Government accepted having used aeroplanes to gun people at 5 places. These were: Goriak near Patna, Bhagalpur district, near Ranaghat in Nadia district, Monghyr district and near Talcher city.
- There were countless lathi-charges, floggings and imprisonments.
- Collective punitive fines were extorted from the residents in the areas affected by the upsurge. For example in U.P. the total amount involved in such fines was Rs. 28,32,000 and by February 1943 Rs. 25,00,000 was realized. Similarly in North Bihar fines were imposed to the amount of Rs. 34,15,529 by the end of February 1943, out of which Rs. 28,35,025 had been realized.

It was through such repressive actions that the British were able to re-establish themselves. The War situations helped them in two ways:

- i) They had at their disposal a massive military force which was stationed here to face the Japanese, but was promptly used to crush the Movement.
- ii) Due to War time censorship they repressed the upsurge in a ruthless manner. They did not have to bother themselves about any internal criticism of their methods, or international opinion. The Allied countries were busy fighting the Axis powers, and had no time to concern themselves with what the British were doing in India.

The Quit India Movement collapsed, but not without demonstrating the determination of the masses to do away with British rule. The Congress leadership did not condemn the deviation by the people from the principle of non-violence, but at the same time disowned any responsibility for the violent acts of the people.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (✗).
 - i) Gandhi wanted only a limited section of the people to participate in the Quit India Movement.
 - ii) The leadership of the Quit India Movement was taken over by militant youth and socialists.
 - iii) No parallel governments were formed during the Quit India Movement.
 - iv) The sober section of the Congress attempted to control the movement, but failed.
 - v) There was no underground activity during the Quit India Movement.
 - vi) Capitalists and merchants participated in great numbers in the Quit India Movement.
- 2) Discuss the measures adopted by the people to uproot the British authority during the Quit India Movement.
- 3) Discuss the measures adopted by the British to crush the popular upsurge.

11.5 LET US SUM UP

The various sections of Indian people had different attitude towards the War, and these were reflected within the Congress. The Individual Satyagraha launched by Gandhi, due to its limited nature of participation, did not get widespread response. It took the Congress almost three years after India was dragged into the War to reach a decision about launching the Quit India Movement. With the declaration for starting the Movement, the British adopted a policy of ruthless repression. All prominent Congress leaders were arrested overnight and the Congress could get no time to plan the line of action to be adopted. However, the Movement took its own course with the people, directing their own actions. The youth and Socialists were at the forefront in directing the Movement. In its initial phase it was the people in the urban centres who were involved but soon the Movement spread to the countryside. In many regions the British authority was uprooted and parallel governments established. The methods of struggle adopted by the people surpassed the confines of Gandhian non-violence and the “sober sections” among Congressmen could not control them.

The British were able to crush the Movement, but underground activities continued for a long time. The Movement had made it clear to the British that it will be difficult for them to retain their hold on India for a long time, and the heroic struggles waged by the INA further demonstrated this.

11.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Your answers should include the four views mentioned in Sub-sec, 11.2.1
- 2) i) ✓ ii) ✓ iii) ✗ iv) ✓ v) ✗ vi) ✗

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) i) ✗ ii) ✓ iii) ✗ iv) ✓ v) ✗ vi) ✗
- 2) Base your answer on the write up in Sub-secs. 11.4.1 and 11.4.2. It should take into account the various acts of people like attacks on police stations, formation of parallel governments, etc.
- 3) These were imposing fines, firing on people, arrests etc. Sec Sub-sec. 11.4.3

UNIT 12: AZAD HIND FAUJ (INDIAN NATIONAL ARMY)*

Structure

- 12.0 Objectives
- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Subhas Chandra Bose: Revolt against British Imperialism
- 12.3 Foundation of the First INA
- 12.4 Netaji's Arrival in East Asia and the formation of Azad Hind Fauj or the Second INA
- 12.5 Azad Hind Fauj: Fight for India's Liberation
- 12.6 Defeat of Japan and the End of World War
- 12.7 Trial of INA Soldiers and the National Upsurge
- 12.8 Achievements of the Azad Hind Fauj
- 12.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 12.10 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

12.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- learn about the formation of the Azad Hind Fauj (also known as Indian National Army or INA),
- understand the process through which Subhas Chandra Bose became associated with it,
- explain the development of INA under his charismatic leadership,
- analyse the role played by the INA in the fight against the British, and
- know about the impact of this struggle on broader Indian Nationalist movement.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

During the 1940s, the Indian National Army or Azad Hind Fauj, along with the Quit India Movement, emerged as one of the most important symbols of India's will to fight for independence in the best possible manner, even through violent efforts. There were mainly three attempts to form Indian national armies during the early 1940s in Europe and Southeast Asia. All these attempts were directly or indirectly associated with Subhas Chandra Bose (popularly known as Netaji) who had moved abroad escaping from the British captivity in India. In this Unit, we will discuss about these efforts by Bose and other Indians from outside India to liberate the country from colonial rule. The legend of Netaji cuts across political, religious, linguistic, and regional divides. He became a truly national figure and the INA became a symbol of national unity and of revolt against imperialism.

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12.2 SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE: REVOLT AGAINST BRITISH IMPERIALISM

Bose was a staunch anti-imperialist, but he also recognized that it was the aggressive and expansionist nationalism that was in the centre of imperialism. He was a nationalist in its creative, egalitarian, and fraternal sense. But he did not favour nationalist chauvinism and its grossly discriminatory character. He felt repelled by the racism of Nazi Germany and aggression of Japan. At the same time, he adopted a pragmatic policy of taking the help of these powers to liberate his own country. His strong desire for the freedom of India led him to ignore the grossest human rights violations these countries engaged in at precisely the time he was soliciting and getting their help for his endeavour.

Bose was politically aligned with the socialists in the Congress and had many differences with Mahatma Gandhi. Firstly, while Gandhi resolutely believed in non-violence, Bose was not averse to using violence as a means to free his country. Secondly, Bose thought that industrialism and modernization would bring about regeneration of India, while Gandhi firmly thought that autonomous development of India's villages would be the salvation of the country. Thirdly, while Bose was politically radical and socialist who did not turn away from the possibility of class conflict to ameliorate the conditions of India's poor, Gandhi believed that class struggle, because of its violent character, was unacceptable and he put his faith in the probable trusteeship of the rich to alleviate the dire conditions of the poor and oppressed. Bose was elected as the Congress President in 1938 with support from Gandhi and others. But when Bose decided to contest the election again for this post in 1939, Gandhi and his associates opposed this. Bose won against Gandhi's candidate, Pattabhi Sitaramayya. But later, owing to opposition from Gandhi and others, he resigned his post and parted ways with the Congress.

When the Second World War started, most of the Indians were not in support of the Allies because of their experiences with British colonialism. In fact, Indian leaders and people were much disturbed about not being taken into confidence before Britain declared India to be a combatant. There was also no concrete promise of any future plan for self-government. The Congress ministries resigned in protest. Even a mild-mannered Gandhi made it clear that he saw 'no difference between the Fascist or Nazi powers and the Allies. All are exploiters, all resort to ruthlessness to the extent required to compass their end'.

Bose was firmly opposed to the colonial rule and refused to accept the idea that the British should be supported against the Nazis in the War. Fearing his vocal and active opposition, the British colonial authorities arrested him in July 1940. In November 1940, he began a fast in the prison, after which he was released from the jail and put under house arrest in December 1940. From there he escaped to Afghanistan through the North-west Frontier Provinces, and then, with the help of the Soviet, German and Italian authorities, he travelled to Soviet Union, finally reaching Germany in 1941.

The Second World War was seriously progressing with Hitler overrunning most of Europe outside Soviet influence. There was a pact between Hitler

and Stalin which had led to their dividing the areas of influence in Eastern Europe. Bose initial confabulations with the German authorities on the possibility of releasing the Indian soldiers who had fallen into German hands after British defeat in North Africa were not successful. Hitler and his cohorts still nurtured hopes for neutralizing England and, therefore, they did not want to take a tough stand against the British and their empire in India. They also refused to declare themselves unequivocally in favour of India's independence. When Bose drafted a declaration for Indian independence in May 1941, both the German and Italian governments kept delaying it under various pretexts.

When Germany invaded Soviet Union in June 1941, Bose's strategy suffered a serious setback. However, as the Germans and Italians still vouched to support him in his endeavour, he continued to hold hope. There was some progress also as some Indian soldiers were now trained by the German officers to make compact units to fight against the British. It was not easy to persuade the common Indian soldiers to participate in such training as they had taken an oath earlier and they also feared for their families back home. But, despite all handicaps in Germany, Bose managed to raise four battalions, consisting of about 4,000 Indian soldiers, ready to fight against the British by December 1942.

It was with this first national army that he adopted Indian tricolour as the national flag, Tagore's song 'Jan Gan Man Adhinayak' as national anthem, and the 'Jai Hind' as national greeting which would be common to all the Indians irrespective of caste and creed. These were enduring legacies from Netaji towards the unity of the country.

Despite some progress, however, the German response remained lukewarm and there were not enough recruits in Europe to raise an effective fighting force. The entry of Japan in the War in September 1940, and more aggressively in December 1941, however, changed the entire dynamic in Asia. The speedy advance of Japanese forces and defeat of the British and other European imperialist powers in Southeast Asia opened up a new vista for Bose and his strategy geared towards the liberation of India. The fall of Singapore in February 1942 enthused him enormously and he came out, for the first time, to speak on Azad Hind Radio declaring that 'The fall of Singapore means the collapse of the British Empire, the end of the iniquitous regime which it has symbolized and the dawn of a new era in Indian history' [cited in Bose, p. 213]. This radio had been in existence since October 1941 and it became the most important mouthpiece of Indian freedom movement abroad during this period.

A substantial number of Indian soldiers fighting for the British had fallen into the hands of the Japanese. It was around them, as well as the resident Indian population in Southeast Asia and other countries, that Bose's strategy revolved.

From this point, he regularly addressed his country people on the radio stirring them to take action against the British. In the Japanese victories, he found the possibilities of a mortal weakening of British imperialism which could then be pushed over the brink. He also was now very hopeful about the possibility of raising a big force of Indians to fight against the British

for the liberation of India. He was in contact with the Japanese ambassador in Germany making plans to realize his goals. The Japanese were also more receptive and forthcoming about Bose's ideas. Bose wanted to move immediately in order to take advantage of British imperialism being at its lowest point during the War.

In May 1942, Hitler agreed to provide logistical support for Bose's shifting to Japan. But Hitler evaded the idea of a declaration of Indian independence. Bose was not satisfied with his meeting with Hitler but at least he secured the promise of German help in his transfer to Japan. On ideological issues and on the domestic and international policies of the tripartite powers, Bose took a very pragmatic stand. He did not even speak publicly about the extreme racist policies of Hitler. He held that 'In this fateful hour in India's history, it would be a grievous mistake to be carried away by ideological considerations alone. The internal politics of Germany or Italy or Japan do not concern us—they are the concern of the people of those countries' [cited in Bose 221].

Meanwhile, the political scene in India was also changing. Gandhi, apprehensive of the Japanese attacks on India, wanted that the British should immediately relinquish the power so that Indians could negotiate with the Japanese. Gandhi believed that the Japanese had nothing against India but they were hostile to the British. If the British continued to hold reins in India, the Japanese would attack and invade India. So, he wanted the British to immediately leave India and let the Indians manage their own affairs. On 8 August 1942, Gandhi gave the slogan of 'do or die' for the Indians and asked the British to immediately 'quit India' which resulted in country-wide eruptions. This major shift in Gandhi's position coincided with the immediacy and urgency of Bose's thinking about the right time to strike.

However, it was only by mid-January 1943 that the plans for his submarine journey to Japan could be arranged. In February 1943, he left the German shore to launch his fight in Asia. By then, however, the German advance was halted both in Africa against the British and in the Soviet Union. Soon, there would be a turn-around, but Bose moved towards his goal undaunted. He still posed a threat to the British, even under the changed situation, when the Quit India Movement was crushed and the Allied forces had halted the advance of Germany.

12.3 FOUNDATION OF THE FIRST INA

The rapid advance of the Japanese forces in Southeast Asia uprooting the European colonial powers, such as the British, Dutch and French, led to a completely changed situation when the Indians in these countries as well as the captured Indian soldiers who had fought in the British army began to be mobilized and organized to fight for Indian freedom.

The total Indian population in this region was about 20 lakhs with significant concentration in Burma, Malaya, Thailand, Indonesia, Hongkong and Indo-China. In 1941, the Japanese strategists devised plans to tap the nationalists in Southeast Asia, including the Indians, to cooperate with them. Major Fujiwara was appointed to work as liaison person to establish links with

the Indians. Fujiwara contacted Giani Pritam Singh of Indian Independence League (IIL) which started cooperation between both sides. It was agreed that some members of IIL would accompany the conquering Japanese forces into Malaya as part of propaganda units where both would work for establishment of an Indian national army which would assist the Japanese forces for achieving freedom of India.

They contacted Captain Mohan Singh, one of the most senior Indian officers, to organize an army of Indian soldiers who were now in Japan's captivity. Pritam Singh also held meetings with other Indian soldiers and asked them to fight for India's independence. Many rounds of discussion were held and finally Mohan Singh was convinced, particularly when the administration of Indian prisoners of war was left to him.

The British officers had abandoned the Indian soldiers to fend for themselves. This was considered as betrayal by the Indian soldiers and officers. The promise of being under control of Indian officers, rather than the Japanese, was probably the best offer they could get under the circumstances. The army was to be based on Indian soldiers only, to be led by Indian officers, and only for the purpose of India's independence.

More Indian soldiers were entrusted to Mohan Singh's responsibility in early 1942 when Malaya and Singapore fell into Japanese hands. Besides looking after the Indian prisoners, Mohan Singh, along with IIL, also got in touch with Indian civilians in Thailand, Malaya, and Singapore. The brisk withdrawal of the British from these countries generated a deep sense of being betrayed among Indians as well as others in these countries. There were also complaints of racial discrimination when the European evacuees claimed all the privileges for escaping from Japanese attack by taking best ships and other provisions and means of transport. Moreover, the Indians in Malaya and other countries were quite deeply imbued with nationalist ideas. This made the job of Pritam Singh and Mohan Singh easy as the Indian civilians as well as the soldiers enlisted with certain enthusiasm and branches of IIL opened in most localities inhabited by Indians.

Thus, the reasons for Indian willingness to join their forces with the Japanese were three-fold: i) there was a deep nationalist sentiment, at least among the intelligentsia; ii) there was a feeling that the British had dishonourably abandoned them and had exercised racial discrimination while fleeing; and iii) there was an element of fear also as they witnessed the cruel Japanese treatment of the soldiers and civilians in the area, particularly the Chinese who were massacred in hundreds by the Japanese.

When the Indian civilians and soldiers in this region realized that the IIL not only provided them protection from the Japanese but also promised to include them in the fight for Indian freedom, they were quite willing to join. A meeting with the veteran revolutionary, Rash Behari Bose, was arranged in Japan. Pritam Singh and Satyanand Puri, who were flying from Bangkok, died when their plane crashed. But five other leaders reached Tokyo.

In the meeting, a draft constitution was prepared and it was decided that later the delegates from the newly conquered countries of Burma and Indonesia should also be invited. The delegates returned to their bases to further mobilize and organize the Indians for the cause of Indian freedom.

The Japanese were also in touch in Subhas Chandra Bose who was in Berlin and was making his radio broadcast from there exhorting the Indians to rise against the British. In June 1942, a large conference of Indian delegates from all over South-east Asia took place for which Netaji also sent a message.

The work started with all seriousness and progressed well. The failure of Cripps Mission and heightened political activities in India had given much hope of a rising which took place by the beginning of August in the form of 'Quit India' Movement. Enthusiasm among the Indians in this region was high and by the end of August 40,000 soldiers had joined the INA. The first INA division of 16,300 soldiers was ready by 10 September 1942 to go into action. Mohan Singh was ambitious and told the Japanese that he wanted to raise an army of 250,000 soldiers which would be recruited largely from the civilian population. He also wanted formal public recognition by the Japanese of the Indian National Army and facilities for training his troops in batches. But the Japanese response was not very encouraging towards these proposals.

The cold Japanese response towards their resolutions and Japanese interference in their activities upset the leaders of the IIL and INA. Many of them were also upset with Rash Behari Bose, the president of the IIL, for not being effective in pursuing the matter. The Japanese interference was general and was being resisted. The question of evacuee Indian properties in Burma became the most contentious element. The Japanese refused to give the control of these properties in Indian hands which the INA and IIL wanted in order to mobilise resources for training and equipping their soldiers. The Japanese reluctance to allow the expansion of Indian national army in Singapore and Malaya also upset Mohan Singh enormously. Moreover, he and other leaders realized that the Japanese were surreptitiously as well as openly not allowing the IIL and the INA to take control of all Indian prisoners of war. The Indians, therefore, began to suspect the Japanese intentions.

The situation became worse, and Mohan Singh plainly conveyed to the Japanese that if they tried to take the place of British in India the Indians would fight them also. He also pointed out their oppressive and racist behaviour in Malaya. He refused to provide INA soldiers for Japanese military campaign in Burma, and then decided to disband the INA by the end of December. Rash Behari, on his part, wanted to save the situation. He proceeded to dismiss Mohan Singh and take control of the activities of Indians there. Mohan Singh was held and isolated by the Japanese along with some of his colleagues. The INA was now effectively non-functional and it was Subhas Chandra Bose who resuscitated it after his arrival in this region.

12.4 NETAJI'S ARRIVAL IN EAST ASIA AND THE FORMATION OF AZAD HIND FAUJ OR THE SECOND INA

Subhas Chandra Bose arrived in Singapore on 2 July 1943 and assumed the command of the INA from Rash Behari. He altered the policy of recruitment

by starting to recruit Indian civilians. About 30,000 people joined the ranks of INA in various capacities from the Indian civilians in the region. He also established Azad Hind League which was in charge of approaching Indian community in this region. By July 1944, the Azad Hind League had 72 branches with 200,000 members. Besides this, Bose also formed an all-women regiment named as 'Rani of Jhansi Regiment' in which about a thousand women joined as soldiers. Lakshmi Swaminathan, a Tamil woman, became the commander of this regiment.

In the first INA, there were multiple centres of authority. Mohan Singh was in charge of military training and operation, but he and the INA was under the IIL's Council of Action with regard to the policy matters, whose head was Rash Behari. All these were placed under the overarching control of the Japanese. On the other hand, the second INA remained committed only to Netaji.

Right since the first INA, the British policy of segregated recruitment and organization policy was given up. There was no longer any talk about the 'martial races' and all soldiers from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds were put together into single units. Bose continued this policy even further by recruiting even civilians along with trained and professional soldiers.

Now all efforts were made to subsume ethnic and regional loyalties under overarching national sentiments by forming mixed regiments and by imparting political training to the INA soldiers. This was done to wean them away from the colonial tradition of forming separate regiments and creation of imagined traditions of valour and martial pasts. The effort now was to Indianise and nationalize the fighting forces.

Even during the first INA, the mixed regiments were named after the nationalist leaders rather than after certain communities and regions. Thus, there were Gandhi, Azad, and Nehru brigades. Subhas Bose persisted with this tradition. He also viewed his struggle as well as that of INA as part of the wider nationalist struggle taking place in India.

Bose declared in Singapore on 21 October 1943 the formation of Azad Hind Government. He himself penned the declaration. It called upon the Indian people 'to rally round our banner and strike for India's freedom'. It further declared that the 'Provisional Government' would guarantee 'religious liberty, as well as equal rights and equal opportunities to its citizens. It declares its firm resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation equally and transcending all the differences cunningly fostered by an alien government in the past' [cited in Bose: 254-5].

The radical change of loyalty by over 40,000 (out of a total of about 45,000) soldiers of the British Indian army in South-east Asia was of momentous importance. This happened in a short time and this evolved into a motivated force which fought against their former employers and trainers, almost similar to that of 1857 Revolt. The most important motivation, of course, was the feeling of nationalism. Another very important factor was Subhas Bose's wide popularity, his charismatic personality, his persuasive powers, his clear and deep commitment to the cause of Indian freedom, and his

passionate attachment to the idea of Indian unity across the boundaries of religion, caste, region, and language.

His engagement for the next two years can be divided into two periods. In the first year of his stay in this region there was great enthusiasm among the Indians there about the possibility of breaching the British defences in India by the Indian National Army, with help for the Japanese, which would lead to nation-wide anti-colonial uprising. In the second period, after the Allied forces became dominant from the mid-1944 and the combined forces of Indian National Army and the Japanese military had to retreat from North-east India as well as from the countries of South-east Asia, Bose played a different role of a leader who would desperately try to keep the morale of his retreating forces high and to find other ways of attaining freedom. He, however, never left the hope of winning freedom for India.

By the late 1943, the response to his call to the people was overwhelming. Thousands of Indian soldiers and civilians volunteered to fight as well as help with money and materials. Netaji exhorted his audiences to prepare well and support in every way the struggle because ‘Indians outside India, particularly Indians in East Asia, are going to organize a fighting force which will be powerful enough to attack the British army of occupation in India. When we do so, a revolution will break out, not only among the civilian population at home, but also among the Indian Army, which is now standing under the British flag. When the British government is thus attacked from both sides— from inside India and from outside— it will collapse, and the Indian people will then regain their liberty’ [cited in Bose: 245-46].

Bose decided that Burma would be crucial to his strategy military manoeuvre. When the Japanese Field Marshal suggested that the INA should work only as field propaganda unit, Bose immediately rejected it and demanded that INA brigades should be used as advance fighting units. The Japanese agreed to initially put one division of INA consisting of about 10,000 soldiers into action. Mohammad Zaman Kiani assumed the command of this unit. This division was further divided into three regiments which had been named after Gandhi, Nehru, and Azad signifying oneness with the nationalist movement at home. Out of these the best soldiers were taken out to form a guerrilla unit under Shah Nawaz Khan which would first go into action. The soldiers named this unit ‘Subhas Brigade’.

For raising the morale of the soldiers, Bose visited them in their camps and also shared his meals with them. Soldiers of all castes and communities were persuaded to eat commonly which led to a common bond between them crossing religious and linguistic boundaries. This display of national unity was important, even though it was taking place on foreign soil, because increasingly sharp communal division was shearing the Indian body politic at home.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Discuss the activities of Subhas Chandra Bose in Europe.
- 2) How was the first INA formed? What was the problem in its operation?
- 3) Discuss the main features of the Azad Hind Fauj or the second INA.

12.5 AZAD HIND FAUJ: FIGHT FOR INDIA'S LIBERATION

On October 23-24, 1943 in the midnight, the Azad Hind Government declared war on Britain and USA. The latter was included because there were American forces on Indian soil, although the USA was in fact sympathetic to the demands for Indian freedom.

Within a year, lakhs of Indian expatriates signed oath of citizenship in Southeast Asia by declaring:

'I, a member of the Azad Hind Sangh [Indian Independence League], do hereby solemnly promise in the name of God and take this holy oath that I will be absolutely loyal and faithful to the Provisional Government of Azad Hind, and shall be always prepared for any sacrifice for the cause of the freedom of our motherland, under the leadership of Subhas Chandra Bose' [cited in Bose: 259].

Japan government promised all kinds of diplomatic and military help to the Azad Hind Government. Bose also persuaded them to regard INA not as a subordinate outfit but as an allied army. The legal control of the Andaman and Nicobar islands was given to the Azad Hind Government by the Japanese, although the latter retained the military control.

The Azad Hind Government headquarters was shifted to Burma from Singapore in January 1944. Bose prepared an alternative structure of government with a full-fledged cabinet and ministers, the Azad National Bank, its own postage stamp, and a national currency.

The advance guerrilla unit known as 'Subhas Birgade' had already moved there. The Japanese army was also now ready for the offensive. Although the Japanese wanted to attach small groups of INA soldiers with larger Japanese units, Bose refused to subordinate Indian soldiers to Japanese command and control, and insisted on an independent role and identity for the INA. He also firmly believed that it was the sacrifice of the Indian soldiers which mattered more for Indian freedom.

It was agreed that one battalion of INA would join the fight against British West African division. After that the INA would move towards Kohima and Imphal in Indian territory. In February some of the INA units successfully fought against the British in Burma. Then in March 1944, the INA, along with the Japanese forces, moved towards Imphal and Kohima by crossing Indo-Burma frontier. The Indian soldiers were very happy and enthusiastic about being in their own country. On this front, around 84,000 Japanese and 12,000 INA soldiers faced about 150,000 British troops. The Japanese troops had not carried much ration with them for speed and they had pinned their hope on the quick capture of Kohima and Imphal. In April 1944, they seemed to be very close to capturing Imphal and Kohima, as they laid siege to Imphal. The INA soldiers were fighting very well and their spirit was very high. They had hoisted the Indian tricolour flag in Moirang, a short distance from Imphal. There was a lot of optimism among the Azad Hind leaders, soldiers, and its adherents in general. A 'free India' seemed to be round the corner.

However, due to the stiff resistance offered now by the British-led forces, the seize was prolonged. During the three-and-half months of seize, under difficult circumstances, their limited ration was getting exhausted. While the British troops were well supplied with ration by continuous American supply by air, the Japanese air support was much restricted and inadequate. Some of the fiercest battles of the World War were fought here in May 1944. The INA brigades were also involved in these fights.

Unfortunately, the monsoon rains arrived early that year. Very heavy rains started which obliterated the tracks and made the whole area muddy. There was nothing much to do on fighting front and the only option was to wait. Already facing problems of transportation and shortages of supplies, the INA and Japanese soldiers were inflicted with malaria and it was difficult to procure medicines being stranded on the forest areas. Yet, the mood among the soldiers as well as other Indians in Southeast Asia was still optimistic. The stalemate continued throughout June and early week of July. Then, on 10 July, the Japanese intimated Bose that it would now be difficult to hold on there and they would now retreat from that theatre of war. The INA units were also much distressed as there was a severe lack of food and medicines along with prevalence of many diseases including malaria. Now retreat was the only option which was taken in the third week of July. Later on 26 July, Japan announced the suspension of campaign in Northeast India. In retreat, a lot of soldiers died due to diseases and starvation, many more were injured and sick.

Bose, in a radio address on 21 August 1944, accepted that INA's bid to take control in North-east India had not been successful. According to him, early monsoon and the problems in transportation were mainly responsible the lack of success. Before the monsoon came the INA and the Japanese soldiers were doing very well, but after that it became difficult to hold on. He did not lose hope and exhorted the soldiers to be prepared for the next round of engagement.

Although the majority of INA troops who took part in action in the North-east were now grounded, another large contingent of soldiers arrived from Malaya in Burma who were ready for action. By then the war had arrived in Burma with the British and American forces trying to drive out the Japanese from there. The INA soldiers were also involved in fighting. They were deployed in Malaya also against the British-American forces.

On the bank of Irrawady in Burma, the INA forces encountered the British forces in February 1945. They inflicted several casualties on the British and blocked their crossing of the river for the time being. Despite the huge air support from the Americans, the British forces did not advance much and stalemate continued even in March 1945.

It was then that some officers of the INA deserted to the British. Even more importantly, the Burmese government, sensing the eventual Japanese defeat, turned against them and in favour of the advancing British. This created major problems of Bose who then negotiated with the Burmese government that their soldiers would not fight against each other.

Despite these problems, however, the INA soldiers fought valiantly in April around Mount Popa. But in face of superior British forces, they had

to withdraw after losing a lot of soldiers. It was clear now that INA could not win this war, but it kept on fighting. On 29 April 1945, Prem Kumar Sahgal was captured by the British, and on 18 May Shah Nawaz Khan and Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon were taken prisoners.

12.6 DEFEAT OF JAPAN AND THE END OF WORLD WAR

Although the battle was lost in Burma, Bose had not given up. He sent his forces to fight in Malaya and Thailand. Despite all the reverses, Bose was hopeful for final victory. He now gathered his forces in Thailand and negotiated with the Thai government for help. He still believed that he would be able to launch another offensive for the freedom of his country.

But on 6 and 9 August 1945, two atom bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan which ended the war in East Asia. Japan surrendered, and now Netaji had to radically revise his strategy. Even after the defeat, Netaji was not pessimistic. He declared to his remaining soldiers that 'The roads to Delhi are many and Delhi still remains our goal'. He had firm belief that 'India shall be free before long' [cited in Bose: 5].

The INA could not succeed militarily due to various reasons. The INA was raised on the basis of nationalist idealism and the belief that they would be quickly able to overwhelm the British forces, at least in North-east India, in conjunction with the Japanese and this will result in a general uprising in India leading to the liberation of the country. Driven by idealistic enthusiasm and Netaji's charisma, thousands of civilians joined the INA. They did not receive sufficient military training required for a modern professional soldier, nor did they have the patience and stamina to endure such training. This resulted in lack of discipline and even desertions. Moreover, the logistical support and funds for regular salary and food for the troops was never sufficient. Quite often, the soldiers did not receive salary but only pocket money. By 1944 even boots were in short supply. Bose's temporary arrangements for fund were no substitute for a state-funded professional military system. Thus, the level of maintenance required for combat army was not available for the INA soldiers. This led to various diseases in the ranks. So, it was mostly the idealistic fervour and Bose's charismatic leadership which motivated the soldiers for acts of bravery. But it could not last for very long and there was decline of morale and motivation among the soldiers as the fighting prolonged.

Bose was also confronted with a broader problem. By the time he reached Japan and then Singapore, Japan's fortune in war had started turning. Till April 1943, Japan had an upper hand both in the Pacific and in Southeast Asia. But around mid to late 1943, the Allied forces were gaining upper hand in certain areas. By 1944, the Japanese government could not supply sufficient resources even for its own army fighting in remote areas. During the campaign inside Indian territory, the Japanese and Indian soldiers did not receive enough ration and clothing for sustenance which led to diseases and mortality in large numbers. The defeat of the Axis powers in Europe and the Pacific region further created problems for Netaji and the INA.

However, what the INA failed to achieve on military front, it more than achieved on the political front.

12.7 TRIAL OF INA SOLDIERS AND THE NATIONAL UPSURGE

The trial of INA officers and soldiers at Delhi's Red Fort aroused such strong sentiments among the Indians against the British that the INA and its main officers became known in every home in the country. The trial of the INA leaders and soldiers re-energized the nationalist political atmosphere in India to almost fever pitch. The Air Force, Navy, and even the Army soldiers became influenced by the nationalist ideology and held the INA martyrs and surviving soldiers in high esteem. The common people protested in thousands and lakhs all over India, fighting pitched battle with the government forces and getting injured and even losing their lives. The after-effects of INA movement turned out to be far more widespread and potent than its concrete achievements on the battlefield.

The trial of the INA prisoners proved a boon for the nationalist movement which had suffered a setback after the defeat of INA and the suppression of the Quit India Movement. The people were enthused and filled the streets in support of the INA. The nationalist newspapers widely published the heroic stories of the fight carried out by the Azad Hind Fauj. The Congress decided to defend the prisoners in the Court and assigned the task to a veteran nationalist lawyer, Bhulabhai Desai. Other leaders also supported them in various ways, including in legal defense.

The trial of three important INA officers, Sahgal, Shah Nawaz, and Dhillon, commenced on 5 November 1945, but was adjourned and recommenced on 21 November. On this date there were angry and violent protests against their prosecution. There were clashes with the military and police in many cities and several protesters were killed and injured. There was a show of unity between the supporters of the Congress and Muslim League who carried the flags of both the parties together.

The Indians in all the wings of colonial government's armed forces expressed resentment in some form or the other. The Royal Indian Air Force stationed at Calcutta openly sent a message to the Bengal Congress Committee praising the 'noble ideal' of India's brave soldiers, and registered their 'strongest protest against the autocratic action of the Government of India and, in effect, that of the British Government in trying these brightest jewels of India' [Ghosh: 24].

Even in military, it was reported that 'the I.N.A. affairs was threatening to tumble down the whole edifice of the Indian army' [Ghosh: 25]. Most of the Indian officers were against prosecution of INA soldiers.

In Royal Indian Navy (RIN), it took a dangerous turn when Indian ratings of 78 ships stationed in Bombay, Calcutta, Karachi, Madras, Cochin, Vizagapatnam, Mandapam, and the Andamans revolted. Only about ten ships remained relatively unaffected. The rebels demanded, among other things, the immediate release of INA prisoners and abandonment of their trials.

Thus, the trials not only created popular nationalist waves of agitation and protests all over the country, but they also generated strong political and nationalist sentiments among the armed forces. The Court sentenced the three prisoners to lifelong deportation, but its decision was reversed by commutation of the sentence by the commander-in-chief of British Indian Army. There was a fear of revolt in the Army and a general upsurge in the country. The three officers were set free and they were received outside by lakhs of people thronging the streets and shouting slogans.

The situation was looking very explosive, and the British now tried to resolve it by putting forward the idea of transfer of power to the Indians by quickly sending the Cabinet Mission to decide the modalities.

12.8 ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE AZAD HIND FAUJ

One of the important achievements of the Azad Hind Fauj was Hindu-Muslim unity at a time of deep communal division in society and politics. Moreover, it also accomplished unity at the caste and regional levels by bringing together people from all regions of India under one banner. It further tried to achieve gender equality by incorporating women not only in administrative roles but also in the army.

The political gains of the INA were enormous. It aroused a tremendous feeling of nationalism among the Indians abroad as well as at home and re-energized them for another possible battle against colonial rulers after the end of the Quit India Movement. Quite significantly, INA became a celebrated cause after its demise and even armed forces were very much affected. It now became quite clear to the British that they could not rely on the loyalty of the Indian soldiers.

In this way, the INA had a huge impact on the process of nation-making as well as decolonization.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Describe the military battles of the INA against British forces.
- 2) What was the impact of the INA on India's freedom struggle?

12.9 LET US SUM UP

The Azad Hind Fauj, formed by Subhas Chandra Bose, popularly known as Netaji, proved to be a major factor in mobilizing and organizing the Indians in Southeast Asia under the nationalist banner. Thousands of Indian civilians, besides the soldiers, joined the army to fight for the liberation of their country. Lakhs of Indians in the region supported it by providing money and sustenance. Its role in integrating the émigré Indians with the home country was phenomenal.

The role of the INA in creating enthusiasm among the Indians at home, even after its military existence was over, was even more significant. It generated tremendous nationalist and anti-colonial feelings not only among civilian population but also among the Indians in the armed forces. This critically weakened the foundations of the colonial government ultimately leading to its end.

12.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See section 12.2.
- 2) See section 12.3.
- 3) See section 12.4.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See sections 12.5 and 12.6.
- 2) See sections 12.7 and 12.8.



UNIT 13: POPULAR STRUGGLES IN THE PRINCELY STATES*

Structure

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Influence of the National Movement
- 13.3 The First Political Organizations
- 13.4 The Congress Policy
 - 13.4.1 Federation Scheme
 - 13.4.2 Congress Ministries
- 13.5 The New Stage
 - 13.5.1 Change in the Congress Policy
 - 13.5.2 Quit India in the States
 - 13.5.3 The Process of Integration
- 13.6 Rajkot: Case Study 1
 - 13.6.1 Reign of Lakhajiraj
 - 13.6.2 Return to Despotism
 - 13.6.3 Beginning of Protest
 - 13.6.4 The Satyagraha
 - 13.6.5 Gandhiji's Intervention
 - 13.6.6 Lessons of the Rajkot Satyagraha
- 13.7 Hyderabad: Case Study II
 - 13.7.1 Nizam's Rule
 - 13.7.2 Beginning of Awakening
 - 13.7.3 The Satyagraha
 - 13.7.4 World War II
 - 13.7.5 The Peasant Movement
 - 13.7.6 The Last Phase
 - 13.7.7 Armed Resistance and the Intervention of Indian Army
- 13.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 13.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

13.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit aims to present before you a broad survey of the popular struggles in the princely states during the 1920-47 period. After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- make a comparison between the struggles in the princely states and the National Movement,

* Adopted from Unit 32 of EHI-01

- discuss the role of the Indian National Congress in preparing the people of the states for these struggles,
- point out the change in the Congress policy on this issue, and
- assess the role of the communists in these struggles.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

British suzerainty over India had been achieved through a long and complex process. It was accomplished through direct conquest, intimidation or accommodation of the pre-colonial Indian political entities which existed in India. The result was direct British rule over three-fifths of the sub-continent, and indirect rule, embodied in the concept of 'Paramountcy' over the remaining two-fifths. The areas coming under the latter arrangement continued to be nominally ruled by Indian Princes. Princely India, or the Indian States, consisted of hundred of states, some of them like Hyderabad, Mysore or Kashmir were of the size of many a European country. Some others were very small with a population of only a few thousands, and many fell in between these two categories.

The most significant feature of indirect British rule over the Indian states was that in return for being acknowledged as the Paramount Power, the British guaranteed the rulers security against all threats to their existence – external and internal. Consequently, the rulers felt no need to undertake even the minimum of measures to ensure the goodwill of their subjects. Most states were run on out-and-out autocratic principles. The rulers squandered the state revenues on extravagant personal whims and fancies. They made frequent trips to European countries and had long stays. They gave lavish entertainment to their foreign guests by means of organizing 'shikar' parties. They also continued to add to the number of women in the harem. The burden of all this naturally fell on the helpless inhabitants. High taxes – even higher than in neighboring British India – were the general rule.

Some of the more enlightened rulers, often in the face of British resistance, did try to introduce administrative and political reforms and promote industrial development. They also made serious efforts to spread modern education and even grant a measure of popular participation in government. Such states, however, constituted a small minority. The vast majority continued to remain backward in all spheres of life. A great part of the responsibility for this situation lay at the door of the British who, especially in the context of the growing strength of the national movement in the twentieth century, sought to maintain Indian States as bulwarks of reaction and were reluctant to countenance any moves towards Responsible Government. Of course, they strongly disapproved of any support that the Princes might extend to the national movement, and through their representatives in the States, the Agents or the Residents, exercised strict supervision and control.

13.2 INFLUENCE OF THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

Nevertheless, as was bound to happen, the national movement, after it had taken roots in British India, exercised a powerful and growing influence on

the people of the States. The ideas of democracy, responsible government and civil liberties popularised by the nationalists had an immediate relevance for them as they in their daily life suffered the excesses of autocratic rule. These ideas were carried at first by individual nationalists, some of them revolutionaries from British India seeking shelter in the states. But when the national movement assumed a mass character, its influence on the people of Indian states became more generalized. In fact, the first local-level popular associations were organised in the states under impact of the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat movement which lasted from 1920 to 1922.

13.3 THE FIRST POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS

Among the States where the first Praja Mandals or State People's Conferences were set up included Hyderabad, Mysore, Baroda, the Kathiawad States, the Deccan States, Jamnagar, Indore and Nawanagar. Among the leaders who emerged through this process, the more important names are those of Balwantrai Mehta, Maniklal Kothari and C.R. Abhayankar. It was largely at their initiative that the first all-India gathering of the people of States took place in 1927 and led to the formation of the All India States People's Conference (AISPC), the first session itself being attended by about 700 political workers.

13.4 THE CONGRESS POLICY

In 1920, the Indian National Congress had declared its policy towards the Indian states through a resolution which called upon the rulers to institute full responsible government. On the question of organizing political movements or struggles in the Indian States, however, the Congress policy was more complex. While individuals living in the States were free to become members of the Congress and participate in movements led by it, they were not to carry on political activity in the states in the name of the Congress. This they could do only in their individual capacity or as members of local political organizations such as Praja Mandals, etc. An obvious reason for this stand of the Congress was that the States were legally independent entities; the political conditions in differences on this count were immense. Therefore, an organization such as the Congress, which determined its politics and forms of struggle, on the basis of the conditions in British India, could not afford to be directly associated with people in the States to rely on the more advanced types of movement in British India for an acceptance of their demands. They were required to build up their own strength, advance their own political consciousness, and demonstrate their capacity to struggle for their own specific demands. Within the framework of these limitations, the Congress and Congressmen continued to extend support to the movements in the States in a variety of ways. In his Presidential Address to the Lahore session of the Congress in 1929, Jawaharlal Nehru elaborated the position of the organization vis-à-vis the states. He emphatically stated: "Indian States cannot live apart from the rest of India.... the only people who have the right to determine the future of the States must be people of these States."

While the process of political awakening and political protest went ahead in many states in the 1920s and early 1930s, the real spurt in the movements in the states came in the latter half of the 1930s. This was largely a product

of two associated developments -- the Federation scheme proposed by the Government of India Act of 1935 and the assumption of office by Congress ministries in the majority of the provinces of British India in 1937.

13.4.1 Federation Scheme

According to the Federation proposal, the Indian states were to be brought into a direct constitutional relationship with British India, as distinct from the existing position in which they were in direct relationship only with the British Crown. This was to be achieved by the setting up of a Federal Indian Legislature which would have representatives from British India as well as from the Indian States. However, while the representatives from British India would be largely elected by the people, the representatives from the Indian States, who were to constitute one-third of the total members, would be nominated by the rulers of these States. The whole purpose of this scheme was to use the nominated representatives of the States as a solid conservative block to counter the weight of the elected representative of British India. The Federation scheme was, therefore, opposed by all nationalists and it was demanded that the representatives of the States should also be elected instead of being nominated. Understandably, this imparted a great sense of urgency to the demand for responsible government in the Indian States, for there could be no elective principle at the Federal level without it being implemented at the level of the States.

13.4.2 Congress Ministries

The assumption of office by Congress ministries in many of the provinces also acted as a spurt to the movements in the States. The fact of the Congress being in power in the provinces in British India generated a feeling of confidence and aroused expectation in the people of the States. It also acted as a pressure on the rulers, the Congress was no longer just an oppositional movement; it was a party in power. They took this as an indication of the future they would have to contend with in their own territories.

13.5 THE NEW STAGE

The high watermark of the movement in the States was thus reached in the years 1938-39. Praja Mandals or People's Association sprung up in many states, and struggles broke out in Rajkot, Travancore, Mysore, Hyderabad, Patiala, Jaipur, Kashmir and the Orissa States.

13.5.1 Change in the Congress Policy

There was a marked change in the Congress policy towards the movements in the States in this new situation. The radicals and leftists had been urging even earlier for a clearer identification with the movement in the States, but the decisive impact on Congress thinking was made by the growth of popular movements in the States. This is clear from the following statement made by Gandhiji in an interview to the *Times of India* on 25 January 1939:

“The policy of non-intervention by the Congress was, in my opinion, a perfect piece of statesmanship when the people of the States were not awakened. That policy would be cowardice when there is all-round awakening among the people of the States and a determination to go through a long course of

suffering for the vindication of their just rights....The moment they became ready, the legal, constitutional and artificial boundary was destroyed.”

At its Tripuri session in March 1939, the Congress passed a resolution which incorporated the idea expressed above by Gandhiji:

“The great awakening that is taking place among the people of the States may lead to a relaxation or to a complete removal of the restraint which the Congress imposed upon itself, thus resulting in an ever increasing identification of the Congress with the States’ peoples.”

The election of Jawaharlal Nehru as President of the Ludhiana session of the AISPC in 1939 also gave great impetus to the movement and became a symbol of the fusion of the movements in British India and the Indian States.

13.5.2 Quit India in the States

The Second World War broke out in 1939 and this led to a marked change in the atmosphere. The Congress Ministries resigned and the British Indian government as well as the Prices became and more repressive. There was a lull in the movement which was, however, broken with the launching of the Quit India movement in August 1942. For the first time, the Congress gave a call to the people of the States to participate fully in the all-India struggle for independence. To their demand for responsible government was now added the demand for independence for India and for the States to become integral parts of the Indian nation. The struggle of the people in the States was formally integrated with the struggle of the people in British India.

13.5.3 The Process of Integration

After the Second World War was over, negotiation for the transfer of power from British to Indian hands were started. The question of the future of Indian States became of critical importance at this juncture. The British government took the position that with their departure and the lapse of British paramountcy, the Indian States became legally independent entities. This would create a situation that might lead to the Balkanization of the sub-continent. The national leadership, and especially Sardar Patel, played a vital role at this stage and succeeded in getting the vast majority of the States to accede to the Indian Union through a combination of diplomatic pressure, arm-twisting and popular movements. Many of the more sensible rulers had realised on their own that independence of their territories as separate entities was not a realistic alternative. However, some of the States, such as Travancore, Junagadh, Hyderabad and Kashmir refused to join the Indian Union till the last minute. Only Hyderabad made a serious bid for independence up to the last moment.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What was the initial impact of national movement on the people of the Indian States?
- 2) What was the policy of the Indian National Congress towards the popular movements in the Indian States?
- 3) Write five lines on the Federation Scheme.

- 4) Read the following statements and mark right (✓) or wrong (✗)
- i) The British exercised indirect control on the areas controlled by the Indian princes.
 - ii) The Federation Scheme was supported by the nationalist leaders.
 - iii) The movement in the princely states acquired an impetus in the 1930s.

Case Studies of Two States

We shall now proceed to take a close look at the pattern of the movements in two Indian States. We have preferred this method of detailed illustration of the movements in selected representative States to the method of summarizing briefly the movements in all the States as we feel that the former method will be more helpful to us in understanding the complex dynamic of the various forces that shaped political consciousness and political activity in the Indian states at the ground level. The states we have chosen are representative not only in terms of size – Hyderabad, the largest Indian states, and Rajkot among the smallest – but also in other ways. Hyderabad was ruled by the Nizam, a Muslim, and Rajkot by a Hindu; in Rajkot it was the Gandhian political workers who were in leadership whereas in Hyderabad the Communists played a major role in the popular movement against the feudal ruler.

13.6 RAJKOT: CASE STUDY 1

Rajkot was one of the numerous tiny States that dotted the Kathiawar peninsula of Gujarat and had a population of only 75,000. Its importance, however, was considerable because Rajkot city was headquarters of the Western India States Agency from where the British Political Agency carried on its dealings with an exercised supervision over all the small States of the area.

13.6.1 Reign of Lakhajiraj

Rajkot enjoyed the distinction of being one of the first States in India where popular participation in government was introduced. This was largely due to the enlightened views of the Thakore Sahib of Rajkot, Lakhajiraj, who ruled the States for twenty years till 1930. He had, in 1923, inaugurated the Rajkot Praja Pratindhi Sabha, a representative assembly consisting of 90 members elected on the basis of universal adult franchise. The Thakore Sahib retained the right of veto, but Lakhajiraj rarely exercised this right. In effect the popular assembly had considerable power. Lakhajiraj promoted industrial and educational development of the State.

This enlightened ruler actively encouraged the nationalist political activity in various ways. He gave permission for the holding of the First Kathiawar Political Conference in Rajkot in 1921, which was presided over by Vithalbhai Patel, the illustrious brother of Sardar Patel who later went on to become the first Indian President of the Central Legislative Assembly. Lakhajiraj was a great admirer of Gandhiji and very proud of the achievements of this 'son of Rajkot'. He would often invite him to his durbar, and then make him sit on

the throne while he himself sat in his durbar. Jawaharlal Nehru was given a public reception by him during a visit to the State. Lakhajiraj also attended sessions of the Kathiawar Political Conference, wore khadi in defiance of the British, and donated land for the setting up of a national school that was to become a centre of political activity.

13.6.2 Return to Despotism

The initiatives taken by Lakhajiraj were too good to last for long. His death in 1930 brought his son, Dharmendra Singhji to the throne and as a ruler he proved to be the exact opposite of his father. Dharamendra Singhji was interested only in his own luxuries and comforts and he was encouraged in this by the crafty Dewan Virawala who used the opportunity to concentrate all powers in his own hands. The State's wealth was wasted on extravagant expenditure and the finances soon reached such a state that monopolies for the sale of rice, matches, sugar and cereals were given for a price to individual merchants in order to raise revenues. Taxes were increased, prices rose and the popular assembly was allowed to lapse. All this produced a discontent and resentment among the people, especially since the contrast with the reign of Lakhajiraj was so sharp.

13.6.3 Beginning of Protest

The ground for struggle had also been prepared by different political groups who had been active in the Kathiawar area for many years. The group that emerged in the leading position during these years, however, consisted of Gandhian constructive workers and their main leader was U.N. Dhebar.

The first blow was struck in 1936 when a strike of 800 workers took place under the aegis of a labour union organized by Jethalal Joshi, a Gandhian activist, in the state-owned cotton mill. The strike lasted 21 days and the Durbar had to concede the union's demands for better working conditions. Encouraged by this success, Jethalal Joshi and U.N. Dhebar organised in March 1937 a meeting of the Kathiawar Rajakiya Parishad (Political Conference), the first to be held in eight years. The fifteen thousand people who attended this conference demanded responsible government and reduction in taxes and state expenditure.

The ruler made no move either to negotiate or concede the demands. The Parishad, therefore, launched the next phase of the struggle in August 1938 by organizing a protest against gambling, for which a monopoly had been sold at the Gokulashtmi fair. The administration had planned repression, and the protesters were beaten with lathis first by the Agency police and then by the state police. The reaction was immediate: there was a complete hartal and Sardar Patel presided over a session of the Parishad on 5 September. Patel also met Dewan Virawala and presented the demands of the people which included a committee to frame proposals for responsible government, a new election for the Pratinidhi Sabha or the popular representative assembly, reduction of land revenue by 15 per cent, cancellation of all monopolies or ijaras, and a limit on the ruler's claim on the State treasury. The Durbar, however, was in no mood to listen, and instead stepped up the confrontation by asking the British Resident to depute a British Officer as Dewan in order to effectively deal with the agitation. The British duly despatched Cadell

to take over as Dewan. Dewan Virawala, who planned the whole scheme, became Private Adviser to the throne, and continued to operate from behind the scenes.

13.6.4 The Satyagraha

Seeing the rigid attitude of the administration, the resistance was stepped up to assume the form of a full-scale satyagraha. There were workers' strikes in the cotton mill and students also went on strike. All goods either produced by the State or products sold under monopoly were boycotted. These included electricity and cloth. Land revenue was not paid and deposits in the State Bank were withdrawn. In short, all sources of income of the State were to be blocked. Volunteers flowed in from Bombay, British Gujarat and the other parts of Kathiawar outside Rajkot. The organization of the movement was highly advanced. Every leader arrested was replaced by another according to a pre-arranged secret chain of command and volunteers were informed of their date of arrival and arrangements in Rajkot were published in the newspapers by means of code numbers. Sardar Patel, though not physically present in Rajkot most of the time, kept himself in regular touch by telephone every evening.

The British government was worried over the possibility of what would be seen as a Congress victory in Rajkot. They did not want the Durbar to come to any settlement with the resistance movements. They feared that this would result in a further spread of the movement and would increase Congress influence. But, hard-pressed by the highly successful satyagraha, the Durbar entered into a settlement with Sardar Patel on 26 December 1938, by which the satyagraha was withdrawn and prisoners were released. The crucial part of the deal was the Durbar's commitment to appoint a Committee of ten state subjects or officials to formulate a scheme of reforms designed to grant the widest possible powers to the people. It was also agreed that, of the 10 members of this Committee, seven would be Sardar Patel's nominees.

The British government, which had opposed the agreement in the first place, now swung into action. After consultations at the highest levels of the Viceroy and the Secretary of State, the Thakore Sahib was forced to take the stand that he would not accept Sardar Patel's list of seven members, and would instead have another one drawn up with the help of the Resident. The reason given publicly for the refusal was also very significant, since it showed clearly the attempt being made to create caste and communal divisions: the list given by the Sardar cannot be accepted, it was argued, because it contained the name only of Brahmans and Banias; Rajputs, Muslims, and the depressed classes were not represented there.

The Satyagraha was resumed on 26 January 1939 and it was met with heavy repression. However, this repression only called forth stronger protest from all over the country. Kasturba Gandhi, who had grown up in Rajkot, was so moved that she decided, in spite of her advanced age and poor health, to go to Rajkot. One arrival, she and her companion Maniben, the Sardar's daughter, were detained in a village outside Rajkot city. Following upon this, Gandhiji himself decided to proceed to Rajkot. He had already taken serious note of the breach of a solemn agreement by the Durbar. He now

felt that his own and his family's close association with the State and the Thakore Sahib's family called forth his personal intervention.

The Durbar, undoubtedly egged on by the British, continued to be obdurate and finally Gandhiji announced his intention of going on an indefinite fast unless the Durbar agreed to honour its agreement by the 3rd March. No assurance was given by the Durbar and the fast began.

13.6.5 Gandhiji's Intervention

As was inevitable, the beginning of Gandhiji's fast became the signal for a nation-wide protest. The Viceroy was pressurized with telegrams demanding his intervention, Congress Ministries threatened to resign, hartals were called and legislatures adjourned. Gandhiji himself sought the intervention of the Paramount Power, to persuade the Thakore to stick to the agreement. On 7 March, Gandhiji broke his fast after the Viceroy asked the Chief Justice of India, Sir Maurice Gwyer, to arbitrate and decide whether in fact the Thakore had violated the agreement.

The Chief Justice upheld the Sardar's position in an award given on 3rd April 1939, but the Durbar, egged on by Virawala, continued to promote the communal and caste divide by encouraging the Muslims and Depressed Classes to put forward their claims and then using these to refuse to honour the agreement. The situation soon began to deteriorate, especially when Jinnah and Ambedkar stepped in to demand separate representation for Muslims and Depressed Classes, and there were hostile demonstrations at Gandhiji's prayer meetings. The British government too, since it had nothing to gain and all to lose from a Congress victory, refused to use its influence.

At this point Gandhiji himself decided to withdraw from the situation and announced that he released the Thakore Sahib from the agreement. He apologized to the Viceroy and the Chief Justice for wasting their time. He also apologized to his opponents, and returned to British India. Analysing the reasons for his failure to achieve a 'change of heart' in his opponent, he felt that he was wrong in having tried to use the authority of the Paramount power to force the Durbar: he should have relied only on the strength of his own suffering.

13.6.6 Lessons of the Rajkot Satyagraha

The Rajkot Satyagraha, with all its twists and turns, demonstrated the complexity of the situation in the Princely States, with the Paramount Power always ready to interfere in its own favour but ever willing to use the legal independence of the Rulers as an excuse for non-interference when intervention was demanded by those in opposition. In British India, this excuse could not be used and the confrontation was therefore of a different order. On account of this difference in the situation, the same methods of struggle when used in different political conditions of British India and Indian States often produced dissimilar results and the Congress was perhaps, justified in showing hesitation for long years to merge the movement in the two zones.

It needs to be pointed out, however, that the Rajkot Satyagraha, for all its apparent failure, exercised a tremendous politicizing effect on the people of the States. Nor was it a pure coincidence that the man who was more

responsible than any other for effecting the integration of the Indian states into the Indian Union in 1947 was none other than Sardar Patel, a veteran of the Rajkot struggle as well as some other resistance actions in the Indian states. Struggles such as those of Rajkot also helped to demonstrate to the rulers of the States the power of popular resistance, and this no double encouraged many of them to accept integration without putting up much resistance.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Read the following statements and mark right (✓) or wrong (✗)
 - i) Unlike most other princely states Rajkot state had introduced the principle of popular participation in the government.
 - ii) The early initiative for political activity was undertaken by Gandhian activists.
 - iii) The Rajkot Satyagraha helped in politicising the people of the state.
- 2) Write five lines on Gandhiji's involvement with the Rajkot Satyagraha.

13.7 HYDERABAD: CASE STUDY II

There was one state which refused to see the writing on the wall and this was no other than the largest Indian state of Hyderabad. Hyderabad was ruled by Osman Ali Khan who remained the Nizam from 1911 till 1948, and it was he who put up the toughest resistance to integration. His opposition was not surprising. He was used to governing in the style of a true despot and his personal estate comprised 10 per cent of the total area of the state. The revenues from this estate went directly to meet the royal expense. He had obviously much to lose from integration of his state into a democratic India.

13.7.1 Nizam's Rule

The people of Hyderabad, who were comprised of three distinct linguistic groups – Marathi speaking (28 per cent) Kannada speaking (22 per cent) and Telugu speaking (50 per cent) had much to be angry about. They were oppressed by a feudal agrarian structure with jagirdars who imposed illegal levies, high rents and exacted forced labour or *vethi*. The overwhelmingly Hindu population also suffered from religious and cultural suppression – their languages were neglected and Urdu promoted in a variety of ways. Muslims were given a disproportionate share of the jobs in the government, especially at the higher levels. The Arya Samaj which had begun to acquire considerable popularity since the 1920s was suppressed with a strong hand and those who had come under its influence could not even hold religious functions without official permission. In the political sphere as well, the Nizam promoted the formation of *Ittehad-ul-Muslimin*, an organization based on loyalty to the Nizam on the basis of common religious faith. It was this cultural, economic, political and religious suppression that prepared the ground for the growth of people's movement in Hyderabad.

13.7.2 Beginning of Awakening

The beginning of political awakening came with the Non-cooperation and Khilafat movements in 1920-22. National schools were set up, charkhas were popularized, propaganda made against liquor-drinking and badges with pictures of Gandhiji and Ali brothers were sold. Public demonstrations of Hindu-Muslim unity were popular and the Khilafat movement was used as an effective forum for organizing open political activity such as in the form of mass public meetings since the Nizam hesitated to come out openly against this movement.

Following upon this, a series of Hyderabad Political Conferences were held in British Indian territory adjoining the state. Responsible government, civil liberties, reduction of taxes, abolition of forced labour, freedom for religious and cultural expression were the main demands put forward at these conferences. The Civil disobedience Movement of 1930-32 further advanced political consciousness, as many nationalists from Hyderabad crossed over to British India to participate in the struggle. They went to jails and mingled with nationalists from other regions. These people returned to Hyderabad with a new sense of urgency and militancy.

Meanwhile, the process of cultural awakening had also been under way. This took the form of different linguistic-cultural zones fanning their own associations. The first to come up was the Andhra Jana Sangham, later transformed into Andhra Mahasabha. This organization of the Telugu-speaking people of the Telengana area worked for the advancement of Telugu language and literature, through the setting up of schools, journals, newspapers, library associations and a research society. Despite the Mahasabha refraining from any overt political activity till the beginning of the 1940s, the Nizam's administration would shut down its schools, libraries and newspapers started by it. In 1937, the other two linguistic cultural zones also set up their organizations: the Maharashtra Parishad and the Kannada Parishad.

13.7.3 The Satyagraha

In 1938 active workers of all the three regions came together and decided to launch a statewide organization named the Hyderabad State Congress. Even before it could actually be set up, the administration banned it on the ground that it did not have sufficient representation of Muslims. Attempts at negotiations came to nought, and the decision was taken to launch a satyagraha.

The satyagraha started in October 1938, and man who led it was Swami Ramanand Tirtha, a Marathi-speaking nationalist, who was a Gandhian in his life-style and a Nehruite in his ideology. As a part of this satyagraha, a group of five, in which all the regions of the state would be represented, would defy the ban orders by proclaiming themselves members of the State Congress. Large numbers of people would turn out to witness the satyagraha and express support, and this continued for two months, thrice a week, at the two centres of Hyderabad and Aurangabad.

At the same time, the Arya Samaj and Hindu Civil Liberties Union also launched a satyagraha against the religious persecution of Arya Samaj. This

satyagraha had religious objectives and even began to take on communal overtones. There was a great danger of the two satyagrahas being confused in the popular mind. The State administration was trying precisely to work in that direction.

This was seen by the State Congress and Gandhiji. Accordingly, it was decided that in order to keep the religious and political issues separate, the political satyagraha of the State Congress be suspended.

There emerged during the same period the famous Bande Mataram movement, which led to a large-scale radicalization of students. This movement began in Hyderabad colleges as a protest strike against the authorities who refused to allow the students to sing Bande Mataram, in their hostel prayer rooms. The strike soon spread to other parts of the State, students were expelled from colleges and many of them went to Nagpur University in the Congress-ruled Central Provinces where they were given admission. This movement proved to be very important because many of the active political workers of the time emerged from this band of Students.

13.7.4 World War II

The Second World War had broken out in 1939. This provided an opportunity to the State government to refuse to discuss any questions of political reforms. The State Congress continued to remain under a ban, and there was another symbolic protest by Swamiji and six other personally selected by Gandhiji in September 1940. This led to their arrest and detention till December 1941. Gandhiji was not in favour of any resumption of mass struggle at this stage since an all-India struggle was in the offing and all struggle should be launched as part of that common programme.

The ban on the State Congress resulted in the regional cultural organizations emerging as the forum of political activity. This became particularly true of the Andhra Mahasabha of the Telugus. Many of the young newly-politicised cadre flocked to the Sabha and gave it a new energy and militant complexion. An important development that occurred at this time was that Ravi Narayan Reddy, who had emerged as a major leader of the younger radical group in the Mahasabha and had participated in the 1939 State Congress satyagraha, was drawn towards the Communist Party of India. He, along with B. Yella Reddy, succeeded in securing the support of a large proportion of the younger cadre as well. The result was to be seen in the growing radicalization of Mahasabha's politic and its focus on peasant problems

Meanwhile, the call for 'Quit India' came. Since the movement this time was to be extended to the Princely States as well, Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru both addressed the AISPC Standing Committee that met along with the AICC in Bombay in August 1942, and gave a call for struggle. The arrests of major leaders succeeded in preventing the emergence of an organized movement but many people all over the State participated in the struggle and went to jail. A batch of women offered satyagraha in Hyderabad city, and Sarojini Naidu was arrested in that connection. There was a new spirit of defiance in the air.

The Communists Party of India adopted, in December 1941, the people's war line – which asked for support to Britain in the anti-Fascist War. In

pursuance of this line, the Communists did not officially support the Quit India movement, thus cutting themselves off from other nationalists. Further, because of the Government of India's changed attitude towards the CPI at this time, the Nizam also removed the ban on the CPI, thus enabling it to function openly at a time when the other nationalists were in jail. In continuation of this process, a split occurred in the Andhra Mahasabha in 1944, the non-Communist elements walking out to form their own separate organization and leaving the Mahasabha in Communist hands.

13.7.5 The Peasant Movement

The Communists were quick to take advantage of their position as soon as the War came to an end. The year 1945-46, and especially the latter half of 1946, were years of the growth of a powerful peasant movement in various pockets of the Nalgonda district, and to some extent in Warangal and Khammam. The issues around which the peasants were mobilized were those of the forced grain levy that had to be paid to the state as a part of war-time food procurement, the practice of forced labour or *vethi begaar* extracted by the government underlings and rural big-wigs, especially landowners' illegal exactions and illegal seizures of land. Clashes occurred between the peasants led by the Communists under the Andhra Mahasabha banner and the goondas of the landlords and later the armed forces of the State. Strong repression of the fierce resistance, which included arrests, beating and killings, succeeded in forcing the peasants to lie low for a time but they had nevertheless acquired a confidence in themselves and in the leadership of the Sangham, as the Mahasabha was popularly known.

13.7.6 The Last Phase

The situation now took dramatic turn with Viceroy Mountbatten's announcement on 3 June 1947 that the British would be leaving India in a short time. The Nizam, on 12 June 1947 announced that he would become sovereign after the British left. He had obviously no intention of joining the Indian Union.

The State Congress now decided to come into the open and take the lead. It had already established its popularity a few months earlier when it had organized a very successful boycott of the elections held in the State under a new undemocratic constitution that the Nizam was trying to foist on the people. In response to the Nizam's refusal to accede to the Union, the Congress now held its first open session from 16th to 18th June and demanded accession to the Indian Union and responsible government. The state leaders also began to prepare, in consultation with the national leadership in Delhi, for a struggle against the Nizam. The struggle was to include both mass satyagraha and armed resistance.

To evade arrests, a Committee of Action was set up outside Hyderabad and offices were established on the borders of the state in Sholapur, Bezwada and Gadag with a central office at Bombay. Also funds were collected in which Jai Prakash Narain played a crucial role. The day fixed for the launching of the movement, 7 August 1947, was to be observed as 'Join Indian Union Day'. The movement took off with a flying start. Meetings were held in defiance of bans in towns and villages all over the state, and workers and

students went on strike. Beatings and arrests followed, as also a ban on the ceremonial hoisting of the national flag. In the subsequent days defying this ban by all means became a major form of this struggle. Students played an important role in this struggle, as did women.

The government intensified repression, and on Independence Day, 15 August 1947, Swamiji and his colleagues were arrested. The new development was an open encouragement by the administration to the Razakars, who were the storm-troopers of the communal organization, the Ittihad-ul-Muslimin, to act as a para-military force. Razakars were issued arms and let loose on unarmed crowds. They set up camps near rebellious villages and regularly carried out armed raids. The Nizam signed a Standstill Agreement with the Indian government, but this did nothing to relieve the repression.

13.7.7 Armed Resistance and the Intervention of Indian Army

The movement now took a different form, that of armed resistance. The State Congress set up camps on the State's borders, and organized raids on custom's outposts, the police stations and Razakar camps. But inside the State, and especially in the Nalgonda, Warangal and Khammam districts of Telengana, it was the Communists who took the lead in organizing armed resistance. They organized the peasants into *dalams*, gave the training in using arms, to attack the Razakars. They also attacked the landlords in many areas, killed a few and chased away many to the towns, and distributed their lands to the original owners, and those with little or no land.

The next stage was reached when the Indian Army attacked Hyderabad on 13 September 1947, secured the surrender of the Nizam, and integrated the State with the Indian Union. The Indian Army was welcomed by the people, including the peasants, as an army of liberation. There was great jubilation and the national flag was hoisted with great joy and sense of freedom.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Write on the nature of oppression prevalent in the State of Hyderabad.
- 2) Read the following statements and mark right (✓) or wrong (✗).
 - i) The Non-Cooperation Movement had no impact on the people of Hyderabad.
 - ii) The Bande Mataram movement helped in radicalizing the students of Hyderabad state.
 - iii) The Nizam did not want to join the Indian Union.

13.8 LET US SUM UP

The history of the struggles in the two States of Hyderabad and Rajkot brings out the similarities and difference between Princely India and British India. Many of the economic and social problems were similar, as for example the curse of landlordism, high taxes, illiteracy and social backwardness. But even these problems tended to be more acute in Princely State because of the autocratic powers of the Rulers. In the political sphere as well, the Indian states were even more backward and had much less of civil liberties and responsible government than British India.

As a consequence, the level of political consciousness and political activity in the Princely States was usually a decade or more behind that in British India. And even when political movements did emerge, there was very little scope for open expression of dissent and opposition. This usually resulted in pushing the political activity underground, and even forcing it to assume some violent forms. This happened not only in Hyderabad, but also in Patiala, Travancore, and the Orissa states. This gave an added advantage to Communists and other left groups who were willing to support the oppressed masses in the face of strong repression and felt lesser hesitation than other nationalists in taking recourse to violence. It is therefore not surprising that Communists played an important role in the movement in States where, as in Hyderabad, Travancore and Patiala, there was a move towards violent means of action.

The history of the freedom struggle in the Indian states also shows that the policy of the Indian National Congress towards the States was constantly changing in keeping with the situation in the country as a whole. As the movements gained in strength, the Congress was able to take clearer and bolder stand and by 1942, no distinction was maintained between the movement in Princely India and British India. In 1947-48, the clear-cut position taken by the Congress against all talk of independence by the States and its willingness to use force were important factors in preventing the Balkanization of the country and the subjugation and defect of the biggest vestiges of feudalism preserved by British colonialism.

13.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Your answer should refer to a general politicization of the people of the states as well as the spread of the ideas of democracy and civil liberties among them. See Section 13.2
- 2) You should emphasize the complexity of the Congress policy toward the princely states. See Section 13.4
- 3) See Sub-sec. 13.4.1
- 4) i) ✓ ii) ✗ iii) ✓

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) i) ✓ ii) ✓ iii) ✓
- 2) See Sub-sec. 13.6.5

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) You should refer to the oppression along economic as well as religious lines. See Sub-sec. 13.7.1
- 2) i) ✗ ii) ✓ iii) ✓

UNIT 14: MAHATMA GANDHI – HIS PERSPECTIVES AND METHODS*

Structure

- 14.0 Objectives
- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Gandhi's Struggle in South Africa
 - 14.2.1 Condition of Indians
 - 14.2.2 Campaign - I
 - 14.2.3 Campaign - 2
- 14.3 Gandhi's arrival in India
- 14.4 Entry into Indian Politics
 - 14.4.1 Champaran
 - 14.4.2 Kheda
 - 14.4.3 Ahmedabad
- 14.5 The Rowlatt Satyagrah
 - 14.5.1 Rowlatt Act
 - 14.5.2 Movement
 - 14.5.3 Importance
- 14.6 The Gandhian Ideology
 - 14.6.1 Satyagraha
 - 14.6.2 Non-Violence
 - 14.6.3 Religion
 - 14.6.4 Hind Swaraj
 - 14.6.5 Swadeshi
- 14.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 14.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

14.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you shall be able to:

- learn about the problems faced by immigrant Indians in South Africa,
- know about the efforts made by Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa to improve the condition of Indians residing there,
- understand the peasants' movement in Champaran and Kheda and the work of Gandhi amongst the peasants,
- know the role of Gandhi in the Ahmedabad Workers' strike and Rowlatt Satyagraha, and
- understand and explain the ideology of Mahatma Gandhi.

* Adopted from Unit 16 of EHI-01

14.1 INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi played a key role in transforming the content, ideology and range of Indian politics during the National Movement. With his entry into politics there opened a new phase of struggle. With the shift to mass mobilization he remained the dominant personality during the National Movement and played a crucial role in directing the struggle against British Imperialism. This Unit takes into account his struggle in South Africa and political activities in India till 1920. This is a period which could be described as the formative stage of Gandhi -- a stage in which he tried to understand Indian economic, social and political reality. It was during this period that he applied new forms of struggle. We also discuss in this Unit his ideology and how he applied that in political actions.

14.2 GANDHI'S STRUGGLE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi who came to be popularly known as the Mahatma, was born in a well-to-do Hindu traditional family of Porbandar in Kathiawar Gujarat on October 2, 1869. Gandhi went to England for his studies in 1881, offered the London Matriculation, and qualified for the Bar. This young barrister returned to India in 1891 and began practicing in the Bombay High Court. Then he shifted to Rajkot where petition-writing brought him a monthly income of about Rs. 300. In 1893, Gandhi sailed to Durban in connection with a legal case of Dada Abdulla and Co., an Indian firm, doing trade in South Africa. Gandhi had contracted to work there for a year only but he stayed there up to 1914 with two breaks in between. During his stay in South Africa Gandhi fought against racial discrimination which denied to the Indian community human rights necessary for leading a civilized life.

14.2.1 Condition of Indians

About 2 lakhs Indians lived in South Africa at a time when Gandhi had to fight for their cause. Most of the Indian Population there comprized indentured, freed labourers, and a few merchants with their clerks and assistants. The indentured labourers were treated as semi-slaves by the white planters. The rest suffered from various racial disabilities with regard to rights of citizenship, trade, and ownership of property.

They were also subjected to all kinds of indignities in their daily life:

- Every Indian, without any distinction, was called contemptuously a 'coolie' which meant a labourer.
- The Indians were not allowed to walk on footpaths or to be out at night without a permit.
- They were prohibited to travel in first and second class railway compartments, and were forced at times to travel on the footboard of trains.
- They were not permitted to enter hotels exclusively reserved for Europeans.

- In Transvaal, Indians were asked to do trade or reside in specific areas which had highly unhygienic surroundings and had no proper arrangements for light, water supply and drainage.
- Moreover, the ex-indentured labourers were asked to pay £3 as poll tax.

14.2.2 Campaign – 1

Gandhi himself experienced this racial discrimination immediately after reaching South Africa. In the court at Durban, Gandhi was ordered by the European magistrate to remove his turban. But Gandhi refused to do so and left the room in protest. While going to Pretoria, Gandhi was not allowed to travel first class and was asked to shift to the van compartment. When Gandhi refused to move away, he was forcibly thrown out. Eventually it was a proposed bill of the Natal Government to disfranchise Indians, which compelled Gandhi to launch his struggle in South Africa.

In a farewell party being given in his honour, Gandhi read a news item that the Natal legislature was going to pass the above bill. This infuriated Gandhi and he declared: 'this is the first nail into our coffin'. When Indian merchants asked Gandhi to help them fight this bill, he decided to postpone his return to India. The farewell party was converted into a committee to plan agitation against the bill.

In order to lend strength to his struggle, Gandhi's first endeavour was to infuse a strong sense of solidarity into the heterogeneous elements composing the Indian community of Natal. He formed an association in 1893 and named it 'Indian Natal Organization'. At the same time, Gandhi's effort was to give wide publicity to Indian cause with a view to securing support from the people and governments in India and England. In India, the Indian National Congress passed a resolution against the disfranchising bill. In England too, a section of the press and the public supported the Indian cause in South Africa.

About 400 Indians living in Natal submitted a petition against the bill. However the Natal legislature passed the bill and the Governor gave his assent to it. Gandhi sent a long petition signed by 10,000 Indians to the Colonial Secretary in England with the appeal that the Queen should not approve the bill. In view of strong opposition, the Colonial office in London vetoed the bill on the ground that it discriminated against the inhabitants of another part of the British Empire. But this did not dishearten the Europeans of Natal. They obtained their object by passing the bill in an amended form. According to the new bill: 'No native of countries (not of European origin) which had not hitherto possessed elective institutions founded on parliamentary franchise were to be placed on voters' list unless they obtained exception from Governor-General.' The amended bill was finally approved.

Gandhi continued his struggle against the racial discrimination by writing and producing articles and pamphlets in order to mobilize public support. This enraged many Europeans in South Africa. In 1896 when Gandhi returned to Natal with his family, a mob of 4000 Europeans assembled at the port to oppose him. Later on, some Europeans attacked him. Fortunately he was saved by the wife of a senior police official. This, however, did

not deter Gandhi from carrying on his campaign. In his next visit to India, he attended the Congress session at Calcutta and succeeded in piloting a resolution on the condition of Indians in South Africa. In 1902 he again returned to South Africa and now stayed there continuously for 12 years fighting against racial discrimination. A weekly *Indian Opinion* was started in 1903 which became a mouth-piece of Gandhi's struggle. In 1904, Gandhi, with a selected band of his associates, shifted to a place near Durban called Phoenix. Here they lived with utmost simplicity and led community life. The importance of Phoenix was that later all its inhabitants became the main participants in Gandhi's Satyagraha.

Gandhi had once told the British High Commissioner in South Africa: 'What we (Indians) want is not political power; but we do wish to live side by side with other British subjects in peace and amity, and with dignity and self respect'. The Transvaal government, however, came out with a bill in 1906 to further humiliate the Indians. According to this legislation every Indian -- man, woman or child above eight -- was required to register and to give finger and thumb impressions on the registration form. Whoever failed to register before a certain date would be guilty of an offence for which he could be punished or deported. At any time, an Indian could be asked to produce his registration certificate, and police officers were permitted to enter into an Indian's house to check his / her papers.

To raise a voice against this bill Gandhi organized a meeting at the Empire Theatre in Johannesburg. The passions of the people were greatly aroused and they were determined to fight to the last to keep their honour and dignity. Gandhi said:

There is only one course open to those like me to die but not to submit to the law. It is unlikely, but even if everyone flinched, leaving me alone to face the music, I am confident that I would not violate the pledge.

Finally, all the participants of the meeting took an oath with God as witness not to submit to this bill if it became law.

Despite vehement opposition by the Indians, the Transvaal legislature passed the Asiatic Registration Bill. Gandhi led a delegation to England with a view to appealing to the British government to veto the bill; but the effort failed and it was announced that the new law would take effect from July 1, 1907. Gandhi evolved a new technique known as Satyagraha (Truth force or insistence on Truth) to launch a struggle against the Act. An organization called Passive Resistance Association was formed which asked the Indian people to boycott the permit offices. Despite all efforts of the Transvaal government to exhort Indians to get themselves registered, only 519 had taken registration forms by November 30, 1907. Gandhi was sentenced to an imprisonment of two months for violating the registration law.

Gandhi agreed to meet General Smuts when a meeting was arranged by his friend Albert Cartright. At the meeting, General Smuts, Secretary for Colonies, assured Gandhi that the registration law would be repealed if Indians registered voluntarily. Gandhi accepted the proposal and convened a meeting of Indians to discuss this informal agreement. Gandhi was criticised by many Indians for accepting this agreement, for they did not

expect any justice from General Smuts. Several Indians even accused Gandhi of accepting a monetary gain from General Smuts. The next day, when Gandhi was going to registration office for voluntary registration, a Pathan attacked him for his alleged betrayal.

Smuts backed out from his words as he did not repeal the Asiatic registration law. The government declined to return the Indian's original applications for voluntary registration. Gandhi restarted his Satyagraha movement. He declared that Indians would burn their registration certificates and 'humbly take the consequences'. A large number of Indians consigned their registration certificates to flames. In the meantime Transvaal government enacted the Immigration law which aimed at excluding new immigrants from India. Gandhi announced that Satyagraha movement would also be directed against this law.

A number of prominent Indians living in Natal took part in Gandhi's Satyagraha movement and they were arrested. This time many of the Satyagrahis in the jail were forced to undergo hard labour. Gandhi was also treated badly in the Transvaal prison. But the oppressive policy of the Transvaal state failed to weaken Gandhi's resolve and his movement.

A small band of Satyagrahis continued to court imprisonment. Their families were given financial support by the Satyagraha association which was funded by the Indian National Congress, and many rich people in India like Ratan Tata, Nizam of Hyderabad, etc. Later on, the satyagrahis shifted to a place named as 'Tolstoy Farm'. Here people led a simple community life and were trained to cultivate all those things which were essential for a true satyagrahi.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Write about the problems faced by Indians in South Africa.
- 2) Which of the following statements are right or wrong? Mark (✓) or (✗).
 - i) Gandhi did not personally experience racial discrimination in South Africa.
 - ii) The Indian Natal Organization was formed to bring about a sense of solidarity among the Indians.
 - iii) About 4,000 Europeans supported Gandhi in Natal.
 - iv) Asiatic Registration Bill was introduced at the instance of Gandhi.

14.2.3 Campaign – 2

In 1913 another bombshell fell on the Indians when a Supreme Court judgement invalidated at a stroke all marriages which had not been performed according to Christian rites and registered by the Registrar of Marriages. In other words, all Hindu, Muslim and Parsi marriages became illegal and their children illegitimate. Gandhi made a strong representation against these implications of the judgement and asked for amendment of the law. Gandhi's strong and persistent protest in this case did not yield any immediate positive result. He intensified his struggle and Indian women whose honour was at stake, actively participated in the programme of action

devised by Gandhi. On November 6, 1913, Gandhi began a march across Transvaal border with a big contingent of Satyagrahis numbering 2037 men, 127 women and 57 children. This resulted in Gandhi's arrest. Despite the oppressive policy of the South African government, the Indians' struggle did not slacken. In India Gopal Krishna Gokhale toured throughout India to mobilize support for Gandhi's movement. Lord Harding, the Viceroy of India, demanded an impartial enquiry into the charges of atrocities levelled against the South African government. For this sympathetic attitude, Lord Harding was criticised in London and Pretoria.

Finally Smuts offered to make some compromise. Negotiations began and a package deal was signed which resolved the major problems of the Indians for which the Satyagraha was launched. The poll tax of £3 on freed labourers was abolished, marriages performed according to the Indian rites were declared legal, and domicile certificate bearing the holder's thumb imprint was now required only to enter the Union of South Africa. In this way the Satyagraha struggle which continued for about eight years was finally called off.

Gandhi was a 'lover of the British Empire' and had a deep sense of faith in 'British love of Justice and fair play' till 1906. Gandhi had helped the British government in Boer war (1899) by organizing an Indian Ambulance Corps. But soon Gandhi's disenchantment with the British began. He found that the British audience was growing deaf to his pleas. For him Satyagraha became the last alternative to redress the grievances of his compatriots. But this did not mean a total end of his loyalty to the Empire; his notion of loyalty was based on the hope that one day Britain might enact the principles which she subscribed to in theory.

The struggle in South Africa deeply influenced the life of Gandhi and our national movement in many ways. The technique of non-violent Satyagraha became the main weapon with which Gandhi and the Congress carried on the struggle against the British rule. Judith Brown (in *Gandhi Rise to Power, Indian Politics, 1915-22*, Cambridge, 1972), believes that the Satyagraha was merely a clever strategy designed by Gandhi in South Africa. But an overview of Gandhi's struggle in South Africa shows that Gandhi had developed an abiding faith in this method, which was not applied merely as a convenient tool in the given situation. Another important result of Gandhi's experiences in South Africa was the realization on his part of the necessity and possibility of Hindu-Muslim unity. Later on it became his deep conviction that the Hindu-Muslim unity was indispensable for launching a powerful struggle against the British rule. Above all, the struggle in South Africa created a new image of Gandhi that he was the leader of Indian people and not of any region or religious community. This worked as a decisive factor in Gandhi's entry into Indian politics.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Which of the following statements are right or wrong? Mark (✓) or (✗).
 - i) The 1913 Supreme Court Judgement legalized Indian marriages.

- ii) Gopal Krishan Gokhale mobilized support in India for Gandhi's Movement in South Africa.
 - iii) Gandhi had no faith in British Justice.
- 2) How did the struggle in South Africa influence our National Movement?

14.3 GANDHI'S ARRIVAL IN INDIA

Before returning to India Gandhi went to England. In the meantime, the First World War broke out. In this situation Gandhi considered it his duty to help the British government. He decided to organize an Ambulance Corps of the Indians. However, after some time due to differences with the British officials, Gandhi dissociated himself from it. He received a Kaiser-i-Hind Gold Medal in the New Year Honours list of 1915.

Gandhi reached India on January 9, 1915 and was given a warm welcome for his partial victory in South Africa. In India, the moderate leader Gokhale was his political Guru. He wanted Gandhi to join the Servants of India Society. But Gandhi could not become its member because some members of the society strongly opposed his entry. Gokhale had extracted a promise from Gandhi that he would not express any opinion on political matters for a year. Keeping his vow, Gandhi spent 1915, and most of 1916 touring India and visiting places as far as Sindh and Rangoon, Banaras and Madras. He also visited Rabindranath Tagore's Shantiniketan and the kumbh fair at Hardwar. All this helped Gandhi in the better understanding of his countrymen and the conditions in India. In 1915 Gandhi had set up an Ashram at Ahmedabad on the bank of the Sabarmati. Here Gandhi lived with his close associates who were being trained in the rigorous of moral and emotional life essential for a satyagrahi.

At this time Gandhi took very little interest in political matters, and mostly at meetings he spoke on his experiences in South Africa and the ideas he had formulated there. When Annie Besant approached Gandhi to join her in founding a Home Rule League he refused on the ground that he did not wish to embarrass the British government during the war. In 1915, he attended the Congress session, but avoided speaking on important issues like self-government. Gandhi welcomed the unity move of bringing back Tilak and others who were earlier excluded from the Congress. But at the same time Gandhi made it clear that he did not belong to any group. He attended the reunited session of the Congress but refused to speak on issues which would have meant aligning himself with a particular group. He spoke strongly on the indentured labourers recruitment and a resolution was passed for the abolition of this practice.

14.4 ENTRY INTO INDIAN POLITICS

Gandhi's entry into Indian politics occurred in the 1917-1918 period when he became involved in three local issues concerning with Champaran indigo farmers, the Ahmedabad textile workers and the Kheda peasants. In these disputes Gandhi deployed his technique of Satyagraha and his victories in all these cases ultimately paved the way for his emergence as an all India leader.

14.4.1 Champaran

Champaran in the Tirhut division of North Bihar had been seething with agrarian discontent for some time. European planters had established indigo farms and factories in Champaran at the beginning of the 19th century. By 1916-17, a large part of Champaran was held by three proprietors, the Bettiah, Ram Nagar and Madhuban estates. Bettiah was the largest estate consisting of over one and half thousand villages. Most of these villages were not managed by landlords but were leased to thikadars or temporary tenure holders, of whom the most influential group was that of European indigo planters. The basic issue of the trouble was the system of indirect cultivation whereby peasants leased land from planters, binding themselves to grow indigo each year on specified land in return for an advance at the beginning of the cultivation season.

Indigo was cultivated under the system called Tinkathia by which a tenant had to cultivate indigo at three-twentieths of his holdings, which generally constituted the best portion of the land. Although some slight modifications were made in Tinkathia system in 1908, it did not bring any material change in the degrading conditions of the tenants. Planters always forced them to sell their crop for a fixed and usually uneconomic price. At this time the demand of Indian indigo in the world market was declining due to the increasing production of synthetic indigo in Germany. Most planters at Champaran realized that indigo cultivation was no longer a paying proposition. The planters tried to save their own position by forcing the tenants to bear the burden of their losses. They offered to release the tenants from growing indigo (which was a basic condition in their agreement with planters) if the latter paid compensation or damages. Apart from this, the planters heavily inflated the rents and imposed many illegal levies on the tenants.

Gandhi took no interest in the case of indigo cultivators of Champaran when this question was discussed at the Lucknow session of the Congress in 1916 on the ground that he knew nothing about the matter. But Raj Kumar Shukul a peasant from Champaran, after strenuous efforts, prevailed upon Gandhi to visit Champaran. Gandhi arrived in Bihar and started making investigations in person. When he reached Motihari, the headquarters of the district of Champaran, he was served with an order to quit Champaran as he was regarded a danger to the public peace. Gandhi decided to disobey the order 'out of a sense of public responsibility.' He was immediately arrested and tried in the district court. But the Bihar government ordered the Commissioner and District Magistrate to abandon proceedings and grant to Gandhi the facilities for investigation. Gandhi was warned not to stir up trouble, but he was free to continue his investigations into the cultivators' grievances.

The Government appointed Champaran Agrarian Committee with Gandhi as one of its members. The committee unanimously recommended the abolition of Tinkathia system and many illegal exactions under which the tenants groaned. The enhanced rents were reduced, and as for the illegal recoveries, the committee recommended 25% refund. The major recommendations of the Committee were included in the Champaran Agrarian Act of 1917.

In this agitation, the chief supporters of Gandhi came from the educated middle class. For instance, Rajendra Prasad, Gorakh Prasad, Kripalani and some other educated persons from the cities worked as his close associates. Local Mahajans, traders and village Mukhtars (attorneys) also helped him. But it was the peasantry which gave him the real massive support. Gandhi approached them in a most simple and unassuming manner. In the countryside, he often walked on foot or travelled in a bullock cart. He came where ordinary people lived and talked about their fight in the language they understood.

14.4.2 Kheda

Gandhi's second intervention was for the peasants of Kheda in Gujarat where his method of Satyagraha came under a severe test. Most of Kheda was a fertile tract and the crop of food grains, tobacco and cotton produced here had a convenient and sizeable market in Ahmedabad. There were many rich peasant proprietors called Patidars. Besides, a large number of small peasants and landless labourers also lived in this region.

In 1917 excessive rain considerably damaged the Kharif crop in Kheda. This coincided with an increase in the price of kerosene, iron, cloth and salt because of which the cost of living for the peasantry went up. In view of the poor harvest, the peasants demanded the remission of land revenue. The 'revenue code' provided for a total remission if the crops were less than twenty five per cent of the normal production. Two Bombay barristers, V.J. Patel and G.K. Parakh made the enquiries and reached the conclusion that a major portion of the crop was damaged. But the government did not agree with their findings. After enquiry into the state of the crop in Kheda the Collector decided that there was no justification for the remission of land revenue. The official contention was that the agitation was not a spontaneous expression of the peasant discontent but was started by 'outsiders' or members of the Home Rule League and Gujarat Sabha of which Gandhi was the president at that time. The truth was that initiative for the agitation against payment of revenue came neither from Gandhi nor from the other Ahmedabad politicians; it was raised by local village leaders like Mohanlal Pandya of Kapadvanj taluka in Kheda.

Gandhi maintained that the officials had over-valued the crops and the cultivators were entitled to a suspension of revenue as a legal right and not as a concession by grace. After a lot of hesitation he decided to launch a Satyagraha movement on 22 March 1918. He inaugurated the Satyagraha at a meeting in Nadiad, and urged the peasants not to pay their land revenue. He toured villages and gave moral support to the peasants in refusing to pay revenue, and to expel their fear of the government authority.

Gandhi was also assisted in this struggle by Indulal Yajnik, Vallabhbhai Patel and Anasuya Sarabhai. The Satyagraha reached at its peak by 21 April when 2,337 peasants pledged not to pay revenue. Most of the Patidars took part in this Satyagraha. Some poorer peasants were coerced by the government into paying the revenue. Moreover, a good Rabi crop had weakened the case for remission. Gandhi began to realize that peasantry was on the verge of exhaustion. He decided to call off the agitation when the government issued instructions that land revenue should be recovered from only those who had

the capacity to pay and no pressure should be exerted on the genuinely poor peasants. This agitation did not have a uniform effect on the area. Only 70 villages out of 559 in Kheda were actually involved in it and it was called off after a token concession. But this agitation certainly helped Gandhi in broadening his social base in the rural Gujarat.

14.4.3 Ahmedabad

Gandhi organized the third campaign in Ahmedabad where he intervened in a dispute between the mill owners and workers. Ahmedabad was becoming the leading industrial town in Gujarat. But the millowners often faced scarcity of labour and they had to pay high wages to attract enough millhands. In 1917 plague outbreak made labour shortage more acute because it drove many workers away from Ahmedabad to the countryside. To dissuade the workers from leaving the town, the millowners decided to pay 'Plague Bonus' which was sometimes as high as 75% of the normal wages of the workers. After the epidemic was over, the millowners decided to discontinue the Plague Bonus. But the workers opposed the employers' move and argued that it was helping them to offset the war time rise in the cost of living. The millowners were prepared to give 20% increase but the workers were demanding a 50% raise in the wages in view of the price hike.

Gandhi was kept informed about the working conditions in Ahmedabad mills by one of the secretaries of the Gujarat Sabha. Gandhi knew Ambalal Sarabhai, a millowner, as the latter had financially helped Gandhi's Ashram. Moreover, Ambalal's sister Anasuya Sarabhai had reverence for Gandhi. Gandhi discussed the workers' problems with Ambalal Sarabhai and decided to intervene in the dispute. Both workers and millowners agreed to refer the issue to a board of arbitration consisting of three representatives of the employers and three of the workers with the British Collector as Chairman. Gandhi was included in the board as representing the workers. But, suddenly the millowners decided to withdraw from the board on the ground that Gandhi had no real authority or mandate from the workers, and that there was no guarantee that workers would accept the arbitration award. They declared the lockout of the Mills from 22 February 1918.

In such a situation, Gandhi decided to study the whole situation in detail. He went through a mass of data concerning the financial state of the mills and compared their wage rates with those of Bombay. Finally he came to the conclusion that the workers should demand 35% instead of 50% increase in their wages. Gandhi began the Satyagraha movement against the millowners. The workers were asked to take a pledge stating that they would not resume work without 35% increase and that they would remain law abiding during the lockout. Gandhi, assisted by Anasuya Sarabhai organized daily mass meetings of workers, in which he delivered lectures and issued a series of leaflets on the situation.

The millowners ended the lockout on 12 March and announced that they would take back the workers who were willing to accept 20% increase. On the other hand, Gandhi announced on 15 March that he would undertake a fast until a settlement was reached. Gandhi's object was to rally the workers who were thinking of joining the mills despite their pledge. The fast created tremendous excitement in Ahmedabad and the millowners were

compelled to negotiate. A settlement was reached on 18 March. According to this agreement, the workers on their first day would receive 35% raise, in keeping with their pledge. On the second day, they would get 20% increase, offered by the millowners. From the third day until the date of an award by an arbitrator, they would split the difference and receive 27 ½ % increase. Finally the arbitrator's award went in favour of the workers and 35% raise was given to them.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Discuss Gandhi's attitude towards the Peasants' Movement in Champaran.
- 2) Discuss the problems faced by workers in Ahmedabad.
- 3) Which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (✗).
 - i) Gandhi joined the Home Rule League.
 - ii) Gandhi did not take sides with any group in the Congress.
 - iii) Rajkumar Shukul brought Gandhi to Champaran.
 - iv) The peasants of Kheda had no grievances against the Government:

14.5 THE ROWLATT SATYAGRAHA

During the years 1917 and 1918 Gandhi took little interest in all India issues. He protested against internment of Annie Besant, and also demanded the release of Ali brothers (Mahomed Ali and Shaukat Ali) who were actively associated with the Khilafat issue. Unlike other political leaders of the time, he did not take active interest in the Reform proposals. But it was the British decision to pass 'Rowlatt Act' which forced him to plunge into national politics in a forceful manner.

14.5.1 Rowlatt Act

In 1917, the Government of India had appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Justice Sydney Rowlatt to investigate 'revolutionary crime' in the country and to recommend legislation for its suppression. After a review of the situation, the Rowlatt committee proposed a series of changes in the machinery of law to enable the British government to deal effectively with the revolutionary activities. In the light of these recommendations, the Government of India drafted two bills and presented them to the Imperial Legislative Council on 6 February 1919. The government maintained that the bills were 'temporary measures' which aimed at preventing 'seditious crimes'.

The new bills attempted to make war-time restrictions permanent. They provided trial of offences by a special court consisting of three high court judges. There was no provision of appeal against the decision of this court which could meet in camera and take into consideration evidence not admissible under the Indian Evidence Act. The bill also proposed to give authority to the government to search a place and arrest a person without a warrant. Detention without a trial for maximum period of two years was also provided in the bills. The bills were regarded by nationalist leaders as

an effort to conciliate a section of official and non-official white opinion which had resented Montagu's Reform proposals.

14.5.2 Movement

There was widespread condemnation of the bills in the whole country. Gandhi also launched his campaign against the bills. He said that the proposed powers were out of all proportion to the danger, particularly when the Viceroy possessed emergency powers of legislation by ordinance. He also stated that they were instruments of distrust and repression, nullifying the proposed reforms. Moreover, he opposed not just the content of the bills, but also the manner in which they were foisted in the country without regard to public opinion. He formed a Satyagraha Sabha on 24th February 1919 in Bombay to protest against the Rowlatt Bills. Its members signed a pledge proclaiming their determination "to refuse civilly to obey these laws (i.e., the Rowlatt Bills) and such other laws as a committee hitherto appointed may think fit and we (members) further affirm that in this struggle we will faithfully follow truth and refrain from violence to life, person or property." While launching the Satyagraha agitation against the Rowlatt bills Gandhi said: "It is my firm belief that we shall obtain salvation only through suffering and not by reforms dropping on us from the English -- they use brute force, we soul force."

Despite strong opposition in the whole country the government remained firm. The Council passed one of the bills, though all the non-official members voted against it. The Viceroy gave assent to the bill on March 21, 1919. A group of liberals like Sir D.E. Wacha, Surendranath Banerjee, T.B. Sapru and Srinivas Sastri opposed Gandhi's move of starting Satyagraha. Their reason for opposing the Satyagraha was that it would hamper the Reforms. Some of them also felt that the ordinary citizen would find it difficult to civilly disobey the Act. Annie Besant also condemned the Satyagraha on the grounds that there was nothing in the Act to resist civilly, and that to break Jaws at the dictate of others was exceedingly dangerous. But the younger and radical elements of Annie Besant's Home Rule League supported Gandhi. They formed the main cadre of Satyagraha movement in different parts of the country. In organizing this Satyagraha, Gandhi was also assisted by certain PanIslamic Leaders, particularly Abdul Bari of Firangi Mahal Ulema group at Lucknow, and some radical members of the Muslim League. M.A. Jinnah also opposed the Rowlatt Bill vehemently and warned the Government of the dangerous consequences if the government persisted in clamping on the people of India the "lawless law".

Gandhi inaugurated his Satyagraha by calling upon the countrymen to observe a day of 'hartal' when business should be suspended and people should fast and pray as a protest against the Rowlatt Act. The date for the 'hart I' was fixed for 30th March but it was changed to April 6th. The success of hartal varied considerably between regions and between towns and the countryside. In Delhi a hartal was observed on 30th March and ten people were killed in police firing. Almost in all major towns of the country, the hartal was observed on the 6th April and the people responded enthusiastically. Gandhi described the hartal a 'magnificent success. Gandhi intensified the agitation on 7th April by advising the satyagrahis to

disobey the laws dealing with prohibited literature and the registration of newspapers. These particular laws were selected because disobedience was possible for an individual without leading to violence. Four books including **Hind Swaraj** of Gandhi, which were prohibited by Bombay Government in 1910, were chosen for sale as an action of defiance against the government.

Gandhi left Bombay on the 8th to promote the Satyagraha agitation in Delhi and Punjab. But, as his entry in Punjab was considered dangerous by the government, Gandhi was removed from the train in which he was travelling at Palwal near Delhi and was taken back to Bombay. The news of Gandhi's arrest precipitated the crisis. The situation became tense in Bombay and violence broke out in Ahmedabad and Virangam. In Ahmedabad the government enforced martial law.

The Punjab region as a whole and Amritsar, in particular, witnessed the worst scenes of violence. In Amritsar, the news of Gandhi's arrest coincided with the arrest of two local leaders Dr. Kitchlew and Dr. Satyapal on 10th April. This led to mob violence and government buildings were set on fire, five Englishmen were murdered, and a woman assaulted. The civil authority lost its control of the city. On 13th April, General Dyer ordered his troops to fire on a peaceful unarmed crowd assembled at Jallianwala Bagh. Most of the people were not aware of the ban on meetings, and they were shot without the slightest warning by General Dyer who later on said that it was no longer a question of merely dispersing the crowd, but one of 'producing a moral effect.' According to official figures, 379 persons were killed but the unofficial accounts gave much higher figures, almost three times of the official figures. The martial law was immediately enforced in Punjab also on the 13 April (night).

14.5.3 Importance

The whole agitation against the Rowlatt Act shows that it was not properly organized. The Satyagraha Sabha concentrated mainly on publishing propaganda literature and collecting signatures on the Satyagraha pledge. The Congress as an organization was hardly in the picture at all. In most of the areas people participated because of their own social and economic grievances against the British rule.

Gandhi's Rowlatt Act Satyagraha provided a rallying point to the people belonging to different sections and communities. This aspect of the movement is quite evident from the massive participation of the people in Punjab, which Gandhi had not even visited before the movement. Broadly speaking, the movement was more intense in cities than in rural areas.

On 18th April Gandhi decided to call off the Satyagraha because of the widespread violence particularly in his home state in Ahmedabad city. He confessed publically that he committed a 'Himalayan blunder' by offering civil disobedience to people who were insufficiently prepared for the discipline of Satyagraha. The most significant result of this agitation was the emergence of Gandhi as an all India leader. His position became almost supreme in the Indian national movement and he began to exercise decisive influence on the deliberations of the Congress. At Amritsar session of the Congress in 1919, Gandhi proposed that the Indians should cooperate in

the working of Reforms despite some inadequacies. But in September 1920 Gandhi reversed his policy of cooperation and decided to launch the Non-Cooperation Movement.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Discuss the provisions of Rowlatt Act.
- 2) Discuss the response of Indians to Rowlatt Act.
- 3) Write a note on Jallianwala Bagh incident.

14.6 THE GANDHIAN IDEOLOGY

Before we discuss Gandhi's ideology it is necessary to mention that there were a number of influences which worked on Gandhi and helped him in evolving his philosophy. His autobiography makes it clear that the outlook of his parents and the socio-religious milieu of his native place left a profound influence on him. In particular, the values of Vaishnavism and the tradition of Jainism shaped his early thoughts. Moreover, some Hindu texts like the *Bhagavad Gita* also influenced him. The Gospels (especially the Sermon on the Mount) and the writings of Tolstoy, Thoreau and Ruskin also greatly influenced his thinking. Gandhi was primarily a man of action and his own experiences in life helped him more than his readings in evolving and shaping his ideology.

14.6.1 Satyagraha

The chief aspect of Gandhi's ideology was Satyagraha i.e. 'truth force'. As mentioned earlier, it was evolved by Gandhi in South Africa but after it had been fully developed it became a dominant element in India's struggle for freedom from 1919 onwards. For Gandhi, the Satyagraha was to be used so that by self-suffering and not by violence the enemy could be converted to one's own view. P. Sitaramayya aptly explains Satyagraha as follows:

It involves self-chosen suffering and humiliation for the resisters. If it is effective, it is so by working on the conscience of those against whom it is being used, sapping their confidence in the exclusive rightness of their cause making their physical strength important, and weakening their resolution by insinuating a sense of guilt for the suffering they have part in causing.

Gandhi made a distinction between the Satyagraha and passive resistance, when he wrote:

The latter (passive resistance) has been conceived as a weapon of the weak and does not exclude the use of physical force or violence for the purpose of gaining one's end; whereas the former (Satyagraha) has been conceived as a weapon of the strongest, and excludes the use of violence in any shape.

In fact, for Gandhi, Satyagraha was not merely a political tactic but part of a total philosophy of life and ideology of action. Gandhi believed that the search for truth was the goal of human life. Since no one could know the ultimate Truth one should never attack another's integrity or prevent another's search for truth.

14.6.2 Non-Violence

Non-Violence formed the basis of Satyagraha. Gandhi wrote:

When a person claims to be non-violent, he is expected not to be angry with one who has injured him. He will not wish him harm; he will wish him well; he will not swear at him; he will not cause him any physical hurt. He will put up with all the injury to which he is subjected by the wrong doer. Thus non-violence is complete innocence. Complete Non-Violence is complete absence of ill will against all that lives.

Gandhi emphasized that non-violent Satyagraha could be practiced by common people for achieving political ends. But some time Gandhi took a position which fell short of complete non-violence. His repeated insistence that even violence was preferable to a cowardly surrender to injustice sometimes created a delicate problem of interpretation. In 1918 Gandhi campaigned for military recruitment in the hope of winning concessions from the British government after the war which cannot be easily recruited with the doctrine of non-violence.

In practice, Satyagraha could assume various forms -- fasting, non-violent picketing, different types of non-cooperation and ultimately in politics, civil disobedience in willing anticipation of the legal penalty. Gandhi firmly believed that all these forms of Satyagraha were pure means to achieve pure ends. Gandhi's critics sometime take the view that through the technique of Satyagraha, Gandhi succeeded in controlling the mass movements from above. The dominant section in the peasantry and the business groups also found the Gandhian non-violent model convenient because they feared to lose if political struggle turned into uninhibited and violent social revolution. On the whole, the use of Satyagraha by Gandhi and the Congress in national movement brought different sections and classes of society together against the British rule.

14.6.3 Religion

Another important aspect of Gandhi's ideology was his attitude towards religion. Religion for Gandhi was not a doctrinal formulation of any religious system but a basic truth underlying all formal religions. Gandhi described religion as the struggle for Truth. His conviction was that religion could not be relegated to the realm of private opinion but must influence and permeate all activities of men. He was convinced that religion provided the fundamental basis for political action in India. This makes easy for us to explain that Gandhi took the Khilafat issue of the Muslims with a view to bringing them in the movement against the British government. Gandhi also used the religious idiom through concepts like 'Ram Raj' to mobilize people in the national movement. However, it cannot be denied that this use of religious idiom prevented Gandhi and the national movement under his leadership from giving effective challenge to a major category of division among the Indian people which can cause a fissure in our national unity in periods of crisis and strain, and tended to push into the background their internal differences and conflicts.

14.6.4 Hind Swaraj

The other important feature of Gandhian thought was the body of ideas which he illustrated in his book *Hind Swaraj* (1909). In this work, Gandhi pointed out that the real enemy was not the British political domination but the modern western civilization which was luring India into its stranglehold. He believed that the Indians educated in western style, particularly lawyers, doctors, teachers and industrialists, were undermining India's ancient heritage by insidiously spreading modern ways. He criticised railways as they had spread plague and produced famines by encouraging the export of food grains. Here he saw Swaraj or self rule as a state of life which could only exist where Indians followed their traditional civilization uncorrupted by modern civilization. Gandhi wrote:

Indian's salvation consists in unlearning what she has learnt during the past 50 years or so. The Railways, telegraphs, hospitals, lawyers, doctors and such like have to go and the so-called upper classes have to learn to live consciously and religiously and deliberately the simple life of peasant.

These ideas certainly look utopian and obscurantist in the context of the early twentieth century. But it seems that his ideas reflected adverse effects of 'modernization' under the colonial rule on the artisans and poor peasantry in the countryside.

Later on, Gandhi tried to give concrete shape to his social and economic ideas by taking up the programme of Khadi, village reconstruction and Harijan welfare (which included the removal of untouchability). It is true that these efforts of Gandhi could not completely solve the problem of the rural people, but it cannot be denied that this programme of Gandhi succeeded in improving their conditions to a certain extent and making the whole country conscious of the new need for its social and economic reconstruction.

14.6.5 Swadeshi

Gandhi advocated swadeshi which meant the use of things belonging to one's own country, particularly stressing the replacement of foreign machine made goods with Indian handmade cloth. This was his solution to the poverty of peasants who could spin at home to supplement their income and his cure for the drain of money to England in payment for imported cloth. It is interesting to find that despite his pronounced opposition to the influences of Western Industrial civilization Gandhi did not take a hostile view towards emerging modern industries in India. As noticed earlier, Gandhi had close relations with industrialists like Ambalal Sarabhai. Another noted industrialist G.D. Birla was his close associate after 1922. Gandhi believed in the interdependence of capital and labour and advocated the concept of capitalists being 'trustees' for the workers. In fact, Gandhi never encouraged politicization of the workers on class lines and openly abhorred militant economic struggles. As a matter of fact, all the major elements of Gandhi's ideology are based on a distrust of conflict in the notion of class interests. Gandhi always emphasised the broad unity that can and must be achieved on the basis of a larger objective among people divided on account of class or any other category.

Check Your Progress 5

- 1) What do you understand by the concept of Satyagraha as propagated by Gandhi?
- 2) Discuss the message which Gandhi conveyed through his book **Hind Swaraj**.

14.7 LET US SUM UP

We have seen in this unit how Gandhi launched a struggle against the racist regime in South Africa. With his entry into Indian politics, there started a new era of mass mobilization. It was by taking up regional issues that he emerged as a national leader. It is necessary to mention that there have always been strong differences of opinion on the relevance of Gandhi's ideology. But the fact remains that his ideas deeply influenced the course of our struggle against the British rule and determined its major thrust and direction.

14.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Sub-sec. 14.2.1
- 2) i) ✗ ii) ✓ iii) ✗ iv) ✗

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) i) ✗ ii) ✓ iii) ✗
- 2) See Sub-sec. 14.2.3

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See Sub-section 14.4.1
- 2) See Sub-sec. 14.4.3
- 3) i) ✗ ii) ✓ iii) ✓ iv) ✗

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) See Sub-sec. 14.5.1
- 2) See Sub-sec. 14.5.2
- 3) See Sub-sec. 14.5.3

Check Your Progress 5

- 1) See Sub-sec. 14.6.1
- 2) See Sub-sec. 14.6.4

UNIT 15: NATIONALISM AND CULTURE: NATIONALIST LITERATURE*

Structure

- 15.0 Objectives
- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 Literature in the 19th Century
 - 15.2.1 Bengali
 - 15.2.2 Gujarati
 - 15.2.3 Hindi
- 15.3 Literature in the 20th Century
- 15.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 15.5 Key Words
- 15.6 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

15.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit informs you about the contribution of literature in the process of the emergence of nationalist consciousness in India. After reading this Unit, you will:

- become familiar with the literary contribution of the leading writers in various Indian languages,
- understand the political content of these literary works, and
- learn the peculiar characteristics of this political content.

15.1 INTRODUCTION

Literature played a significant role in the struggle for India's freedom. Beginning with the 19th century, when nationalist ideas began to emerge and literature in different Indian languages entered its modern phase, more and more writers began to employ literature for patriotic purpose. Most of them, in fact, believed that because they belonged to an enslaved country, it was their duty to create literature of a kind that would contribute to the all-round regeneration of their society and pave the way for national liberation. Even when freedom from the British rule had not yet emerged as a programme of any major political organization or movement, and the Indian National Congress was concerned only with constitutional agitation, the realization of subjection and the need for freedom had begun to be clearly expressed in literature. With the passage of time, as the freedom movement began to attract larger sections of the people, and the demand for freedom became more insistent, literature strengthened the growing idealism of the people. But it also did something more. Besides inspiring people to make all kinds of sacrifices for the cause of the country's liberation, literature also brought out

* Adopted from Unit 23 of EHI-01

the weaknesses of the nationalist movement and its leaders. In the following sections we shall take a look at both of these aspects.

15.2 LITERATURE IN THE 19TH CENTURY

It will not be possible for us to consider literature in all the major Indian languages. For purposes of convenience we shall confine ourselves mainly to three languages: Hindi, Gujarati and Bengali. We shall notice that similar sentiments and ideas found manifestation in the literature of all three languages. This is a striking similarity that is reflected in the literature of all the Indian languages. And this shows a broad identity of sentiments and ideas in relation to the freedom movement all over the country.

It was mainly during the latter half of the 19th century that political associations and national consciousness along modern lines emerged in different parts of the country. The foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 was, in a way, the culmination of these earlier developments. The literature produced during this period, as also later, was not only influenced by national consciousness; in turn it also influenced the character and pattern of national consciousness.

15.2.1 Bengali

In Bengali, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya (1838-94) was one of the powerful intellectuals who made it his mission to understand the problems of his society and country. His novels were intended to inspire their countrymen with patriotic sentiments. Bankim also wrote essays that compelled his readers to think about the causes of the existing wretched state of the country. He even brought out a journal - **Bangadarsan** – with a view to educating and inspiring as many of his countrymen as possible. His essays were often written in a humorous and sarcastic style that entertained the reader even if it compelled him or her to think. The combination of entertainment and education became even more effective in the novels.

Though he wrote social novels also, it was largely through his historical romances that Bankim broadcast the message of patriotism. He combined history and fancy to create characters who were only too willing to make any sacrifice -- even lay down their lives, in their fight against injustice, oppression and subjection. This combination became particularly effective in the **Anandamath** (1882). With its celebrated song, 'Vande Mataram', the **Anandamath** inspired generations of patriots, and the revolutionaries truly treated it as their gospel.

There was, however, a kind of pro-Hindu bias in Bankim's conception of nationalism. This even assumed the form of an anti-Muslim feeling when, as in the **Anandamath**, the fight shown was against Muslim oppressors. This aspect of Bankim's nationalism has been the subject of serious scholarly debate. What is important for us, in this context, is to realize that the kind of bias we notice in Bankim is not confined to him alone. Nor is it confined to that group of patriots or nationalists whom our text-books describe as revivalists or religious nationalists. This is a bias which, more or less, is reflected in a cross section of nationalists. We may also note that this bias is not part of the dominant ideology of Indian nationalism that emerged

during the later 19th century. In other words, while an anti-Muslim bias got betrayed time and again, it was not consciously put forward as part of the nationalist ideology.

We cannot think of a more convincing example than that of R.C. Dutt (1848-1909). Remembered as one of the pioneers of what is described as 'economic nationalism' for his powerful exposure of the country's exploitation under British rule, Dutt was heavily westernized in his dress, habits and thoughts. This was only natural in view of his position as a member of the Indian Civil Service which was virtually monopolized by Britishers. But despite his westernization, Dutt remained a Hindu who admired and respected his traditions and culture. It is this aspect of his personality that led him - the author of *The Economic History of India* - to write the *History of Civilization in Ancient India* and translate the *Rig Veda*, *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. This he was prompted to do by what he termed his 'literary patriotism'. The same literary patriotism influenced the choice of his first four novels, all of which are historical romances.

Today the role of Dutt's literary writings in the development of Indian nationalism may have been forgotten. But in his own life-time, and a little later also, these inspired people in Bengal and in other parts of the country as much as did his economic writings. There is, thus, a cultural complement of Dutt's economic nationalism. In fact, the very distinction between cultural nationalism and economic nationalism is an artificial and arbitrary distinction. Indian nationalism, like nationalism in other parts of the world, was a comprehensive force that appealed to people at more than one plane. It appealed to their idealism as also to their material interests. In the process it affected different aspects of their lives as social beings: as members of a professional group or economic class; as members of a caste, sect or religion; as members of a linguistic group or region; as man or woman.

Coming back to Dutt's historical novels or romances, there is betrayed in these a pronounced anti-Muslim bias. It seems that with the passage of time Dutt came to realize the political dangers of a conception of nationalism in which that part of India's past was remembered that entailed a confrontation between Hindus and Muslims. For, later on he moved away from historical novels of this kind and concentrated on social novels. It is significant to note that, in spite of such a realization, when he idealized the ancient Indian past in his social novel **Samaj** (1893), he unselfconsciously revealed a conception of Indian nationalism in which Hindus were seen as the key figures. But to say this is not to suggest that Dutt was a communalist. What his example is meant to highlight is the fact that, given the circumstances of later 19th century colonial India, Indian nationalism necessarily contained undertones that were capable of emerging, as a result of other politico-economic factors, as communal tendencies. It means that even the greatest of creative writers should not be seen as individual figures. They should, rather, be understood as representative figures who gave expression to the underlying forces and tendencies of their times. Hence, there is an element of similarity in otherwise such dissimilar personalities as Bankim and R.C. Dutt.

We have dwelt on this aspect of Indian nationalism at some length because it becomes visible to us only when we seek to understand it in terms of contemporary literature. It is an aspect that does not correspond to the standard text-book picture of Indian nationalism where it is neatly divided into secular and communal (or religious), economic and cultural, and moderate and extremist. There is reason to modify this stereotypical image of Indian nationalism and to see it as an integrated, though complex, whole.

15.2.2 Gujarati

Let us now turn to Govardhanram Madhavram Tripathi (1855-1907), one of the makers of modern Gujarati literature, who wrote the four parts of his famous novel, *Sarasvatichandra*, over a period of no less than fourteen years (1887-1901). Designed as an epic in prose, and written professedly to inspire and educate the reading classes of Gujarat about the destiny of their country, *Sarasvatichandra* deals with the multi-faceted problems of India in bondage and lays down possible lines of action for patriotically inclined Indians. It laments the loss of India's independence. At the same time, however, it welcomes the fact that of all the nations it is the British who are ruling over this country. With their inherent sense of justice and love of democracy, they would prepare India for self-rule. While Govardhanram placed trust in British justice, he also emphasized that if the Indians did not look after their own interests, even the British would feel tempted to completely neglect their welfare.

We may today find it strange that Indians should have trusted the British like this. Still this faith was an essential part of the Indian attitude towards the colonial connection. In fact, it was even related to the will of God who, it was argued, had placed India under British tutelage. In a way most of us share this attitude when we trace, to give just one example, the making of modern India to the influences released by the British rulers, particularly English education. Ironically enough, even the emergence of Indian nationalism is seen, to a large extent, as a product of western influences. This being the case, we should not find it difficult to understand why the early Indian nationalists welcomed British rule although they were not blind to its exploitative aspect.

We may do well, at this stage in our discussion, to follow the reflection of this dual attitude towards British rule in later 19th century Indian literature. Let us begin with a very perceptive statement made by Vishnu Krishna Chiplunkar (1850-82). Commenting on British rule, he wrote in his *Nibandhamala* about the way English educated Indians had been affected by it: 'Crushed by English poetry, our freedom has been destroyed.' In this comment 'English poetry' stands for English education and all those intellectual influences by means of which the faith was instilled among Indians that British rule was for their welfare and the result of divine dispensation. Chiplunkar had the insight to understand this subtle and invisible dimension of the British hold over India. So powerful, indeed, was this hold that in spite of his own insight Chiplunkar himself subscribed to the divine dispensation theory and enumerated the advantages that India was deriving as a result of the British colonial connection; significantly enough, he did this in the very essay in which he had talked of the destruction of India's freedom by 'English poetry'.

15.2.3 Hindi

We shall now move on to Hindi literature and refer to Bharatendu Harishchandra (1850-85) who was largely instrumental in ushering the modern phase of Hindi literature. Despite his early death Bharatendu produced a vast mass of literature and wrote in a variety of forms such as poetry, drama and essays. He also brought out a number of journals in order to enlighten the people about the affairs of their country and society.

A large proportion of Bharatendu's literature is concerned with the question of subjection. For example, in a public lecture on the promotion of Hindi (1877) he asked the people the following poignant question: 'How come, as human beings we became slaves and they (the British) kings?' This was a question that touched the very essence of India's political situation, and did so in such a simple and moving manner that even the most ordinary men and women could understand it. This, however, was a question that could drive among people a feeling of impotence in the face of their all-powerful 'kings'. Bharatendu, consequently, inspired them with yet another question which was intended to remove their despair. 'How long', he asked, 'would you suffer these sorrows as slaves?' He went on, in this lecture, to warn against the paralyzing tendency of depending on foreigners for the country's salvation. He spurred the people on to set aside their fear and mutual differences, and to stand up to uphold the dignity of their language, religion, culture and country. This lecture, it may be mentioned, was delivered in the form of very simple couplets that could touch the very core of their listeners and readers.

Bharatendu, thus, employed poetry to carry to the people the message of patriotism. He even used popular and conventional poetic, and other literary, forms for the purpose. For example, he wrote bhajans that were intended to describe the state of the country. In this manner he could enlarge the field of his appeal and message. He also advised his contemporaries to make use of popular literary forms. This, it may be noted, was a development that reached its climax during the heyday of the freedom movement when popular songs were composed and sung during *prabhat pheries* and public rallies. Many of these songs the British Indian government proscribed, though without much success.

One advantage of such compositions was that the reality of foreign rule could be brought out in an idiom that even the illiterate millions could immediately grasp and feel inspired by. No understanding of the intricacies of political economy with its theories of imperialism was required to know what the British presence in India meant. To give just a couple of examples, we know that 'drain of wealth' constituted an important item in the nationalist critique of British rule. It was a theme that generated a fierce controversy, and the controversy was often conducted in a language and with the help of facts and figures that were by no means easy to grasp. And yet 'drain' became in course of time something that the people had little difficulty in understanding. In the popularization of 'drain' a significant part was played by literature. Thus, in his public lecture on the promotion of Hindi, Bharatendu singled out 'drain' as the chief evil of foreign rule - in fact, the very reason why foreign rule existed - and said in everyday language:

People here have been fooled by the power and trickeries of the machine. Everyday they are losing their wealth and their distress is increasing. Unable to do without foreign cloth, they have become the slaves of foreign weavers.

Bharatendu uses the simple term 'foreign weavers' to denote the powerful industrial interests in Manchester and relates the deeper forces of British imperialism with the life around common men and women in India. He translates into everyday consciousness the two symbols - Manchester and 'drain' - of the exploitative relationship between Britain and India. Thus he could bring out the stark reality of this relationship in a **mukari**, which is a conventional poetic form containing only four lines. In what, strikingly enough, he described as a 'mukari for modern times', Bharatendu provided the following description of 'drain':

Secretly sucking the whole juice from within,
Smilingly grasping the body, heart and wealth;
So generous in making promises,
O friend: Is it your husband? No, the Englishman.

The choice of popular forms was not confined to poetry alone. In some of his plays, too, Bharatendu made use of conventional and well-known forms and stories. For example, his *Andher Nagari Chaupatta Raja* uses a popular tale – a tale that was in common circulation in different parts of the country – to bring out the arbitrary and oppressive character of British rule. While the political message is clearly conveyed, the reader is all along entertained. Humour is effectively utilized for political ends. As for humour, Bharatendu managed to entertain his readers even in otherwise serious writings. In the *Bharat Durdasha* (1880), which is his most direct political play, Bharatendu introduced a number of funny sequences or sentences.

What Bharatendu said about the country's subjection in his lecture on the promotion of Hindi recurs again and again in many of his writings. But this is often accompanied by generous praise for British rule. Thus his *Bharat Durdasha*, despite its strong patriotic thrust, accepts that with the establishment of British rule the regeneration of the country has been facilitated. Similarly, in the *Bharat-Janani* (1877), another of his political plays, Bharatendu admits that if the British had not come to administer India, the country's ruin would have gone on uninterrupted.

It may be stressed that this duality of attitude towards the British connection is not peculiar to Chiplunkar or Bharatendu. They are merely examples meant to indicate the general pattern of the educated Indian response to the west in general and British rule in particular. With the passage of time, the realization of subjection and its disastrous consequences tended to become dominant and the appreciation of the boons offered by the British began to decline. But until the last, Indians could not shed off the tendency to admire aspects of the British connection.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (✗)?
 - i) The need for freedom was expressed in literature, earlier than the political organizations.

- ii) There was a pro-Hindu bias in Bankim Chandra's historical novels.
 - iii) Bharatendu Harishchandra praised the British in his writing.
 - iv) The 19th century literature adopted a dual approach towards the British rule.
- 2) Answer the following questions:
- i) Who brought out the journal *Bangadarshan*?
 - ii) Which year did Bankim write *Anandmath*?
 - iii) Who is remembered as a pioneer of Economic Nationalism?
 - iv) Who wrote the play *Andher Nagari Chaupatta Raja*?
- 3) Match the following as in the text
- | | | | |
|--------|-------------------------|---|---------------------|
| i) A | Anand Math | A | Literary Patriotism |
| ii) B | Bharat Durdasha | B | Mukari |
| iii) C | R. C. Dutt | C | Political Play |
| iv) D | Bhartendu Harishchandra | D | Historical Romance |

15.3 LITERATURE IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Until about the First World War (1914-18) and the Russian Revolution (1917) the general trend of the discussion of freedom and subjection followed, by and large, the pattern that had emerged during the later decades of the 19th century. Freedom was seen as the natural condition to which any people should aspire. India could be no exception to this rule. Instead of specific grievances and specific concessions, an integrated critique of British rule evolved over the years and freedom seemed the only solution. What this freedom would mean in concrete terms, however, did not become the dominant theme of discussion during this long phase. It is not that issues like poverty and exploitation within the Indian society -- as against the exploitation by the British -- did not figure in Indian literature before the 1914-18 war. They often did. Indian literature of this period offers many examples of moving descriptions of the poverty of peasants. Perhaps the most outstanding of these examples is provided by *Chhama Atha Guntha* (1897) -- Six Bighas of Land -- a novel by Fakirmohan Senapati, one of the makers of modern Oriya literature. These moving descriptions are at times accompanied by radical statements in relation to the existing pattern of social organization. For example, Radhacharan Goswami (1859-1923) a leading Hindi writer, was moved by rural poverty to suggest, as early as 1883, that land should not belong to the government or the zamindar but to the peasant who tilled it. Such radicalism, however, remained confined to sentiments. It was not presented as part of a carefully worked out plan of social reorganization. Nor was it integrated with the question of national freedom.

Besides economic inequality and exploitation within the Indian society, the social inequality and oppression based on, caste was also discussed at times. But this, too, remained more a sentimental issue.

After the First World War, however the situation changed fairly rapidly. The issue no longer was simply whether India should become free. That had to be ensured, at any cost. The real point of debate now tended to relate to the actual content and meaning of freedom. Freedom for whom? Surely, freedom could not merely mean the replacement of British with Indian masters. As Rupmati, a character in Premchand's short story, 'Ahuti', says: 'Swaraj does not mean that Govind sits in John's place.' She asks: 'Will the same evils, for the removal of which we are' exposing our lives to danger, be welcomed simply because those evils have turned swadeshi and are no longer videshi?' Her preference is clear. 'If even after swaraj is attained', she says, 'property enjoys the same power and the educated people remain as selfish as before, then I would rather not have swaraj.'

Indian literature during the last thirty years of the freedom struggle became increasingly concerned with the momentous question of the objectives freedom was expected to serve. It, consequently, turned more and more to the ideological dimension of the freedom struggle. In the process, it not only debated the nature of free India but also closely followed the character of the freedom movement. After all, it could not turn a blind eye to the ideals and reality of the movement -- with its divisions and leaders -- if it cared to bring about a certain kind of society after the country had won independence. If the programmes, ideals and leaders of the movement were not of the right kind, it was impossible to have the desired type of free India. The significance of this concern is highlighted by the following comment in Premchand's novel *Ghaban* (1931). Devidin, an ordinary man with marked nationalist sympathies, tells the leaders: 'If you run after luxuries even when you are not in power, you will eat away the people when it is your rule.'

The work of Premchand (1880-1936), the great Hindi-Urdu novelist and a confirmed nationalist, amply illustrates the anxiety about the disturbing side of the nationalist struggle. In two of his major novels, *Rangbhumi* (1925) and *Karmabhumi* (1932), the underlying selfishness of the educated, nationalist leaders is clearly exposed. But this is a selfishness that is disguised with humanism and radicalism. It is so well disguised that these leaders delude themselves that everything they are doing is in the interest of the country and the people; even their compromises and secret dealings with the rulers are in the interest of the nationalist movement. But the most depressing view of nationalist politics is provided in *Godan* (1936), which is Premchand's masterpiece and one of the greatest Indian novel. In *Rangbhumi* and *Karmabhumi* the nationalist characters, with all their failings, finally emerge as martyrs. They realize their weaknesses and make proper amends. As for *Rangbhumi*, its blind hero, Surdas, who is cast in the mould of Mahatma Gandhi, represents an aspect of nationalist politics and leadership for which Premchand has nothing but respect and admiration. *Godan* offers no such redeeming features. Through at least three characters -- Rai Saheb, Khanna and Pandit Omkarnath -- it shows the role of money and petty material considerations in nationalist politics. Rai Saheb, a zamindar, joins the satyagraha, and then goes back to the politics of the legislative council and unscrupulously uses money in the bargain. Similarly, Khanna, who is a banker, businessman and petty industrialist rolled into

one, does his bit during the Civil Disobedience Movement, and after that starts making money by means that are more foul than fair. And Omkarnath is a journalist who can breathe fire in his editorials. But this fire-breathing nationalist is basically a self-seeker for whom nationalism is matter of self-promotion.

Exploitation being its basic theme, *Godan* portrays a sad and cheerless world. Here Premchand is not carried away by sentimentalism. He does not offer any easy solutions. The 'villains' in *Godan* do not suddenly undergo a change of heart. In fact, there are no villains in this novel. It is not the wickedness of individuals that leads them to oppress and exploit their poorer fellow human beings. Exploitation is the result of certain socio-economic and political arrangements within the society. The oppressed classes will not have a better deal if those belonging to the dominant classes are individually good and kind persons. Rai Saheb, himself a kind-hearted zamindar, has understood this when he says: 'I cannot set aside my self-interest.' He adds: 'I want that my class should be forced to give up its selfishness through the pressure of the administration and morality.' What, naturally, Rai Saheb cannot see is that the real solution is not to bring pressure upon his class - the zamindars -- but to abolish the class and make every kisan a zamindars. The whole logic of *Godan* points towards this solution; although, being a powerful work of fiction, it does not prescribe solutions.

What *Godan* further shows is that the zamindars, as an exploiting class, do not exist in isolation. They are, in reality, part of a vast and complex network of exploitation in which businessmen, industrialists and zamindars together have a vested interest. Of course, this network is supported by the existing political order. It is not that there are no antagonisms among these various moneyed interests. But, despite their clashes, they possess the sense to put up a joint front against those who threaten their supremacy. That is how the peasants and the workers continue to be oppressed and exploited.

Godan thus brings out, in all its intricacy, the duality of class and nation. Freedom for the nation is essential. But it should not be the freedom of the dominant classes to exploit the wretched of the society. Nationalism should not be permitted to disguise, in the name of patriotic idealism, the interests of the few at the expense of the many.

In the understanding of the duality of class and nation the growing influence of socialist ideas in the wake of the Russian Revolution performed an important function. Thus in *Premashram*, a novel that he started writing in the year after the Russian Revolution, Premchand showed Balraj, an angry young villager, being inspired by the example of Russia. Calling upon his fellow villagers to fight against injustice and oppression, Balraj tells them that in Russia 'the cultivators have become the rulers'.

While the duality between class and nation was seen, it was not easy to understand how the duality could be resolved. Considering that India was struggling against a firmly entrenched imperialist power, a united front of all the classes within the Indian society had to be forged. And this meant at least some compromise with vested interests. Moreover, there was also the question of ideological preferences. If the influence of socialist ideas suggested the way of class interests being resolved by conflict, Gandhian

influence pointed towards trusteeship and change of heart. If Premchand's work is representative of his times - as, indeed, it is -- no clear ideological choices could be made during the freedom struggle.

For example, while he was writing *Godan*, a novel that showed the futility of relying on individual goodness and change of heart, Premchand wrote a letter that goes against the very logic of this great novel. 'Revolution', he said, 'is the failure of saner methods.... It is the people's character that is the deciding factor. No social system can flourish unless we are individually uplifted. What fate a revolution may lead us to is doubtful. It may lead us to worse forms of dictatorship denying all personal liberty. I do want to overhaul, but not to destroy.' Like most of his educated contemporaries, Premchand felt torn between two opposing ideological positions, without having been able to make up his mind one way or the other.

It may be noticed in this context that many scholars have tried to argue that after the initial Gandhian influence Premchand was able to finally opt for a radical progressive position. As against these scholars there are others who maintain that until the end Premchand remained a Gandhian. Both these attempts simplify a complex historical situation. By way of confirmation we may offer the example of the literature produced by the 'Kallol' group in Bengal, a group that had among its members the famous radical nationalist poet, Qazi Nazarul Islam. Progressive and realistic, these writers consciously moved away from the life of the privileged sections of society and wrote about the oppressed and the deprived. They raised the cry of revolt much more vocally than Premchand. And yet they remained bound to the hidden pulls of their own social background and failed to present a clear cut ideological position.

Also important, in this context, is the example of Saratchandra Chattopadhyaya (1876-1938) the famous Bengali novelist who wrote so feelingly and realistically about the cheerless existence of women and questioned some of the cherished values of middle class society. Like Premchand, Saratchandra's sympathies were with the Congress. He admired Gandhi and had close personal relations with Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das. Unlike Premchand, Saratchandra was even a member of the Congress. And yet he wrote *Pather Dabi* (1926), a novel that idealized those who followed the path of revolutionary violence to liberate the country. This novel, it may be noted, was banned by the government. This contradiction is striking enough: an admirer of Gandhi and a member of the Congress praising the path of violence. Saratchandra shows further contradiction with regard to his political position. Between 1929 and 1931 was serialized his *Bipradas*. These were the years when the Congress adopted Purna Swaraj as its goal and launched the Civil Disobedience Movement. Written during these dramatic years, *Bipradas* presents the picture of a zamindar who is worshipped by his raiyat to such an extent that they -- the raiyat -- refuse to respond to the appeals of the nationalists.

Reflecting these diametrically opposite pulls, literature should persuade us to have a new look at the marking of our recent history. It should persuade us of the need to go deeper than the carefully formulated programme and

pronouncement of political parties and other organizations. For beneath these consciously stated positions lay pulls and prejudices of which people were not always conscious. Thus it happened that the author of *Godan* was himself not fully aware of the revolutionary logic of his novel, otherwise he could not have so emphatically argued against the idea of revolution in the letter that we have already mentioned. Thus, again, it happened that when the Progressive Writers' Association was formed in order to promote progressive ideas through literature, Premchand was requested to preside at its first session (1936) although, as we have seen, he was unwilling to support the idea of class war. It is not sound history to assume that because Premchand presided over the first session of the Progressive Writers' Association, he must have been nothing but progressive. And what applies to individuals -- in this case Premchand -- applies to movements also. For, no movement can be independent of its members. It can lay down neat principles and objectives. It can also isolate itself formally from other movements and organizations in the society. But it cannot ensure that its followers actually share in their entirety its principles and objectives. The individuals constituting a movement remain exposed to other influences as well.

Literature of the last thirty years of the freedom struggle tells us that during these momentous years, people were increasingly becoming aware of socio-economic issues even as they were being fired by the zeal for independence. They were coming under the influence of different, even opposing, ideological currents. In fact, they did not always realize the contradictory nature of these ideological positions. We have dwelt at length on Premchand because both in his life and in his writings we are able to follow the working of these contradictory influences and the inability of even the most sensitive and intelligent of men and women to make a clear choice. If Premchand, like most of his contemporaries, reveals both Gandhian and socialist influences, if he paints a dismal picture of the nationalist movement and also provides stirring accounts of the same movement, the task of the historian is not to assume that only one of these conflicting positions can be the real position. Instead, historians should see the conflicting positions as forming parts of a complex whole. Of course, they should see in these unresolved ideological conflicts the working of socio-economic forces as well. As is clear from the description in *Karmabhumi*, *Ranghbumi* and *Godan*, contemporary literature provides the historian with insights for seeing the dialectical operation of ideology and material interests.

For understanding the complex interplay of forces that went into the making of our freedom struggle we may turn profitably to the pre-1947 writings of the great Bengali novelist, Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay (1898-1971), especially his *Dhatridevata*, *Ganadevata* and *Panchagram*. *Dhatridevata* is a semi-autobiographical novel and may be seen as a kind of preparation for *Ganadevata* and *Panchagram* which are in reality one novel in two parts. Possessing epical dimensions, *Ganadevata* and *Panchagram* have as their central theme the disintegration of village society under the impact of exploitation and industrialization. Tarasankar is not interested in individuals.

His concern is the community, the people. Naturally, the freedom movement too affects the life of the community. The Congress, the Muslim League and the revolutionaries appear on the scene; the first two more than the third. We get a view of larger historical forces from below. Idealism, power, material interests are mixed in different proportions as they affect the destiny of the people in the five villages that provide the locales of *Ganadevata* and *Panchagram*. However, just as *Godan* with its two villages and *Ranghbumi* with just one village deal with the tragic fate of rural society as a whole, through these five villages Tarasankar tells us at great length and with acute sensitivity about India during the freedom struggle from the vantage point of the deprived and the dispossessed in her villages.

With all his sensitivity and objectivity however, Tarasankar betrays in these three novels the kind of ideological flux that we have been talking about. He writes very feelingly about the growing burden of oppression on the poorer sections of the village society. He also describes their struggles against this oppression; a struggle that is doomed to fail not only because of the power of the dominant groups but also because of the large reality of industrialization against which the village community life and economy simply cannot survive. But this unmistakable sympathy for the poor and the oppressed is accompanied by an equally unmistakable sympathy for the culture that was associated with the order that is now disintegrating. In other words, Tarasankar reveals in these novels the coexistence of an implicit ideological radicalism with an implicit social conservatism.

It is not that contemporary literature does not provide instance of working in which clear ideological choices are shown. No less a literary giant than Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) condemned revolutionary violence in the clearest possible terms in his novel *Char Adhyay* (1934). But then Tagore was not at his creative best in this novel. He was if anything, writing a sort of political manifesto in the form of fiction. Similarly, Ramanlal Vasantlal Desai (1892-1954), perhaps the most popular Gujarati novelist of the period, showed in his *Divyachakshu* (1932) the complete conversion of its revolutionary hero, Arjun, from faith in violence to the Gandhian path. But like *Char Adhyaya*, *Divyachakshu* cannot be treated as a representative work. Moreover, unlike Tagore, Ramanlal Desai was by no means a novelist who would unravel the complexities of life and society.

A more representative figure in contemporary Gujarati literature can be seen in K.M. Munshi who was born five years before Ramanlal Desai and survived him much longer in independent India. A leading lawyer and literary writer, Munshi was also a member of the Congress. In his capacity as a prominent Congress leader he subscribed to a secular ideology. But virtually the whole of his work as a novelist not only invokes a glorious Hindu past but also promotes a Hindu conception of Indian nationalism.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Read the following statements and mark right (✓) or wrong (✗).
 - i) Literature in India was able to spell out in concrete terms, various dimensions of Independence.

- ii) 'Godan' was concerned only with the question of Independence.
 - iii) Premashrama was inspired by the example of the Russian Revolution.
 - iv) Although Saratchandra Chattopadhyaya admired Gandhi, yet at times idealised those who believed in revolutionary violence.
- 2) Write on the political contribution of Premchand's literary works.
- 3) Match the following:
- | | | | |
|--------|---------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| i) A | Chhaman Atha Guntha | A | Saratchandra Chattopadhyaya |
| ii) B | Karmabhumi | B | Tarashankar Bandyopadhyaya |
| iii) C | Bipradas | C | Fakirmohan Senapati |
| iv) D | Ganadevata | D | Premchand |

15.4 LET US SUM UP

We have, in this brief sketch of Indian literature during the freedom struggle, deliberately dealt with those aspects of the freedom movement which force us to move away from neat categories in order to understand it. What we have said about the freedom movement - the constant interplay of contradictory forces -- holds true about the making of modern Indian society as a whole. To put it simply, it is not that one person or group is secular, progressive and nationalist while another person or group is reactionary and communal. Society and the people living in it are too complex to permit such neat classifications. This is a lesson that literature teaches us best.

Historians, and other social scientists, may do well to learn this lesson.

15.5 KEY WORDS

Historical Romance: A work of fiction placed in a historical setting.

Religious Nationalists: Those who received inspiration for their patriotism from their religion.

Literary Patriotism: Using literature for expressing patriotic ideas.,

Economic Nationalism: An attempt, undertaken by the 19th century leaders and intellectuals, to establish the economic roots of Indian Nationalism, by preparing an economic critique of the British rule.

15.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) i) ✓ ii) ✓ iii) ✗ iv) ✓
- 2) i) Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya
- ii) 1882

iii) R.C. Dutt

iv) Bhartendu Harishchandra

3) i) A-D ii) B-C iii) C-A iv) D-B

Check Your Progress 2

1) i) ✗ ii) ✗ iii) ✓ iv) ✓

2) Your answer should refer to

a) the emphasis that Premchand laid on the freedom struggle in his literary works,

b) some of the political choices and statements made by the characters in his novels and

c) his own political ideological leanings

3) i) A-C ii) B-D iii) C-A iv) D-B



UNIT 16: LEFT-WING MOVEMENTS*

Structure

- 16.0 Objectives
- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 How the Leftist Movement Grew in India
- 16.3 Early History of Communist Movement in India
- 16.4 Formation of the Communist Party of India
- 16.5 Formation of Workers' and Peasants' Parties
- 16.6 Communist Influence on Trade Unions
- 16.7 Meerut Conspiracy Case and the 1934 Ban
- 16.8 Formation of the Congress Socialist Party
 - 16.8.1 The Early Socialists
 - 16.8.2 Brief Sketches of the Early Socialists
 - 16.8.3 Towards All-India Congress Socialist Party
- 16.9 The Programme of the Congress Socialist Party
- 16.10 The Impact of the Congress Socialists Programme upon National Politics
- 16.11 Let Us Sum Up
- 16.12 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

16.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will get

- the historical background of the emergence of left in India
- explain the ideology and programme of the leftist parties and groups in India during the freedom struggle, and
- show to what extent the leftists influenced the socio-political life of India in the pre-independence era.

16.1 INTRODUCTION

Before going into the history of the leftist movement in India, let us discuss the historical and ideological significance of the word 'Left'. During the period of the French revolution, in the National Assembly of France, there were three groups – a conservative group which supported the monarch and nobility and did not want to reduce their powers, a liberal group which wanted limited reforms in the government, and a radical group which wanted drastic changes in the system of government, such as the adoption of a constitution and limitation of the powers of monarch. Within the assembly the conservatives sat on the right side of the speaker, the radicals sat to his left, and the liberals sat in the centre. Since then, in the political vocabulary,

* Adopted from Unit 27 of EHI-01

the word 'Left' has been used to mean such groups and movements which stand for radical reforms in the government and in the socio-economic order keeping in mind the interests of the unprivileged and oppressed sections of the society. The word 'Right' on the other hand is used to mean such groups which are opposed to change in the existing system of government and socio-economic order because of their own stakes. Those who stand for limited changes in the socio-economic and political system are known as Centrists. Left is generally considered to be synonymous with socialism, because socialism is an ideology which aims at the uplift of the toiling workers and protecting them from exploitation by their employers, i.e., the capitalists.

In this Unit we shall discuss the formation and the programmes of the Communist Party of India and the Congress Socialist Party.

16.2 HOW THE LEFTIST MOVEMENT GREW IN INDIA

The Leftist movement originated and grew in India as a result of the development of modern industries and the impact of socialist movements in other countries like Great Britain and Russia. As a result of the industrial development in certain places like Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, large and concentrated working populations came into existence. Gradually the workers started organizing themselves to demand better working conditions and higher wages. This led to the emergence of trade unions. The growth of Trade Unionism prepared the ground for the formation of the Leftist parties.

Till the end of the First World War, workers' strikes in the Indian industries were rare phenomena and the workers were not politically conscious. From the end of the First World War onwards there were frequent strikes in the industries and a large number of trade unions were formed. The large-scale unrest of the workers at the end of the First World War was mainly due to the rise in prices caused by the War, and unwillingness of the employers to raise the wages. While demanding economic benefits the workers also became conscious of their political role. In cities like Bombay the workers organized strikes against the repressive Rowlatt Act. The nationalist leaders also became keenly interested in the working class movement. The first session of the All India Trade Union Congress was held at Bombay in October 1920 under the presidentship of the nationalist leader, Lala Lajpat Rai.

Against this background we will discuss the history of the leftist parties in India.

16.3 EARLY HISTORY OF COMMUNIST MOVEMENT IN INDIA

Having seen the success of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, and the formation of the Communist International, some Indian revolutionaries and intellectuals, working within and outside India, contemplated the formation of a Communist Party in India. It was M.N. Roy (Manabendra Nath Roy) who first formed the Communist Party of India outside India in Tashkent under the auspices of the Communist International in 1920.

The original name of Manabendra Nath Roy was Narendranath Bhattacharya. He was born on 6 February 1889 in a poor Brahman family of the Urbalia village of 24 Parganas district of Bengal. Early in life he was a revolutionary nationalist. He received his education in the National University, founded by Aurobindo Ghosh. During the First World War he was engaged in bringing about an armed revolt in India with the help of German arms. While pursuing his goal as a revolutionary he travelled through many countries – Malay, Indonesia, Indo-China, Philippines, Japan, Korea, China and U.S.A. He landed in the city of San Francisco in the summer of 1916. In U.S.A. he changed his name to Manabendra Nath Roy. During his stay in U.S.A., he studied Marxist literature. Gradually he turned from nationalism towards international communism. After U.S.A. joined the First World War on the side of Allied Powers, i.e., Great Britain and France, Roy found it unsafe to remain there any longer. He went to Mexico. There he came in contact with the Russian Communist emissary, Michael Borodin. Roy became friends with Borodin, got converted to communism and helped Borodin to organize the Communist Party of Mexico. From Mexico he went to Moscow at the call of Lenin, the Russian Communist leader.

Roy held the view that the nationalists were reactionaries (opposed to progress), and that the Communists should carry on their struggle against imperialism independently by forming parties of workers and peasants.

In October 1920, M.N. Roy came to Tashkent, a place in Soviet Russia, not very far from Afghanistan. There he established a military school for training the Indian frontier tribes for the purpose of armed revolt against the British Government, and also formed the Communist Party of India. The Communist Party of India was affiliated to the Communist International in 1921. In the meantime, being disgusted with the British Government's hostility towards the Sultan of Turkey (who was the Caliph or the religious head of the Muslims), thousands of Muslim Mujahirs (pilgrims) joined Roy at Tashkent. There they took lessons in the newly established military school. As this school was closed in May 1921, the Mujahirs went to join the Communist University of the Toilers of the East at Moscow. There received training in the ideas of Marx and Lenin.

After getting training at Moscow, the Mujahirs returned to India. On their return they were caught by the police and brought for trial to Peshawar. This trial is known as the Peshawar Conspiracy Case (1922-23). As a result of the trial, two prominent Mujahirs – Mian Muhammad Akbar Shah and Gawhar Rahman Khan were sentenced to two years' rigorous imprisonment and the rest to one year's hard labour.

In the meantime, the revolutionaries like Virendra Nath Chattopadhyay, Bhupendranath Dutt, and Barkatullah who were working outside India became converts to Marxism, and inside India some Communist groups also emerged. Some Non-cooperators turned to Communism after the suspension of the Non-Cooperation Movement by Mahatma Gandhi.

In Bombay a Communist group was organized by Shripad Amrit Dange. Dange was born in October 1899 in a Marathi Brahman family of Nasik. His father was a clerk in a Solicitor's firm. He was educated in Wilson College. When Gandhi launched the Non-Cooperation Movement, Dange

discontinued his studies and joined it. Soon after the suspension of the Non-Cooperation Movement, he became a convert to communism. In 1922 he started editing a Communist journal, entitled *The Socialist*. In an issue of this journal, dated 16 September 1924, Dange announced the formation of the Indian Socialist Labour Party of the Indian National Congress. Dange probably wanted the Communists to function as a group within the Congress.

In May 1923, in Madras Singaravelu Chettier, an old lawyer who called himself a Communist announced the formation of the Labour Kisan Party. In the Gaya session of the Indian National Congress, held in December 1922, he moved the resolution on national independence, criticized Gandhi's suspension of the Non-Cooperation Movement and suggested that the Non-Cooperation Movement should be combined with workers' national strikes.

In 1925-26, in Bengal, Muzaffar Ahmad formed the Labour Swaraj Party (which was soon renamed as Peasants and Workers' Party) with the help of Kazi Nazrul Islam. Kazi Nazrul Islam who was at that time a Havildar in the 49th Bengal Regiment later on became famous as a Bengali poet. Communist groups were also formed in cities like Lahore and Cawnpore.

Meanwhile M.N. Roy was keeping contact with the Communists in India through secret emissaries. On 2nd November 1922 M.N. Roy wrote a letter to Dange, outlining the plan of a dual organization of the Communist Party of India. Roy suggested the formation of a public organization, and secret groups.

The early Indian Communists found it difficult to form an all-India organization because of the British Government's hostility towards them. In 1924, the British Government started a conspiracy case against the four leading Communists – Muzaffar Ahmad, S.A. Dange, Shaukat Usmani and Nalini Gupta. The Government alleged that these Communist had established "a branch of a revolutionary organisation known as Communist International" with the object of depriving the British King-Emperor of the Sovereignty of British India. This case is known as the Cawnpore Conspiracy Case, as the trial of the accused took place in Cawnpore. During the trial Dange claimed the right to preach socialism in India, as it had been allowed in other parts of the British Empire and Great Britain. As a result of this trial Dange, Ahmad, Usmani and Gupta were sentenced to four years of rigorous imprisonment in May 1924.

16.4 FORMATION OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA

In September 1924, at Cawnpore, Satyabhakta announced the formation of the Indian Communist Party. He also announced a provisional constitution of the party. This aimed at the attainment of complete independence and reorganization of Indian society on the basis of common ownership and control of means of production and distribution of wealth "in the interests of the whole community of India". In December 1925, Satyabhakta organized an all-India Conference of the Communists at Cawnpore which was attended by a number of Communists including Nalini Gupta and Muzaffar Ahmad who had been release from jail. The Conference met under the presidency of Singaravelu Chettier. The Cawnpore is regarded as the formal beginning

of the Communist Party of India. In this meeting the Central Committee of the Party was constituted with S.V. Ghate and J.P. Bergarhatta as the Joint Secretaries.

Towards the end of 1926 the Constitution of the Communist Party of India was published. Meanwhile, the Central Committee of the Communist Party held a number of secret sessions for working out the party's programme. From 1925, the British Communists started coming to India for organizing the Indian Communist Movement. In 1928 two members of the Communist Party of India were elected as alternative members of the Executive Committee of the Communist International in its sixth Congress. In 1930 the Party was formally affiliated to the Communist International.

The infant Communist Movement of India had some drawbacks:

- It suffered from paucity of funds,
- The British Government was very hostile towards the Communist Party of India because of its revolutionary character and affiliation with the Communist International
- There was paucity of cadres, and
- The privileged upper strata of Indian society opposed Communism.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Give an account of the Communist Movement in India from 1920 to 1925.
- 2) Describe the formation of the Communist Party in India. What were the drawbacks of this Movement in the early phase?

16.5 FORMATION OF WORKERS' AND PEASANTS' PARTIES

In spite of the obstacles, the Communist Movement gained momentum. In 1927 in Bombay and the Punjab the Workers' and Peasants' parties were formed. These parties attempted to propagate their ideology and programme through the use of press. The Bombay Workers' and Peasants' Party brought out a Maratha weekly entitled *Kranti* (Revolution). The Punjab Workers' and Peasants' Party brought out an Urdu weekly, called *Mihnatkash* (Worker).

A Workers' and Peasants' party was also formed at Meerut in a conference, held in October 1928. The conference passed resolutions, demanding:

- national independence, abolition of princely order,
- recognition of workers' right to form trade unions,
- abolition of Zamindari,
- land for the landless peasants,
- establishment of agricultural banks,
- eight-hour working day, and
- minimum wages for industrial workers.

In December 1928, an all-India Conference of workers' and peasants' parties was held at Calcutta under the presidentship of Sohan Singh Josh. Here three major decisions were taken:

- i) This Conference formed a National Executive Committee, comprising leading Communists.
- ii) The Conference emphasized the international character of the Communist movement and the need for the affiliation of the Communist Party of India with international organizations like League against Imperialism and the Communist International.
- iii) This Conference asked the Communists to carry on their movement independently instead of identifying themselves with “the so-called bourgeois leadership of the Congress”.

16.6 COMMUNIST INFLUENCE ON TRADE UNIONS

In the meantime, the Communists increased their influence over the Trade Union organizations by leading the workers' strikes. The Communists played a prominent role in the Railway Workshop workers' strikes of February and September 1927 at Kharagpur. Their influence also increased over the Bombay Textile Mill workers. From April to October 1928 the textile workers of Bombay carried on massive strikes, in protest against the wage-cuts. In these strikes, the Communist Girni Kamgar Union played the most prominent role. There was a tremendous increase in the strength of this Trade Union in 1928. By December 1928 its strength went up to 54,000 members, while the Bombay Textile Labour Union, led by the veteran liberal trade unionist N.M. Joshi had only 6,749 members.

The strikes in industries assumed alarming proportions in 1928. During that year 31.5 million working days were lost as a result of the strikes. The Government held the Communists responsible for unrest in the industries. The Government, therefore, planned measures for curbing their activities. In January 1929, the Viceroy Lord Irwin declared in his speech before the Central Legislative Assembly: “The disquieting spread of Communist doctrines has been causing anxiety”. On 13 April 1929 the Viceroy proclaimed the Public Safety Ordinance for the purpose of deporting the subversive elements. Simultaneously of workers' problems and practically banned such strikes which “coerced” the Government or caused hardship to the people.

16.7 MEERUT CONSPIRACY CASE AND THE 1934 BAN

The most severe anti-Communist measure taken by the Government was the arrest of 31 Communists on 14 March 1929. Subsequently one more was arrested. These Communists were tried at Meerut on the charge of conspiracy against His Majesty's Government. The charge was brought against them by R.A. Horton (an Officer on Special Duty under the Director, intelligence Bureau, Home Department, Government of India). It was alleged by him that under the direction of the Communist International these Communists wanted to deprive the British Monarch of his sovereignty over British India by means of general strikes and armed uprising. It was pointed out that to achieve this objective the Communists had formed workers' and Peasants'

Parties in such places as Meerut. The thirty two persons, accused in this case, included two English Communists – Philip Spratt and B.F. Bradley and an English journalist, named Lester Hutchinson. The rest were Indian Communists. The trial of the Communists went on for four years. Finally on appeal from the Special Sessions Court, the Allahabad High Court acquitted some of the accused and drastically curtailed the others' sentences, holding the view that "the accused persons have not been charged with having done any overt illegal act in pursuance of the alleged conspiracy".

The Meerut Conspiracy case against the Communists was universally criticized in India. Mahatma Gandhi described it as an instance of the "reign of lawlessness under the guise of law" and intended not to kill communism but to strike terror. This case, instead of being a set-back for the Communist Movement, made heroes and martyrs out of Communists. In their defence speeches before the court, the "accused Communists" made such statements which appealed to the anti-British sentiments of the nation and raised the dignity of the Communist Movement. For example in his statement to the court, Radharaman Mitra said:

This is case which will have political and historical significance. It is not merely a case launched in the ordinary course of its duties by the Police against 31 criminals. It is an episode in the class struggle. It is launched and conducted as part of a definite political policy. It is an attempt on the part of the British Imperialist Government of India to strike a blow at the force which it recognizes as the real enemy which will ultimately bring about its overthrow, which has already taken up an attitude of irreconcilable hostility towards it and has already shown a very menacing strength.

In 1934 the Communists renewed their militant trade union activities. There were strikes at Sholapur, Nagpur and Bombay. The Government became panicky, and, finding it difficult to tackle the Communists, banned the Communist Party of India on 23 July 1934. Thereafter many of the Communists carried on their activities within the Indian National Congress and the newly formed Congress Socialist Party. The Communist Party continued to function underground.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Why and how did the British Government try to suppress the Communist Party of India?
- 2) The Meerut Conspiracy case in fact helped the Communist cause. Comment.

16.8 FORMATION OF THE CONGRESS SOCIALIST PARTY

The Communists carried on their activities more or less independent of the Indian National Congress, but within the Congress a considerable section was drawn towards the Socialist ideology and sought to work out a Socialist programme through the Congress. Among this section there were leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose, Jaya Prakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Dev, Achyut Patwardhan, and Ram Manohar Lohia.

16.8.1 The Early Socialists

In 1934, after the suspension of the Civil Disobedience Movement, a section of Congressmen decided to enter into the legislatures to work for the Congress cause within the government. Mahatma Gandhi endorsed the line of action, adopted by these Congressmen who were known as the Constitutionalists.

At this stage some socialists wanted to form a socialist party within the Congress organization so as to prevent the erosion of the revolutionary character of the Congress by entry into the legislatures. The Socialists within the Congress believed in Marxist ideas like the Communists. But there were two basic differences between the Congress Socialists and the Communists:

- i) First, while the Congress Socialist owed their allegiance to the Indian National Congress, the Communists owed their allegiance to the Communist International.
- ii) Secondly, while the Congress Socialists were nationalists, the Communists at the same time also believed in the goal of an international Communist society.

The Congress Socialists wanted to create a broad base for the Congress organization by bringing into it the workers and the peasants. They held that the workers and the peasants should take part in the struggle for national liberation. They believed in the efficacy of such techniques as workers' strikes and peasants' agitation for the attainment of freedom from foreign rule. The Congress Socialists believed in class struggle and stood for abolition of capitalism, zamindari system, and the princely states. They wanted to incorporate radical socio-economic measures for the uplift of toiling masses into the Congress Party's programme.

In the early thirties Socialist groups had been formed by the leftist Congressmen in provinces like Bihar, U.P., Bombay and the Punjab. In 1933 in Nasik jail some young Socialists such as Jayprakash Narayan, Achyut Patwardhan, M.R. Masani, N.G. Gore, Ashok Mehta, S.M. Joshi and M.L. Dantwala floated the idea of forming a Socialist Party within the Congress organization. In April 1934 at Banaras, Sampurnananda published a pamphlet in which he stressed the need for the formation of an all-India Socialist party as a wing of the Congress. Such a wing, he held, would counter-act the influence of capitalists and upper bourgeoisie.

The Congress Socialists belonged to the westernized middle class. They were influenced by the ideas of Marx, Gandhi and the Social Democracy of the West. They simultaneously practised Marxian Socialism, Congress nationalism and liberal democracy of the West.

16.8.2 Brief Sketches of the Early Socialists

Jayprakash Narayan, the foremost leader of the Congress Socialists, was born in 1902 in Bihar. In 1921 he discontinued his studies in a Patna college to join the Non-Cooperation movement. Thereafter he went to the United States of America for receiving university education. There he earned his livelihood by doing manual work and continued his studies. In U.S.A. he came in contact with Communists and became a Marxist. While returning

from U.S.A., he found that the Indian Communists were taking orders from the Communist International at Moscow. Though he appreciated the Bolshevik Revolution of Russia and the success of Communism in the country, he did not like the idea of Indian Communists acting under orders from Moscow. Returning to India, he joined the Congress party in 1929. In 1930 he was made the President of the Labour Research Department of the Congress. His wife, Prabhavati was a staunch follower of Gandhi. Jayprakash published a book, entitled *Why Socialism?* in which he stressed the relevance of socialism for India.

Yusuf Meherally was born in 1903 in a prosperous business family of Bombay. He was influenced by the writings of Mazzini and Garibaldi and by the Sinn Fein Movement of Ireland and the Chinese and Russian revolutions. In 1928 he organized the Bombay Provincial Youth League which took active part in organizing demonstration against the Simon Commission and in the Civil Disobedience movement.

Achyut Patwardhan was born of a rich Theosophist father in 1905. He was educated at the Banaras Hindu University. After completing his education, he served as a University lecturer for some time, and then visited Europe. He joined the Civil Disobedience Movement and was sentenced to imprisonment in Nasik jail. Patwardhan was profoundly influenced by the Gandhian and Theosophical ideas.

Ashok Mehta was born in 1911 at Sholapur. His father was a prominent Gujarati litterateur. He was educated at the Bombay University. He joined the Civil Disobedience Movement and was sentenced to imprisonment in Nasik jail. For a number of years he edited the journal of the Congress Socialist Party entitled *Congress Socialist*.

M.R. Masani was born in a rich and learned family in Bombay. He studied at the London School of Economics. He was influenced by Fabian Socialism, British labour movement and the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia.

Acharya Narendra Dev was born in 1889 in Uttar Pradesh. His father was a lawyer. In the early part of his life he was influenced by the extremist nationalists like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Har Dayal and Aurobindo. After the Bolshevik Revolution he turned to Marxism. He attached importance to the role of peasantry in the nationalist as well as the socialist movement. So he devoted himself to the organization of peasantry in Uttar Pradesh. He also valued the role of middle class intellectuals in the socialist movement. He proved himself to be a great exponent of Marxism and at the same time supported Gandhi's constructive activity.

Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia was born in a nationalist Marwari family of Uttar Pradesh in 1910. He was educated at Banaras (Hindu), Calcutta and Berlin universities. He took his doctorate in Political Economy from the Berlin University. After his return to India, Jawaharlal Nehru put him in charge of the Foreign Affairs Department of the All India Congress Committee. Lohia was influenced by the Social Democratic ideas of Europe and the Gandhian ideas. He did not believe in Marxism or Communism. He founded a journal, entitled, *Congress Socialist*, which later on became the official organ of the Congress Socialist Party.

16.8.3 Towards All India Congress Socialist Party

The first All-India Congress Socialists' Conference was convened at Patna by Jayprakash Narayan on behalf of the Bihar Socialist party in May 1934. The Conference was presided by Acharya Narendra Dev. In his presidential speech, Narendra Dev criticized the new Swarajist section of Congressmen who wanted to enter the legislatures and thereby run counter to the revolutionary character of the Congress. He asked the socialists to carry on their agitation for the adoption of their programme by the Congress. The Conference passed a resolution asking the Congress to adopt a programme that was socialist in action and objective. After this Conference the Congress Socialists worked hard to organize the All-India Congress Socialist party. As the Organizing Secretary, Jayprakash Narayan campaigned in different parts of the country to organize the provincial wings of the party.

The first annual session of the All-India Congress Socialist party was held in Bombay in October 1934 under the presidentship of Sampurnananda. It was attended by delegates from thirteen provinces. In this meeting the National Executive of the Congress Socialist party was constituted with Jayprakash Narayan as the General Secretary.

16.9 THE PROGRAMME OF THE CONGRESS SOCIALIST PARTY

The Congress Socialist Party adopted a constitution which outlined the following programme of action:

- i) To work for the acceptance of the Congress Socialist Party programme by the Indian National Congress.
- ii) To organize the workers and the peasants for their own economic uplift as well as for carrying on the movement for the achievement of independence and socialism,
- iii) To organize Youth Leagues, Women's Organization and Volunteer Organizations and secure their support for the Congress Socialist Party's programme, and secure their support,
- iv) To resist any attempt on the part of the British Government to involve India in imperialist wars, and to utilize such crises for the intensification of the freedom struggle,
- v) To resist any negotiation with the British Government on constitutional issues.

The meeting at Bombay adopted a comprehensive programme as the blueprint of a Socialist society in India, containing the following items:

- 1) Transfer of all power to the masses,
- 2) Development of the economic life of the country to be planned and controlled by the state,
- 3) Socialization of key industries (e.g. steel, cotton, jute, railways, shipping, plantations, mines), Insurance and Public Utilities, with a view to the progressive socialization of the instruments of production, distribution and exchange,

- 4) State monopoly of foreign trade,
- 5) Organization of cooperative societies for production, distribution and credit in the unorganised sector of the economic life,
- 6) Abolition with compensation of princes and landlords and all other classes of exploiters,
- 7) Redistribution of land among the peasants,
- 8) The state was to encourage and control co-operative and collective farming,
- 9) Liquidation of debts owned by peasants and workers,
- 10) Recognition of the right to work or maintenance by the State,
- 11) “To everyone according to his needs” is to be basis ultimately of distribution of economic goods,
- 12) Adult franchise which shall be on functional basis,
- 13) The State shall neither support nor discriminate between religions nor recognize any distinction based on caste or community,
- 14) The State shall not discriminate between the sexes, and
- 15) Repudiation of the so-called Public Debt of India.

The Bombay session adopted separate programmes for the workers’ and peasants uplift. For workers the demands were: freedom to form trade unions and the right to go on strikes, living wages, forty-hour week, and, insurance against unemployment, sickness, accident and old age. For the peasants the demands were: abolition of landlordism, encouragement of cooperative farming, exemption from rents and taxes on uneconomic holdings, reduction of land revenue and abolition of feudal levies.

Independence (freedom from British rule) and socialism were the twin objectives of the Congress Socialist Party. For the purpose of attainment of independence the Congress Socialists joined hands with anti-imperialist and non-socialist forces within the Congress. Jayprakash Narayan said: “Our work within Congress is governed by the policy of developing it into a true anti-imperialist body”. He also warned his co-workers early in 1935: “Nothing should be done which may antagonise the genuinely nationalist elements and drive them to join hands with the compromise-seeking right wing.”

But as the ultimate objective of the Congress Socialists was to establish a Socialist society in India, the Congress Socialists also worked to secure the acceptance of their programme by the Indian National Congress. Acharya Narendra Dev in his presidential speech in the first all-India Congress Socialists Conference said that Congress Socialists should carry on their “endeavour influence the National Movement in the direction of socialism.”

The Congress Socialists followed three lines of activities for the attainment of the twin objectives of freedom and socialism:

- 1) Inside the Congress they worked out anti-imperialist and nationalist programmes of the Congress as Congressmen,

- 2) Outside the Congress they mobilized the workers, peasants, students, intelligentsia, youth and women for the cause of socialism,
- 3) They also sought to integrate the above two lines of activities.

The Congress Socialists sought to mobilize the workers and peasants for their economic amelioration as well as the country's liberation from foreign rule.

16.10 THE IMPACT OF THE CONGRESS SOCIALISTS' PROGRAMME UPON NATIONAL POLITICS

There was a mixed reaction among the Congressmen to the formation of the Congress Socialist party. The conservative or Right Wing Congressmen criticized the Congress Socialists "loose talk" about the confiscation of property and class war. Mahatma Gandhi also rejected their idea of class war. Gandhi wanted to bring about a change of heart in the princes, zamindars and capitalists so that instead of considering themselves the owners of the states, zamindaries and factories, they should behave as the trustees for their subjects, tenants and workers.

But the leftist Congressmen like Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose welcomed the formation of the Congress Socialist Party, though neither Nehru nor Bose joined the party. In the annual session of the Congress, held at Lucknow in April 1936, in his presidential speech Nehru espoused the cause of socialism. He said:

I see no way of ending the poverty, vast unemployment, degradation and subjection of the Indian people except through socialism. That involves vast revolutionary changes in our political and social structure, ending vested interests in the land and industry as well as the feudal autocratic Indian states system. That means ending private property except in a restricted sense and replacement of the present profit system by the higher ideals of cooperative service.

In 1936 Nehru inducted three Congress Socialists – Narendra Dev, Jayprakash Narayan and Achyut Patwardhan into the Congress Working Committee, besides another leftist, Subhas Chandra Bose. The Faizpur session of the Indian National Congress, held towards the close of 1936 under the presidentship of Jawaharlal Nehru, adopted an agrarian programme, containing such items as reduction of revenue, abolition of feudal dues and levies, introduction of cooperative farming, living wage for the agrarian labourers and formation of peasant unions. In the meantime the Congress Labour Committee asked the Congress ministries, formed in the provinces in 1937, for adopting measures for safeguarding and promoting the interests of workers.

The Congress Socialists played an important role in the Kisan (peasant) movement. Through the efforts of Prof. N.G. Ranga, Indulal Yagnik, and Swami Sahajanand Saraswati the All-India Kisan Sabha was organized. The first All-India Kisan Congress met at Lucknow in 1936. The Kisan organizations demanded the abolition of zamindari, reduction of land tax, and collective affiliation to Congress. The Congress Socialists changed the Congress Party's policy from aloofness to closer involvement in the

affairs of princely states. The Congress socialist activists also took part in the democratic movements of the people in the princely states against their autocratic rulers. They agitated for civic rights and responsible government.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Trace the circumstances leading to the formation of the Congress Socialist Party in 1934.
- 2) What were the basic differences between the Communist Party of India and the Congress Socialist Party?
- 3) What kind of impact did the Congress Socialist Programme have on the nationalist politics?

16.11 LET US SUM UP

The Left-wing movements in India owed their origin and growth to the development of modern industries, working Class Movement, nationalist awakening and impact of socialist movements in other countries, particularly the Bolshevik revolution of Russia. In 1920, the Communist Party of India was formed in Tashkent by M.N. Roy, an Indian Marxist. Though there were a number of Marxist groups in India by 1920, the Communist party of India was formally started in a conference, held at Cawnpore in 1925. The Communist party of India aimed at the overthrow of British imperialism and establishment of the government of workers and peasants like their counterparts in Russia. The communists carried on their movement independent of the National Congress because they considered the Congress to be an association of the Indian bourgeoisie and vested interests. The Communists rapidly enhanced their influence over the trade unions of workers. By 1928 the Communist led Girni Kamgar union became very powerful. The British Government sought to suppress the Communist movement by means of conspiracy cases against the Communist leaders. In 1929, the Communist party of India was banned by the British Government.

Although the Indian National Congress was led by the Indian middle class and basically aimed at the liberation of the country from foreign rule, yet an important section of Congressmen also aimed at establishing a socialist state in India. In 1934 some leftist Congressmen Like Jaya Prakash Narayan and Acharya Narendra Dev formed the Congress Socialist party as a wing of the Congress. The Congress Socialists simultaneously carried on a movement for independence from foreign rule and – establishment carried on a movement for independence from foreign rule and establishment of a socialist state. They organised the movement of the workers and peasants. They carried on movements for abolition of the princely order, landlordism and capitalism. Their movements resulted in the adoption of programmes for the uplift of workers and peasants by the Indian National Congress.

16.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See section 16.3. Your answer should include (i) the formation of early communist groups (ii) formation of communist parties (iii) roles of S.A. Dange and M.N. Roy.

- 2) See section 16.4. For the second part of the answer you should include (i) the problem of funds (ii) the British Govt's attitude (iii) problem of cadres.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See sections 16.6 and 16.7. Your answer should include (i) the British fear about their overthrow by the Communists by strikes and uprisings (ii) the Public Safety Ordinance and Trade Dispute Act (iii) the Meerut Conspiracy Case (iv) ban on Communist Party in 1934.
- 2) See Section 16.7. Your answer should include (i) the universal Criticism the case drew (ii) also the fact that the trial provided the communists a public forum to express their views and commitments.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See section 16.8. Your answer should include (i) the influence of socialist ideology within the Congress (ii) formation of socialist groups within the Congress (iii) the role of different individuals like Prakash Narayan and Narendra Dev in giving direction to early socialists. (iv) the first All India Congress Socialists' Conference. (v) the first annual session of the All-India Congress Socialist Party.
- 2) See sub-section 16.8.1. The answer will include two basic differences (a) the Congress Socialists goal was limited to establishing socialism within India while the Communists believed in an international communist society. (b) Congress Socialists wanted to work only within the Congress. The Communists were ready to work independently outside the Congress.
- 3) See Section 16.10. Your answer should include (i) conservative reaction (ii) influence on left congressmen like Nehru (iii) role in Kisan movement (iv) changes in Congress policy like abolition of Zamindari etc. being included in Congress Programme.

UNIT 17: GROWTH OF TRADE UNION AND PEASANT MOVEMENTS*

Structure

- 17.0 Objectives
- 17.1 Introduction
- 17.2 Condition of the Workers
- 17.3 Rise of Trade Unionism
 - 17.3.1 Meaning of Trade Unionism
 - 17.3.2 Early History
 - 17.3.3 Formation of All India Trade Union Congress
- 17.4 Growth of Trade Unions
- 17.5 Split in the AITUC
- 17.6 New Phase
- 17.7 Hardships of the Peasantry
- 17.8 Peasant Movements during 1920s
- 17.9 Peasant Movements in the 1930s
- 17.10 Formation of All India Kisan Sabha
- 17.11 The Congress and the Peasantry
- 17.12 Let Us Sum Up
- 17.13 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

17.0 OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this Unit is to give you a short history of the growth of “Trade Union and Peasant Movements” in India during the 1920s and 1930s. After going through this Unit, you will be able to:

- know about the condition of the workers,
- understand the meaning to Trade Unionism, its early history and the formation of the All India Trade Union Congress,
- follow the process of development of trade union movement and the split which took place at the later stage,
- know about the hardships faced by the peasantry, and
- explain how peasant movements emerged in various parts of the country and how the peasants were organized in Kisan Sabhas.

17.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit, we will explain to you the growth of Trade Union and Peasant Movements during the 1920s and 1930s. During the first half of the 20th century you will see how these movements gradually got an organizational

* Adopted from Unit 28 of EHI-01

character and pressurized the colonial regime to change its policy. Some important points you should bear in mind for this change in the character of the working class and peasant movements of this period:

- the emergence of new trends in the national movement, particularly the shift to mass politics and mass mobilization,
- the economic and social consequences of the First World War which adversely affected different sections of the Indian people, and
- the impact of Bolshevik Russia and the growth of socialist ideas in India.

These factors gave rise to the working class and peasant movements in India which were radically different from what we had witnessed in the earlier periods.

17.2 CONDITION OF THE WORKERS

We will now briefly describe the conditions of the workers, which largely explain why trade unions grew in India. Bombay, the main centre of India's cotton textile industry, and Bengal, the centre of jute and tea industry, had the maximum working class population in India. The living and working conditions of the workers were very miserable. They worked for 15, 16 even 18 hours a day. There were no leave rules, no security of jobs. The workers had to bribe Jobbers (Sirdars) on whom depended their fate. They lived in dark, damp bustees (slums) with no water supply and no sanitary arrangements.

The condition of the coal mine workers was even more miserable. In the coal mines in Jharia and Giridih the working hours were from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. Women and children worked underground and accidents were very common, but it was not until 1923 that accident insurance of a sort was introduced by the Government. Even so, workers found it difficult to establish their claims for compensation. The workers were paid low wages so that the employers could maximize profits. The Royal Commission of Labour pointed out the wages were lowest in Madras and Kanpur and highest in Bombay. Over the years fines were imposed on the workers for breakages, late attendance and under production. Indebtedness spread among the workers who often turned to Kabuli money-lenders. These money-lenders charged high rates of interest. There was no provision for provident fund or pension. When the workers grew old, they lost their jobs and had to rely for their subsistence on their children or relatives.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Write on the problems of the workers.
- 2) Write 'Yes' or 'No' against each sentence
 - a) Bombay was the main centre of India's jute industry.
 - b) Calcutta and Bombay had the maximum working class population.
 - c) The workers had to work for 15 to 16 hours a day.

- d) The Royal Commission on Labour was appointed to enquire the condition of the workers.
- e) The workers had the right to strike.
- f) The workers had the right to old age pension.

17.3 RISE OF TRADE UNIONISM

You will now see how workers organized themselves into trade unions to fight against their exploitation. The rise of trade unionism marked a new epoch in working class movement.

17.3.1 Meaning of Trade Unionism

Trade Unions, which are very common today, are associations of the workers formed with the purpose of improving the conditions under which they work in mills and factories. With the establishment of mills and factories in India in the 19th century, hundreds of workers began to work together and meet every day. This gave them the opportunity to discuss their problems and place their views before the employers. The workers were mostly illiterate. They did not have any idea in the beginning of forming Trade Union and uniting themselves. There were a few ‘outsiders’, mostly intellectuals, who tried for years to educate and organize them in trade unions. Very often they became leaders of the unions.

17.3.2 Early History

As we have already said, a few individuals being moved by the miserable condition of the workers tried to improve their working conditions. For example in Bengal Sasipada Banerjee, a radical Brahmo, founded the working men’s club. He also published a journal, the *Bharat Sramjibi* (Indian worker) in 1874, and organized night schools to spread education among the jute mill workers. But he did not form a trade union. Similarly in Bombay, N.M. Lokhande, started the weekly *Dinabandhu* in 1880 and founded the Bombay Mill-Hands Association in 1890. This Association, though not a trade union, put forward the demands of:

- reduction in working hours,
- a weekly holiday and,
- compensation for injuries suffered by the workers during work at the factories.

B.P. Wadia, a close associate of Annie Besant formed the Madras Labour Union in April, 1918. This was the first trade union in India. In Ahmedabad, a centre of cotton textile industry, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi led a strike of the workers in 1918. Gandhi requested the mill-owners to refer the matter to arbitration but they refused. Gandhi then advised the labourers to go on a strike. The strike continued for 21 days. Gandhi began a fast but after three days a settlement was reached. In 1920 Gandhi formed the **Majoor Mahajan** which advocated peaceful relations between the workers and their employers, arbitration and social service.

17.3.3 Formation of All India Trade Union Congress

Trade unionism was slowly gaining ground through the efforts mentioned above. In 1919-20 there was a wave of strikes in many industrial centres such as Kanpur, Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, Jamshedpur and Ahmedabad. Thousands of workers took part in these strikes. It was against this background that the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) was formed in Bombay in 1920. Lala Lajpat Rai presided over the inaugural session which was attended by prominent nationalist leaders and trade unionists like Motilal Nehru, Annie Besant, C.F. Andrews, B.P. Wadia and N.M. Joshi. The All India Trade Union Congress was the central organization of the Indian workers.

Although strikes became frequent in the 1920s, growth of trade unionism among the workers was rather slow. The Royal Commission on Labour gives two reasons for it:

- i) Differences of language and community were factors that stood in the way of workers unity. In the Bengal Jute mills, for instance, the majority of the workers came from Bihar and U.P.; and Bengali workers were in a minority.
- ii) The jobbers and the employers were opposed to the growth of trade unions. In 1929, only 51 unions with 190,436 members were affiliated to AITUC. But the majority of the workers were not yet organized in trade unions. The fear of dismissal from jobs also kept the workers away from the trade unions.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What is a Trade Union?
- 2) Is Trade Union useful for the workers?
- 3) Write on the early initiatives for the improvement of the conditions of the workers.
- 4) How was the All India Trade Union Congress formed?

17.4 GROWTH OF TRADE UNIONS

In spite of these hurdles the trade union movement was gaining popularity among the workers. The main reason for this was that the workers had many grievances, such as long hours of work, bad housing, low wages, dismissals from jobs, etc. They turned to the outsiders for help. The 'outsiders' were nationalists, communists and socialists. Sometimes they were also independents in the sense that they did not belong to any party. These 'outsiders' organized meeting of the workers, wrote petitions addressed to the employers and formulated a charter of demands.

They organized them into trade unions which in many cases were affiliated to the All India Trade Union Congress. When the employers refused to consider their demands, the workers struck work. During the strike, the trade unions often helped them with money because they did not receive wages during the strike. Strike meant a great deal of suffering for the workers, specially when strikes continued for months. Even so, numerous strikes occurred in

factories. Middle class employee who worked in government offices and commercial firms also formed trade unions and organized strikes.

Bombay was the largest centre of cotton mills in India. Most of these mills were built by Indian capitalists. In 1924 there was a big strike of 150,000 workers in Bombay against the refusal of bonus which had been paid during the preceding four years. In 1926 the Textile Labour Union was formed with N.M. Joshi as the President. In April 1928 there was general strike in Bombay. The workers in most of the mills joined this strike. On 9 October the strike was withdrawn when the government appointed a committee to consider the demands of the workers. Thus the strike forced the government to intervene in the dispute between workers and employers.

In Bengal the British capitalists owned the jute mills. It was biggest Industry in Bengal. There occurred 592 industrial disputes in Bengal during 1921-29, out of these 236 occurred in the jute mills. In 1928 the workers of Fort Gloster Mills in Bauria in Howrah district struck work. This strike was remarkable in the sense that it continued from 17 July to 31 December for about six months. In July 1929, there was a general strike in the jute mills. The Bengal Congress showed sympathy for the strike. The Government intervened and the strike ended on 16 August.

Jamshedji Tata founded the first modern steel factory in India in Jamshedpur which was named after him. About 20 thousand workers worked in this factory and in 1920 the workers formed the Labour Association. In a protest against to the dismissal of large number of workers the Tata Steel factory started a general strike in 1928 which continued for more than six months. Though the strike was not wholly successful, the Labour Association was recognized by the employers.

During the same period in Ahmedabad, a 20% wage cut by the mills-owners led to a general strike in 56 out of 64 textile mills. Madras city was also an important centre of trade union movement. The first May Day was celebrated in 1923, at Madras by Singaravelu.

17.5 SPLIT IN THE AITUC

The Great Economic Depression started in America and spread throughout the world in 1929. The Depression in India continued till 1936. Hundreds of factories closed down and thousands of workers lost their jobs. The number of unions also fell.

Unfortunately, there were two splits within the All India Trade Union Congress during this period. The first split took place in 1929. Jawaharlal Nehru was then the president of the AITUC. The main issue was whether the AITUC would boycott the Royal Commission on Labour appointed by the British Government or not. The moderates wanted to join it while the extremists wanted to boycott it. Finally, the moderates left the AITUC and formed the Indian Trade Union Federation with V.V. Giri as the president. There was another split in 1931. The communists left the AITUC and formed the Red Trade Union Congress. The splits took place when thousands of workers were being dismissed by the employers. The splits weakened the trade union movement.

17.6 NEW PHASE

However, a new phase of trade union movement started from 1935 onwards. The unity in the AITUC was restored. The Indian economy began to improve from 1936 onwards. In 1937 the Congress formed ministries in the provinces. The formation of the Congress ministries aroused inspiration and expectation among the workers. The number of trade unions doubled between 1936 and 1939 and the number of members also increased considerably. The number of strikes increased from 157 in 1936 to 406 in 1939. Notable strikes included those affecting the Kesoram Cotton Mills in Calcutta and Ahmedabad textiles in 1935, the Bengal Nagpur Railway from December 1936 to February 1937, and a series of labour disputes in Calcutta jute mills and Kanpur textile mills during 1936 culminating in the next year in massive general strikes in both centres. An important development of this period was the attempt made by the leftists and socialists to unite the trade unions and peasant organizations for a collective movement. Indeed it was the phase of the expansion of the trade union movement.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Why did trade union movement become popular among the workers? How did the 'Outsiders' help the workers?
- 2) What was the effect of the Great Depression on the workers?
- 3) Discuss in brief the growth of trade union movement after 1937.

17.7 HARDSHIPS OF THE PEASANTRY

A number of peasant struggles were witnessed in various parts of India during the 1920s and the 1930s. The establishment of colonial rule adversely affected the Indian peasantry and they rose in arms on their own against this exploitation. But, as we will see, the change in time did not bring an end to the exploitation of the peasantry. Rather it continued unabated. But the peasants had learnt, from their experience that they should not remain unorganized to fight against the forces of the government and the landlords. The 20th century on the one hand showed not only the revolt of the peasantry against the excesses of the Taluqdari and Zamindari system but also the formation of peasant organizations like the Kisan Sabhas.

There may be certain variations in the form of exploitation in different parts of India, but in general the peasants in India suffered great hardships and were always at the mercy of the others. Here we will list some of the major grievances of the peasantry which will help you understand the real condition of the peasantry of that time.

- In many regions the peasants had no occupancy rights on the lands tilled by them. The landlords had the power to evict them which they used to harass their tenants.
- Besides the regular taxes payable to the landlords, the landlords compelled the tenants to pay 'Nazaranas', 'Abwabs' and other gifts on various pretexts.
- The heavy burden of land revenue/rent made the peasantry heavily indebted to village merchants and landlords who charged heavy

interests rates. It was very difficult for the peasants to get rid of the debt-trap which continued from generation to generation.

- The outbreak of the First World War added to the miseries of the peasants. For example in many regions they had to pay for war funds; military service, etc.
- During this period there was a sharp rise in the prices of food grains. This rise in prices benefitted the middle men and the merchants, not the poor.

In such a situation it was the duty of the Government to help the peasant. But the Government itself was on the side of the landlords. This was because it depended on the landlords for stability of its rule in the countryside. That is why under the pressure of these hardships the peasants chose the path of revolt as the way of their emancipation.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) What were the main grievances of the peasants?
- 2) Which of the following statements are correct or wrong? (mark ✓ or ✗).
 - i) During this period the peasants for the first time organized themselves into Kisan Sabhas.
 - ii) The landlords had no right to evict the tenants from the lands tilled by them.
 - iii) The peasants were not forced but they willingly paid the 'abwabs' to the landlords.
 - iv) The rise in prices of foodgrains was beneficial for the poor peasants.
 - v) The government was very much sympathetic to the grievances of the peasantry.

17.8 PEASANT MOVEMENTS DURING 1920S

Against this background we will now discuss some of the important peasant movements that took place during the 1920s. U.P. was one of the strong centres of the peasant movements during this period. The oppressive Taluqdari and Zamindari system made the peasants life unbearable. The nationalists showed a great deal of interest in the problems faced by the peasants. But it was Baba Ram Chandra who took the initiative to organize the peasants of Oudh against the landlords. Baba Ram Chandra was a Maharashtrian Brahman by birth. He went to Fiji as an indentured labourer in 1905 and from there he came to the Oudh countryside in 1917-18. Dressed like a 'Sannyasi' (Monk), he moved amongst the peasants, held meetings in the villages and quoted the *Ramcharitmanas* for awakening and mobilizing peasants in the countryside. He told the peasants that they were in bondage to the Government and Taluqdars, and only by unifying themselves into an organized group could they end this bondage. When he was arrested by the British government in August 1920, numerous peasants flocked to the court compound demanding his release.

The peasant movement got associated with the Congress-launched Non-Cooperation movement in 1920. In 1921, peasant movement became militant and spread to Rae Bareilly, Fyzabad and Sultanpur in Central U.P. The peasants held demonstrations demanding that evictions from land should stop. They raided the houses of the landlords and the moneylenders. On 6th January, 1921 the peasants gathered at Furstganj Bazar to protest against the high cost of grains and cloth, the heavy profit making of the banias and the high-handedness of Taluqdars. The police failed to disperse the peasants and fired on them. Six persons were killed. The defenseless peasants were again fired upon on 7th January when thousands of peasants collected at the Mushiganj Bridge in Rae Bareilly, Nehru described this incident in his Autobiography:

“As I reached the river sounds of firing could be heard from the other side. I was stopped at the bridge.... We found that men had been killed in the firing.”

The situation, however, changed by the summer of 1921. The movement faded out due to the repressive policy of the government, the efforts of the Congressmen to restrain the movement and the amendment of the Oudh Rent Act in 1921. But this failed to pacify the peasants, and in late 1921 and early 1922 the movement emerged again in Hardoi, Barbanki, Sitapur districts, etc. In these districts the ‘Eka’ movement was started by the peasants. Madari Pasi, a radical peasant leader, was the leading spirit behind this. The Movement led by him posed a serious challenge to the landlords and the administration. However, the movement failed again due to the repressive policy of the British government. But Madari Pasi could not be arrested.

In north Bihar the peasant movement grew under the leadership of Swami Vidyanand. The Raja of Darbhanga, who had large estates in this areas, oppressed the local peasants in various ways. Swami Vidyanand organized the peasants against the Darbhanga Raj. But here the movement was not as militant as in U.P.

In Bengal also the peasants joined the no-tax movement. This was more intense in the Midnapore district. The peasants refused to pay the Union Board taxes. The movement became so strong that the members of the Union Boards resigned. The Government decided not to proceed with the Union Boards. Thus the movement ended in victory.

The Congress attempted to mobilize the peasants in Gujarat. In 1927 the Government had enhanced the revenue in Bardoli in spite of the fall in the prices of cotton. Leaders like Vallabhbhai Patel and Kunwarji Mehta played an important role in mobilizing the peasant. This led to the beginning of the Bardoli Satyagraha in 1928. The peasants refused to pay revenue to the Government. As a result there was much repression and the lands of the presents were seized by the Government. At least the Government arrived at a compromise and the rate of assessment of revenue was reduced.

Besides the movements mentioned above, there were sporadic peasant revolts in other parts of the country as well. In Rajasthan, Malabar, Orissa, Assam and other provinces also the peasants vehemently protested against the injustices done to them.

17.9 PEASANT MOVEMENTS IN THE 1930S

During the 1930s also the peasants rose in revolt in different provinces. The peasant struggle was most intense in U.P. Here the Congress gave a call for no-tax movement and asked Zamindars to stop paying revenue. But some leaders wanted to start a no-rent movement. What is a no-rent movement? It is a movement of the tenants who paid rent to the landlords. While no-tax movement was directed against the Government, the no-rent movement affected the landlords. In the winter of 1931, a no-rent movement was launched. There was a great response from the tenants. They stopped paying rent to the landlords. The movement spread in Rae Bareilly, Etawah, Kanpur, Unnao and Allahabad and the leaders like Kalka Prasad of Rae Bareilly asked the peasant to stop all kinds of payments. The Government tried to suppress the movement. The peasant union was declared illegal. The movement was crushed.

In Bengal and Bihar the peasants took part in no-tax movements. In Bengal even peasant women prepared and sold contraband salt in Midnapore district, and were beaten up by the police. In Manbhum, Singhbhum and Dinajpur districts the tribal peasants joined the salt Satyagraha and went to jail. But there was no movement for non-payment of rent to the landlords.

In Madras Presidency also, the peasant movement had begun to grow. Already the Andhra Ryots' Association was founded in 1928, whose leader was Professor N.G. Ranga. The Ryots' Association popularized the immediate demands of the peasantry and reduction of rents was one of the important demand which affected the landlords. When the Civil Disobedience Movement began, the ryots held meetings in the villages and campaigned against land revenue. The agitation became strong in Tanjore, Madurai and Salem. By late 1931 grain riots started in some districts. In Krishna district the house of a moneylender was raided and his granary was robbed. In Guntur district there was a clash between the police and the peasants. But in spite of the efforts of the Government and the Congress to restrain the peasant movement, it continued to grow with much more vigour.

17.10 FORMATION OF ALL INDIA KISAN SABHA

In different regions, provincial Kisan Sabhas were already formed by the 1920s. But the need for a central organization of the peasants was felt by the socialists and the communists. Their efforts led to the formation of the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) in 1936. By 1937 branches of the All India Kisan Sabha were formed in different provinces. N.G. Ranga, Swami Sahajanand, Narendra Dev, Indulal Yagnik and Bankim Mukherjee were some of the prominent leaders of the All India Kisan Sabha. The objectives of the Kisan Sabha were:

- the protection of the peasants from economic exploitation,
- the abolition of landlordism, such as the Zamindari and the Taluqdari systems,
- reduction of revenue and rent,

- moratorium on debts,
- licensing of moneylenders,
- minimum wages for agricultural labourers,
- fair price for commercial crops, and
- irrigation facilities, etc.

In their meetings and demonstrations the Kisan Sabha popularized these demands, and put pressure on the Government to concede to these demands. In its second annual meeting at Faizpur the AIKS urged “all anti-imperialist forces in the country and especially the Kisans and workers to develop their day-to-day struggle against the exploiters, as represented by the British Government in India, the Zamindars and landlords and industrialists and moneylenders.” The AIKS decided to work independently of the Congress and proclaimed that the emancipation of the peasants lay in “their own organization”.

The Kisan Sabha launched a new type of movement which was directed mainly against the landlords. In Bihar there was a popular movement in 1937-38 which was known as the **Bakasht** Movement. **Bakasht** means self-cultivated. The landlords often evicted the tenants from **Bakasht** land. With the formation of the Congress ministry in 1937, the Kisan Sabha thought that the time had come to force the issue of **Bakasht**. It launched the **Bakasht** Movement during which the peasant fought against eviction. There were clashes between the landlords and the peasants.

In Bengal also the Kisan Sabha was active. In the Burdwan district the Canal Tax was imposed on the peasants after the construction of the Damodar Canal. The Kisan Sabha organised a satyagraha movement for the reduction of Canal Tax. The Government partly accepted the demand of the Kisan Sabha and the movement was withdrawn. In north Bengal districts the **hat tola** movement was launched. The landlords collected a levy from the peasants who sold rice, paddy, vegetables, cattle in fairs and **hats** (weekly markets). The peasant refused to pay this levy. Sometimes the landlords came to a compromise with the peasants and exempted poor peasants from paying the levy.

In 1939 there was a movement of the share croppers. They were poor peasants who tilled the land of the landlord and gave a portion of the produce to the landlord, but they had no security of tenure and could be evicted by the landlord. In 1939 the tenants took the crop from the field to their threshing flour. Previously they had to carry the crop to the landlord's granary, where the crop was threshed and then divided between the share cropper and the landlord. The movement became strong in Dinajpur district in north Bengal. The Government came to a compromise with the peasants. It was decided that in future paddy would be stored in a place to be decided by the landlord and the share cropper. Thus the movement was successful, and the peasants learnt the power of organization. Similarly there was peasant struggle in Orissa and Andhra Pradesh during this period. N.G. Ranga played a vital role in organizing the peasants in Andhra Pradesh.

17.11 THE CONGRESS AND THE PEASANTRY

The questions that come to mind are: What was the Congress response to the peasants' movement? What was the peasants' response to the Congress led nationalist movement?

The Congress leadership was well aware of the strength of the peasantry and their importance in struggle against the British Raj. They were also concerned about the peasant issues and the grievance of the peasantry. This is reflected in Nehru's observation, made in 1937; "The outstanding problem of India is the peasant problem. All else is secondary". But the Right Wing within the Congress, which represented the dominant social groups in the Indian society, was afraid of the growing class consciousness of the Indian peasantry and of the demand of the Kisan Sabha for the abolition of landlordism. They wanted the peasants' support to strengthening the anti-imperialist movement, but avoided the peasants' demand against the landlords. Whenever the peasants rose against the landlords the Congress leadership tried to restrain them. The right wingers regarded the formation of the Kisan Sabha as a challenge to the Congress organization.

Against this if we look at the Kisan Sabha and the peasant movement we find that at no stage the Kisan leaders worked against the Congress. They had full faith on the Congress and its role for the liberation of the country. But unlike the Congress right wingers the Kisan leadership demanded the emancipation not only from British rule but also from the hegemony of the Zamindars and Capitalists. This was the basic issue which led to differences between the Congress leadership and the peasant leadership. The attitude of the peasants to the Congress becomes clear from the speech of Sahajanad, given on 4 October 1939:

"We all cling to the Congress not for its magic or mystery, but because it represents the nation, it has not taken any false step at critical junctures ... All our attempts are simply to strengthen its hands in taken opportune decisions at this most critical juncture of our national struggle for deliverance."

Check Your Progress 5

- 1) How was the peasant movement started in U.P. during the 1920s?
- 2) What were the major demands of the AIKS?
- 3) Give your answer in one sentence.
 - i) What is a no-revenue movement?
 - ii) Who was the leader of the Bardoli Satyagraha of 1928?
 - iii) What is Bakasht land?
 - iv) Who were the share-croppers?

17.12 LET US SUM UP

The hardship and misery of the workers created a favourable ground for the growth of trade union movement in India. But the illiteracy of the workers, their differences of language, race and community, and, above all, the anti-trade union attitude of the employers delayed the formation of trade unions in India.

Even so, trade union movement gradually became very strong from the 1920s onward. The 'outsiders' helped the growth of trade unions. The formation of All India Trade Union Congress in 1920 was a landmark. It should be remembered that Congressmen, Communists, Socialists and Independents worked together in the AITUC.

There was an expansion of trade unionism from 1937 onwards. The Congress formed ministries in the provinces. This aroused popular expectations and workers joined trade unions and launched strikes. The Communists and Socialists played an active role in these strikes.

The excessive burden of taxation, fear of eviction, lack of occupancy right on land, and the rise in prices of essential commodities on the one hand, and the passive attitude of the Government to injustice forced the peasantry to rise in revolt.

Different states of India witnessed a series of peasant uprisings during the 1920s and 1930s. The peasants organized themselves in Kisan Sabhas and a new type of movement started. The movements were directed mainly against the landlords. All India Kisan Sabha was formed as a central organization of the peasants. This was one of the lasting effects of the peasant movements during this period.

17.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The workers lived in miserable condition. They had no leave, no job security and no provision for old age pension. See Section 17.2.
- 2) a) No, b) Yes, c) Yes, d) Yes, e) No, f) No.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Trade Union is an association of the workers. See Sub-section 17.3.1.
- 2) Trade Union gives the workers the opportunity to fight unitedly against the exploitation.

See Sub-section 17.3.1

- 3) Some individuals seeing the miseries of the workers tried to organize them and educate them to improve their condition. See Sub-section 17.3.2.
- 4) Gradually the idea of trade union was gaining popularity among the workers and finally the All India Trade Union Congress was set up as a central organization of the workers. See Sub-section 17.3.3.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Trade union movement became popular among the workers because of the grievances that the workers had. The outsiders helped the workers by organizing meetings, writing petitions and educating them about their rights. See Section 17.4.
- 2) Rise in prices, closure, of factories, suspension of workers etc. See Section 17.5.

- 3) The improvement in country's economy, the restoration of unity in AITUC, formation of Congress ministries in the provinces, etc. See Section 17.6.

**Growth of Trade Union and
Peasant Movements**

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) The peasants had no occupancy right, the fear of eviction from the land, heavy burden of taxation, etc. See Section 17.7
- 2) i) ✓ ii) ✗ iii) ✗ iv) ✗ v) ✗

Check Your Progress 5

- 1) Your answer should include the oppression by the Taluqudars, initiative taken by Baba Ram Chandra to mobilize the peasants, and the progress of the movement. See Section 17.8
- 2) Your answer should include the protection of peasants from economic exploitation, abolition of landlordism, reduction of revenue and rent, etc. See Section 17.10.
- i) Non-Payment of revenue to the government.
- ii) Vallabhbhai Patel
- iii) Self-cultivated land.
- iv) The poor peasants who tilled the lands on share basis.

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UNIT 18: THE CAPITALIST CLASS AND THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE*

Structure

- 18.0 Objectives
- 18.1 Introduction
- 18.2 Growth of Indian Economy and the Indian Capitalist Class
- 18.3 The Emergence of a Class Organization
 - 18.3.1 Role in the Economic Sphere
 - 18.3.2 Role in the Political Sphere
- 18.4 Nature of Anti-imperialism: The Constitutional Path
- 18.5 Congress and the Capitalists
- 18.6 Capitalists' View of the Congress
 - 18.6.1 Approaching the Congress
 - 18.6.2 Capitalists' Strategy to contain the Left
- 18.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 18.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

18.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will learn about the:

- growth of the Indian Capitalist Class in the context of colonialism and the colonial economy,
- attitude of the Indian Capitalists as a class towards colonialism.
- attitude of the Indian Capitalists towards the mass movements and the left, and
- relationship between the Capitalist Class and the Indian National Congress.

18.1 INTRODUCTION

The Indian National Movement was, in its initial stages during the second half of the nineteenth century, mainly confined to the educated middle classes. However, in course of time, it began to expand its social base and gradually other classes and sections of society began to join it. The nature of the role played by various classes and social groups and the timing of their joining the national struggle varied. In this Unit, we will discuss the role of the Indian capitalist class in the freedom struggle.

The modern capitalist class began to emerge in India in the second half of the nineteenth century. Till about World War I, there were few Indian capitalists and the size of their investments was also not substantial. Moreover, they were as yet largely dependent on the colonial government's support. At this stage of development, it was hardly possible for the Indian capitalists as a

* Adopted from Unit 31 of EHI-01

class to take an open confrontationist position with regard to the colonial state. The capitalists stayed away from the Swadeshi Movement of 1905-1908. At the time of the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-22), while many traders participated in the movement, several eminent capitalists like Purshottamdas Thakurdas actually opposed the movement. Subsequently, however, the capitalists' position changed. There were many Indian capitalists who extended their support to the freedom struggle.

18.2 GROWTH OF INDIAN ECONOMY AND THE INDIAN CAPITALIST CLASS

The emerging political position of Indian capitalists was connected with the nature and extent of the growth of the Indian economy.

The developments in the Indian economy during the colonial period, especially in the twentieth century, were significantly different from the experience of most other colonial countries and largely explain the position of Indian capitalist class vis-à-vis imperialism. Let us briefly outline these developments:

- i) Soon after the beginning of the twentieth century, the Indian economy entered a process of rapid import substitution. During the two World Wars, as also in the course of world depression of the 1930s, the grip of imperialism over the India economy became comparatively weaker and the process of growth of Indian industry, largely the indigenous manufactures substituting foreign imports, gained a large impetus. More importantly, the growth in indigenous industry that occurred in this period was derived largely from the resources of independent Indian capital. In other words, the Indian capitalists grew with an independent capital base and not as junior partners of foreign capital.
- ii) Increase in indigenous industrial growth since World War I was reflected in a definite reversal of the typical colonial pattern of foreign trade under which the colony imported manufactured goods and exported agricultural raw materials. Between 1914 and 1945, the proportion of manufactured goods in India's total imports declined considerably, while the proportion in total exports increased. Conversely, the proportion of raw materials in India's total exports declined and the proportion of capital goods (as opposed to consumer goods) in total imports increased. Also, the dependence of Indian economy on the colonial type of international trade began to show a decline while the growth in internal trade took some rapid strides.
- iii) The hold of foreign capital which in any case was not as large in India, as in some other colonial countries, and was not very significant in domestic industry began to decline during this period. Foreign capital inflow into the Indian economy fell off after a spurt in the early 1920s. On the other hand, repayment of foreign debt and repatriation of existing foreign investments (partially through the takeover of foreign companies by Indian capitalists) started increasing, especially since the 1930s. As a result, from about 1935, there was a new outflow of foreign capital from India. In fact, during the World War II, India ceased to be a debtor country. On the contrary, by the end of the

War, Britain owed India a whopping sterling balance equivalent to nearly Rs. 1500/- crores. This meant that India was not dependent on the London money market any longer as it did not need foreign borrowing.

- iv) During the post-World War I period, in the course of the processes discussed above, the Indian capital class was able to grow rapidly. It was able to do so through:
- constant economic and political struggle, and
 - by taking full advantages of the crisis faced by British imperialism especially during the two wars and the great depression.

The Indian capitalists resorted to import substitution in areas such as cotton textiles and steel industry and slowly took over areas like banking, jute, foreign trade, coal, tea, etc., where European capital in India had traditionally dominated. They also initiated some steps which accounted for the bulk of new investments made since the 1920s in industries such as sugar, cement, paper, chemicals, iron and steel. As a result, on the eve of independence, Indian enterprise had already captured about 72 per cent of the Indian market. In the financial sphere too, massive advances were made by Indian capital. For example:

- While in 1914 Indian banks held about 30 per cent of the total deposits, by 1947 their share had increased to over 80 per cent.
- Indian companies grew rapidly in insurance business as well, capturing about 79 per cent of life insurance and 55 per cent of general insurance by 1945.
- The total assets of the top three Indian business houses in 1946 greatly surpassed the total assets of top three non-Indian companies.

However, this spectacular and independent growth of Indian capitalist class, quite unusual in a colonial situation, did not occur as is often argued, as a result of a conscious policy of 'decolonization' initiated by the colonial state. It occurred in spite of, and in opposition to, colonialism either when imperialism was facing a crisis or as a result of waging a constant struggle against the colonial interests. The Indian capitalists did not see their interests as tied with colonialism.

Moreover, the capitalist class, on the whole, was not tied up in a subservient position either economically or politically with pro-imperialist feudal interests in the country.

Another situation, where a colonial capitalist class may move towards collaborating with imperialism is when it sees a threat to its existence from radical anti-capitalist or left-wing popular movements in the colony. Such situations did arise in certain colonial or semicolonial countries, where the capitalist class sought to suppress the radical movement in alliance with imperialism. We can cite the example of China. In India also, the capitalists were concerned about the growth of the left. However, whenever the Indian capitalist class felt that the threat from the left was growing, it responded not by seeking help from imperialism, but by attempting to strengthen, by various means, the right wing in the national movement.

The following points then emerge from the above discussion:

- i) The Indian capitalist class grew independently and in opposition to imperialism and therefore did not see its long-term class interests as being tied up with imperialism.
- ii) The rapid and independent growth of Indian capitalists enabled them to feel strong enough to take anti-imperialist position.
- iii) The threat of popular left movements did not lead the capitalist class to collaborate or compromise with imperialism. The issue before the capitalist class was not, whether to oppose imperialism or not, but that the path chosen to fight imperialism should not be such that it would threaten capitalism itself.

Check Your Progress I

- 1) Was the growth of the Capitalist class a by-product of Colonialism?
- 2) What was the attitude of the Indian Capitalist class towards the threat of the left?

18.3 THE EMERGENCE OF A CLASS ORGANIZATION

It was in the process of figuring out its attitude towards imperialism and the national movement that the capitalist class in India emerged as a political entity. Since the early 1920s, capitalists like G.D. Birla and Purshottamdas Thakurdas were making efforts to establish a national level organization of Indian commercial, financial and industrial interests. The initial idea was to establish an Indian business organization which could effectively lobby with the colonial government -- a role which relatively more organized non-Indian business interests were already performing. This effort led to the formation of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) in 1927. The FICCI soon acquired a large membership which increasingly became representative of Indian business interest from all over the country. Within a short period of its formation, it was recognized by the British authorities as well as the general Indian public as a body which represented the dominant opinion within the Indian capitalist class.

18.3.1 Role in the Economic Sphere

The capitalist leaders clearly stated that the goal of the FICCI was to become the “national guardians of trade, commerce and industry”. It was to perform in the economic sphere the function that is normally expected of a nationalist organization. In pursuance of this goal the Indian capitalists, developed a comprehensive economic critique of imperialism in all its manifestations. For example, their critique exposed the imperialist exploitation that was going on through direct appropriation of surplus in form of taxation, remittance of ‘Tribute’ or home charges in addition to the exploitation through trade, foreign investments, financial and currency manipulations and so on. The leaders of the Indian National Congress, of the eminence of Motilal Nehru and Gandhiji, often did not hesitate to seek the assistance of capitalists like Purshottamdas or G.D. Birla on complex economic matters which related to Indian interests vis-à-vis imperialism.

18.3.2 Role in the Political Sphere

The role of the FICCI was, however, not to be limited to making an economic critique of imperialism and fighting for the economic demands of the capitalist class in particular and of the nation as a whole in general. The leaders of the capitalist class clearly saw the necessity of effective intervention in politics. Purshottamdas Thakurdas, President of FICCI, declared at its second annual session in 1928: “We can no more separate our politics from our economics”. Involvement in politics for the capitalists meant allying with the Indian National Movement. As Purshottamdas said in the 1928 FICCI session, “Indian Commerce and Industry are intimately associated with and are indeed, an integral part of the national movement – growing with its growth and strengthening with its strength”. A transformation could be seen in Purshottamdas for he had earlier opposed the Non-Cooperation Movement. Clearly, the capitalists realized that even their economic aims could be achieved only by fighting for a change in the existing political system of colonial domination. G.D. Birla expressed this understanding in 1930:

“It is impossible in the present political condition of our country to convert the government to our views, the only solution lies in every Indian businessman strengthening the hands of those who are fighting for the freedom of our country”.

But, at the same time Birla told the British Government that he had never financed the Civil Disobedience Movement.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What was the initial objective behind the formation of the FICCI?
- 2) What role did the FICCI play in the economic sphere?

18.4 NATURE OF ANTI-IMPERIALISM: THE CONSTITUTIONAL PATH

The capitalist class was concerned as to what kind of national struggle was to be supported by them. The capitalists, while determining their attitude towards the British were, always in favour of not completely abandoning the constitutional path and the negotiating table. They supported constitutional forms of struggle and were not in favour of agitation and civil disobedience. There were several reasons for the capitalist class adopting this attitude:

i) Fears of a Mass Movement

First, the capitalists feared that mass civil disobedience, especially if it was prolonged, could lead to the radicalization of the masses and instead of just putting pressure against imperialism it could begin to threaten capitalism itself. Not wishing the anti-imperialist movement to turn anti-capitalist, the capitalists always tried to bring back the national movement to a phase of constitutional opposition. Another reason why the capitalists could not afford to support a prolonged and all-out opposition to the colonial government was that in their normal day to day business they needed a minimum cooperation of the colonial government. This dependence on the existing government for immediate needs, combined with the fact that mass

agitation disrupted normal business, led the capitalists to shy away from any kind of mass action even under the aegis of the Indian National Congress.

ii) Constitutional Forums

The capitalists considered that a total or prolonged boycott of all constitutional avenues such as councils and legislatures or the negotiations like the Round Table Conferences was a “suicidal policy”. They felt that if the nationalist forces completely abandoned these forums then with the help of loyalist elements the government could easily get such policies or measures passed in these forums which would seriously affect Indian economic development. This again was linked with their own interests. Thus, keeping this in mind the capitalists not only supported but at times actually participated in the various forums offered by the colonial Government. For example, some of them even joined the Viceroy's Executive Council. In fact they wanted to extract to their benefit whatever reforms that were possible within the system.

In certain cases the capitalists did not support participation in constitutional bodies unconditionally. G.D. Birla and Purshottamdas made it clear that they were to “participate on (their) own terms”, with “no compromise on fundamentals”. It was on this ground, for example, that the proposals of constitutional reforms put forward by the Joint Parliamentary Committee in 1934 were rejected by the FICCI as being “reactionary”.

Moreover, the capitalists generally refused to negotiate with the British government on constitutional or economic questions without the participation of, or at least the approval of, the leading organizations of the national movement. In 1930, for example, the FICCI advised its members to boycott the Round Table Conference saying that “... no conference ... convened for the purpose of discussing the problem of Indian constitutional advance can come to a solution unless such a conference is attended by Mahatma Gandhi, as a free man, or has at least his approval”. Thus many leading capitalists boycotted the first Round Table Conference but attended the second along with Gandhi. When the Congress was absent for the third Round Table Conference, Purshottamdas attended in his individual capacity. But he made it clear that the conference could not settle the constitutional problems in Gandhi's absence. The capitalists had clearly realized that no progress could be made to safeguard their interests, unless support of the Congress was secured. Ambalal Sarabhai, a prominent capitalist of Ahmedabad, summed up this situation in 1929 when he said, “minus the support of the Congress the government will not listen to you”.

Thus, the capitalists were in favour of a constitutional approach and methodology due to two reasons:

- a) They could check the Left by strengthening the Right wing.
- b) They could show it to the government that they were in no way a threat to the continuity of British rule. For example, Purshottamdas declared in December 1942, that “the various demands put forward by the commercial community did not and could not aim at the liquidation of the British Empire”.

It was the faith in constitutionalism that G.D. Birla involved himself during 1935-37 with Gandhi regarding the question of elections and forming of ministries.

iii) Attitude to Mass Movements

However, at times they felt a mass movement necessary in order to extract crucial concessions for their class or the country. Here we can cite the comment made by G.D. Birla in January 1931 about the ongoing Civil Disobedience Movement. He said: “there could be no doubt that what we are being offered at present is entirely due to Gandhiji if we are to achieve what we desire, the present movement should not be allowed to slacken.”

iv) Dangers of a Prolonged Mass Movement

Yet they would not like the mass movement to continue for long. They attempt for a compromise that could lead to the withdrawal of the movement. Often they offered their services as intermediaries between the government and the Congress in the negotiations for peace. The best example for this was the negotiations before the Gandhi-Irwin Pact in March 1931. But here the threat of continuing, or launching the mass movement, again was used as a bargaining point. As G.D. Birla, put it in January 1931, the capitalists in their “anxiety for peace” were not to surrender of “reduce (their) demands”. They, he continued, should have “two objects in view: one is that was should jump in at the most opportune time to try for a conciliation and the other is that we should not do anything which might weaken the hands of those (i.e., the national movement), through whose efforts we have arrived at this stage”. In other words, through the capitalists argued for peace or conciliation they did not do so either at the cost of surrendering basic national demands or of weakening the national movement as a whole.

The capitalists, even when they had serious reservations about the continuance or launching of a mass civil disobedience movement, never supported the colonial government in repressing it. On the contrary, they repeatedly pressurized the government to stop repression, remove the ban on the Congress and the press, release political prisoners and stop arbitrary rule through ordinances. There was no change in the attitude even when the national movement was at the pitch of its non-constitutional mass phase. The fear of the mass movement becoming too radical or the fact that it involved losses in day to day business did not lead the capitalist class as a whole, to either supporting the government in repressing it or even openly condemning or dissociating from it.

18.5 CONGRESS AND THE CAPITALISTS

You would like to know about the relationship between the Indian National Congress and Capitalists. Generally speaking this relationship is analysed from two viewpoints:

- i) The Congress was deeply influenced by the Capitalists who used it to serve their own class interests. This viewpoint is centred on the thesis that the capitalists, by using the funds at their disposal, pressurized the Congress into fighting for their own demands like:
 - a lower Rupee-sterling ratio

- tariff protection to Indian Industries, and
- reservation of coastal traffic to Indian shipping, etc.

Besides this, the capitalists influenced the political decisions of the Congress like the withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1931; selections of Congress candidates in elections particularly in 1937; crushing the working class movement during late 1930s; and financing the right wing, etc. Hence Congress was a capitalistic organization by nature.

- ii) The second point of view is based on the assumption that the Congress was not at all influenced by the capitalists; rather it dictated its own terms.

According to this viewpoint:

- i) A programme of economic nationalism with demands for protection, fiscal and monetary autonomy vis-à-vis imperialism did not benefit the capitalist class alone. These were national demands for independent economic development. Anyone who was anti-imperialist, whether a capitalist or not, had to fight for these demands. In fact the socialists and communists in India also fought for these demands. Besides, the doctrine of economic nationalism was developed by the early nationalists in India several decades before the Indian capitalist organized themselves politically, and began to fight for these demands. As a matter of fact when these demands were first raised in the nineteenth century, the capitalist class had barely come into existence and it did not come out in support of them. Clearly, the Congress did not have to be bought, manipulated or pressurized by the capitalists to put forward these demands.
- ii) Secondly, the Congress dependence on the funds from businessmen was not the determining factor as far as the policy decisions were concerned. Nor was the financial dependence on capitalists so strong as to affect its policies. The overwhelming majority of Congressmen maintained themselves on their own account and the day-to-day agitations were carried out with the voluntary hospitality and support of the common people and the funds raised through membership fees and small donations. Even during the constitutional phase, when the Congress went in for elections, its dependence on the capitalists for funds was not such as to make it dependent on them.

This is not to say that the Congress did not need or accept funds from the capitalists, especially during the constitutional phases. However, through these funds the capitalist class was not in any basic way able to influence the policy and ideology of the Congress along lines which was not acceptable to it independently.

The attitude of the Congress leaders, even those who were supposed to be close to the capitalists, is very revealing in this context. Gandhiji, as early as February, 1922, while welcoming and even appealing for support from merchants and millowners made in very clear that:

Whether they do so or not, the country's march to freedom cannot be made to depend on any corporation or groups of men. This is a mass manifestation. The masses are moving rapidly towards deliverance and they must move whether with the aid of the organized capital or without. This must therefore be a movement independent of capital and yet not antagonistic to it. Only if capital came to the aid of the masses, it would redound to the credit of the capitalists and hasten the advent of the happy day.

Similarly, Motilal Nehru who, in the Swarajist phase, was in close contact with Bombay and Ahmedabad capitalists and accepted significant sums of money from them for political work, had no hesitation in severely castigating them in 1928 when he felt that they were trying to retreat from their erstwhile commitments. He said that, the Congress should welcome this change in the attitude of the mill owners. An alliance between the Congress and capitalists who are bent on profiting by the sufferings of the nation is an impossible one. The more suitable field of work for the Congress is among the workers and not the owners of the mills. But I was misled by the patriotic talk of some of my personal friends among the mill owners. Mahatmaji never believed in an alliance with the latter, and I have now told him that he was right and I was wrong.

The message was clear. The capitalists had to behave if the Congress was to work with them. Whether they did so or not the Congress would go ahead with its work relying on the support of other classes. But this did not mean that the Congress did not want their financial support. On many occasions it took donations. For example, Dalmia contributed substantially for election funds in 1937 and the constructive programme was always financed by Birla.

18.6 CAPITALISTS' VIEW OF THE CONGRESS

How did the Indian Capitalists view the Indian National Congress? In fact the Congress was never perceived by them as their own class party. J.K. Mehta of the Indian Merchants Chamber put it as a party, "with room in it for all shades of political opinion and economic views". But at the same time, the Capitalists tried to ensure that the national movement did not get radicalized, i.e., come under the influence of socialists or communists. In fact Birla and Thakurdas had earlier opposed the suggestion of Dorabji Tata for forming a political party of the Capitalists. This was because they felt that the Congress itself could take care of their interests provided the right wing dominated in the Congress.

18.6.1 Approaching the Congress

Interestingly, the capitalists themselves showed remarkable maturity in never seeing the Congress as their class party or even as a party amenable only to their influence. They fully recognized that the Congress was a multi-class popular movement with room in it for all shades of political opinion and economic views. Which shade or which class perspective would exercise greater weight within the Congress, remained an open question and was partially linked to the political maturity and farsightedness of each class.

18.6.2 Capitalist Strategy to contain the Left

It is with this understanding that the capitalists moulded their politics to try to ensure that the national movement did not get too radicalized, i.e., it did not come under the dominating influence of the socialists or communists. However, as pointed out earlier, the capitalists did not respond to the growing threat of the left in India by allying themselves with imperialism. For example, in 1928, they refused to support the colonial government in passing the Public Safety Bill which was intended to contain the communists, on the ground that such a Bill would result in an attack on the national movement. The fact that the capitalists did not abandon the side of nationalism, even when threatened by the left tendency within the national movement, went a long way in maintaining the influence of the capitalist perspective within the movement.

Instead of abandoning the side of nationalism, the capitalists evolved a complex strategy to combat the left in the nationalist stream. As a part of their strategy, they gave support to the right wing of the national movement, and did extensive political and ideological propaganda, arguing for rapid economic growth, equitable distribution, partial nationalization, land reforms and schemes for worker's welfare. By formulating what FICCI President, G.L. Mehta called "a consistent programme of reforms (as the) most effective remedy against social upheavals". They sought to combat the influence of the left on the national movement.

It needs to be reiterated, however, that the capitalists' attempt to contain the national movement within bourgeois limits did not involve any compromise with imperialism. They remained anti-imperialist, though, their goal was to evolve or support a strategy of overthrowing imperialism, which would simultaneously ensure the maintenance of the capitalist system:

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) It may be said that
 - i) the capitalists were not financing the Congress in anyway.
 - ii) the capitalists were completely financing the Congress.
 - iii) the capitalists were financing the Congress but the extent to which this determined the Congress's political decision is a matter of controversy.
 - iv) none of the above.
- 2) One of the most effective strategies the capitalists evolved to contain the left in the national movement was to
 - i) strengthen the ultra left
 - ii) dissociate themselves from the Congress main stream
 - iii) remain within the Congress and strengthen the right wing
 - iv) none of the above.

18.7 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, you got to know:

- about the emergence of Indian Capitalism in the concrete conditions of the space created by declining hold of foreign capital, import substitution forced by war, and changes in foreign trade. This took place because of an internal crisis in imperialism weakened by the World War and the 1930s depression.
- about how, even then, the Indian Capitalists had to struggle against colonial policies to establish themselves.
- about how the organization of the Indian Capitalists as a class under the Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), helped to define in a concrete manner how economic and politically imperialism was affecting its growth.
- it was the result of this clear cut critique of colonialism that decided the Indian Capitalists' strategy in the national movement,
- that this strategy was marked by
 - i) a realization of the dangers and the necessity of the mass movements to their interest,
 - ii) a need to counter the potential of the left, and
 - iii) a need to constantly orient the multi-class platform that the Congress was, towards its class interests.

18.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Sub-sec. 18.2.5. Your answer should cover (i) the nature of Indian Capitalists opposition to Colonialism and (ii) the weakening of British Imperialism.
- 2) See Sub-sec. 18.2.7. Your answer should include (i) the capitalists' attitude towards the growth of left and (ii) the strength of the left.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See section 18.3, the first para. Your answer should include the efforts of Indian business to build a national organization to lobby for their interests.
- 2) See Sub-sec 18.3.1. Your answer should include (i) its role of a national guardian of trade and industry (ii) its role in developing a critique of imperialism.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) (iii)
- 2) (iii)

UNIT 19: TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE: 1945-1947 *

Structure

- 19.0 Objectives
- 19.1 Introduction
- 19.2 Background: India and the Raj
 - 19.2.1 Second World War: Impact on the Indians
 - 19.2.2 Second World War: Impact on the British Government
 - 19.2.3 End of the War: The British Policy
 - 19.2.4 Congress and the Muslim League
- 19.3 Attempts at a Negotiated Settlement
 - 19.3.1 The Simla Conference
 - 19.3.2 The Labour in Power
 - 19.3.3 Elections and the Cabinet Mission
 - 19.3.4 The Communal Carnage and Interim Government
- 19.4 The Popular Upsurges
 - 19.4.1 Direct Confrontations
 - 19.4.2 Indirect Confrontations
- 19.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 19.6 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

19.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit deals with a brief but a very crucial period of Indian Nationalism. After reading this Unit, you will:

- become familiar with the impact of the World War on the British rulers and the Indian people,
- be able to link up the various kinds of political activities undertaken during this period,
- to narrate the popular struggles which break out in this period, and
- evaluate their role in weakening and ultimately throwing out the Raj.

19.1 INTRODUCTION

In the earlier Unit, you have been familiarized with the various constitutional processes at work, political developments and their crystallization, the political maturing of certain sections of Indian society and finally the breakout of the Second World War and its consequences. As a result of all this the 1940s witnessed a vastly different political scenario. New tensions and conflicts emerged. The relationship, mainly conflictual, between the rulers and the ruled acquired new dimensions, and the range of political activities became much wider as the possibility of independence began taking shape. There were now on the one hand, new attempts being made

* Adopted from Unit 35 of EHI-01

for a negotiated settlement, for a peaceful transfer of power -- a politics of the negotiating chamber. On the other hand, the popular upsurges for freedom, dissatisfied with the methods of negotiation, looked for different outlets. These outlets were found in various confrontations with the British and were different from the politics of the negotiating chamber. During this period the separatist politics also raised its head and the movement for Pakistan gathered greater momentum.

The situation thus, was very complex. All streams of politics – nationalist as well as communalist -- were attempting for a transfer of power. But the popular struggles, direct anti-British fights as well as the anti-feudal struggles, challenged the British authority on a different plank. In this Unit we will attempt to unfold some of the complex characteristics and the different dimensions of India's struggle for freedom during 1945-47.

19.2 BACKGROUND: INDIA AND THE RAJ

The period 1945-47 represents a climax of the political events of the preceding decades. It is important therefore, to have a look at the background to the development which took place in these decisive years. In particular, it was the Second World War and its impact on the British government and the Indian people which shaped the course of some of the events. Let us now look at how the War affected the Government, its policies and various sections of the Indian population.

19.2.1 Second World War: Impact on the Indians

From the decline of the “Quit India” movement to the collapse of the Axis powers (Germany, Italy and Japan) in the Second World War, between 1943 and 1945, the Indian political scene was apparently rather quiet. Beneath the surface, however, disquiet was building up steadily over the acute War-time sufferings of the people. The Raj could hardly cope with this disquietude, despite all its show of strength, and only hoped to side-track it by leaning more heavily on diversionary tactics than ever before.

Popular distress was due primarily to an inflation caused by the channelizing of Indian products (agricultural, as well as industrial) to meet the military needs, and through a fall in imports of consumer goods (from British) to the Indian civilians. It was further accentuated by the British failure to pay for the Indian contribution to the defence expenditure and the growing volume of their debt to India. For example, if we take 100 as the base for prices in 1939 the following figures show the rise during the year 1941-44:

Year	Rice	Wheat	Cotton Manufactures	Kerosene
1939	100	100	100	100
1941	172	212	196	140
1942	218	232	414	194
1944	333	381	285	175

The attempt of the Government at “controlling” the prices led quickly to the disappearance of the products from the open market and their reappearance soon afterwards – following large scale hoarding – in the “black-market” at

very exorbitant prices. Artificial, abnormal scarcities were thus added to the normal scarcities that resulted from ceaseless supplies to the Allied armies. Basic items were not ordinarily available to the public and when they did show up in extraordinary circumstances, the common man could hardly afford them. While the suppliers to the military – “the war contractors” – the hoarders and “the black-marketeers” were having a field day, the consumers in general, and even the producers and the industrial workers, were forced to live through a harrowing time. Such precarious economic rope-dancing could only result in gave disasters if:

- the climate turned harsh and the crops failed;
- if the food procurers for the Government bungled their work and those for the army overdid theirs;
- if the officials mismanaged the movements of food grains from one place to another; and
- if the military adopted a “scorched earth” policy in a region to stem the apprehended march of an invading army.

As the cumulative effect of some of these disorders, a gruesome tragedy in fact took place in Bengal in the latter half of 1943 when a devastating famine – suspected largely to be “man-made” or the handiwork of an apathetic officialdom – starved more than 3 million people to death. Though not actually ravaged by famines, the condition of the rest of India was not much better than that of Bengal and presented more or less a uniform picture of the depressed countryside and the gloomy urban centres. Clearly, the suffering people had reached by 1945 almost the end of their tether, and the so-called all-powerful Raj could do very little to reverse the trend.

19.2.2 Second World War: Impact on the British Government

With a World War at hand, the British were also not really in a position to deal efficiently with the Indian situation, their eyes being fixed wholly on the prosecution of the fight, they had neither the time nor the inclination to bother about the plight of the Indians, or to ponder over the Indian reactions. And when the war came to a close, the Raj was too exhausted, too much in need for a respite, to start setting its Indian house in order afresh. The situation had changed considerably:

- The European element in its armed forces was already hankering for demobilization - for an opportunity to go home - rather than staying on indefinitely in India;
- To many Britons India did no more appear to be an ideal place for their civil and military careers or an easy field for their protected expatriate entrepreneurship.
- It was no longer convenient, even impossible, in the face of obvious Indian hostility, to make use of India’s economy for furthering Britain’s global trade interests, except by forcibly silencing all opposition.
- The extent of force that Britain had to use upon India in its desperate bid for survival in 1942 was extremely difficult to repeat at the end of the war in 1945, and that, too, on an anticipated massive scale.

- Financially, India was no more a debtor to Britain, and Britain; on the contrary, Britain had become hugely indebted to India.
- Administratively, the Indian Civil Service – the famed “steel frame” of the empire – was reduced during the war to a wholly run-down state.

Harassed by such crisis-management duties as holding the prices, ensuring the supplies, tackling the famines or famine-like conditions, hunting the “fifth-columnists”, sounding air-raid signals, enforcing “black-outs”, and burdened with the ever-increasing weight of the daily executive and judicial chores, the capabilities of a meagre number of men in the ICS were stretched so further that they did not seem to be able to carry on for long without being broken down completely. To make matters worse, the enlistment of the Britons for the war took precedence over their recruitment in the ICS, and the British entry into the cadre practically stopped at the height of the war in 1943. Irrespective of its putting up a brave face, the Raj had little reason to feel very secure with a minority of loyal Europeans in the ranks in the mid-1940 (587 in number) alongside an Indian majority (614 in total) of uncertain proclivities in a rapidly changing circumstance. The days of classical imperialism had come apparently to an end with the termination of the World War.

19.2.3 End of the War: The British Policy

Evidently after the war, it was no longer convenient for a metropolitan country – and far less profitable – to rule directly over a colony for the systematized reaping of all the economic advantages from it. However, the Second World War by no stretch of imagination marked the collapse of imperialism, rather it had heralded its survival, and opened up the possibility of rejuvenation on new lines – neo-colonialism.

That the Indian nationalists would not be willing to play into the hands of the puppeteers, and that a battle-weary and an internally wrecked Britain could not again be in a position to dominate the world market, did hardly discourage the British to dream on the wild neo-colonialist lines. Playing up the divergences of a pluralist people was expected by the British to be as useful in their tactical retreat from India as it certainly had been throughout in fostering the Raj’s advance.

Of all the distinctions among Indians that the imperial authorities tried to magnify, and make use of, those between the followers of two co-existing religious, Hinduism and Islam, or between the Hindu majority and the substantial Muslim minority, proved to be the most effective. On most of the important public matters, the Raj had succeeded in subtly setting one of these two communities against the other, by acknowledging the Muslim League as the only representative body of the Indian Muslims, by casting doubts on the nationalist character of a “Hinduised” Indian National Congress, and by using the League as a Political force to counter-balance the Congress. The way the Raj utilized the League’s demand for a Pakistan to thwart all constitutional negotiations with the Congress at the initial stage of the war, the manner in which it allowed the League practically through the back door (in the absence of the Congress from the legislative scene on

account of the “Quit India” movement) to take over some of the provincial ministries, and the sardonic pleasure with which its officials noted the spreading of the League’s sphere of influence among the Muslims with the aid of intrigues and dispersal of official patronages – all clearly point to the careful building of a backlash that could thwart the progress of the anti-imperialist movement.

19.2.4 Congress and the Muslim League

On their part, the nationalist leaders could do precious little to counter the Pakistan Movement. Their self-righteous desire to do away with communalism merely through denunciation, disregard, and their criticism of the retrograde feudal leadership of the League however failed to check its growth because:

- they made no serious attempts to contact the Muslim masses for wining them away from the League’s hold
- the idioms which they spoke in, like *Bande Matram*, *Ramrajya*, etc, were used by the League to propagate against them among the Muslims.

What seemed worst from the nationalist viewpoint -- and contrary to all their great expectations – was not that the League had been benefiting from the exercise of some political leverage under the Raj’s shadow, but that its scheme of Pakistan – supposedly the panacea for all the evils of the Muslims – had gradually been attracting a considerable following among them.

- i) The educated Muslim middle class and the Muslim business interests started welcoming the severance of a part of the Indian Sub-Continent where they would not suffer from the unequal competition with the long-standing and overbearing Hindu business houses and professionals.
- ii) To this possibility of a Muslim hegemony over jobs and business in a region, was being added the anxiety of the Muslim peasants in Punjab and Bengal for freedom in a future Pakistan from the Hindu Bania and Zamindari exploitation.

The League’s support-base among the Indian Muslims was broadening. This afforded its supremo, M.A. Jinnah, with an opportunity to assume – with unflinching British approval – an increasingly obstinate bargaining posture vis-à-vis the Congress. Jinnah’s obstinacy was apparent as early as in July 1944 when he set Gandhi’s belated initiative for a Congress-League rapprochement at naught, and refused to budge – even at the risk of weakening the over-all Indian claim for independence – from his obsessive demand for a wholesome Pakistan (comprising the Muslim-majority provinces of Sind, Punjab, Baluchistan, North West Frontier Provinces, Bengal and Assam in their entirety). The situation admirably suited the interests of the British, who could use it either to perpetuate their post-war imperial rule over India – at the best or to break-up at the worst – the Indian empire to their ulterior advantage. Howsoever distasteful to the common man and woman, and disconcerting for their hopes and aspirations, the communal tangle and the Pakistan issue were to dominate the Indian proceedings between 1945 and 1947.

The development during these crucial years ran on two perceptible lines:

- i) The level of high politics for bringing about a negotiated settlement among the Congress, the League and the Raj on India's political future.
- ii) The level of popular actions for demonstrating sporadically the urge the Indian masses felt for resistance against the British and their indigenous collaborators.

Although the two lines did hardly ever converge, they nevertheless attracted and distracted each other and constituted together the history of the three fateful years that culminated in the partition and independence of India.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Read the following statements and mark right (✓) or wrong (✗).
 - i) The World War was followed by a rapid increase in the prices of various commodities.
 - ii) Owing to the World War, the British could not deal with the Indian political situations very effectively.
 - iii) The proportion of British officers in the ICS increased after 1940.
 - iv) The British tried to bridge the gap between the Hindus and the Muslims.
 - v) Muslim business groups supported the demand for Pakistan.
 - vi) In Punjab and Bengal the Muslim peasants were exploited by banias and zamindar.
- 2) How did the British perpetuate the political hostility between the Hindu and the Muslim?

19.3 ATTEMPTS AT A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENTS

Once the tide of the war turned in their favour, the British started realizing by the end of 1944 generally that the Indian situation should not be allowed to remain where it stood after the Quit India Movement. They realized that it would be impossible to hold India by force for long. A dialogue, therefore, had to begin with the imprisoned Congress leaders, at least for preventing them in future from taking advantage of an explosive post-war situation of economic hardships and unemployment. According to Wavell, the energies of the Congress and its fellow-travellers were required to be directed from the path of agitation into "some more profitable channel, i.e. into dealing with the administrative problems of India and into trying to solve the constitutional problems". Churchill and his men stubbornly resisted this line of thinking till the termination of the war came in full view (with the surrender of Germany in May 1945) and the war-time Coalition Government in Britain was scheduled to make room for a freshly elected one.

19.3.1 The Simla Conference

Eventually permitted by the home authorities to set the ball of negotiations rolling, the Viceroy, Wavell, ordered on 14 June 1945 the release of all the Congress Working Committee members, and invited them along with others, notably the League leaders, to join in a Conference in Simla (24 June - 14 July 1945) for setting up a new Executive Council at the Centre -- practically Indian in composition -- excepting the Commander in Chief and of course, the Viceroy, presiding over its deliberations. The Council would have equal representation from the so-called "Caste Hindus" and Muslims, and it should function within the existing constitutional arrangement without its being responsible to the legislature.

The British in fact were lukewarmly agreeable to discuss the making of a new constitution only at the actual end of the war. While attending the conference, the Congress naturally refused to be treated as a "Caste Hindu" body and, asserting its secular nationalist character, staked the right to select the representatives of any community, including Muslims (of whom Abul Kalam Azad and Abudal Ghaffar Khan presented themselves in Simla in the capacities of the leaders and distinguished members respectively of the Congress delegation), as the Congress nominees to the council. The league, which insisted -- more obdurately than with reason -- on its having the sole agency to speak for every Indian Muslim, objected to the Congress stand, and claimed an absolute jurisdiction for choosing all the Muslim members of the Council. The Claim even embarrassed the Viceroy who felt that the loyal Unionist Muslims, or those in power in Punjab without compromising themselves with the League, deserved some representation.

Not satisfied with this, the League further demanded a communal veto by asking for a two-third majority in the proposed Council, instead of a simple one, on any decision opposed by the Muslim members (or its own nominees) and related to the Muslim interest. In his anxiety for encouraging the League's intransigent posture, and brushing aside the Congress offer to join the Council by keeping it open for the League to step in later, the Viceroy, Wavell, abruptly decided to abandon the British proposals and dissolve the Simla Conference. Judging by the subsequent development, his action implied not only an official recognition of the League's monopoly to speak for all Muslims, and thereby inflated its stature in the Muslim eyes, but he also seemed to have conceded to the League in Substance the power to Negate any future Negotiation that did not suit its own convenience. Hereafter, the satisfaction of the League became a pre-requisite to any major settlement.

19.3.2 The Labour in Power

Following a massive victory in the general elections, the British Labour Party came into power in Britain in July 1945 which thereby raised hopes for an early settlement of the Indian question. Known for their sympathies with the nationalist cause in India, the Labour leaders had already committed themselves to freeing India, if and when they were voted to power. They had also agreed to grant India freedom by transferring authority from the British to the Indian hands. So unequivocal appeared to be the position of the Labour Party on the issue of Indian independence, and so complete

was its electoral victory, that even the Viceroy of India shuddered at the possibility of the new British rulers handing over India “to their Congress friends as soon as possible”. What Wavell did not know initially, but came to understand soon with some satisfaction, was that the Labourite enthusiasm for making a promise, without being in office, could not be the same for keeping it when in office. If the Whigs and Tories in Britain, or for that matter the Tories and the Liberals there, did not drastically differ in the past in their attitudes towards the maintenance of the Indian Empire, despite the difference in ideology, why should the Labours not agree – in spite of their socialist affectation – with many of the Conservatives, bureaucrats and vested interests on the most advantageous ways of dismantling it? Apparently, the Labours were as willing as the conservatives and the British officials to:

- let the Communalists holding all others in India to ransom.
- silence popular outbursts in the country by the use of brute force,
- become obsessed with the defence of British overseas interests, and
- actually employ British-Indian troops in Indo-China and Java to prop up the French and the Dutch imperialists, respectively.

Consistent with the tenor of its overall approach, the first moves that the Attlee Government made in India were hardly path-breaking, or which a non-Labour Government could not make. It asked the Viceroy to announce on 21 August 1945, the holding of new elections for the Indian Legislatures in the approaching winter of 1945-46. The elections were not only overdue for the centre (last elected in 1934), as well as for the provinces (last elected in 1937), but also essential for reopening the constitutional game – the wrangles and squabbles in the name of negotiations. Viceroy was prompted further to renew on 19 September 1945 the promises of “early full self government” for India (refusing carefully to use the term “independence”), discussions with the elected legislators and the representatives of the Indian princes on the formation of a Constituent Assembly for undertaking fresh constitutional arrangements (by-passing conveniently the previous Labourite assurance to elect a Constituent Assembly on “universal suffrage”) and efforts to be made once again for setting up the Viceroy’s Executive Council with nominees from the main Indian parties .

19.3.3 Elections and the Cabinet Mission

The elections were duly held in the winter of 1945-46. By the time the elections took place, the Muslim League – following the congenial aftermath of the Simla Conference, and dangling of the carrot of Pakistan -- was in a favourable situation to deal with its separate Muslim electorate. For the Muslim traders and middle classes, to the dream of Musalmanon-kiHukumat and the Indian Muslim’s special right of self-determination was added the fervent religious cry of “Islam in danger”. Although the Congress was at the crest of its popularity, especially with the people’s anticipations of the coming of independence, it was nevertheless not in a position in such religiously frenzied atmosphere to carry the bulk of the Muslim voters with it. The outcome of the elections, particularly the respective positions of the Congress and the League, clearly brought all these out.

The Congress won overwhelmingly in the General (non-Muslim) constituencies, securing 91.3 per cent votes, winning 57 out of 102 seats in the Central Legislative Assembly and obtaining majorities in all the provinces except Sind, Punjab and Bengal. The spectacular Congress victories, however, could not diminish the significance that the Government had already thrust upon the Muslim electorate. From the British point of view, and at the negotiation table to be presided by them, what mattered more in 1946 than the massive national mandate for the Congress was the League's ability to goad the Muslim voters to its side, by hook or by crook. Apparently in this the League attained remarkable successes by polling 86.6 per cent of the Muslim votes, winning all the 30 Muslim seats in the Central Legislative Assembly and grabbing 442 out of 509 Muslim seats in the provinces. But despite all its achievements, the League could not establish its Swaraj on those Muslim-majority provinces which it was demanding for Pakistan. It lost NWFP and Assam to the Congress and failed to dislodge the Unionists from Punjab. Even the League ministries that were set up in Bengal and Sind hinged precariously on official and European support. The fact was that the League's claim for Muslim support had hardly ever been tested in undivided India. The elections were held not only on the basis of separate electorate, which had been devised to keep the Muslims away from the national mainstream, but also on the strength of severely restricted franchise – barely 10 per cent of the total population. Had the elections been contested on the adult franchise, it is difficult to say what would have actually happened, in view especially of the Congress successes in such elections in India in 1952 and the League's reverse in East Pakistan in 1954, as well as of its failure thereafter to control affairs in West Pakistan.

Once the main parties emerged from the limited elections in their strength, as anticipated more or less by the British, the Attlee Government lost no time in commencing negotiations with them. A high-powered mission of three British cabinet members (Pethick Lawrence, Secretary of State for India; Stafford Cripps, President of the Board of Trade; and A.V. Alexander, First Lord of Admiralty) was sent to India to find out ways and means of a negotiated, peaceful transfer of power in India. As it had already been sensed in the British circles, time was running out of the British hands for all practical purposes, and India had reached the high point of ferment by March, 1946 with popular unrest finding intermittent expressions throughout the country. What was worse was the British fear that the disquietude of the people might take shape of another countrywide "mass movement or a revolution", which it was in the power of the Congress to start, and which, the Viceroy felt, "we are not certain that we can control". The Cabinet Mission, therefore, arrived in India to wrest the initiative. Aided by the Viceroy, it held discussion with the Indian leaders till June 1946 for setting the constitutional future of India, and for deciding upon an interim Indian Government.

Following a series of long-drawn deliberations with the Indian leaders of all kinds, which had often run into stalemates on account of Jinnah's brinkmanship over Pakistan and the Muslim right of self-determination, the Mission eventually came up with a complicated, but somewhat plausible plan for wriggling out of the Indian impasse. Although the Viceroy and

one of its members (Alexander) had been sympathetic towards Jinnah, the Mission was unable to accept the League's demand for a full-fledged Pakistan (comprising the whole of all the Muslim majority areas) on the ground that the right of communal self-determination, if conceded to Muslims, had also to be granted to the non-Muslims who formed majorities in West Bengal and Eastern Punjab, as well as in Assam proper. This would necessitate such a bifurcation of Bengal, Punjab and Assam which would go against all regional and linguistic ties, create insurmountable economic and administrative problems, and yet might not satisfy the League (for Jinnah at this stage was unequivocally opposed to the acceptance of a "truncated and moth-eaten Pakistan"). Having thus rejected both the concepts of a larger and a smaller Pakistan, the Mission offered the plan of a very loose union of all the Indian territories under a centre that would control merely the defences, the foreign affairs, and the communications, leaving all other subjects to the existing provincial legislatures. The provincial legislatures would then elect a Constituent Assembly, with each province being allotted a specified number of seats proportionate to its population and distributed strength-wise among its various communities. The members so elected "will divide up into three sections"-- Section A for the non-Muslim majority provinces (Bombay, the United Provinces, Bihar, the Central Provinces, Orissa and Madras), Section B for the Muslim-majority provinces in the north-west (Sind, NWFP and Punjab) and Section C for the same in the north-east (Bengal and Assam). All these sections would have the authority to draw up provincial constitutions and, if necessary, group constitutions, and setting up thereby provincial and sectional legislatures and executives. As the completion of all these long-term arrangements would take considerable time, the Mission proposed a short-term measure -- the formation immediately of an Interim Government at the Centre, enjoying the support of the major political parties, and with the Indians holding all the portfolios.

The Mission's plan was intended to be a compromise, by placating the Congress through the rejection of the Pakistan scheme and by mollifying the League through the creation of autonomous Muslim-majority areas is some proximity. At the outset, therefore, both the Congress and the League were inclined to accept the plan. But soon difficulty surfaced over the provisions for forming sections or groups of provinces. The League interpreted the groupings to be compulsory, for that might brighten up the possibility of a future full-fledged Pakistan by bulldozing the Congress-administered Muslim-majority provinces of NWFP (in section B) and Assam (in section C) into it (in their respective sections the Congress majorities from NWFP and Assam would be reduced to helpless minorities). It was precisely because of the opposition of NWFP and Assam to their being dragged into Sections B and C that the Congress wanted the grouping to be optional. The Congress was also critical of the absence of any provision for the elected members from the princely states in the proposed Constituent Assembly, though it appeared to be willing to swallow the limited and indirect nature of electing the Constituent Assembly which was blatantly contrary to its past demand for such an election on adult franchise. By the end of July 1946, the Congress and the League decided against trying out the Cabinet Mission plan any further, mainly on account of their difference over the

grouping system, but partly because of the Mission's inability to clarify its intentions. In its anxiety for putting up a disarranged India under some nominal centre, and with the communally segregated autonomous units almost as a prelude to "Balkanization", the Mission failed to take note of all the important details. Still, the Cabinet Mission plan was the most that the British – in their haste to leave the ground to the neo-colonialists – could really offer. After July 1946, they had not even talked seriously of the necessity for maintaining the pretence of a weak Indian Union.

19.3.4 The Communal Carnage and Interim Government

The setback over the Cabinet Mission plan so exasperated the League that it wanted forthwith to force the situation through "Direct Action", or give concrete expression to its postelection slogan, 'Ladke Lenge Pakistan' ("we shall have Pakistan by force"). The outcome was the communal carnage that began first on the Direct Action Day (16 August 1946) in Calcutta, and then in a chain of reactions spread over other areas of the country, notably in Bombay, eastern Bengal and Bihar, a certain part of the U.P., NWFP and Punjab. In Calcutta, the League rowdies, encouraged by the League Premier of Bengal, Suhrawardy, had a field day on 16 August by suddenly resorting to large scale violent attacks on the non-Muslims. Once the element of surprise was over, the Hindus and Sikh toughs also hit back. The army, stationed at the very heart of the city, took its own time to react, and when it did sluggishly move to restore order 4,000 had already been killed in three days, and 10,000 injured.

Riots erupted in Bombay in September 1946, but not so frenziedly as in Calcutta. Even then, more than 300 persons lost their lives in stray incidents there. In October 1946, communal riots broke out furiously in Noakhali and Tippera, leaving 400 dead and resulting in widespread violation of women, loot and arson. Noakhali was promptly avenged in Bihar towards the end of October with unsurpassed brutality, massacring more than 7,000. U.P. was not lagging far behind, and at Garhamukhteswar alone approximately 1,000 people were slaughtered. The Bihar and the U.P. butchery called for retaliatory actions in NWFP (Hazara district mainly) and led eventually to furious communal riots, encompassing the Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs of Punjab, especially in Lahore, Amritsar, Multan, Attock and Rawalpindi, and killing about 5,000 by the middle of 1947. These were, however, the mere beginnings, for the communal riots continued to blaze very high throughout 1947 and the earlier part of 1948, resulting in deaths and injuries to several lakhs of people, abduction and rape of countless women, immense destruction of personal properties and innumerable desecration of religious places. Millions had to become refugees, and whereas in some localities (like Punjab) a wholesale exchange of population took place, in others (like Bengal) people continued to leave their places in waves for a long time to come. In the sheer extent of human suffering and dehumanization, and in the total upsetting of the country's social and economic fabric, the fratricidal violence in the Indian subcontinent between 1946 and 1948, and intermittently thereafter, perhaps had only a few parallels in the annals of civilization.

It was coinciding practically with the outbreak of the communal carnage that an Interim Government at the centre came into existence in September 1946. To begin with, the Viceroy's attempts at its formation met almost with the same difficulty they faced in the Simla Conference, namely Jinnah's insistence on parity between 5 Hindu nominees of the Congress and 5 Muslim nominees of the League in such a Government, apart from 1 Sikh and one Scheduled Caste in it. As anticipated, the Congress rejected such a proposal of "parity", claimed the right to include any number of Hindus, Muslims and others in its list of nominees and demanded the new Government to function like a cabinet, and not like a mere advisory body to the Viceroy. Wavell would have called off his endeavours on the ground that nothing was likely to be achieved if the main parties continued to differ, which he contentedly did in Simla in June 1945, had he not been thoroughly alarmed by the popular actions at the mass level immediately before and soon after the sojourn of the Cabinet Mission in India. It was the threat to law and order, either in shape of a mutiny of the forces in the recent past, or in the form of strike by the postal and railways employees in their imminence, that Wavell decided to go ahead with the plan of an Interim Government, constituted, even solely for the time being, by the Congress – the party which enjoyed the greatest influence over the public mind.

Elated apparently by the Viceregal gesture of giving them precedence over their League counterparts, and expecting the formation of the Interim Government to be to their advantage, as well as an advance towards the peaceful transfer of power, the Congress leaders opted on 2nd September for the marking of a cabinet under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru. As the situation unfolded later on, the Congress-dominated functioning of the Interim Government became on the whole an exercise in misadventure. Despite all its concern, it was in effect helpless -- in the face of the communal holocaust -- to move the leisurely army, under a British commander in Chief, into the riot-afflicted areas. Being presided over by the Viceroy, the Interim Government was also not able sometimes to withstand his vetoing power. And its position worsened when Wavell persuaded the League leaders to join it on 26 October 1946, overlooking their persistence with the "Direct Action", and by agreeing to balance the Congress-nominated Scheduled Caste member. Thereafter the Interim Government, obstructed by its League members, and divided sharply into the Congress and the League camps, backed up by their warring followers within the bureaucracy, was reduced for all practical purposes to a figure head. If the Government of a country at the centre was thus torn asunder, and the major communities of its people were led desperately to cut each other's throat, could it still hope to remain untied, and yet be independent? The senior and venerable Congress leaders – those rendered a harassed, riot-wrecked and battle-weary lot by the beginning of 1947 -- were no longer hopeful. Rather, they were too keen to come out of the labyrinth at any cost, if necessary by buying freedom at the exorbitant price of partitioning the nation, and by putting their life-long nationalist dreams at an auction.

The alternative for them was:

- to refuse to serve in a sham Interim Government,
- to come down the streets to appeal to the saner sentiments,

- to try to expose the machinations behind the rioters,
- to make an effort to organize resistance against both the Muslim and the Hindu communalists, and
- to simultaneously go all out for launching the final anti-imperialist mass movement and to attempt at achieving popular unity on the battle lines.

The alternative, of course, was bound to be long-drawn, hazardous and, indeed, very difficult, but not impossible for those who could rely ultimately on the urges and upsurges of the people.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Read the following statement and mark right (✓) or wrong (✗)
 - i) Simla Conference failed because the Congress did not want to represent the Muslims.
 - ii) The Cabinet Mission rejected the proposal of an interim government.
 - iii) The “Direct Action” launched by the Muslim League led to communal rioting at a large scale.
 - iv) The position of the Interim Government improved after the Muslim League joined it.
- 2) Why did the British make attempts for a settlement?
- 3) What was the impact of the victory of the Labour Party in England, on the Indian political situation?

19.4 THE POPULAR UPSURGES

The symptomatic expressions of the popular upsurges between 1945 and 1947 were broadly of two varieties:

- i) those which led to direct confrontations with the colonial administration,
- ii) and those which indirectly undermined colonialism through their opposition to its indigenous upholders -- certain capitalists and princelings, most landlords and mahajans.

The occurrences on both these lines had on the whole been so numerous that one is left with little alternative but to highlight only the major ones.

19.4.1 Direct Confrontations

Here we discuss some of the major direct confrontations with the colonial administration:

- i) **INA Trials:** The initial explosion took place over the INA trials, or the prosecutions against the imprisoned member of the Indian National Army. By the time first trials began in November 1945, the heroic exploits of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and his army had already been revealed to the Indian Public, catching their imagination and swaying their emotions. There was countrywide protest when the three INA heroes (Sehgal, Shah Nawaz and Dhillon) belonging to the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities, and symbolizing the unity of

the people, were put on the docks in the historic Red Fort of Delhi. There were meetings and processions, angry outbursts and agitated speeches almost everywhere, calling for the immediate release of the INA prisoners.

The developments in Calcutta, however, surpassed all other places and turned the city into a storm centre. On 21 November 1945, students marched at the call of the Forward Bloc towards the administrative quarters in Dalhousie Square. The processionists were joined on the way by the members of the Students Federation and the League students' organization. Combined, these students tied the nationalist, the League and the red flags together to symbolize the need for anti-imperialist people's solidarity. The demonstrators were halted by the armed police on Dharamtolla Street for the night and fired upon the following day, killing a Hindu and a Muslim student. The firing instantly inflamed the entire city and the people of Calcutta went into action by disrupting traffic, burning car and lorries and setting up barricades on the streets. The Sikh taxi-drivers, tramway employees and factory workers struck work and the street corners hummed in excitement. For full two days, 22 and 23 November, the enraged groups of people repeatedly clashed with the armed police in different parts of the city, faced firings and hit back with whatever little weapons they could lay their hands upon. By 24 November 1945, the British were able to restore "order". But only after 14 cases of police firings, 33 deaths, injuries to hundreds of civilians, policemen and the men of the army, and destruction of 150 police and army vehicles.

The Calcutta turmoil in particular, and the nation-wide agitation in general over the INA issue, did not go altogether in vain. The authorities decided to climb down, first by announcing in December 1945 to try only those INA members who could be accused of murder and brutalities, and then by remitting in January 1946, the sentences passes against the first batch of the accused. After some initial insensitivity, the Government in fact was quick to read the significance of the INA agitation, in relation to Indian nationalism. It understood that the agitation "cuts across communal barriers", and that the civil disturbances accompanying it could produce disastrous results for the Raj.

Curiously enough, the Indian public leaders, whether of nationalist or of communalist type, refused to see in the agitation what the British had already seen, and they decided to brand mass actions as "frittering away" of energies in "trifling quarrels" with police. As an antidote to the unified enthusiasm of the people, the Congress Working Committee chose (in its meeting of 7-11 December 1945) to remind everyone of the need for observing strict non-violence. The Congress and the League leaders' restraint over popular outbursts could only be explained by their pre-determination in favour of a negotiated settlement with the British, or by their opting for political bargaining rather than for fighting to the finish. They were willing to take up the INA question, or any such issue, only so far as to derive advantages from it in the coming elections, and no further.

The INA agitation was by no means over by the end of 1945. It struck again in February 1946, and at the same epicenter – the volatile Calcutta.

The league students of the city gave a strike call to protest on 11 February 1946 against the sentence of 7 years' imprisonment passed on A. Rashid Ali of the INA. Other students organizations including the Communist-led Student Federation, joined in amidst spontaneous display of inter-communal solidarity. The protestations were transformed into fierce fights when the militant working class youth united with the students. A massive rally (addressed by the League, the nationalist and Communists spokesmen) and a general strike on 12 February paralyzed Calcutta and its industrial suburbs, leading eventually to clashes with the police and the army, the erection of barricades on the roads and street skirmishes in various parts. After two days of bloody encounters, resulting in the deaths of 84 and injuries to 300, the authorities were able finally to restore "order". The tension, however, continued to linger on, not only in Calcutta and Bengal, but also in other parts.

- i) **RIN Revolt:** At the heels of the second Calcutta outburst in February 1946 came the most serious of all the direct anti-imperialist confrontations of the post war phase -- the revolt of the Royal Indian Navy. Having served abroad, and being familiar with the ways of the world outside, the ratings of the RIN were resentful of the racist behavior of their English superiors. Besides, despite their segregation from the people at large, they were aware on the whole of the unrest building up in the country, especially over the INA trials. Their own rising tempers suddenly frayed over the poor quality of food they were served with. On 18 February 1946, the ratings of "Talwar" in Bombay harbor went into hunger-strike to protest against bad food and worse racial arrogance. Others in 22 ships in the neighborhood followed suit on the following day, and it soon spread to the Castle and the Fort Barracks on the shore.

The strikers raised the National, the League and the Red flags together.

They elected a Naval Central Committee headed by M.S. Khan and drew up their demands, highlighting as much the national ones as their own. They demanded:

- release of the INA prisoners,
- freedom of all other political prisoners,
- withdrawal of Indian troops from Indo-China and Java,
- better food,
- more civilized treatment, and
- equal pay for European and Indian sailors.

On 20 February, the ratings in the Barracks were surrounded by armed guards, while their Comrade in the ships found British bombers threatening them with destruction. Fighting started next day when the beleaguered ratings tried to break out of the Barracks and some of the ships (already taken over by the ratings from their European superiors) preferred gun-battles to surrender. There were heroic confrontations, too, in Karachi, spearheaded by the rebels in "Hindusthan". By 22 February, the revolt had spread to all the naval bases in the country, involving 78 ships, 20 shore establishments and 20,000 ratings.

As natural in the electrifying circumstances of 1946, the mutineers evoked unprecedented popular response. In Karachi, the Hindu and Muslim students and workers demonstrated in support of the ratings, and engaged the army and police in violent clashes. Bombay witnessed emotional expressions of public sympathy -- people hailing the ratings, rushing in food for them and shopkeepers insisting on their taking whatever articles they liked. The Communists, with the support of the Congress Socialists, gave a call for a general strike on 22 February. Defying the Congress and the League directives to the contrary, 300,000 workers came out of the factories and mills and took to the streets on that day. Thereafter it was Calcutta all the way in Bombay -- with clenched fists, barricades and street fights, but with more suffering, bloodshed, and greater, almost exclusive involvement of the working class. Several hundreds died in the delirious two days, and thousand suffered injuries. The rising in Bombay, however, could not make any further headway on account of two reasons:

- The overwhelming military might of the Raj which was put in action.
- Vallabhbhai Patel and Jinnah jointly persuaded the naval ratings to surrender on 23rd February. An undertaking was given by the Congress and the League that they would prevent any victimization of the ratings. But soon this assurance was forgotten. Thus, ended the Revolt of the RIN.
- Similar direct anti-imperialist confrontations, though not of the same magnitude and significance as those of the INA and the RIN agitations, also continued to take place contemporaneously in different parts of the country. Some of these were:
 - 1) The popular outcry against the government decision to cut down the ration supplies to the civilian population was one such example, over which 80,000 demonstrated in Allahabad in mid-February 1946.
 - 2) Another was the widespread police strike in April 1946 under the aegis of the leftists in Malabar, Bihar, eastern Bengal (in Dacca in particular), the Andamans, and even in Delhi.
 - 3) In July 1946 the postal employees decided to defy the authorities and actually struck work for a time. Sympathising with their cause, and at the call of the Communists, the people in Calcutta observed a total and peaceful general strike on 29 July 1946.
 - 4) Excitement also ran very high in July 1946 throughout the country over the threat of an-all-India Railway employees' strike.

Strike and industrial actions had in fact become in 1946 the order of the day.

19.4.2 Indirect Confrontations

The strike wave of 1940 created problems not only for the governmental authorities, but also for the capitalists and planters of all hues -- European as well as Indian. Surpassing all previous records, it resulted in 1,629 stoppages of work, affecting 1,941,948 workers and leading to the loss of 12,717,762 man-days. Committed basically to their economic demands, the strikes nevertheless generated a defiant and self-confident mood all around, and created an environment for secular, collective action in most of the cities and

towns. If the prospect for a popular liberation movement against colonialism seemed good in the urban centres, its popular liberation movement against colonialism seemed good in the urban centres, its possibility appeared to be even better in the rural sector where startling developments were taking place between 1945 and 1947. The way the peasantry, more specifically the poor section of it, stood up to resist its immediate exploiters, and thereby weaken the hands of their colonial masters, should be apparent if some of the major happenings in the countryside are briefly recounted here.

i) Worlis

One of the earliest, and intense, of the post-war peasant agitations was that of the Worlis in Thana district, Bombay. The Worlis – the tribal or adivasi peasants – were in majority in the villages of Umbergaon, Dananu, Palghar and Jawahar Taluks of Thana. Being poverty-stricken, most of their lands had passed into the hands of moneylenders and landlords for their failure to re-pay loans (usually in grains) they had incurred at exorbitant rates of interest (50 to 200 per cent). Some of them were eventually reduced to the status of tenants-at-will who were settled in their previously held lands on paying half the produce as rent. Others had to become landless agricultural labourers, working either as farm-hands in the landlords' cultivable lands, or wage-earners cutting grass on their fallow lands, or as workers for the contractors on the forest lands on paltry payments. In times of difficulty, they had to continue to take *Khwati* or grain from the money lenders and landlords, and their failure to pay back, they were forced to give *Veth-Begar*, or to labour for the landlord, without payment. Consequently, many of the Worlis – whether tenants-at-will or landless labourers – had to turn life-long serfs for all practical purposes.

It was in 1945 that the Worlis were first organized by the Maharashtra Kisan Sabha, and led subsequently by outside leaders like Godavari Purulekar to refuse to give *Veth-Bigar*. In the autumn of 1945 the Worli labourers demanded a wage increase for cutting grass, and struck work. The landlords retaliated by terrorising them with the help of hirelings and the police. The police even opened fire on October 1945 on an assembly of the strikers in Talawada, killing 5 and injuring many. The sufferings, however, bolstered up the spirit of the Worlis rather than breaking up their morale, and in course of time the landlords had to agree to pay them at the enhanced rates. The Worli agitation continued in 1946 for an increase in the wages for forest work, cutting trees and landing logs for the forest contractors. By autumn 1946 they struck forest work for months, and in the face of repressions of the local Government they succeeded in forcing the Maharashtra Timber Merchants Association to accept a wage increase. Their success so enraged the local Government that it hit vengefully back by externing all their leaders, arresting a large number of their activists and instituting criminal cases against many of them. The worst happened on 7 January 1947 when 5 more peasants died in the police firing in Palghar taluk. The Worli movement gradually petered out thereafter, though many of the agitators –who fled to the jungles – tried heroically to regroup themselves.

ii) Bakasht Peasants Agitation

Compared to the struggle of the Worlis, the *Bakasht* peasants' agitation of 1946-47 in Bihar was more extensive, and certainly more desperate, the agitation had grown for a decade or so over the *Bakasht* lands which were managed, directly by the Zamindars. Apart from the *raiya* lands which they settled with the occupant tenants, and the *Zirati* lands which they kept for themselves, and got cultivated by agricultural labourers, the Zamindars rented the *Bakasht* lands to the tenants-at-will at varying rates. Having no legal standing, the *Bakasht* peasants were exposed to continuous ejectments. There was a sudden spurt in ejectments in the latter half of the 1930s when the authorities contemplated conferring some tenancy rights to the helpless *Bakasht* peasants. The peasants resisted under the banner of the Kisan Sabha, and fought furiously from 1937 to 1939 against the Zamindars' agents, the Government officials and the police.

Hostilities, however, were temporarily halted with the onset of the Second World War, and an uneasy peace had somehow been maintained between the battle lines through unreliable arbitrations and unstable agreements. The issue again came to the forefront in 1946 when the Congress contested the elections in Bihar by promising to abolish the Zamindari system. Faced with the possibility of losing their Zamindaris, the Zamindars thought that they should be able to retain at least their personal lands if they clear the *Bakasht* lands of all the tenants, and try to turn these into the *Zirat*. Naturally the *Bakasht* peasants vigorously resisted fresh attempts at evictions, and by the summer of 1946 the agitation was renewed simultaneously in Monghyr, Gaya and Shahabad districts. Armed with court orders (based on fictitious records) and *Lathials*, the Zamindars marched to oust the tillers from the *Bakasht* lands. The tillers, under the leadership of the Kisan Sabha, refused to give up, offered satyagraha and came into violent clashes. These were cases of arson and loot, death and injuries, and also arrests and imprisonments. Soon the movement was extended to Darbhanga, Madhubani, Muzaffarpur and Bhagalpur. The conflict became bitterest during the harvesting season when the peasants had to defend the crops already raised. Women and children also joined in the fray and peasants volunteer corps were organized to oppose the invading Zamindars' men. Half-hearted Government measures like the Bihar Bakasht Disputes Settlement Act of 1947 had little effect on the ensuing battle, which did not subside till the Congress ministry was forced to pass the Bihar Abolition of Zamindari Act, 1948.

iii) Travancore Agitation

Unlike the occurrences in Maharashtra and Bihar, those in the state of Travancore in the south were neither wholly rural nor exclusively agrarian in their content. Nevertheless the agrarian issues (like the economic exploitation and social oppression of the *Jenmis* or landlords) and the agricultural classes (like the exploited and oppressed poor peasants, village artisans and agricultural labourers) contributed richly to what had happened there in 1946. The movement crisscrossed between the overlapping villages and small towns, and included in its fold poor peasants, agricultural labourers, fishermen, toddy-tappers, and coir factory workers, most of whom came from the depressed agricultural ranks and flocked around towns

to eke out precarious existence. The state authorities unleashed the forces of terror on their opponents in the Aleppy region. Police camps were set up, and indiscriminate arrests, detentions and tortures began. Persecutions eventually forced the workers to take shelter in places protected by their own volunteer force. To counteract the state violence, they called a general strike on 22 October 1946 in the Aleppy-Shertalai area, and initiated a rising by attacking the police camp at Punnappa (near Aleppy). The authorities promptly clamped martial law on 25 October and ordered the army to attack the workers' sheltered position at Vayalar (near Shertalai) on 27th. What followed was a ghastly massacre of 800, whose martyrdom not only swayed the public opinion against the state's independence move, and thereby in favour of its integration with the nationalist India, but also inspired a local tradition of anti-federal radicalism.

iv) Tebhaga Movement

The most extensive of all the post-war agrarian agitations, however, was the Tebhaga movement, which swept 19 districts of Bengal and drew about 6 million peasants into it, including a high percentage of Muslims. The tumult originated in the sharecropping system that prevailed in most parts of Bengal and the exploitative pattern that it sustained. Visibly tense by the end of the war, the sharecroppers started viewing the customary division of crop to be wholly disadvantageous to their well-being. They, therefore, had no hesitation in responding to the call of the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha in September 1946, demanding three-fourth of the produce for the tillers instead of the one-half. The slogan "Tebhaga Chai" (we want three-fourth share) rent the sky, while the sharecroppers started taking the harvested crops to their own yards in place of depositing these with the Jotedars as per the common practice. They offered one-third crop share to the Jotedars, retaining two-third for themselves. In those cases where the Jotedars managed somehow to take the crops with themselves, the sharecroppers forcibly broke open the yards to claim their two-third. The contest over crops and grains naturally led to innumerable clashes, arrival of armed police on the trouble spots, and arrests, lathi-charges and firings. Entire north Bengal became the hotbed of agitation with certain parts of Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur and Rangpur playing the leading roles. Mymensingh, Medinipur and 24-Paragnas were also not lagging far behind. Despite the communal carnage in Calcutta and Noakhali, the Muslim peasants took an active part and threw up militant leaders of the movement. Peasant women also joined in it in large number, and often came to its forefront. The movement, however, wilted in the face of a repressive Government, the apathy of the Congress and the League, the hostility of the rentier Bengali middle classes, and, above all, the worsened communal situation. The renewed rioting in Calcutta towards the end of March 1947 and its repercussions in other parts, finally led to the suspension of the movement.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) List the various demands put forward by the ratings of the RIN.
- 2) What was the major difference between the direct and indirect confrontation?

19.5 LET US SUM UP

The survey of the popular actions between 1945 and 1947 does reveal on the whole the anti-colonial consciousness of the common men and women in India -- a requisite inner strength to match any neo-colonial design. They also displayed, and more importantly so in the communally devised, divisive circumstances, the enormous capacity of the Indian people to rise above their difference, and stand and act unitedly. These were the silver linings in the clouds over India. The Muslim League leaders were too engrossed in playing the power-game, as conducted by the British, and too involved in their own demand to observe these positive traits. It was left only to the nationalists, especially those who had sworn all their lives by mass mobilization and a united India, to take note of the possibilities that the turbulent days offered. However, the Congress decided to ignore most of the popular outbursts of 1945-47, and to obstruct and condemn if they seemed to move towards radical lines. What it also overlooked in its obsession for a peaceful transfer of power was that they would be powerless against any neo-colonialists venture in the other half.

19.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) i) ✓ ii) ✓ iii) ✗ iv) ✗ v) ✓ vi) ✓
- 2) Your answer should include the tendency of the British to consider the Muslim League as the sole spokesman of the Muslims, to deny the Congress the capacity to represent Muslims, thwart the possibility of any constitutional negotiations among the Indian; and to support and the promote the Muslim League in a variety of ways. See Sub-sec. 19.2.3

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) i) ✗ ii) ✗ iii) ✓ iv) ✗
- 2) You should refer to the changed political situation after the world was a change in the government policy towards the Congress; a desire to dialogue with the imprisoned Congress leaders to prevent them from renewing agitation. See Section 19.3.
- 3) The victory of the Labour Party raised hopes among the Indian nationalists for the fulfillment of their demands. For details Sub-Sec. 19.3.2

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) These include the general national demands like the release of INA prisoners, freedom of political prisoners and the withdrawal of Indian troops from Indo-China and Java; as well as their specific demands like better food, better treatment and equal salary.
- 2) The direct confrontations were aimed against the British Government. The indirect confrontations, on the other hand, were not directly aimed against the government, but against its indigenous representatives like the Zamindars, Princes etc. nevertheless they also helped in unifying the people against the government.

UNIT 20: COMMUNALISM AND THE PARTITION OF INDIA*

Structure

- 20.0 Objectives
- 20.1 Introduction
- 20.2 Background to Pakistan
 - 20.2.1 Transformation of the Muslim League
 - 20.2.2 The British Policy
 - 20.2.3 The Cripps Mission: March-April 1942
- 20.3 Post-War Developments
 - 20.3.1 Simla Conference and Elections
 - 20.3.2 The Cabinet Mission
 - 20.3.3 Formation of Interim Government
 - 20.3.4 Fixing of a Time Limit for British Withdrawal
 - 20.3.5 The Third June Plan and its Outcome
- 20.4 Congress and Partition
- 20.5 Congress' Handling of the Communal Problems
 - 20.5.1 Pitfalls of Conciliation
 - 20.5.2 The Basic Failure
- 20.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 20.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

20.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- explain the nature of communalism in the last decade of British rule,
- get an idea of the background to the demand for Pakistan,
- trace the political developments leading to the partition of India,
- assess the role played by Muslim League, the British and the Congress in the creation of Pakistan.

20.1 INTRODUCTION

Although there had been major developments related to communalism up to 1940, the 1940s represent the most crucial and decisive phase of communalism. It was in this period that the biggest communal demand – the demand for Pakistan – was put forward, and popularized by the Muslim League. This period also witnessed the actual coming into being of Pakistan in 1947. Partition of India was the culmination of the divide and rule policy enunciated by the colonial government to maintain its regime in India. This Unit attempts to explain the process of the formation of Pakistan, and gives you a summary of the major events which led to it.

* Adopted from Unit 36 of EHI-01

20.2 BACKGROUND TO PAKISTAN

The demand for Pakistan did not arise in a vacuum. It was a product of certain political developments which took place after 1937. The period after 1937 witnessed serious changes in the politics of communalism. In the popularization of the Pakistan demand the British policy also played a very active role by giving it acknowledgement and credibility. Let us look at their roles separately.

20.2.1 Transformation of the Muslim League

The year 1937 was a turning point in the history of Muslim communalism. In the elections held for the Provincial Legislative Assemblies that year, the League won only 109 out of 492 reserved Muslim seats and only 4.8% of total Muslim votes. The poor election results showed the League that it must expand its popular base among different sections of the Muslim population, particularly among the urban lower middle classes. A radical socio-economic and political programme was ruled out for achieving the purpose, as the existing social base of the League was among the landlords and loyalist elements. Therefore the League raised the cry of “Islam in danger” and threat from the impending “Hindu Raj”. To appeal to save one’s religion from the threats being forced upon it soon turned into a campaign of hatred against the followers of other religions. According to W.C. Smith, communal propaganda was full of “fervor, fear, contempt and bitter hatred”. Jinnah and other League leaders declared that the real aim of the Congress was not independence but a Hindu Raj which would enable them to fulfill their basic motive – the domination of Muslims and exterminations of their faith. Once the prospect of a Hindu Raj became a deep-seated fear in the Muslim psyche it was easy to drive home the need for a separate homeland where the Muslim could live and practise their faith in freedom. The demand for Pakistan inevitably flowed from the politics of fear and hatred adopted by the League after 1937. At its Lahore session in March 1940, the League passed the famous “Lahore resolution” demanding a sovereign state for the Muslims on the ground that Hindus and Muslims were two nations.

20.2.2 The British Policy

The growth of Muslim communalism was considerably aided by the wholehearted official backing given to it by the British Government. By 1937 the policy of divide and rule really amounted to keeping the Hindu-Muslim divide unbridgeable. All other divisive technique had virtually become non-viable at that particular juncture. Earlier the colonial authorities had pitted the landlords and the backward and schedule castes against the National Movement and tried to split the Congress into Right and Left wings, but without success. The election of 1937 showed that the only weapon left in the armoury of the British to divide Indian nationalism was communalism.

After the outbreak of the Second World War the Muslim League was assiduously fostered by Viceroy Linlithgow. The Pakistan demand was used to counter the demand of the Congress that the British should promise that Indian would be free after the War and as proof of their sincerity, transfer actual control of the government to Indians immediately. The British pointed out the Hindus and Muslims must come to an agreement

on how power was to be transferred before the process could begin. The League was officially recognized as the representative voice of Muslims (even though its performance in the last elections hardly substantiated this claim) and promised that no political settlement would be made unless it was acceptable to the League. This was a blanket power of veto, which Jinnah was to use to good effect after the War had ended.

20.2.3 The Cripps Mission: March-April 1942

In March 1942 Stafford Cripps (a Labour party leader with friendly links with many leaders of the Congress) headed a mission to India whose declared intention was “the earliest possible realization of self-government in India”. However, the actual provisions of the offer belied this declaration by Cripps. Dominion status, not full independence was promised and that too after the War, and the people of the princely states were to be represented in the proposed Constituent Assembly by nominees of the princes.

It was clear that the British would retain control over defence in the new Executive Council. The Congress could hardly have accepted what was, according to the Secretary of State, Amery, a conservative, reactionary and limited offer. But above all the Cripps’ proposals brought in ‘Pakistan’ through the backdoor via the “local option” clause. Provinces were given the right to sign individual agreements with Britain about their future status should they choose to reject the new constitution that would be framed.

Though the Cripps Mission failed, Cripps’ proposals gave a fillip to the activities of the Muslim League and provided legitimacy to the Pakistan demand by accommodating it in their provision for provincial autonomy. At a time when the demand had hardly been taken seriously by Indians, its sympathetic consideration by officialdom was a great service to the cause of Pakistan.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Why did the Muslim League raise the cry of Islam in danger?
- 2) Discuss the role of British policy in widening the communal divide in India.

20.3 POST-WAR DEVELOPMENTS

In this section we will give you a sequence of events from the end of the war till the making of Pakistan. The conditions for partition and the ultimate shape of Pakistan depended almost entirely on development in these two years.

20.3.1 Simla Conference and Elections

At the end of World War II, at the initiative of the Viceroy, Wavell, the Congress leaders were released from jail in mid-June 1945 and invited to Simla to work out an interim political agreement under which Indians would be responsible for running the country. The Congress was willing to cooperate and gave in its list of nominees but Jinnah decided to test the power of veto given to him by the British. He insisted that the League alone had the right to nominate Muslims to the Executive Council. This was embarrassing for the government as this denied representation to

the Muslims of the Unionist Party of Punjab, which had supported the British staunchly throughout the War. But the present and future interests were considered more important than past loyalty and Wavell preferred to announce the breakdown of the Conference rather than bypass the League. Jinnah's power to veto the constitutional progress had been upheld.

Elections – The Watershed

The elections held in the winter of 1945-46 to the Central and Provincial Legislative Assemblies were fought by the League with a straight forward communal slogan: "A vote for the League and Pakistan was a vote for Islam". Mosques were used for election meetings and pirs (holy men) persuaded to issue fatwas (directives) that Muslims must vote for the League. The choice between Congress and the League was portrayed as a choice between the Gita and the Koran. It was small wonder then, that the League made a clean sweep of the Muslims seats.

20.3.2 The Cabinet Mission

By early 1946 the British authorities had come to the conclusion that a graceful withdrawal from India was the best option for them. The Cabinet Mission was sent to India in March 1946 to establish a national government and work out a constitutional arrangement for transfer of power. Now when the British had decided to leave it was believed that the old policy of divide and rule would no longer be suitable. British strategies in the Indian subcontinent after independence, it could be argued, would be better served if India was united. It was believed that a united India, which was friendly with Britain, could be an active partner in the defence of the Commonwealth, whereas a divided India's defence potential would be weak and conflict between India and Pakistan would frustrate the joint defence plans.

The change, in the British attitude towards the Congress and the League around this time reflects this understanding. The British Prime Minister, Attlee, declared on 15th March 1946 that "a minority will not be allowed to place a veto on the progress of the majority". This was in sharp contrast to the Viceroy Wavell's attitude during the Simla Conference in June-July 1945 when Jinnah had been allowed to wreck the Conference by his insistence on nominating all Muslims. The Cabinet Mission also believed that Pakistan would not be viable as a separate entity. Therefore the plan that was drawn up by the Mission was to safeguard the interests of the Muslim minority within the overall framework of unity of the country. Three Congress provinces like Madras, Bombay, U.P., Bihar, Central Provinces and Orissa, would form group A, Punjab, N.W.F.P and Sind would go into Group B, and Bengal and Assam would make up Group C. The common centre would look after defence, foreign affairs and communications. A province could level the group to which it was assigned after the first general election and after ten years it could demand modification of both the group and union constitutions.

Ambivalence over Grouping

Disagreement arose between the Congress and the League over the issue of grouping. The Congress demand was that provinces should have the option not to join a group at a very beginning, rather than wait till general election

were held. The Congress raised this objection keeping in mind the Congress ruled provinces of Assam and N.W.F.P., which had been placed in sections C and B. The League demanded that provinces be given the right to modify the Union Constitution immediately and not wait for ten years. Thus, the basic problem was that the Cabinet Mission deliberately refused to clarify its stand, even when asked to do so. This was because of the hope that their ambivalence might reconcile the irreconcilable position of the Congress and the League, but in effect, it only complicated matters.

Soon it was obvious that the League and the Congress were at cross-purposes in their interpretation of the Mission Plan. Both parties saw it as a confirmation of their stand. Sardar Patel drew satisfaction from the fact that Pakistan was now out of the picture and the League's power of veto had been withdrawn. The League made it clear (in the 6th June 1946 statement) that it accepted the Plan in so far as the basis of Pakistan was implied by the clause of compulsory grouping. Nehru explained in his speech to the A.I.C.C. (on 7th June 1946) that the Congress Working Committee had only decided that the Congress would participate in the Constituent Assembly. Since the Assembly was a sovereign body, it would formulate the rules of procedure. The implication was that the rules laid down by the Mission could be amended. The implication was that the rules laid down by the Mission could be amended. The League, whose acceptance of the Plan had in any case been qualified, quickly took advantage of Nehru's speech to withdraw its acceptance of the Mission Plan on 29th July 1946.

20.3.3 Formation of Interim Government

The British Government was now placed in a dilemma. Should it wait till the League came around or should it implement the short-term aspect of the plan, and set up an Interim Government with the Congress alone? Wavell's preference was for the first option but the British Government was of the opinion that Congress cooperation was absolutely necessary for their long-term interests. Accordingly the Congress was invited to form an Interim Government which came into being on 2nd September 1946 with Jawaharlal Nehru functioning as its de facto head. This was a sharp departure from earlier British practice, as, for this first time, the British were willing to defy Jinnah's stand that no constitutional changes be made unless it was acceptable to the League.

League Launches Direct Action

Jinnah, however, was determined to ensure that the British continue with their old policy. He warned the British Prime Minister, Attlee, that surrender to the Congress by the British would compel the Muslims to shed their blood. This was no empty threat as the league had already accepted the programme of Direct Action. The call for Direct Action was given in Calcutta on 16th August 1946 and the new slogan was 'Larke Lenge Pakistan' (we will fight and get Pakistan). Communal frenzy was provoked by Muslim communal groups, with the League's Bengal ministry headed by Suhrawardi looking on passively if not actively abetting it. Hindu communal elements retaliated, perhaps with equal brutality, and around 5000 people were killed in what has come to be known as the 'Great Calcutta killings'. The trouble broke out in Noakhali in East Bengal in early October 1946, and a reaction to this

sparked off widespread attacks on Muslims in Bihar in late October 1946. The following months saw riots everywhere in U.P., Bombay, Punjab and N.W.F.P. and the tide could not be stemmed.

British revert to Conciliating the League

Jinnah's ability to unleash civil war sent the British authorities back to their old policy of placating the Muslims. They realized that though the league was their creation, it had now assumed the shape of a "communal monster which could not tamed". Wavell had kept up his effort to bring the league into the Government and now the Secretary of State, Pethick-Lawrence, supported him on the ground that civil war would become inevitable if the League stayed out. On 26th October 1946 the League joined the Interim Government.

Interim Government – Another Arena of Struggle

However, the League's entry into the Interim Government did not end conflict, it only opened up another arena of struggle. The League was allowed to join the Interim Government without forsaking the idea of Pakistan or the plan of Direct Action. Furthermore, it did not accept the short term or the long term aspects of the Cabinet Mission Plan. League leaders, including Jinnah, publicly said that the Interim Government was merely the continuation of civil war by other means. Jinnah's assessment was what the exclusive control over administration by the Congress was not in the League's interest and therefore he was keen that the League share power. The Interim Government was seen as a foothold which would help the League to advance towards its goal of Pakistan.

Conflict between Congress and League members in the Interim Government erupted very soon. The choice of second-rung League leaders as League nominees (except Liaqat Ali Khan) clearly indicated that the League had no intention to share with Congress the responsibility for running the Government. On the other hand, the intention apparently was to demonstrate that cooperation between the two was impossible. The League ministers made it a point to disagree with actions taken by the Congress colleagues. They refused to attend the parties at which Congress members would arrive at decision before the formal meeting of the Executive Council so as to sideline Wavell.

Interim Government – Threat of Breakdown

The Congress leaders had raised the objection (right after the League members were sworn in) that the League could not join the Interim Government without accepting the Cabinet Mission Plan. Later, when non-cooperation of the League both inside and outside the Government became clear, the Congress members demanded that the League either give up Direct Action or leave the government. Further, the League refused to participate in the Constituent Assembly which met on 9th December even though the statement made by His Majesty's Government (on 6th December 1946) upheld the League's stand on grouping. The breaking point came when the League demanded that the Constituent Assembly be dissolved because it was unrepresentative. On 5th February 1947 the Congress members of the

Interim Government sent a letter to Wavell with the demand the League members should be asked to resign. A crisis was imminent.

20.3.4 Fixing of a Time-Limit for British Withdrawal

The situation was saved by Attlee's announcement in Parliament on 20th February 1947 that the British would withdraw from India by 30th June 1948 and that Lord Mountbatten would replace Wavell as Viceroy. This was no answer to the constitutional crisis that was at hand but it showed that the British decision about leaving India remained unchanged. The Congress responded with a gesture of cooperation to the League. Nehru appealed to Liaquat Ali Khan:

The British are fading out of the picture and the burden of this decision must rest on all of us here. It seems desirable that we should face this question squarely and not speak to each other from a distance.

But Jinnah's reaction to Attlee's statement was entirely different. He was confident that now he only needed to stick firmly to his position in order to achieve his goal of Pakistan. After all, the declaration made it clear that power would be transferred to more than one authority if the Constituent Assembly did not become a fully representative body, i.e. if the Muslim majority provinces did not join it.

The Governor of Punjab had warned in this regard that "the statement will be regarded as the prelude to the final showdown", with everyone out to "seize as much power as they can, if necessary by force". He was soon proved right. The League began a civil disobedience campaign in Punjab which brought about the collapse of the coalition ministry headed by Khizr Hayat Khan of the Unionist Party.

Thus the situation which Mountbatten found on his arrival in India was a fairly intractable one. The League was on the war path, as Punjab showed, and Jinnah was obdurate that he would accept nothing less than a sovereign Pakistan. The Cabinet Mission Plan had clearly become defunct and there was no point in persisting with it. The only way the British could maintain unity was by throwing all their weight behind it. The role of mediators between the Congress and League had to be discarded. Those who opposed unity had to be put down firmly and those who wanted unity had to be openly supported. Despite Attlee's claim years later that "we would have preferred a united India", and that "We couldn't get it, though we tried hard", the truth was that the British chose to play safe and take both sides along without exercising any check or restraint even when the situation demanded this type of assertion of authority.

20.3.5 The Third June Plan and its Outcome

This was done by making concessions to both the Congress and the League. India would be divided but in a manner that maximum unity was retained. The League's demand would be accommodated by creating Pakistan, but it would be made as small as possible in order to accommodate the Congress stand on unity. Since Congress was making the bigger concession i.e. it was giving up its ideal of a united India, all its other stands were to be upheld by the British. For example, Mountbatten supported the Congress stand that the

princely states must not be given the option of independence. Mountbatten realized that it was vital to retain the goodwill of the Congress if he hoped to persuade India to remain in the Commonwealth. Dominion status offered a chance of keeping India in the Commonwealth, even if for a while, and hence the 3rd June Plan declared that power would be handed over by 15th August 1947 on the basis of domination status to India and Pakistan.

The Congress was willing to accept dominion status because it was the only way of assuming complete power immediately and taking the communally explosive situation in hand. British officials were half-hearted about preventing the communal situation from deteriorating further. Sardar Patel summed up the situation in his statement to the Viceroy: “You won’t govern yourself, and you won’t let us govern”. The British had abdicated responsibility and the advancing of the date for withdrawal to 15th August 1947 made this more apparent.

The speed with which the country was partitioned was disastrous from the Indian point of view, although it suited the British and enabled them to forsake responsibility for the worsening communal situation. Both transfer of power and division of the country, equally complicated processes, were hurried through in seventy two days from 3rd June to 15th August 1947. Some senior British officials like the Commander-in-Chief and the Punjab Governor were of the opinion that a minimum period of a few years was necessary to effect a peaceful division. Jinnah complicated matters further by refusing to let Mountbatten be a common Governor-General of India and Pakistan. There was no institutional structure to which problems arising from division could be referred and even the joint defence machinery broke down in December 1947 as a fall-out of the hostilities in Kashmir.

Massacres that accompanied Partition

The speed with which division was affected and the delay in announcing the awards of the Boundary Commission aggravated the tragedy of partition. These were Mountbatten’s decisions. Mountbatten delayed the announcement of the Boundary Commission Award (even though it was ready by 12th August 1947) to disown responsibility for further complications. This created confusion for ordinary citizens as well as the officials. People living in the villages between Lahore and Amritsar stayed on in their homes in the belief that they were on the right side of the border. Migrations necessarily became a frenzied affair, often culminating in massacres.

The officials were busy arranging their own transfers rather than using their authority to maintain law and order. This was conceded by none other than Lackhart, who was Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army from 15th August to 3rd December 1947:

Had officials in every grade in the civil services, and all the personnel of the armed services, been in position in their respective new countries before Independence Day, it seems there would have been a better chance of preventing widespread disorder.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Read the following statements and mark right (✓) or wrong (✗).
 - i) Muslim League contested the elections on the basis of a socio-economic programme.

- ii) The Interim Government could not work because the League workers were unwilling to cooperate.
- iii) Jinnah wanted Mountbatten to become the Common Governor General of India and Pakistan.

2) What were the basic merits and flaws in the Cabinet Mission Plan?

20.4 CONGRESS AND PARTITION

Why did the Congress accept Partition? It was one thing for the League to demand Pakistan and the British to concede it because it was in harmony with the politics they had pursued. But why did the Congress, which had fought for unity for long years, give up its ideal of a united India. One view is that the Congress leaders succumbed to the temptation of power and struck a deal with the British by which they got quick power while the nation paid the price of partition. This view is both simplistic and incorrect. What were involved were not the personal failings of the top leaders but a basic failure of the entire organization.

The Congress acceptance of Partition was the consequence of its failure over the years to bring the Muslim masses into the nationalist mainstream and since 1937, to stem the advancing tide of Muslim communalism. By 1946 it was clear to the Congress leaders that the Muslims were behind the League as it had won 80 per cent Muslim seats in the elections. However, the point of no return was reached a year later when the battle for Pakistan was no longer confined to the ballot box but came to be fought on the streets. Communal riots engulfed the country and the Congress leaders concluded that Partition was a lesser evil than a civil war.

The breakdown of the Interim Government only confirmed the inevitability of Pakistan. Nehru remarked that the Interim Government was an arena of struggle and Sardar Patel, in his speech at the AICC meeting on 14th June 1947, drew attention to the fact the Pakistan was actually functioning not only in Punjab and Bengal but also in the Interim Government. Moreover, the Interim Government had no power to intervene in the provinces (even when the League ministry in Bengal was guilty not only of inaction but of complicity in the riots in Calcutta and Noakhali). Nehru realized that there was no point in holding office when “murder stalks the streets and the most amazing cruelties are indulged in by both the individual and the mob.” Immediate transfer of power would at least bring about a government that would have the power to fulfill its responsibilities.

Another consideration in accepting partition was that it firmly ruled out the specter of the ‘balkanisation’ of the country. The Congress had the support of the Viceroy, and behind him His Majesty’s Government, in refusing the option of independence to the princely states. Through persuasion or force, they were made to join either the Union of India or Pakistan.

Gandhi and Partition

It is common knowledge that Gandhi was so distressed when partition became an imminent reality that he no longer wished to live for 125 years, as he had stated earlier. One popular interpretation is that Gandhi’s advice was ignored by his disciples, Nehru and Patel, who wanted power at any

cost and though he felt this betrayal acutely, he did not wish to condemn them publicly because they had been his faithful followers.

Gandhi's own statements, however, suggest that the main reason for his helplessness lay in the communalization of the masses. The Muslims began distrusting the Hindus and then the Hindus and Sikhs also got convinced that mutual co-existence was impossible. The Muslims had already declared him to be their enemy. When different segments of people wanted partition, what could he or the Congress do but to accept it? At his daily prayer meeting on 4th June 1947 Gandhi said:

“The demand has been granted because you asked for it. The Congress never asked for it...But the Congress can feel the pulse of the people. It realised that the Khalsa as also the Hindus desired it”.

Socialists and Gandhians appealed to Gandhi to launch a struggle for unity bypassing the Congress leaders. Gandhi pointed out that the problem was not that he was unwilling to go ahead without the Congress leaders. After all, few had agreed with his assessment in 1942 that the time was right for a struggle of the Quit India type, and yet he had defied their counsels and he had been proved right. The crucial lacuna in 1947 was that there was no “force of good” upon which he could “build up a programme”. He confessed – “Today I see no sign of such a healthy feeling. And therefore, I shall have to wait until the time comes”.

The time never came, for political developments were moving at too fast a pace. Partition was announced on 3rd June and implemented on 15th August 1947. Gandhi's advice to Congressmen, conveyed in his speech to the AICC meeting on 14th June 1947, was to accept Partition as an unavoidable necessity for the present, but not accept it in their hearts and fight to reverse it later, when passions would subside.

20.5 CONGRESS' HANDLING OF THE COMMUNAL PROBLEMS

It is often argued that partition could have been avoided if the Congress had been willing to conciliate Jinnah, not only before he came up with the demand for a separate state in 1940, but also in 1942 at time of the Cripps Mission or even in 1946 when the Cabinet Mission Plan was put forward. Maulana Azad in his autobiography *India Wins Freedom* has supported this position. This view ignores the fact that Jinnah laid down the impossible conditions that he was willing to negotiate with the Congress only if it declared itself a Hindu body and accepted the Muslim League as the sole representative of the Muslims. Had the Congress accepted this demand, it would have had to give up its secular character. This would not only have meant betrayal of the nationalist Muslims who had resolutely stood behind the Congress at great personal cost, but betrayal of the Indian people and their future. In Rajendra Prasad's words, the Congress “would be denying its own past, falsifying its history, betraying its future”.

20.5.1 Pitfalls of Conciliation

In fact, though the Congress refused to negotiate with Jinnah on his terms, it made unilateral concessions to Muslim demands despite Jinnah's intransigence. The Congress accepted the autonomy of Muslim majority

provinces during the negotiations with the Cripps Mission in 1942. In his talks with Jinnah in 1944 Gandhi recognized that Muslim majority provinces would have the right of self-determination. When the Cabinet Mission Plan proposed that Muslim majority provinces (groups B and C) would set up a separate Constituent Assembly if they wished, the Congress did not oppose this. Congress opposed compulsory grouping (because it would force N.W.F.P. and Assam into groups they many interpretation of the Federal Court on whether grouping was compulsory or optional. Accordingly, when the British Cabinet clarified in its 6th December 1946 statement that grouping would be compulsory, the Congress quietly accepted the new interpretation. As we have pointed out, earlier, Nehru appealed to Liaquat Ali Khan for cooperation when His Majesty's Government announced a time limit for their withdrawal on 20th February 1947. So when the Congress finally accepted the 3rd June Plan and Partition, this was only the final act of surrender to the League's demand. It was the culmination of a process of reconciliation to the harsh realities of a situation created by the League's intransigent championing of the demand of a sovereign Muslim majority state.

Thus, the policy of concessions, intended to reassure Muslims that their interests would be protected, ended up as surrender to extreme communal demands. For example, the Congress conceded the right of secession in the hope that "the Muslims would not exercise it but rather use it to shed their fears". This was wishful thinking as by the 1940s Muslims communalism was no longer based on an assiduous fanning of minority fears, but on an assertive "Muslims nation" determined on a separate sovereign state. Consequently, every time the Congress made a concession, Jinnah pegged his demand a notch higher, seeing that Congress was yielding. Far from cutting the ground from under the communalists' feet, every round of concessions strengthened their foothold as more and more Muslim joined their ranks, impressed by their success. Along with Muslim communalism, Hindu communalism also registered rapid growth as the Hindu communalists projected themselves as the only champions of Hindu interest, which they charged, the Congress was betraying in the hope of winning over Muslims.

20.5.2 The Basic Failure

This lack of understanding of the logic of communalism in the 1940s was only symptomatic of the general failure of the Congress in contending with communalism. Though the Congress was committed to secularism and though Gandhi staked his life for Hindu Muslim unity, the Congress was not able to formulate a long-term strategy to fight communalism in its different forms at the level of both policies and ideology. The Congress leaders naively believed that reassurances, generous concessions and willingness to reach a compromise would solve the communal problem.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Read the following statements and mark right (✓) or wrong (✗).
 - i) Congress accepted partition because the congress leaders succumbed to the temptation of power.
 - ii) British Government accepted partition because it was in keeping with its policies pursued in the past.

- iii) The Congress policies of concessions and conciliations contributed in the making of Pakistan.
- iv) The real failure of the Congress lay in not being able to evolve a long-term strategy to fight communalism.

2) Why did Gandhi feel so helpless regarding the partition of India?

20.6 LET US SUM UP

The partition of India was primarily the result of the persistent efforts of the Muslim League from 1940 onwards to obtain a separate homeland for the Muslims. Through an astute combination of constitutional methods and direct actions, the League, under Jinnah's stewardship, consolidated its position and forced the political situation into a deadlock, from which partition was the only escape. But Pakistan could not have been created without the help given by the British. British authorities used the communal card in their moves to counter the national movement which was growing from strength to strength. They gave credibility to the Pakistan demand, recognized the League as the sole representative of Muslims and gave the League the power to veto progress in political settlements. Even when their own interests inclined them towards leaving behind a United India, they proved incapable of standing up to Jinnah and tamely surrendered to the blackmail of direct action. Official inaction in checking the rapidly deteriorating communal situation reached a point from which partition appeared its long-standing commitment to a United India. Its weakness lay on two fronts. It failed to draw the Muslim masses into the national movement and was able to evolve a strategy to successfully fight communalism.

20.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Your answer should include i) the performance of the Muslim League in the elections of 1937, ii) the need to expand its base iii) the utility of religious slogans in consolidating Muslims of different backgrounds and turning them against Hindus; and iv) to drive home the need for a separate homeland for Muslims.
- 2) See Sub-section 20.2.2 and 20.2.3

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) i) ✗ ii) ✗ iii) ✗
- 2) The merit was that it accepted the principle of Indian Unity. The flaw was a lack of clarity regarding the grouping of provinces to be compulsory or optional. See Sub-section 20.3.2

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) i) ✗ ii) ✓ iii) ✓ iv) ✓
- 2) Gandhi's helplessness was because of i) a growing communalisation of the masses; ii) his inability to carry them with him in his struggle for unity; and iii) the acceptance of the spirit of partition by the Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs alike.

UNIT 21: EMERGENCE OF INDEPENDENT INDIA: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DEMOCRATIC POLITY*

Structure

- 21.0 Objectives
- 21.1 Introduction
- 21.2 The Concept of Democracy: A History
 - 21.2.1 The Early Liberals
 - 21.2.2 Limits of Liberal Democracy
- 21.3 The Evolution of Democratic Ideas and Institutions in India
 - 21.3.1 The Impact of the British Rule
 - 21.3.2 The Perception of the Constituent Assembly
- 21.4 The Question of Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles
- 21.5 Towards a Democratic State Structure
 - 21.5.1 Parliamentary System at the Centre
 - 21.5.2 The State
- 21.6 The Electoral System
 - 21.6.1 Towards a Democratic Representation
 - 21.6.2 Limits
- 21.7 Federal Polity vs. Centralism: Options of a Democratic State
 - 21.7.1 Historical Background to Federalism
 - 21.7.2 Federalism after the Partition
 - 21.7.3 The Constraints of the Administrative and Financial Structure
- 21.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 21.9 Key Words
- 21.10 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

21.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will learn about:

- the evolution of the concept of democracy,
- the evolution of democratic ideas and institutions in India, and
- the limits within which these ideas and institutions function.

21.1 INTRODUCTION

Democracy is the watchword of the developing nations today. All shades of political opinions equally proclaim their adherence to it. However, in practice, it might mean quite different things to different classes, groups and

* Adopted from Unit 37 of EHI-01

parties. Thus, there is no one agreed definition of democracy. In India too, the ideas and institutions of democracy grew up in the context of different perceptions of different classes, groups and parties. The context of anti-colonial struggle and the post-independence developments gave these perceptions a definite direction.

21.2 THE CONCEPT OF DEMOCRACY: A HISTORY

As a concept, the word democracy originated probably in the fifth century B.C. to describe the system of government found among few of the Greek City States. The translation of Greek word provides us with a basic definition of democracy as 'rule by' or 'of the people'.

In the modern context, these views were first revived and articulated in the early modern Europe as a critique of pre-capitalist ideology and rule. In seventeenth and eighteenth century, Europe witnessed the emergence of capitalism and the erosion of the existing feudal order. It was during this period that revived democratic ideas acquired their conceptual apparatus and practical social meaning in the principles of liberalism.

21.2.1 The Early Liberals

The early liberals, like the Levellers, John Locke and later Rousseau, J.S. Mill and others, rejected the hitherto dominant view that society constituted natural hierarchy. They rejected the paternalistic theory of authority and government based on the principle of the divine right of kings. These liberals located the ultimate source of authority in the consent of the people. The right to life, liberty and property were considered fundamental for human development. But they did not provide any blue-print for a society in which these rights could be enjoyed by each individual. The right to equality was to be only an abstract principle, and remains so to date, as a kind of formal equality before law. Most liberals, with the exception of Rousseau, upheld that the right to estate and property was of overwhelming concern for the growth of the individual personality and social prosperity. Whereas in Locke's and Mill's philosophy, consent based authority could be interpreted as the essence of bourgeois democracy in Rousseau's thought it implied the utopian notion of popular sovereignty and direct democracy under a small state system.

21.2.2 Limits of Liberal Democracy

Liberal democracy in practice has had its limitations. It does not provide us with a democratic model where all people can exercise equally the right to vote. One of the staunch protagonists of liberal democracy J.S. Mill, for example, advocated the system of plural voting for less numerous richer classes. This was intended to maintain a proper numerical balance in favour of the rising capitalist class as opposed to the strength of the working people. It was only with introduction of universal adult suffrage in this century that the ideas of democracy acquired a representative character. With this development, democracy indeed became a household word to be defined (or actualized) in terms of the system of voting. Thus, democracy is essentially

identical today with a system of government installed in power through free and fair elections.

The Nature of Democratic Representation

Now the question arises, as to how representative these democratic governments and their electoral systems are? Has the universal voting right made the governments that people vote for more democratic? In this context, when we study the functioning of various political institutions of representative democracy, (i.e., parliamentary or Presidential forms of government, the unitary or federal structure of political power and the pattern of franchise or voting), we find that their actual operation in modern polity is predominantly determined by the nature of the prevalent party-system. The growth of the political parties in the last two hundred years or so has been the most significant political development in the polities of modern democracies. It is only through the competition between the political parties for political power by the mechanism of electoral system that democracy is supposedly realized.

Political Parties and Democracy

Invariably, the ruling parties in modern democracies are based on the principle of leadership, centralization, discipline, and patronage-based power. This inevitably breeds bureaucratization of these parties, and thereby the elitist pattern of decision making. Thus, Joseph Schumpeter defines democracy as “that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of competitive struggle for people’s vote”. The struggle for the people’s vote takes place not according to the will or interests of an ordinary sovereign voter; rather the ruling parties in liberal democracies represent the will of the dominant classes. Whenever any party ceases to function in this way, it is projected as a threat to social order and peace.

The political parties do not exist in a vacuum. They are not created just for the sake of their own leaders and the rank and file. They essentially survive with the support of the social force of certain classes, whose interests they protect and further. In all class-divided societies this class-bias is evident in their policies and programmes. It is by studying the ideology, policy, programme and the character of the dominant political parties, which alternately or regularly came to power, that the actual nature of democracy or its representativeness can be understood. Such analysis also testifies that ruling class parties usually win elections by working out highly populist strategies for the mass manipulation of the voters.

Participatory Democracy?

In the foregoing context of elitist, bureaucratic and populist distortion of democracy, some authors have suggested the alternative of ‘participatory democracy’ as a way out. According to them, the real essence of democracy can be captured only if there exists an institutional arrangement of decision-making, based upon various levels of people’s participation. Such political framework of democracy is possible, only if the people realize that they are equally enjoying the fruit of socio-economic development. In other words, they become their own political master or genuine sovereign voters.

21.3 THE EVOLUTION OF DEMOCRATIC IDEAS AND INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA

Democratic ideas and institutions grew up in the context of the impact of British rule, the national movement and the development of post-independence polity.

21.3.1 The Impact of the British Rule

In the evolution of the modern democratic ideas and institutions in India, the experience of British Colonial rule and of the anti-colonial freedom struggle was decisive. It was only when the pre-Colonial Indian Society was put into the melting pot of colonial rule that the ideas of democracy and nationalism started to take shape, in the beginning of nineteenth century. Colonial exploitation required a new economic and administrative infrastructure, which in turn set new social forces of production into motion. Out of these came a new social mobility which allowed the growth of reformist, nationalist, liberal and democratic ideas.

Indian Renaissance and Democracy

The demand for the introduction of democratic and representative institutions in India dates back to the days of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Indian Renaissance. However renaissance in India marked only a half-hearted advance towards a liberal democracy. It lacked a radical self-critical appraisal of India's social structure and its value system.

Even in this half-hearted advance through Renaissance the movement lacked the support of any prominent social class. It was confined to a tiny section of educated people. Thus it lacked a revolutionary will and the power for the social and ideological transformation of Indian society. Unlike the social movements of anti-feudal revolution in the west, and transition to capitalism the democratic movement in India took place without any break with pre-capitalist ideologies. Thus democracy and capitalism in India always remained impregnated with a strong sense of revivalism and with local parochial traditions of caste, language, region and religion.

The introduction of Western education in India was the most significant development in the growth of liberalism, democracy and nation-building in the modern Indian context. It provided the educated manpower to organize business and industry along scientific lines. It produced the leadership of the national movement. The organization of the Congressnationalist platform was achieved with the initiative of the educated elite. In fact, according to the early nationalists, the unity of the educated elite signified Indian national unity.

The Early Nationalists and Democracy

The success of the early nationalists lay in the spread of the message of democracy and nationalism among educated Indians. In the beginning, they demanded the introduction of representative institutions within the framework of British rule over India. Even the political message of the slogans like 'Swaraj' and 'Swadeshi' did not go beyond the confines of British rule.

In the beginning, therefore, the Indian National Congress lacked the militancy and programme essential for a decisive struggle for independence and democracy in India. The English educated elite groups were too deeply drawn into the charm of the colonial ethos and its value-system to seek any real radical break with the British rule. In the process, early Congress politics, during the Moderate era, were hampered by its incapacity to seek mass support for its policies and action, outside the narrow circle of the English educated elite. This limitation was sought to be overcome by the Extremist leadership. They tried to achieve this goal not on the basis of a specific socio-economic policy of mass-mobilization against colonial exploitation, but with the help of the religious ideology of Hindu revivalism. Instead of achieving a democratic consensus of all communities on the basis of a common socio-economic programme of nationalism, Hindu revivalism led to communal division between Hindus and Muslims. The religious extremists therefore strengthened the Muslim fear that Congress was an essentially Hindu party. Thus the alienation of Muslims from Congress led to the weakening of the movement of democracy and nationalism in India.

Democracy in the Age of Mass Movements

In the twentieth century the movement of nationalism and democracy registered significant advances. The Minto-Morely Reforms of 1909 permitted a minority of indirectly elected members to the central legislative council and majority of directly elected members to enter the provincial council. The 1919 Act introduced the system of dyarchy in India. The 1935 Act was passed in the aftermath of the Khilafat, the Non-cooperation and the Civil Disobedience Movements. During these movements large section of Indian people were drawn in the struggle for democracy and freedom. This included a section of capitalist class, the middle classes, the working class and peasantry. Their participation of the working people in these movements immensely enhanced the stature and strength of the nationalist movement and its leadership. Finally, as a result of the Quit India Movement and post-World War II social situation, power was transferred to the Indians. However, the independence of India witnessed the worst communal holocaust and the partition of the country.

21.3.2 The Perception of the Constituent Assembly

The establishment of the 385-member Constituent Assembly by the colonial government in 1946 was the culmination of the struggle for democratic government and independence in India. It represented various shades of opinion including Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. But this body of Constitution-makers was not fully representative in character. 292 members of it were chosen by the legislative assemblies of 11 provinces (ruled directly by British) elected on a restricted franchise of about one-fifth of the adult population. 93 members were nominated by the rulers of the native states under the overall hegemony of the British. The partition of the country in August 1947 reduced the size of this body to 298 of which 208 owed their loyalty to the Congress party.

The Constituent Assembly gave direction to the establishment of democratic institutions in India. It functioned, both as the Parliament as well as the Constitution making body until January 1950. The Congress Party being the

most influential section, it naturally had a direct impact on the philosophy of the Indian Constitution. The real shape of the Indian Constitution was determined not by an autonomous body of legal experts, but by the liberal creed of the Congress party. The Constitution was, above all, a legal form of the political philosophy upheld by the Congress party. And, all the decisions about the establishment of liberal-democratic institutions in India, the form of government, federalism, secularism and democratic rights were taken at the level of the Congress party and its high command. This was confessed on the floor of the Assembly by the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution, Dr. Ambedkar, himself by saying that: “They had to go to another place to obtain a decision and come to Assembly”.

However, there was nothing wrong in such an overwhelming influence of the Congress *per se* in the making of the Constitution. Constitutions are never made entirely within a legalistic framework. Both the Philadelphia convention of 1787 and French National Assembly of 1778-91 also went far beyond the legalistic terms and references. However, there was a major difference between them and the Indian Constituent Assembly. They marked a radical liberal revolutionary break in their social situation while this was not the case in India. The independence of India highlights a compromise with the social situation that has been imposed by the reality of Partition. This historical situation appeared beyond the control of the Congress party and its leadership. The division of the country, however, gave a free hand to the Congress party in the Constituent Assembly to evolve a constitutional framework of its own choice. Earlier it had lacked this freedom while negotiating with the Muslim League.

21.4 THE QUESTION OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND DIRECTIVE PRINCIPLES

Both the leadership of the Congress party and an overwhelming majority of the Constituent Assembly members were deeply influenced and impressed by the western liberal tradition of democracy. From the beginning of the freedom struggle itself, their advocacy of basic human rights and political freedom of individual citizens epitomized the liberal democratic creed. The Congress Party was duty-bound to incorporate these promises in the Indian Constitution. The Fundamental Rights were therefore declared as the most sacred part of the Constitution. The individual, rather than the village, family, caste or community was regarded as the basis legal unit. In the background of highly communal structure, characterized by social division around local-parochial particularistic ties and an inward-looking social outlook, this was a great step forward in the direction of liberal justice and equality.

Further, the right to freedom of speech and expression, religion and faith, assembly and association, occupation, and the acquisition, holding or disposing of property were made enforceable by the system of courts. In this context the process of judicial review and the independence of the judiciary were regarded as sacred. A hierarchical system of courts was, therefore, provided with the Supreme Court of India standing at its apex. The objective of judicial review and the independence of judiciary were to

defend the rights and property of individual citizens. The courts were vested with absolute powers to interpret the Constitution in this context of liberal democracy in India.

On the other hand, the Directive Principles of the Constitution (as enunciated in the Part IV of the Indian Constitution) were declared to be fundamental, but not enforceable by any court, in the governance of the country. Therefore, these directives have not been realized in practice.

Check Your Progress 1

Which of the following is the correct statement?

- 1) The Extremist nationalists
 - i) Were able to take democratic ideals and values to the people.
 - ii) Were not able to take democratic ideals and values to the people.
 - iii) Tried to take democratic values to the people through the vehicle of religious revivalism.
 - iv) None of the above.
- 2) The hallmark of the achievement of Indian democracy in the post-independence period was that
 - i) caste and community came to be regarded as the basic legal units.
 - ii) the individual came to be recognized as the basic legal unit.
 - iii) both (i) & (ii) are correct.
 - iv) none of the above.

21.5 TOWARDS A DEMOCRATIC STATE STRUCTURE

The evolution of liberal traditions of authority has a long history in India. It was not established overnight by the decision of the Constituent Assembly. From the period of the Indian Renaissance up to Independence in 1947, the Indian political elite had become familiar with the working of British system of governance. The influence of this experience with the working the British model was naturally overwhelming in the choice of the state structure to govern Indian polity in the future. Therefore, when the Constituent Assembly was entrusted with the task of creating a formal institutional network of state-power in India, they willingly opted for the Parliamentary system of government patterned on the Westminster model.

21.5.1 Parliamentary System at the Centre

The Parliamentary system of governance envisages the collective responsibility of the executive (i.e. the Council of Ministers) to the Legislature. The decision-making authority here rests with the Council of ministers led by the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister is not only the leader of the majority party or coalition of parties in the Parliament, but he / she is also the spokesperson of the nation and the state. His / her influence is overwhelming in shaping the policy of the state and government. Therefore, it is argued by some that it is neither the Parliamentary nor the Cabinet form

of government which is in operation in the contemporary period. According to many political scientists and commentators (in India and Britain), what exists in reality is the Prime Ministerial form of Government. The institution of presidency is merely nominal. It is created for five years by an electoral college consisting of the members of both houses of the Union Parliament and the legislative assemblies of the states. The President of India acts on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers led by the Prime Minister.

21.5.2 The State

Like the Centre, at the state level also the real executive power is vested in the Chief Minister by virtue of his / her position as the leader of the majority party in the state legislature. The role of the Governor has been the major bone of contention from the beginning. It has become very controversial, as on the one hand he / she acts as the nominee of the Centre by virtue of his / her being appointed by it, and on the other hand according to the Constitution he / she is supposed to act in accordance with the will of the majority party and its leadership in the state legislature. Thus, there always exists a conflict in his / her role as centre's loyal nominee vis-à-vis his / her loyalty to the Constitution. This conflict becomes far more prominent if the ruling party at the state level happens to be in political opposition to the ruling party at the Centre.

21.6 THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The introduction of the representative system of government based on universal adult franchise was one of the most significant advances towards the democratization of the Indian political system. For this purpose, the Election Commission (Article 324) was created to supervise the entire procedure and machinery for national and state elections.

21.6.1 Towards a Democratic Representation

India's experience with elections on the whole has been positive. They have become the chief system by which the strength of any leadership or a party is tested. Although the introduction of universal suffrage strengthened the already established caste-class authority in terms of economic power, social position and political authority, it also gave a voice to the hitherto disenfranchised sections of society. In this way, the elections have become central to the legitimacy of political authority in India. In case they cease to be the key instruments of political legitimation, the political system of India itself might be threatened. Whenever electoral choices were seen as being critically important in the health of democracy, the Indian voters have utilized their right to franchise with wisdom.

Elections, in this way, have become a part and parcel of India's political life. They are more or less taken for granted for the solution of any crisis. This is evident in case of Jammu and Kashmir, Assam, and Tamil Nadu. The functioning of the electoral system in India then has been central for the continued health of its democratic system.

21.6.2 Limits

However, within the context of Indian politics, we find that elections have not revolutionized the situation. They were not introduced with any

revolutionary aim either. They were utilized as a vehicle for legitimizing the existent social and economic power of the dominant castes and classes. Therefore, with few exceptions, they have not been helpful to the toiling people as a weapon to diminish the socio-economic and political hold of vested interests.

Finally, it can be said that in certain cases the vested interests have manipulated the institution of elections to maintain their hold. This was sought to be done even by resorting to caste, communal, linguistic and regional chauvinism. There is also an ongoing debate on the use of radio, television and electronic media for meeting political ends. No small party or individual social workers can easily reach to the mass of the votes without adequate media network and the funds to fight elections.

21.7 FEDERAL POLITY VS. CENTRALISM: OPTIONS OF A DEMOCRATIC STATE

One of the strongest features of democracy in the contemporary world is the decentralization of decision-making, resource mobilization and its allocation. This is a requirement of any modern large-scale society, its politics and economy. Federalism provides an adequate organizational structure for the administration of the large-scale societies of modern nation-states.

21.7.1 Historical Background to Federalism

In the context of a highly diverse society like that of India, federalism exists as the sole medium of satisfying the political and cultural aspirations of its distinct communities. The first major democratic consensus towards this direction was taken in 1916, when both the Congress Party and the Muslim League reached an accord known as the Lucknow Pact. The basis of this consensus was the federal character of the future Indian state. However, this consensus was not followed upon in the best spirit as a necessity for Indian unity. From the very beginning therefore, while the Congress Party was motivated by achievement of maximum extent of centralization, the Muslim League worked for the utmost possible decentralization.

In the conflict between these two perceptions, the question of residuary power was keenly debated. While the Congress nationalists and various other Hindu majority factions fought for vesting these powers with the Centre, the Muslim League and other minority groups wanted them within the orbit of the state government power. This debate about the demarcation of powers between centre and states was a stumbling block facing the All Parties Committee headed by Pandit Motilal Nehru, the Round Table Conferences, and all subsequent negotiations, leading to the two Missions sent by the British Government to India between 1942 and 1947. While the nationalists led by the Congress made compromise after compromise to avert the partition of India, the Muslim League stood finally for the partition of India rather than for a strong federal polity.

21.7.2 Federalism after the Partition

After the partition of India, instead of going for federal polity a strong case of unitary centre was therefore made by the Constitution makers. Yet the need to organize India along federal principles could not be ignored.

So, what we have in India is a federal form of government with unitary essence. The Constitution itself provided innumerable provisions by which the centre and a strong ruling party at the centre could easily infringe upon the powers of federating units. For example, the Constitution empowers the governors of the state (nominated by the centre) to dismiss the elected state governments. The power of the centre to give direction to the state and its power to declare emergency also tended to strengthen the forces of centralism.

21.7.3 The Constraints of the Administrative and Financial Structure

The administrative and financial structure of Indian state, its economy, and its organization also lead to the strengthening of the centralized political structure in India. The resources for various development plans in agriculture, industry, education and health had to come through arrangements with the Planning Commission established in March 1950. In the process, the Planning Commission became biased in favour of centralization and the activities of socio-economic development became central subjects.

Finally, bureaucracy in India existed as a legacy of the colonial state. Of approximately 1,000 ICS Officers serving at the time of independence, 453 were Indians and became the policy-makers of Indian state. Not everyone in the Constituent Assembly was convinced about their overwhelming importance to the independent Indian state. Many democrats, reformers and the nationalists even wanted to get rid of them. But, the votaries of the centralized state prevailed ultimately. Patel, for example, defended their utility by saying that “I have worked with them during difficult period... Remove them and I see nothing but a picture of chaos all over the country.” Even the radical Nehru concurred in their continuance by saying that: “the old distinction and differences have gone... In the difficult days ahead our service and experts have a vital role to play and we invite them to do as comrades in the service of India”.

In addition to the bureaucracy, the role of para-military forces like the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the Border Security Force (BSF) and the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) are also instruments in strengthening the centralized political power structure in India.

Check Your Progress 2

Which of the following is the correct statement?

- 1) The weakness of the electoral system in India is that
 - i) it has come to be manipulated by national and regional elite by using caste, communal and regional chauvinism.
 - ii) it has no weakness at all.
 - iii) it has given effective representation to the toiling poor and depressed classes.
 - iv) None of the above.
- 2) What are the constraints in making India a truly federal structure?

21.8 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, you were able to learn about a brief history of the concept of democracy at a general level. We also discussed the way in which the idea of democracy and its institutions have shaped up in India. Finally, we dealt with the limits of both the concept of liberal democracy as well its practice, mainly through the Indian experience.

21.9 KEY WORDS

Plural Voting: A system of voting in which one person gets more than one vote.

Disenfranchised Section: Those sections of a society who do not have the franchise i.e., right to vote and elect a representative.

Consensus: Complete agreement on an issue.

Universal Suffrage: right to vote and elect representative for every individual.

Paternalistic Theory of Authority: a theory that gave the king, the authority to rule since he had to look after his subjects as a father looks after his children.

Pre-capitalist Ideologies: ideologies i.e., world views which existed prominently before capitalism. In Indian context they are identified as religion or caste. These worldviews in contrast to capitalism's global spread were local in nature.

Concept of Natural Hierarchy: a concept which talked of society being divided into rich and poor because of natural reasons i.e. reasons of biology. So biologically the fittest man became rich and the unfit became poor.

Westminster Model: The parliamentary form of government which has evolved in Britain. Westminster is the place where the British Parliament is located.

21.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) iii) 2) ii)

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) i)
- 2) See Section 21.7. Your answer should include:
- a) role of historical factors.
 - b) constraints of administrative and financial structure.

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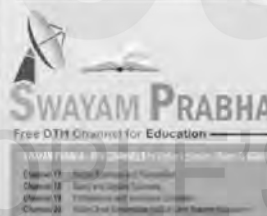
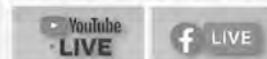
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