

Block

# 2

## **THE FORMATIVE PHASE**

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### **UNIT 5**

**Foundations of Indian Nationalism** **5**

---

### **UNIT 6**

**Economic Nationalism** **15**

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### **UNIT 7**

**Resistance to Colonialism in Intellectual and Social Spheres** **27**

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### **UNIT 8**

**Towards Radical and Mass Politics – Swadeshi Movement** **37**

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## BLOCK 2 THE FORMATIVE PHASE

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### Introduction

A variety of intellectual and political activities during the second half of the nineteenth century prepared the ground for the rise of organised nationalism. Formation of provincial associations, racist inclinations of the colonial regime, legacy of the revolt of 1857 as well as many later popular rebellions and intellectual stirrings in favour of reform and nationalism laid the foundations of nationalism in India. **Unit 5** will introduce you to the details of this process.

One of the most important forms of intellectual oppositions to the colonial rule was the idea of economic nationalism. It was fervently argued by the Indian nationalists that colonialism was based on economic exploitation of India, that Indian wealth was carried abroad showing the basically foreign character of the British rule, that indigenous industries were eliminated through the invasion of Indian markets by machine-made British goods, that Indians were forced to act as cannon-fodders in the wars which were primarily waged for British colonial expansion, and Indian peasants were intensely exploited by the unbending colonial revenue policies. Such ideas slowly became widespread influencing a large number of Indians strengthening anti-colonial nationalism. We have discussed these ideas in **Unit 6**.

**Unit 7** analyses the processes of intellectual and social opposition to colonialism, particularly among Indian intelligentsia. Cosmopolitanism, rationalism, religious universalism, defence of tradition, even mimicry were in different ways creating conditions to resist the intellectual and cultural advance of colonialism.

As various anti-colonial ideas accumulated and spread over decades and as popular resistance to colonial rule formed, we witness the emergence of a unified nationalist movement in the form of Swadeshi movement. Its strongest impact was felt in Bengal, but it was also present in many other parts of India. In **Unit 8**, you will learn about the emergence, growth and then decline of this movement.



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# UNIT 5 FOUNDATIONS OF INDIAN NATIONALISM\*

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## Structure

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Legacy of Popular Revolts
- 5.3 Intellectual Awakening
- 5.4 Provincial Political Associations
- 5.5 British Administrative Measures
- 5.6 Foundation of Indian National Congress
- 5.7 Interpretations of Historians
- 5.8 Summary
- 5.9 Exercises

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## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

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This Unit introduces you to the process of ‘political awakening’ in India in the second half of nineteenth century leading to the establishment of Indian National Congress in 1885. The great revolt of 1857 is considered as the culmination of popular discontentment against British rule and also marked the beginning of a long drawn struggle against British imperialism. In the presidencies of Bengal, Bombay and Madras, where the British first established its foothold, the new intelligentsia who were the beneficiaries of western education became critical of the exploitative character of the colonial rule. Initiatives to form provincial political associations first came from this elite section of society. Although in different parts of India the tribal people and the peasantry raised their voices against imperialism, there was no unity of purpose. The process of political mobilisation took a definite shape in the second half of nineteenth century. In this Unit we are going to discuss the impact of popular revolts in the development of new political consciousness and the role of educated Indians in mobilising public opinion. We would familiarise you with the political developments of this period leading to the rise of Indian nationalism. You would also learn about the formation of various provincial associations, British administrative measures in 1870s and 1880s contributing towards the growth of anti-British opinion and the foundation of Indian National Congress. You would also get an idea about how historians have interpreted the beginning of Indian nationalism.

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## 5.2 LEGACY OF POPULAR REVOLTS

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The primary object of British rule was to expand and protect the interests of Britain in India. In fulfilling its mission in India various policies adopted by British government in economic, political and social spheres gave birth to discontent against British rule and the idea of pan-Indian nationalism. The first hundred years of British rule witnessed the plunder of India’s resources causing major famines in India. Famines were certainly not new in India but natural

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calamities caused these famines. During British rule famines were man made because of exploitative policy of British government. The new land revenue system, commercialisation of agriculture, drain of wealth, and de-industrialisation adversely affected the peasants and the tribal people who revolted in many parts of India during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Beginning with the Sanyasi and Fakir rebellions in 1760s in Bengal till the Santhal rebellion of 1850s in the Bhagalpur-Rajmahal area, India witnessed about 100 rebellions involving different sections of Indian society. These rebellions were not centrally organised, nor there was a centralised leadership, nor they succeeded in arresting the expansion of British rule but these rebellions definitely conveyed the feelings of Indians towards British rule. The challenge that these rebellions put to British rule helped in creating awareness about exploitative nature of foreign rule and in developing anti-British sentiments.

The great revolt of 1857 is seen as the outburst of accumulated anger of dispossessed princes, disgruntled soldiers and aggrieved peasantry. Describing this great revolt as the mutiny of sepoys simplifies the complexity of issues involved in raising the banner of revolt by diverse groups of Indians. In the process of extracting maximum land revenues traditional landed aristocracy lost powers and privileges and the peasantry came under the burden of heavy taxes. By promoting British goods British rule caused serious hardship to the artisans and handicraftsmen. So the banner of revolt raised by the sepoys soon took the character of a civil rebellion having support from landed aristocracy, peasants, artisans and others. The British succeeded in suppressing the revolt, but the revolt succeeded in generating a powerful expression of nationalist sentiment which was yet to take an organised shape. The anti-British sentiments became so strong among Indians that even those who were the beneficiaries of British rule in India started criticising its repressive policies. Exemplary courage and sacrifice of lives by rebels soon became legends and gave birth to a sense of strong patriotism.

The spirit of protests against exploitation continued after 1857 and the indigo cultivators' resistance to the oppressive system of indigo cultivation by all European planters turned into a major revolt in 1859-60 in the province of Bengal. *Neel Darpan* written by Din Bandhu Mitra portrayed the oppression of indigo planters. Against their wishes peasants were forced to cultivate indigo for the benefit of planters. The administration being supportive of planters the peasants were left with no option to complain against extortion, flogging and other forms of tyranny except to revolt against planters. Servants of the East India Company were involved in plundering of wealth and it is argued that this caused the famine of 1770 in Bengal leading to massive starvation death. Exorbitant rent, forced cultivation, seizure of crops and cattle forced peasants to raise voice against the oppression and the eastern part of Bengal witnessed massive agrarian unrest during the second half of nineteenth century. In 1873 peasants organised agrarian league in Pabna district in Eastern Bengal and mobilised peasants to stop payment of rents to zamindars. Peasant discontent forced the government to pass Bengal Tenancy Act in 1885 to protect tenants. The new intelligentsia in Bengal represented by Bankim Chandra Chatterjea, R.C. Dutt, Surendranath Banerjea and others expressed their solidarity in support of tenants. In 1875 peasants in Poona, Ahmednagar, Sholapur, Satara of Maharashtra gave a call for social boycott of moneylenders and later on peasant resistance turned into agrarian riots. Peasant resistance succeeded in compelling the government to enact the Deccan Agriculturists' Relief Act of 1879 as a token protection against moneylenders.

Peasants in Malabar, Punjab and other parts of India were forced to raise voice against exploitation and deprivation in the course of nineteenth century. In the absence of any organised leadership and definite ideology peasant movements during this period might not have directly challenged British rule but the courage and consciousness shown by peasants had definite influence in shaping public opinion against colonialism. The new Indian intelligentsia was very much touched by the miseries of peasants and in the writings of nineteenth century this concern for peasants was reflected. The various popular revolts paved the ground for the growth of new political consciousness against British rule.

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### 5.3 INTELLECTUAL AWAKENING

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In 1817 with the establishment of the Hindu college at Calcutta Indian elite, belonging mostly to upper caste Hindus, got opportunity to learn English language and western science. English was made the official language in place of Persian language in 1835 and the rising elite saw in learning English the key to power under British regime. Lord Macaulay, known for his report on education in India, was a firm believer in the superiority of western education and wanted to train Indians in western education who would speak the rulers' language. This was followed by the famous report of Sir Charles Wood developing a framework of the colonial government's education policy in 1854 which led to the setting up of first three Indian universities in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in 1857. The new colonial education empowered a section of Indians with a graduate degree making them eligible for government employment. But the new graduates with ambition very soon found them left out in the race for coveted administrative posts in government. There were competitions within Indian elites for shares of power and resources. It is argued that a sense of frustration due to limited employment opportunity gave birth to anti-British sentiments. One may not fully agree with the argument that the frustration of educated Indians made them nationalist but there was a visible change in attitude of educated Indians towards British rule in the second half of nineteenth century. In the initial years of British rule educated Indians were generally appreciative of the beneficial aspects of colonial rule and looked towards the west for new ideas and scientific education. The trend began to change from the second half of nineteenth century after realising the exploitative nature of colonial rule and the growing misery of Indian masses. Racist arrogance and denial of equal rights to Indians further alienated educated Indians and contributed towards the development of consciousness as Indian nation. Liberal, democratic and egalitarian ideas of the west opened the eyes of educated Indians to become critics of British domination and influenced them to look back to Indian civilisation for its unique power of assimilation. The period since 1860s witnessed significant increase in the literary production in vernacular languages. Through pamphlets and novels written during this period in vernacular languages a new interest was generated to rediscover India's golden past, particularly preceding the Muslim invasions. As against authoritarian and individualistic features of British rule effort was made to search for democratic, unifying values in Indian tradition. 'Indians in the important provinces of Bengal, Bombay, and Madras did not join the Mutiny. However, education, the press, and European racism and economic oppression were arousing a new political consciousness. Both the Mutiny of 1857 and the indigo peasant disturbances in 1859-60 contributed to this awakening in Bengal'. (John R. McLane, *The Political Awakening in India*, 1970, p.30). Vernacular press was also developing with

great importance and had great influence in shaping Indian opinion against British rule. One can make out the impact of vernacular press in influencing public opinion from the following testimony given by Reverend James Long before the Indigo Commission in 1860.

‘The vernacular press is rising into great importance, as a genuine exponent of native opinion, and it is to be regretted that the European community pays so little regard to its admonitions and warnings. It is the index of the native mind. In 1853, I visited Delhi, Agra, and Lucknow, and particularly examined the statistics connected with the vernacular press, in the upper provinces, and I remember the impression with which I left, after I had been through its lanes and gullies, exploring the localities of its vernacular presses. I felt then very strongly, how little the Europeans of Delhi and other cities were aware of the prodigious activity of the vernacular periodical press, and the impression it was evidently producing on the native mind as tested by the avidity with which books, treating on native and political subjects, were purchased... Bengali newspapers, such as the *Bhaskar* and *Probhakur* are circulated widely even as far as the Punjab, for wherever Bengalis go ... they keep up a correspondence with each other in their own language and read their native papers. Thus on a visit to Benares, three years ago, I was in a part, called the Bengali-tolla, inhabited almost entirely by Bengalis, who used the Bengali language. Two Bengali newspapers were printed there. These Bengali newspapers have mofussil [rural] correspondents, who give them the news of the district, and to each Bengali newspaper is attached a translator of English newspapers; hence the native mind is much more familiarised with political movements both in Europe and India. ..

‘The amlas [agents] of the courts, the state of the police, the character of magistrates are constant subjects of criticism in those papers. I remember reading sixteen years ago, a series of powerful articles in the *Bhaskar*, exposing with the most caustic wit, the abuses of the courts... I calculate that though native papers have a limited numerical circulation in the Mofussil [rural districts], yet each paper is probably read by from five to ten natives, and the information in it is orally communicated to a far wider sphere... the practice of Hindoos to have one person at night to read to a large number; and the power of communicating information orally, is a well paid profession among a class of Hindoos called *kathaks*. I have been present at an assembly where three hundred males, and more than one hundred females behind the *purdah*, were listening to an eloquent discourse in Bengali by a *kathak* for one hour and a half; and during that time, the attention was so profound, that the dropping of a pice [small coin] could be heard.

‘Nor are the popular songs of Bengalis sung at these assemblies always confined to subjects of love and religion, they occasionally touch on politics; for instance, on the appointment of indigo planters as honorary magistrates, strong feelings of indignation were excited among natives, but especially among ryots.’ [Cited in John, R. McLane, *The Political Awakening in India*, 1970, pp.32-36].

After reading the above text, the point to be noted is the importance of vernacular press in creating awareness about the abject misery of indigo cultivators. Educated Indians’ concern for poor cultivators and their criticism of British rule helped in shaping public opinion against British rule. More important is the fact that oral traditions helped in creating awareness about exploitative nature of British rule

among common masses. Folk songs and local forms of drama were used in exposing the misdeeds of British rule. The dawn of new political consciousness among Indians soon became visible with the emergence of a number of political associations.

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## 5.4 PROVINCIAL POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS

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The formation of political associations to put forward demands of Indians to British government marked the beginning of new political consciousness of Indians. The new intelligentsia played significant role in these associations. The intelligentsia did not initially question the legitimacy of the continuation of British rule, but by 1870s their faith in British governance was shaken because of several famines caused by British rule. Dadabhai Naoroji and Ramesh Chunder Dutt strongly criticised economic exploitation of India by British rule. It is argued that as the Charter of English East India Company was going to expire in 1853 and British officials were reviewing conditions in India before the renewal of the Charter so the educated Indians took this opportunity to form provincial associations to put forward their demands. The British Indian Association was founded in Calcutta in 1851, formed by Zamindars of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, was the earliest public organisation to mobilise people for the political cause. Before the setting up of British Indian Association there were the Landholders' Society and the Bengal British India Society in Calcutta. The Landholders' Society was active in protecting the interest of landlords, whereas the Bengal British India Society was more broad based in its aim by focusing on the rights of peasants also. The British Indian Association with members from landed gentry and new intelligentsia drew the attention of British authority through petitions to London and local authorities to protect the interests of Indians and give more share of public office for Indians. In Bombay, the Bombay Association (1852) and in Madras, Madras Native Association (1852) were formed with the objectives to appeal British parliament for protecting interests of Indians. 'Transcending the ties of family, caste, religion and locality...these associations were the first overt sign of a social and political revolution in the sub-continent.' [Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, p. 202].

In spite of repeated representations by the provincial associations the major grievances of Indians were not addressed and Indians continued in their demand for more representation of Indians in government services. After the great revolt of 1857 and the setting up of universities in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras political consciousness of Indians took a new turn. Being critical of limited approach of the British Indian Association young educated people in Bengal came forward to form the Indian League. The League wanted to broaden its base by involving masses and encouraging political education. Development of national unity was in its agenda. But best known and more active political association was Indian Association, established by the noted advocate Surendranath Banerjea in 1876 in Calcutta. Indian Association demanded the opening of Indian Civil Service to Indians and engaged in creating public opinion against various issues affecting interests of Indians. The association asked for elected Indian representatives in municipalities in which members were appointed by government and also organised public protest against the Vernacular Press Act of 1878. In Bombay the Bombay Presidency Association was formed in 1885 by Pheroza Shah Mehta, Badruddin Tyabji and Kashinath Telang. The association took up local grievances

and through representations impressed upon British parliament for addressing their demands. In Poona, the Sarvajanic Sabha (1870), formed by the new intelligentsia became the platform for voicing political concerns and M. G. Ranade was its guiding force. It demanded Indian representation in parliament and protested publicly against the Vernacular Press Act in 1878. The Sabha was also concerned of agrarian problems and intervened to settle agrarian disputes. In Madras, first it was Madras Native Association (1852) and then P. Ananda Charlu and others established Madras Mahajana Sabha (1884) to draw attention of the government to various problems faced by local people. All these provincial associations which came up after 1850s in spite of having its limited social base and limited objectives marked the beginning of the process of political awakening and gave momentum to political activity. These associations provided confidence to Indians to organise political opposition to the mighty British rulers.

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## 5.5 BRITISH ADMINISTRATIVE MEASURES

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The great revolt of 1857, popular revolts against oppression faced by peasants and tribals, development of new political consciousness among Indians against British rule made the British rulers to think about administrative mechanism to stem the tide of anti-British opinion. The Indian Press, in English as well as in vernacular languages, during the period from 1860s to 1885 played a vital role in creating political consciousness of Indians. *Bengalee* and *Amrita Bazar Patrika* in Bengal, *Kesari*, *Mahratta*, *Indu Prakash* and *Voice of India* in Bombay, *Hindu* in Madras, *Tribune* in Punjab and many other newspapers tried to educate people raising important issues and to spread ideas about political rights among the common people. Issues like racial discrimination, injustice to Indians, economic exploitation were highlighted to argue that British rule resulted in economic and intellectual subordination of Indians to Britain. To put a curb on this anti-British propaganda by the Indian Press, Lord Lytton, the Viceroy, passed the Vernacular Press Act in 1878. This was followed by the Arms Act which introduced a system of license to have firearms in India but the Europeans were exempted from it. This open discrimination infuriated Indian public opinion against British policy of victimisation. Lord Ripon, successor of Lord Lytton, made efforts to appease the educated Indians by repealing the Vernacular Press Act although no action was initiated to amend the Arms Act. More crucial was the Ilbert Bill which allowed an Indian magistrate to judge a European. This invoked strong criticism of the English population living in India which had racist overtones. The Bill was amended to pacify the Europeans but all these exposed the true character of British rule to Indians. ‘The strength of English feeling and the threat of a “white Mutiny” forced the government to compromise in 1884 and to permit Europeans to be tried by juries, at least half of whose members would be European. In the Ilbert Bill controversy, nationalists saw a crude racism which was normally hidden behind the impersonality of institutions and the walls of private clubs.’ [John R. McLane, *Indian Nationalism and The Early Congress*, p. 38]. Indians could realise the depth of British hostility to political reform in India. Ripon also thought of raising the age-limit of Indians for Indian Civil Service examination but most of the Viceroy’s counselors opposed the increase in number of Indians in the civil service. Lord Ripon created hope among Indians but ultimately he could not succeed in bringing any major change to fulfill the expectations of Indians. Lord Dufferin who succeeded Lord Ripon took a very cautious approach towards new initiatives to fulfill aspirations of Indians. He was even hesitant of opening

up further employment opportunities for Indians in the civil service. Shrinking employment opportunities combined with repressive government measures pushed Indians further towards political mobilisation to make their voices heard. The shift in political thinking of Indians since 1870s was taken note of in a contemporary report which states:

‘within the last...20 years...a feeling of nationality, which formerly had no existence...has grown up, and the...press can now, for the first time in the history of our rule, appeal to the whole native population of India against their foreign rulers. Twenty years ago...we had to take account of local nationalities and particular races. The resentment of the Maharatta did not involve that of the Bengalee...Now...we have changed all that and 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...the great political fact of the day’. [Cited in Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, pp.146-147].

The point to be noted here is that the measures introduced by the Viceroys in the period between 1870s and 1880s to strengthen British control over Indian empire in fact fanned the flames of political aspirations of Indians.

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## 5.6 FOUNDATION OF INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

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The efforts made by educated Indians at the provincial level to form associations with the aim of organising public opinion culminated in mobilising a national political conference of educated Indians. An Englishman, Allan Octavian Hume, a retired member of the Indian Civil Service was a major motivating force to bring the educated Indians who were active in provincial associations together to form one national political association. Hume wanted to have an all India representative body of educated Indians to voice their concerns on issues affecting them. Surendranath Banerjea also tried to make his Indian Association a broader platform by convening an all India conference of the association. But the initiative taken by Hume gave birth to the formation of the Indian National Congress and later on Surendranath joined the National Congress. In December 1885 seventy-two delegates all belonging to educated class living in the big cities of Calcutta, Bombay, Poona and Madras met in Bombay under the presidentship of W.C. Bonnerji, a noted Bengali lawyer. From its foundation onwards every year the Congress held annual conference in different cities and discussed issues which were of interest of educated elite Indians. Although Hume played a major role in the foundation of Indian National Congress by the early 1880s the idea of forming a national representative body was very much in discussion among educated Indians. The principal demands of the Congress in its initial years were the reform of the central and provincial legislative councils giving greater powers to Indians, Indianisation of the top-level administration, judicial reform, the spending of less money on war but none of their demands had mass appeal. Direct political agitation was not in its agenda rather the focus was on writing petitions, speeches and articles to impress upon English liberal opinion for reforms in India. One can get an idea of the aims of the Congress from the following words of Dadabhai: ‘We are proceeding upon cautious and conservative lines to obtain definite developments of existing institutions in the changed state of things that British

rule and British education has brought about in India.’ W.C. Bonnerji as the first president of the Indian National Congress stated that the Congress objective was the ‘eradication, by direct friendly personal intercourse, of all possible race, creed, or provincial prejudices amongst all lovers of our country...the promotion of personal intimacy and friendship amongst all the more earnest workers in our country’s cause in (all) parts of the Empire.’ [Cited in Bipan Chandra and others (ed.) *India’s Struggle for Independence*, p.77]. In the context of the process of political awakening that was taking place since 1850s the early Congress leaders were primarily engaged in preparing the foundations of democratic movement at national level rather than giving call for any immediate radical action. But definitely the foundation of the Indian National Congress gave the Indians a platform of their own to carry forward the struggle against British rule.

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## 5.7 INTERPRETATIONS OF HISTORIANS

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The foundation of Indian National Congress is generally considered as the first manifestation of organised nationalism in India and the beginning of a national political community in India. Historians have analysed the foundation of Indian nationalism and the formation of Indian National Congress from different perspectives. In this section we would like to introduce you to some of important researches done by historians. Anil Seal argues that because of differences in levels of progress in different provinces and differences in interests of Congress members coming from different social background it was difficult for the Congress to have common aims and national goal. He, commenting on the role played by Hume in the foundation of Indian National Congress, wrote,

‘By the early 1880s the idea of a national representative body was being discussed in every Presidency of India, and there had already been a number of attempts to bring it into being. The 1885 Congress itself was one of several such attempts, and its organisation owed something to men in Bombay, Poona, Madras and Calcutta. It was not the work of Hume alone, although he had a hand in it. During Ripon’s viceroyalty, Hume had made himself very useful as a sub-editor of Indian opinion and as an agent of Indian action. As such he was admirably suited to be one of the organisers of the Congress...It should be obvious that before the delegates assembled at Bombay, there was already a tendency to raise its activities to the all-India level. The repeated efforts in the early 1880s to form a united organization show that this tendency was growing stronger and stronger, and that the odds on one or other of these efforts succeeding were getting shorter. Congress was the experiment which, for reasons partly adventitious, was to survive’. [*The Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, pp.272, 277].

C. A. Bayly has argued that for ‘many local leaders, the congress was essentially a secondary organisation, and their association with it derived from the need to pursue within the regional and all-India skeleton of organization and aspiration the much more circumscribed local and sectional aims which derived from lower levels of politics’. [C. A. Bayly, *The Local Roots of Indian Politics, Allahabad, 1880-1920*, p.4]. Bayly’s argument draws attention to regional diversity and the local interests in the genesis of nationalist politics undermining the ideological considerations of the Indian intelligentsia.

John R. McLane does not subscribe to the arguments of Seal and Bayly who underestimate common aims and ideology of the Congress giving more emphasis on individual and local interests. McLane writes:

‘The Indian founders of the Congress were impressed by the nobility of a nationalist vision of subordinating the interests of self, family, and caste to the interests of an Indian nation. The Congress vision held that Indians shared fundamental economic and political interests, that those interests were in conflict with those of Britain, and that the collective welfare of all Indians could be improved by restructuring the relations between India and her foreign rulers. The first generation of Congress leaders was groping for a means of translating the vision into concrete political tactics. Congress leaders were sometimes diverted from this task by their personal careers. Nevertheless, the vision was potent, sincerely held, and widely shared’. [John R. McLane, *Indian Nationalism and the Early Congress*, pp.7-8].

Bipan Chandra and others in their book, *India’s Struggle for Independence*, have argued that from the beginning India’s national leaders understood the basic clash of interests between Indian people and British colonialism. The national movement under the Congress developed ‘a clear-cut anti-colonial ideology’. The common struggle against colonialism promoted the spirit of nationalism and intellectuals helped in ‘arousing the inherent, instinctive, nascent, anti-colonial consciousness of the masses.’ The foundation of the Congress is seen as the ‘culmination of a process of political awakening that had its beginnings in the 1860s and 1870s and took a major leap forward in the late 1870s and early 1880s’.

Depending on their ideological orientation historians have tried to interpret the foundation of Indian National Congress and the beginning of Indian nationalism. The crystallisation of what was essentially growing political consciousness at regional level into a common political platform to fight colonialism under the banner of Indian National Congress may be considered as the beginning of organised political movement at the national level. The Congress provided the platform for a variety of critiques of British rule in India. Membership being confined to educated middle class in its early years did not restrict its presence being felt by others, particularly its economic and political agenda.

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## 5.8 SUMMARY

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The British rule in India gave birth to a new political consciousness and the idea of nationhood and political rights. Being confronted with various forms of exploitation under British rule and the much visible racist attitude of the Anglo-Indians, the Indians felt the urge to raise voice against foreign rule. Indian intelligentsia being the beneficiary of western education played a key role in exposing the exploitative character of British rule and mobilising public opinion under one umbrella. You have seen how in different provinces people formed associations to deliberate on issues affecting their interests and this political consciousness ultimately paved the way for the formation of Indian National Congress. Early Congress leaders sensed the transformation of India under British rule and tried to build up an organised Indian opinion capitalising on the impact of British rule. Historians have analysed the foundation of Indian nationalism from different perspectives. But the fact remains that in spite of its narrow social base and limited approach the formation of Indian National Congress marked the journey of new democratic political movement for nationhood.

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## 5.9 EXERCISES

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- 1) Discuss the role of intellectuals in the emergence of Indian nationalism.
- 2) Can British administrative measures be considered as an important factor in the rise of nationalism in India?
- 3) Discuss the views of various historians on the phenomenon of nationalism in India.



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# UNIT 6 ECONOMIC NATIONALISM\*

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## Structure

- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 What is Economic Nationalism?
  - 6.2.1 Origin of the Idea of Economic Nationalism
  - 6.2.2 Economic Nationalism in Colonial Context
- 6.3 Economic Nationalism in India
  - 6.3.1 Early Thoughts
  - 6.3.2 Economic Critique of Colonial Rule
    - 6.3.2.1 The Drain of Wealth
    - 6.3.2.2 Poverty of Indian People
    - 6.3.2.3 Underdevelopment of Industry
    - 6.3.2.4 Public Finance
    - 6.3.2.5 Agriculture
    - 6.3.2.6 Foreign Trade
  - 6.3.3 Emergence of Economic Nationalism in Colonial India
- 6.4 Summary
- 6.5 Exercises

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## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

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Economic nationalism was a crucial part of Indian nationalism, particularly in the late nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century. It was rooted in the comprehensive economic critique of the colonial rule which the early nationalist leaders undertook in their publications, speeches and public campaigns. Their writings and speeches created the framework in which both the unity of India and the foreignness of the British rule could be situated. It was a domain in which both the 'Moderate' and 'Extremist' leadership took part in creating and shaping an adversarial discourse which proved to be enduring.

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## 6.2 WHAT IS ECONOMIC NATIONALISM?

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Economic Nationalism, along with economic liberalism and Marxism, is considered among the three most significant ideologies of modern political economy. Economic nationalism has been conventionally understood as the economic ideology which favours domestic control of economy, labour and capital formation. It has been viewed as favouring some sort of autarchy in opposition to globalisation which visualises interdependence among all nations. To attain its goal, the economic nationalists are supposed to impose tariff to restrict free trade, to promote indigenous industries and to seek import substitution.

While such a characterisation is not untrue, recent writings have emphasised that economic nationalism has more to do with nation than with a certain fixed variety of economic policies such as tariff barriers and protectionism. Thus, the ideology of economic nationalism, in this view, should be defined in terms of its nationalist content rather than its endorsement of specific economic policies.

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\* Resource Person: Prof. S.B. Upadhyay

Moreover, by bringing the nation and nationalism into the idea of economic nationalism, it is possible to see more clearly that the economic nationalists can pursue a variety of economic policies some of which may be associated with other streams of economic thought.

### 6.2.1 Origin of the Idea of Economic Nationalism

Friedrich List (1789-1846) is considered as the most important economic nationalist of the nineteenth century and also the initiator of the concept of economic nationalism. List's theory of 'national economics' differed from the doctrines of 'individual economics' and 'cosmopolitan economics' by Adam Smith (1723-1790) and Jean-Baptiste Say (1767-1832). In his book, *The National System of Political Economy* (1844), List criticised the economic liberals for assessing the economic policies basically for the benefit of the individuals or the entire humanity. He criticised the 'dead materialism' of liberal thought and argued that the liberals considered 'individuals as mere producers and consumers, not as citizens of states or members of nations'. According to List, such 'boundless cosmopolitanism' did not take into account the crucial significance of the nation for the purpose of economic policy. He asserted: 'Between each individual and entire humanity, however, stands THE NATION'. He formulated his perspective based on this intermediate agency: 'I would indicate, as the distinguishing characteristics of my system, NATIONALITY. On the nature of *nationality*, as the intermediate interest between those of *individualism* and of *entire humanity*, my whole structure is based'. Since individuals are members of the nation, the economic policy should not aim exclusively for the wealth-maximisation of the individual, but should be oriented to develop nation's culture and power. Such a development would finally enrich the entire humanity because 'the civilisation of the human race [is] only conceivable and possible by means of the civilisation and development of the individual nations'. Thus, List's aim was to direct the enquiry to 'how a *given nation* can obtain ...prosperity, civilisation and power'. The mechanism through which this was to be achieved was by developing the country industrially. Thus, erecting tariff barrier for providing protection to the infant industries became the basic aim of List's economic policy.

Besides this important trend of economic nationalism enunciated by List, there were three other noticeable trends in nineteenth-century Europe:

- 1) This strand of economic nationalism developed a critique of economic liberals' policy of convertible currency. The economic liberals believed that such a monetary programme would facilitate free trade. Thus, for this purpose they supported the gold standard for all currencies for a common monetary standard. The economic nationalists opposed this and one of their strongest ideologues was Thomas Attwood (1783-1859), a British banker and politician. Attwood proposed that Britain should have a paper currency which was not tied to gold. He also argued that the government should increase money supply at the time of economic depression. He felt that these policies would reduce unemployment. His views on currency was echoed by American economist Henry Charles Carey (1793-1879) who argued for an inconvertible currency which would promote domestic economic growth by allowing the money supply to expand freely. Similarly, Isaac Buchanan (1810-83), a Canadian businessman and politician, also preferred inconvertible national currency because it provide full employment to the

people and develop the productive resources of the country [Helleiner 2002: 316].

- 2) Yet another strand in nineteenth-century economic nationalism favoured autarchy and a strong interventionist state. Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), a German philosopher and publicist, strongly favoured national economic self-sufficiency. For this, he advocated an interventionist state which would directly provide the economic needs of the people. In an economic treatise published in 1800, *The Closed Commercial State*, argued in favour of autarchic economic nationalism, and a strong interventionist state which would ensure employment and would regulate wages and prices. He insisted on an inconvertible currency to control the domestic prices and on prohibition of foreign trade as fluctuations in trade might destabilise national economic plans. Another German publicist, literary figure and political economist was Adam Heinrich Muller (1779-1829) who strongly criticised the liberal political economy and the system of free trade. Whereas Fichte's economic ideas were inspired by the Jacobinist policies in revolutionary France, Muller's thoughts were conservative and anti-liberal. Muller's opinion was that free trade was antithetical to national unity. He, therefore, advocated protectionism, inconvertible national paper currency, and an autarchic economy.
- 3) There was a belief among many economic nationalists that liberal economic policies such as free trade and gold standard for currency were not in conformity with national cohesion. However, such liberal economic policies in case of certain countries, particularly Britain, were quite helpful in attainment of nationalist goals. A lot of British policy-makers were in favour of free trade not because of their internationalism and advocacy of world peace, but because this would have promoted their monopoly of trade in machine-made goods. This would enhance the power and wealth of their own country. The ideology of free trade also provided the British a sense of nationalist superiority with which to denigrate the culture and traditions of other, particularly colonial, countries. But the liberal content in economic policies was not to be found only among the dominant industrial and colonial power like Britain. It was present even in the policies of those countries which developed somewhat late along industrial lines, such as France, Germany, Belgium and Netherlands. Thus, it may be said that economic nationalism was not uniformly against liberal economic policies. Certain, though limited, trends of economic nationalism endorsed some of the liberal policies, depending upon the actual requirements of the respective countries.

Thus, economic nationalism may be understood as concerned not with particular economic policies, but with the nation. The economic nationalists may advocate certain policies which would help the national economic growth at a particular point of time. There are no fixed economic policies advocated by economic nationalism. It may adopt a variety of forms and contents depending on the situation. It is a form of nationalism rather than of economic theory. It is not against economic liberalism as such. In certain situations, it may advocate similar policies as economic liberalism. The conventional view of the political economists identifying economic nationalism with mercantilism, statism and protectionism is no longer valid. It is not the state but the nation, and it is not specific economic policies but

economic interests of the nation at any given time, that economic nationalism is concerned with.

### **6.2.2 Economic Nationalism in Colonial Context**

Although he believed that a peaceful world order could only be established on the basis of equality among nations, Friedrich List's notion of equality was limited to the Western nations. For other countries, which he called the 'torrid zone' of the world such as the Asian and African countries, he believed that the idea of infant-industry protection was irrelevant because such countries were destined to be colonised (Helleiner 2002: 314). Such a view was quite in keeping with the policies of economic liberals in Britain and other countries that there should be an international division of labour which would allow the Western nations to produce manufactured goods while the rest of the world would trade in its primary products.

Economic nationalism in the colonies can be situated within the broader framework of an unequal relationship between the imperialist country and the colonial country, between the centre and the periphery. This relationship was based on unilateral transfer of funds from the colony to the colonising country. This transfer of resources can be direct and indirect. The direct forms consist of repatriation of income through plunder (particularly in the early phase), salaries and interests on investment. The indirect forms can be several, the most important being the unfavourable terms of trade for the colony under which the colony is encouraged to produce primary and low-priced goods which it exports either to the colonising country or to some other country in order to earn foreign exchange for the benefit of repatriation of money. The colony is also forced to import manufactured goods from the colonising country. It was in this context of unequal economic relationship that the ideas of economic nationalism developed in the colonial countries. Here we are going to discuss these ideas in case of India, which was a colonial country from 1757 to 1857.

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## **6.3 ECONOMIC NATIONALISM IN INDIA**

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Economic nationalism in India developed within the context of its subordination to Britain. This was associated with two other developments – capitalist expansion on a world scale leading to what has also been called as 'the first globalization', and colonial construction of India in terms of a territorially defined space. Britain had industrialised by the middle of the nineteenth century, pushing out in all directions in search for raw materials for its industries, food grains for its working population and relatively secure markets for its manufactured goods. Some other European countries had also started industrialising in the nineteenth century blocking Britain's penetration in their territories as well as posing as competitors in non-industrialised countries of Europe and the rest of the world. Thus, the European industrialisation was opening up the globe in unprecedented and unforeseen ways, leading to tremendous rise in international trade which was basically unequal in nature consisting of flow of manufactured commodities out of Europe and primary products into Europe, particularly its Northern and Western parts. The drive to secure this unequal trade led to intense rivalry among the European powers in the late nineteenth century resulting in what has been called as the 'partition of the world' into respective areas of influences either as directly-controlled territories or areas of indirect influence.

On the other hand, there were ever increasing attempts on the part of the imperialist European powers to remove the internal barriers of trade within particular colonial territories and administrative unification of a defined territorial space. In India, after 1858, the colonial state was consolidated and its institutional structure was expanded on an unprecedented scale. It was also simultaneously engaged in effecting a 'distinctively modern forms of social, economic, and territorial closure'. This comprised of eliminating the internal custom barriers, introduction of a uniform system of laws, a centralised monetary system, building of a network of transport and communication such as railways, roads, post and telegraph, telephones, institution of decennial censuses for enumeration of people, various survey agencies for the measurement of land and people, and a modern bureaucracy and police for administering the land revenue, maintaining law and order and generally making the presence of the state visible all over the country.

The territorialisation of space was intimately linked with the deterritorialised character of the global-imperial economy. Thus, 'the colonial production of space entailed practices that both bound indigenous society within a territorialised particularity and universalised social relations'. In this way, 'the bounded economic and territorial whole of colonial India was inserted within the deterritorialising dynamic of the world market' (Goswami 1998: 612-13). It was within this context of restricted colonial space, wider global market and international division of labour that the nationalist response was formulated and popularised.

### 6.3.1 Early Thoughts

The main stream of nationalist economic thoughts was formulated in the period between 1870s and 1905. However, there was a small group of people in Maharashtra who even earlier discussed and wrote on some of issues concerned with the economic exploitation of India by the British. In fact, cognition of the negative economic consequences of British colonial rule in India can be traced back to the early years of 1830s in the writings of Raja Rammohan Roy. He complained against the 'tribute' paid to Britain and showed his concern for the plight of the self-cultivating peasants. But in the 1840s, certain Maharashtrian intellectuals such as Bhaskar Pandurang Tarkhadkar, Govind Vitthal Kunte (popularly known as Bhau Mahajan) and Ramkrishna Vishwanath criticised the British rule for economically exploiting India, particularly by draining its resources. They were convinced that instead of being good for India, the British colonial rule was 'the most bitter curse India has ever been visited with'. Although they also critiqued British rule on political and social grounds, their severest critique was on the economic front. Bhaskar Tarkhadkar declared that he wanted 'to show how rigorous the present policy of the British has been in operation in regards to draining India of its wealth and reducing it to poverty'. He argued that the destruction of the indigenous industry in Maharashtra, as in India as a whole, resulted in poverty and misery of the artisans. Moreover, the siphoning of India's wealth between the battle of Plassey in 1757 and 1815 amounted to 'about 1,000 million pounds'. He also criticised the no-tariff policy of the colonial government whereby 'British goods were forced upon [India] without paying any duty'. This resulted in limiting the possibility of the growth of modern industry in India, besides destroying the indigenous handicrafts industry. Similarly, Bhau Mahajan criticised the imperialist policies of waging wars and charging them on Indian treasury: 'Having emptied the Indian treasury on ill-conceived wars, the

government issued bonds....’ Ramkrishna Viswanath attributed India’s poverty mainly to drain of wealth and the adverse balance of trade. He further advocated Indians to work hard and invest in national modern industry (Naik 2001). Thus, since the 1840s, the Indian intelligentsia was agitated on the issue of the unfair and exploitative treatment of the Indians by the colonial rulers. Their criticism, though sketchy, covered several aspects of this economic discrimination which was later taken up much more comprehensively.

### 6.3.2 Economic Critique of Colonial Rule

During the 1870s and the 1880s, a wide-ranging and comprehensive nationalist critique of British rule emerged in India. The most important proponents of the emerging ‘political economy of nationhood’ were Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917), Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842-1901), Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848-1909), Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866-1915), G. Subramaniya Iyer (1855-1916), G.V. Joshi (1851-1911), Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) and Surendranath Banerjea (1848-1925). They realised that India was being integrated within global capitalism in a subordinate position. Ranade defined this position as ‘dependent colonial economy’. According to him, the country was being transformed into a ‘plantation, growing raw produce to be shipped by British Agents in British ships, to be worked into Fabrics by British skill and capital, and to be re-exported to the Dependency by British merchants to their corresponding British firms’ [cited in Goswami, 615]. These nationalist writers also criticised the processes of ‘ruralization’ and ‘de-industrialization’ to which India was subjected. Moreover, the theory of ‘drain of wealth’ as formulated by Naoroji remained the most popular nationalist economic plank to denounce the British rule.

In his pioneering and magisterial survey of the economic thoughts of the early Indian nationalists, Bipan Chandra discusses in detail the scathing critique of colonial economic policies by the early nationalist leaders. He covers various points of nationalist critique on economic drain, decline of indigenous industry, excessive taxation, discriminatory international trade, etc. In this section, we will briefly discuss some important issues related to this far-ranging critique.

#### 6.3.2.1 The Drain of Wealth

The critique of the drain of wealth from India became probably the most popular sentiment in the anti-colonial nationalist narrative. That the colonial rulers were taking out India’s money leading to country’s impoverishment was conceived as the biggest economic evil of the colonial regime. Drain was conceived as unilateral transfer of resources from India to Britain without any corresponding economic and commercial gain. The venerated nationalist, Dadabhai Naoroji, was the originator of the ‘drain theory’. In 1867, in a speech, he argued that Britain was siphoning off India’s wealth which amounted to about 25 per cent of country’s revenue which was ‘added to the resources of England’. In 1873, he further criticised Britain for ‘ignoring India’s interests, and making it the drudge for the benefit of England’. This, he stated, was unnatural and a monstrous evil. He declared that ‘to stop the bleeding drain from India’ was ‘the most important question of the day’ and exhorted his countrymen to summon all their energies to solve this problem. For about fifty years he carried on his struggle against drain. His book *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (1901) remains a significant milestone in the formulation of the nationalist political economy. The book by

William Digby (1849-1904), *Prosperous British India* (1901), G.S. Iyer's *Some Economic Aspects of British Rule in India* (1903) and R.C. Dutt's *Economic History of India* (1901-03) were other detailed works bitterly critical of the imperialist drain of India's resources. Several other leaders and newspapers joined this campaign which soon became the central tenet of mass nationalist ideology.

### 6.3.2.2 Poverty of Indian People

The grinding poverty of the great mass of Indian people, after more than a century of colonial rule, was visible to all. The earlier hope harboured by Indian intelligentsia that the British rule in India would follow benevolent economic policies leading to prosperity had vanished by the late nineteenth century. Since the 1870s, there had been constant concern about extreme poverty of Indians among the nationalists. The subject of poverty dominated most public discussions on India by the nationalists. The relentless criticism of British rule for impoverishing India was quite evident in the writings and speeches of even the 'Moderate' nationalists. In 1870, Naoroji read his famous paper on this issue and in 1876 came out his book, *The Poverty of India*. M.G. Ranade, G.V. Joshi, R.C. Dutt, and others regularly discussed this topic on every available forum. The Indian National Congress took up the issue in 1886 and discussed it regularly since then. In 1891, it passed a resolution stating that 'full fifty millions of the population, a number yearly increasing, are dragging out a miserable existence on the verge of starvation, and that, in every decade, several millions actually perish by starvation' [Chandra 1966: 9]. Discussions and resolutions on this issue became a regular feature in subsequent sessions. The Indian nationalist intellectuals argued that India was one of poorest countries in the world despite more than a century of British rule. What was even worse, they asserted, was that this poverty was growing. They tried to rally all classes and groups in India on this platform. Thus, the problem of poverty was made a common national issue and a plank for unity of all classes in Indian society.

Debate on the 'poverty problem' was raised to such a pitch by the nationalists and their sympathisers that the British officials were forced to respond to them. They initially denied the existence of poverty and instead tried to paint a rosy picture of colonial rule. But the figures given by the nationalists, quoting mostly from the official sources, required something more than flat denial. Several government officials took it upon themselves to provide official apologia by arguing that this was not the case, and India was actually progressing. However, their arguments did not appear convincing to the people.

Directly and indirectly, the Indian leaders pointed out that the real cause of poverty was alien and exploitative character of the colonial regime, and the functioning of the colonial government was oriented towards serving the interests of Britain rather than that of India.

### 6.3.2.3 Underdevelopment of Industry

The nationalists were of the firm opinion that India was going through a process of industrial underdevelopment under the colonial rule. It was caused by two phenomena, both closely related to colonial policies – decline of India's indigenous industries and the failure to quickly develop the modern industry. This, according to the nationalists, played a big role in the poverty of the Indian people as the jobs in one sector was lost but not compensated by the rapid growth

of the modern sector. They constantly pointed out the fact that India was once a great manufacturing country which exported its goods to all parts of Asia and Europe. Now the situation has reversed and the Indians themselves were forced to import clothes from Britain. This was 'one of the saddest chapters in the history of British India', as R.C. Dutt declared. Due to this India's wealth was declining, employment opportunities were drastically diminishing, and poverty was steadily increasing. The shrinking of industrial employment had led to growing ruralisation and intense pressure on agriculture which itself was in a precarious situation. This meant, in Ranade's words, 'that we are standing on the edge of a precipice, and the slightest push down will drive us into the abyss below of unmixed and absolute helplessness' [Chandra 1966: 57].

This was done because the British used their political power to sell their cheaper machine-made goods in India leading to destruction of the famous Indian handicrafts industry. The abolition of tariffs thereby imposing free trade on India and the construction of railways for cheap and rapid access to the remote Indian markets created conditions for easy spread of British industrial dominance over Indian markets. Various other policies of the colonial government thereafter resulted in very slow development of the modern industries. For example, the nationalists argued, the abolition of tariff doubly hindered the growth – by allowing cheap foreign goods to invade the country's markets and by decreasing the revenue collection of the government which would then be compensated either by more internal extraction or low public expenditure. One of the nationalist leaders, Surendranath Banerjea stated: 'It had been the settled policy of England in India ever since her rise in political power, to convert India into a land of raw produce for the benefit of the manufacturers and operatives of England' [Chandra 1966: 55]. The nationalists, therefore, demanded that such policies which obstructed the growth of Indian industries should be removed and emphasis should be laid on speedy industrialisation of the country. In this respect, the most important issue on their agenda was the creation of a suitable tariff regime which would help the growth of Indian industries by restricting the entry of cheaper machine-made goods from more industrialised countries.

#### **6.3.2.4 Public Finance**

Nationalist criticism of the colonial public finance related to both its aspects – how much revenue was collected, and how it was spent. The financial policies of the colonial government received great attention from the nationalists because of its deleterious effect on the resources of the country. They were very critical of the taxation policies of the colonial government which claimed that the taxes in India were quite light. It was argued by the government officials that the revenues from land, toddy and opium were not taxes thus making the tax regime appear light. The nationalists, on the other hand, argued that all collections by the government from the total annual income of the country should be considered as forms of tax. They rejected the government claims that India was lightly taxed, and contended that the tax burden was huge and was reaching its limits. Ranade stated in 1880 that any 'further increase of taxation must be adjudged as political insanity'. Similarly Naoroji bitterly remarked that the colonial rulers were 'screwing out more and more taxes, like squeezing a squeezed orange – inflicting suffering and distress'. The *Kesari*, a Marathi journal edited by Tilak, wrote:

'No article in India has escaped taxation. Even the foliage of trees has been taxed. There are, however, some things which are yet to be taxed, so that the triumph of the English may be complete. Among such things may be mentioned the skin of the Indian people and their atmosphere'. [Quoted in Chandra 1966: 503-4].

The nationalist argument was that it was not the amount of taxation per head which should be considered, but its proportion to the per capita income. Calculated by taking the amount of collection as a proportion of the income of each individual, Naoroji argued, the taxes in India were 16 per cent while in England it was only 8 per cent. Thus, the nationalists contended, the burden of taxation should be seen in relation to the wealth of the country and the earnings of the people.

Even more important than the amount of taxes, from the nationalist point of view, was the manner of its expenditure. A large part of this tax collection was taken out of the country and not spent inside. As Naoroji argued, 'It is not the incidence of taxation that is India's evil... The evil is the drain of a portion of the revenue out of the country'. Moreover, its use on military, on wars with India's neighbours, on railways and on various unproductive and wasteful activities was severely criticised by them. G. K. Gokhale argued in 1897 that utility of taxation in any country was decided by 'the purposes for which the increase has been incurred and the results produced by such outlay of public money'. In the European countries and independent nations, the high level of taxation had resulted in 'increased strength and security to the nations, and increased enlightenment and prosperity to the people'. But in India, Gokhale asserted, constantly increasing taxation and its irrational expenditure 'under autocratic management, defective constitutional control, and the inherent defects of alien domination, only helped to bring about a constantly increasing exploitation of our resources, has retarded our material progress, weakened our natural defences, and burdened us with undefined and indefinite financial liabilities'. [Bipan Chandra 1966: 575].

The fundamental point which the nationalists wanted to make was that it was alien rule which was basically responsible for this miserable state of affairs. If the government of an independent country levies more taxes, it was for the benefit of the people; but higher collection by an alien government results in depleting the national resources.

### **6.3.2.5 Agriculture**

Almost 80 per cent population of colonial India was dependent on agriculture, and revenue from land formed the largest part of government collection in the nineteenth century. The land revenue demand was high and it was strictly collected resulting in growing impoverishment of the peasantry. The nationalists picked up this issue early and insisted that it was one of main causes of recurrent famines, India's poverty and decline of its agriculture. Almost all nationalists took up this issue, but it was R.C. Dutt who developed it into a consistent campaign. The Indian National Congress passed resolutions on this issue almost every year from 1888 to 1903. Critique of colonial land revenue policy emanated from almost the entire nationalist leadership. The nationalist agitators objected to: i) the high pitch of land revenue which took a large portion of agricultural savings, draining capital away from India, hindering investment in agriculture, pauperising the

countryside and creating regular famines; ii) constant revisions in assessment of revenue creating uncertainty and dissuading the cultivators to invest in land, leading to stagnation and decay in agriculture; iii) periodic raise in revenue demands by the government encouraged the landlords also to raise it even more in their areas; iv) strict collection of rents and revenues from the peasants accompanied by evictions and punishment. The combined effect of these policies was to drain capital out of agriculture, to prevent investment in land, decline in the quality of land, pauperisation of agricultural population and the recurrence of famines resulting in large-scale deaths.

To improve the matters, the nationalists suggested that the government should decrease its land revenue demand so that the peasants be left with some surplus to tide over the adverse weather conditions, the mode of collection be made more flexible and a permanent tenure should be fixed in all regions.

The demand of a 'permanent settlement' did not necessarily mean that the nationalists were asking for a Bengal-type Zamindari Settlement all over. In many cases, what they were demanding was a long-term fixation of tenure under which the peasants would be assured that they had to pay a certain revenue for a long time and that their lands would not be confiscated. The fact that most of the nationalists distinguished between the Bengal-type settlement and a fixed government demand under all types of settlement was attested in their numerous writings. [For details, see Chandra 1966: 420-36]. Their appeal to the government was to fix the revenue for a long time so that the peasants might benefit and the surplus would be re-invested for the improvement of land.

### 6.3.2.6 Foreign Trade

Although India had always been participating in international trade, the colonial takeover resulted in an enormous increase. Both import and export expanded exponentially and the nature of trade underwent a significant transformation. Until 1813, India had been primarily an exporter of manufactured goods, particularly cotton and silk textiles, and an importer of precious metals such as gold and silver. However, in the nineteenth century, it became an exporter of primary products such as raw cotton, jute, other industrial raw materials, tea, coffee, and foodgrains, and an importer of manufactured goods. Another feature of India's trade became an excess in the value of exports over the value of imports.

Here also the nationalists contested the optimistic view of the colonial administration that the growth of trade was good for India. They argued that the volume of trade in itself could not be taken as an indicator of the prosperity of a country without taking into account its context and its nature. They also did not agree that the trade volume was large if compared to the European countries. So far as the nature of the trade was concerned, they averred, it was a reversal of the earlier trend and reflected the de-industrialised status of Indian economy. They also recognised that the so-called favourable balance of trade consisting of excess of export over imports was not in India's benefit. It was rather a tailor-made condition for earning foreign exchange so that India could pay growing interest on its forced foreign debts, the so-called 'Home Charges' be paid, and the salaries and other earnings of the British in India be remitted in British currency. Thus, the trade earnings of India benefited Britain and drained India. Dadabhai Naoroji in 1895 declared that the export earning was 'mostly only the form in which the

increasing crushing tribute and the trade-profits and wants of foreigners are provided by the poor people of British India'. R.C. Dutt also pointed out that 'the Economic Drain from India for Home Charges compelled that country to export more than she could import'. This excess was forced and maintained even during the years of famine when the country itself needed foodgrains.

### 6.3.3 Emergence of Economic Nationalism in Colonial India

Economic Nationalism emerged in India out of the ideological contestation between the colonial government officials and the early nationalists. The late nineteenth century was the period when this ideological struggle was the most intense. The earlier optimism that world's leading industrial power would develop India in its own image gave way to despairing realisation that India was in fact regressing. After comprehensive and repeated analysis of each aspect of Indian economy, the early nationalists seemed to be reaching the conclusion that stagnation and decline of Indian economy was not due to oversight by the colonial masters but was integrally connected with the structure of colonial rule, that the 'British rule was economically injurious to India and perhaps it was designedly so' [Chandra 1966: 737].

The critique of the classical political economy and of the narrow economic policies of colonial regime provided the ground to develop the concept of a 'dependent colonial economy' along with the universalistic principles of nationalism. Ranade, in his writings of economics during the 1890s, criticised classical economics for being too individualistic and particularistic. He argued that it was developed in the specific context of Britain and was not universally applicable. He criticised the English economists for proposing laissez faire purely from an economic point of view without looking at the broader issue. The broader context consisted in taking into account 'the political and social elements'. And 'if political economy is to be anything more than schoolmen's metaphysics', it has to consider 'the higher interests and aspirations' of the people. The individualism and economism of the classical economics can be tamed only by subordinating it to the higher principle of the national and general interest:

'Individual interests are not the center round which the Theory should revolve ... the true center is the Body Politic of which that Individual is a member, and that Collective Defense and Well-Being, Social Education and Discipline ... must be the center, if the Theory is not to be merely Utopian'. [Quoted in Goswami 1998: 619].

What the nationalists desired was the development of a proper national economic policy which would serve Indian interests. They wished to propel India on to the path of modern industrial development. Overall, their economic outlook was bourgeois in character. But they did also speak for the masses of the peasants and workers. Their greatest achievement was to make 'the people of India conscious of the bond of common economic interests and of the existence of a common enemy and thus helped to weld them in a common nationalism' [Chandra 1966: 758].

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## 6.4 SUMMARY

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Economic Nationalism developed in India during the last three decades of the late nineteenth and the first two decades of the early twentieth centuries. Even

though we witness stirrings of such sentiments in the earlier period also, particularly in the 1840s, it was only in the late nineteenth century that it fully evolved. It was based on the realisation that the British rule was inimical to the economic interests of India because the economic policies of the colonial government were geared towards the benefits of the metropolitan country, that is, Britain. The early nationalists argued that India needed its independent national economic policies which would herald it on the path of modern industrial development. Through all means available at their disposal – newspapers, journals, speeches, books, lectures and political agitations – they constantly campaigned on this issue for almost five decades. Such concerted criticism of the colonial regime gave rise to an almost unified body of opinions on economic issues among the nationalist intelligentsia. The result was an unprecedented realisation among Indian people, particularly the middle classes, that India was a territorial unity and that its interests were common. As this realisation grew over the years, the foundations of Indian nationalism were firmly laid.

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## 6.5 EXERCISES

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- 1) What is economic nationalism? Discuss the views of its earliest proponents.
- 2) Who were the important economic nationalist thinkers in India? What did they think about colonialism?
- 3) Discuss the views of early nationalists in India on drain of wealth and lack of industries in India.

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# UNIT 7 RESISTANCE TO COLONIALISM IN INTELLECTUAL AND SOCIAL SPHERES\*

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## Structure

- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Colonial Mimicry or a New Cultural Synthesis
- 7.3 Cosmopolitanism of Indigenous Intellectuals as Resistance
- 7.4 Rationalism and Religious Universalism
- 7.5 Cultural-Ideological Resistance and Incipient Nationalism
- 7.6 Limits of Cultural-Ideological Battle in a Colonial Milieu
- 7.7 Summary
- 7.8 Exercises

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## 7.1 INTRODUCTION

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There were many factors which were responsible for the colonial conquest. Some of these immediate reasons were advanced technology of weapons and maritime transportation, the failure of non-Europeans to cope with the infectious diseases brought by the colonisers to which the colonial people had not developed immunity, the strong centralised polities of Europe based on emerging identities of nationhood. We also know that colonisation of lands through conquest and consequent domination of colonised people also led to dissemination of colonial culture and ideology. The responses to this spread of colonial cultural ideas were varied. One with which we are quite familiar was the intellectual introspection about the strengths and weaknesses of indigenous culture, religion and institutions. The Indian intellectuals analysed colonialism in the context of their own society. The response had been mixed and varied. Bhikhu Parekh classifies this response under categories like traditionalists, modernists, critical traditionalists and critical modernists. While the traditionalists upheld their cultural pasts and its traditions, all others were in one way or the other trying to find new alternatives to the existing social structures. The modernists believed that the emancipation of India lay in the radically restructuring traditions and adopting western mode of thinking and technology or in other words they tried to create India as a mirror image of the imperial power. The critical traditionalists relied on indigenous cultural resources but did not mind some additional, supplementary borrowings from the resurgent west. The critical modernist also stood for a synthesis of two cultures, the indigenous and the western, but gave more weight to 'advanced' rational thinking of the Europeans. In this Unit, we will try to highlight some of ways and means through which Indian intellectuals offered resistance to colonialism in the sphere of culture and ideology.

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\* Resource Person: Prof. Shri Krishan

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## 7.2 COLONIAL MIMICRY OR A NEW CULTURAL SYNTHESIS

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The relationship between ideological and cultural impact of the West on the indigenous society or what now scholars call as ‘colonial modernity’ and the ‘Indian renaissance’ has been discussed and debated by the historians of modern India. Some believe in a kind of stimulus-response assumption and feel that an inert and degraded Indian society was modernised by the impact of Western knowledge. In other words, they argue that English education and literature, administrative practices, science and philosophy and material and technological elements of the Western civilisation acted like a stimulating force to wake up Indians from their long slumber and brought them closer to the social conditions, processes, and discourses that had emerged with Age of Enlightenment in Europe. There are others who contradict this line of argument and believe that Western ideas and administrative practices could not make much of a difference in superstitious and backward looking traditional Indian society. Whatever change took place as a result of Western impact was superficial, partial and open to doubt. Another viewpoint is that Western ideology and cultural practices, in whatever distorted and mimic form they entered Indian milieu, were instruments of colonisation of Indian society and it was through them that Indians acquired a sham and apparent modernity.

The encounter between the English ideas and institutions and indigenous Indian society and culture was, however, more complex than these interpretations. If we accept the broad description of modernity from Anthony Giddens as a shorthand term for modern society, or industrial civilisation associated with (1) a certain set of attitudes towards the world, the idea of the world as open to transformation, by human intervention; (2) a complex of economic institutions, especially industrial production and a market economy; (3) a certain range of political institutions, including the nation-state and mass democracy. Largely as a result of these characteristics, modernity is vastly more dynamic than any previous type of social order. It is a society—more technically, a complex of institutions, which, unlike any preceding culture, lives in the future, rather than the past, then naturally Indian response to it was varied. In general connotation, ‘mimicry’ refers to the imitation of one species by another. Webster’s New World College Dictionary further defines the term as “close resemblance, in colour, form, or behaviour of one organism to another or to some object in its environment ... it serves to disguise or conceal the organism from predators.” The disguising of the organism in the process of mimicry brings the term closer to the warfare device of camouflaging which, according to Webster’s Dictionary, implies “the disguising of troops, ships, guns, etc. to conceal them from the enemy, as by the use of paint, nets, or leaves in patterns merging with the background.”

Homi K. Bhabha, a famous critic has used the concept of mimicry to describe and explain this cultural encounter between the colonial rulers and their colonial subjects. The effect of mimicry is camouflage. It is not a question of harmonising with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled—exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare. He sees the coloniser as a snake in the grass who, speaks in “a tongue that is forked,” and produces a mimetic representation that “... emerges as one of the most elusive

and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge". For Homi K. Bhabha, "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable 'Other', as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite". He is the foremost contemporary critic who has tried to unveil the contradictions inherent in colonial discourse in order to highlight the colonizer's ambivalence with respect to his attitude towards the colonised Other and vice versa. It is precisely mimicry that disrupts the colonial discourse by double vision, double articulation or the forked tongue. The colonial mimicry, argues Bhabha, was a strategic project to create a class of 'domesticated others', representatives of colonized subjects who would assist the colonial project by acting as intermediaries between the colonial presence and the colonised people. But the discourse of colonial imitation is structured around an ambivalence that accentuates the difference between the anglicised men doing the imitation and the British colonial rulers. According to him, mimicry or imitation always produces a slippage between that which it meant to represent and the representation itself and this itself is a threat to the civilizing mission of the colonial rulers. Because the figure of mimicry do not represent, but only repeats, it accounts for the partial presence of the colonial subject, through its ambivalent discourse. However, it is a questionable assumption to reduce critical investments of various intellectual strands to such simple notion of colonial mimicry. The Indian intellectuals analysed colonialism in the context of their own society. The response had been mixed and varied. The urge to change emerged not only in secular and cultural field but also in religious realm and literary-artistic forms. The urge for change came from within, that is, it has indigenous roots and modernity came not simply as the distorted and feeble caricature of the Western model. India had precedents in past of such cultural encounters with outside and it had assimilated intellectual and cultural trends from outside even in earlier phases of its history. The English colonial scholars and administrators had attributed an essential, ancient and immutable characteristic to the historicity of India. Fundamental to this belief was that of an unchanging Hinduism, unless it was threatened by events external to itself. The Indian intellectuals focused on the dynamic side of Indian history and culture. It was a kind of absorption of new elements in the enduring and ever-changing civilisation of India by selection of some aspects of past and borrowing some novel features from the newly encountered Western knowledge and culture. All this was done not just for imitation, but in a spirit of critical self-enquiry. As M.G. Ranade put it beautifully: "No mere foreign graftings can ever thrive and flourish unless the tender plant on which the grafting is to be made first germinates and sends its roots deep into its own indigenous soil. When the living tree is thus nourished and watered, the foreign manure may add flavour and beauty to it."

The colonised Indians did not always try to correct or extend the Orientalists who suggested an essential, ancient and immutable characteristic to the historicity of India. They in their own diffused way, tried to create an alternative language of discourse. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-91), though deeply impressed by Western rationalist thought and though himself an agnostic, lived like an orthodox *pandit* and formulated his dissent in indigenous terms. He did not counterpoise John Locke or David Hume against *Manusamhita*; he counterpoised the *Parasara Sutra*. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar did seek to create a new political awareness which would combine a critical awareness of Hinduism and colonialism with cultural and individual authenticity. Ishwar Chandra too fought institutionalised violence against Indian women, giving primacy to social reform

over politics. But his diagnosis of Hinduism did not grow out of feelings of cultural inferiority; it grew out of perceived contradictions within Hinduism itself. Even when he fought for Indian women, he did not operate on the basis of Westernised ideals of masculinity and femininity or on the basis of a theory of cultural progress. He refused to Christianise Hinduism. He refused to use the imagery of a golden age of the Hindus from which contemporary Hindus had allegedly fallen, he resisted reading Hinduism as a 'proper religion' in the Western sense, he rejected the ideologies of masculinity and adulthood, and he refused to settle scores with the West by creating a nation of super-Hindus or by defending Hinduism as a perfect antidote to Western cultural encroachment. His was an effort to protect not the formal structure of Hinduism but its spirit, as an open, anarchic federation of sub-cultures and textual authorities which allowed new readings and internal criticisms. Thus, Ishwar Chandra's resistance to colonialism was not defined by the Western version of rationalism, the popular Bengali *bhadralok* stereotypes about him notwithstanding. It was also not heavily reactive, though that impression too was created by some elements of his everyday life including his Indian dress, interpersonal style and food habits.

The colonial rulers thought that colonial exploitation was an incidental and deplorable upshot of a philosophy of life that was in harmony with superior forms of political and economic organisation. They could not effectively rule a continent-sized country while believing themselves to be moral cripples. They, thus, projected their cultural forms and ideas as superior. The imperialists claimed that their policy was a noble enterprise and its aim was to civilise and benefit the colonial people. A belief in the virtues of empire was widespread at the time; there were also many dissenters among the indigenous intellectuals. Some of them tried to discover an alternative frame of reference within which the oppressed do not seem weak, degraded and distorted men. Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-83) and Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) borrowed their fundamental values from the Western world view and, in spite of their image as orthodox revivalists, were mercilessly critical of the contemporary Hinduism. They also took the position that the Hindus had been great, virile and mature in ancient times and had fallen on bad days because of their loss of contact with textual Brahminism and true Ksatriyahood. Thus, Vivekananda and Dayanand, too, tried to Christianise Hinduism, particularly the dominant Hindu concept of the desirable person. In doing so, they identified the West with power and hegemony, which in turn they identified with a superior civilisation. Then they tried to 'list' the differences between the West and India and attributed the former's superiority to these differences. The rest of their lives they spent exhorting the wretched Hindus to pursue these cultural differentiae of the West. And as expected they found out that traditions supporting some of the valued Western traits were there in Hinduism but were lost on the 'unworthy' contemporary Hindus. The main elements of their 'reformed' Hinduism were: i) an attempt to turn Hinduism into an organised religion with an organised priesthood, church and missionaries; ii) acceptance of the idea of proselytisation (*suddhi*); iii) an attempt to introduce the concept of the sacred book following the Semitic creeds (the Vedas and the Gita in the case of the two Swamis); and iv) acceptance of ideas akin to monotheism and a certain puritanism and this-worldly asceticism borrowed partly from the Catholic church and partly from Calvinism. These intellectual debts to the West were indirect because the intellectuals of this type tried to seek the support of scriptures for the social and religious reforms that they were advocating. They cited and often re-

interpreted the scriptures to justify the need for reform. The wisdom of *shastras* was used by them according to necessity and desirability felt for furthering the cause of reform. They justified deviations from the scriptures by re-interpreting them according to contemporary times and principle of rationalism.

Partha Chatterjee, in his conceptual fortification of the 'domestic space', depicts home as the 'spiritual-moral domain', as a space unconquered by colonial intrusion and its expanding 'public space'. In this 'private space' of home, 'indigenous communities' retained their sovereignty over its primary denizens, women. We feel that such a static picture of family life and its forms neglects the central role of family in local power structures, which got drastically altered by forces unleashed by direct and indirect interventions of colonial power. In fact, we now know that the 'private-ness' of family became a concern of public discourse from the nineteenth century itself. The interior of family did not remain inert, static or immutable. It may be true that the text-based view of Indian family as a unit of patrilineal descent and patrilocal residence played important role in reproducing caste-hierarchy and patriarchal domination but there were also the regional and caste variations in the form of family. Women are not a unified, timeless or ineluctable other as the gender hierarchy is locally variable, mediated by other entities. The domain of home or its boundaries are drawn for it by the larger culture, as well as by the political economies of race, nation, sexuality and empires that shape it. The oriental home was depicted as a pathological, dark, unhygienic space by the British and hence an indication of indigenous communities' incapacity to self-govern themselves. Indians also started themselves refracted about their homes, families and women and the reformers and intellectuals invested a large amount of energy in dealing with women question.

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### 7.3 COSMOPOLITANISM OF INDIGENOUS INTELLECTUALS AS RESISTANCE

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Cosmopolitanism is frequently conflated with the imperial inclinations of a historical period; a fact that stresses its contradictory relationships with power. Marx had hinted the emergence of such a cosmopolitanism, the need for a constantly changing market chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. In his words: "It must settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere ... the bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market give a *cosmopolitan* character to production and consumption in every country... The individual creations of individual nations become *common* property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible." Where the world consisted of antagonistic nation-states, the 'other' was often seen as something to fear, to attack, to colonise, to dominate or to keep at bay. The other was dangerous, especially those others who were on the move, such as armies, migrants, traders, vagrants, travellers who might travel into and stay within one's country. The intellectuals are often the people who are on the move at mental level, catching up ideas from different sources and assimilating them and spreading them in a new context with entirely new outcomes. The main tradition in modern cosmopolitan thought sought to extend republican political philosophy into a wider and essentially legal framework beyond the relatively limited modern republic. With this came the vision of a world political community extending beyond the community into which one is born or lives.

Cosmopolitanism thus became linked with the universalism of modern western thought and with political designs aimed at world governance. Cosmopolitanism thus reflected the revolt of the individual against the social world, for to be a 'citizen of the world' was to reject the immediately given and closed world of particularistic attachments. Not surprisingly it became associated with the revolt of the elites against the low culture of the masses. The social world as territorially given, closed and bounded by the nation-state and the class structure of the industrial societies did not sit comfortably with the openness of the cosmopolitan idea, with its universalistic orientation. Rather than seeing cosmopolitanism as a particular or singular condition that either exists or does not, a state or goal to be realised, it should instead be seen as a cultural medium of societal transformation that is based on the principle of world openness, which is associated with the notion of global publics. The dominant conception of cosmopolitanism can be termed moral cosmopolitanism due to the strong emphasis in it on the universalism of the cosmopolitan ethic. In the most well known version of this the basis of cosmopolitanism is the individual whose loyalty is to the universal human community. The ideas of cosmopolitanism came indirectly through the educational medium and the Indian intellectual adopted the stance of universal rationalism and humanism to judge existing indigenous and imported Western ideas through these ideological prisms. In both Eastern and Western India, using the traditional as well as new Western ideas, the Indian intellectuals re-assessed the societal needs and articulated the need for social change and reform of religious traditions. We all know about Raja Rammohan Roy's contribution. His renowned stance against Sati did cite references from the scriptures but his belief was grounded on universal rational principles and morality. This anxiety for use of rational reflection informed by universal ideals was evident in not only in Rammohan's other pronouncements on religious and socio-cultural issues but even in persons like Dayanand Saraswati who advocated a return to original scriptures and believed in infallibility of Vedas but reinterpreted them in the light of modern day rational and utilitarian parameters. Rammohan supported western instead of oriental education because that embraced 'mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry, anatomy with other useful sciences'. Although religious reform was the main plank of many intellectuals, none of them were entirely religious in nature. Some of them were in fact agnostics like Akshay Kumar Dutt and Vidyasagar, who avoided debate on supernatural questions. Henry Louis Vivien Derozio promoted an aggressive kind of rationalism at Hindu College in Calcutta as a result of which the young western educated students of the college questioned not merely the superstitions of any one particular religion but also the irrationality inherent in belief-system itself and they particularly advocated rationalism. Akshay Kumar Dutt wrote several instructive works and a number of articles in *Tatva Bodhini Patrika* as its editor where he tried to use rational principles to understand nature and its working. He also examined Indian religions sociologically using Comte's positivism and Utilitarian logic. Here, we should bear in mind that reasoned arguments were not alien to Indian philosophy of Vedanta. In fact logic was integral part of Indian philosophy. But now the intellectuals like Akshay Kumar Dutt learned the method of reason based on observation and experiment to understand the working of all natural phenomena and sought to apply it. This new scientific and empirical method gave a new leverage to the arguments of reformers and intellectuals who were trying to understand the reason for Europe's progress and the 'backwardness' of their own society.

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## 7.4 RATIONALISM AND RELIGIOUS UNIVERSALISM

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Two important criteria which guided the course of reform movement in nineteenth century India were rationalism and religious universalism. Social bearing of an institution was judged by a rationalist assessment. Mostly reformists rejected unusual supernatural explanations. Raja Rammohan Roy and Akshay Kumar Dutt both linked natural phenomenon to natural causes. They judged natural and social phenomenon by the one and only principle whether its soundness could be proved. Akshay Kumar Dutt argued that all phenomena should be understood as entirely mechanical processes. This mind-set not only enabled them to adopt a rational approach to tradition but also to appraise the existing socio-religious practices from the point of view of social usefulness. The influential leaders of Brahma Samaj repudiated the permanent efficacy of Vedas and leaders of Aligarh movement tried to patch up teachings of Quran with the requirements of modern times. The reformers were not always concerned about quoting from religious scriptures for the reforms they were advocating. They often advanced secular perspective for gaining support for their efforts. Akshay Kumar Dutt did not bother to go by past precedents or religious sanctions in advocating widow-remarriage and opposing polygamy and child-marriage. Reformers cited medical reasons to shore up their viewpoint. In Western India, reformers relied less on scriptures as an aid to social reform. For example, Gopal Hari Deshmukh, popularly known as Lokhitwadi, did not care whether the reform had a sanction in religious scriptures or not. He believed that religion itself should be changed to suit contemporary reality. Reacting sharply against opponents of widow-remarriage, he wrote: ‘Enforced widowhood is a murder of living human being. It involves killing of human passions, feelings and emotions. You are butchering your own daughters in cold blood.’

Another feature of this intellectual exercise was that although the particular reformers were operating within the realm of their own particular religious group, their perception was universal. Raja Rammohan Roy believed that different religions were just national version of universal ethical teachings. He conceived of Brahma Samaj as a universal religion and defended the common indispensable monotheism as the soundest moral principle of all true religions. Keshub Chandra Sen uttered this more unambiguously in the following words:

‘Whoever worships the true God daily must learn to recognise all his fellow countrymen as brethren. Caste would vanish in such a state of society. If I believe that my God is one, and that he has created us all, I must at the same time instinctively, and with all the warmth of natural feelings, look upon all around me—whether Parsees, Hindus, Mohammadans or Europeans—as my brethren.’

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## 7.5 CULTURAL-IDEOLOGICAL RESISTANCE AND INCIPIENT NATIONALISM

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Along with reason, the nineteenth century reformers and intellectuals also absorbed the idea of justice and individual conscience. It was instrumental in linking the resistance to social protests in early colonial India. We see production of plays like *Nil-Darpan* and *Jamindar Darpan*. These voices of conscientious protest were to later evolve into political nationalism one that is exemplified in

production of Bankim's *Anandmath* and its voice of passionate love for motherland. Even though it finds place in a tangential form in the writings of some of these reformers, the idea of embryonic nationalism can be traced there. Lokhitwadi, for example wrote:

'The British rule in India is not eternal; we shall also become wise by learning Western science and technology, and we should endeavour to excel and beat them on their own ground. It is only then that we shall begin gradually to demand power. In order to remove our discontent the British might part with some power. The more power they give the more will it whet our appetite for it and the British may begin to oppose our demands. If they do so we may perhaps have to do what the Americans did when they drove away the English from their land.'

A similar observation of Dayanand Saraswati shows his internal turmoil when he says that the most oppressive indigenous ruler is far better than the most benevolent alien ruler. Colonial administrators ridiculed Indian men for being weak, non-martial and effeminate. There was some kind of self-criticism among the educated Indians too along the similar lines. We can trace such ideas to earlier social reformers and in this ideological project they tried to emulate the ideas of hegemonic masculinity. Implicitly, they placed in opposition the values of hegemonic masculinity to a femininity defined by weakness, indecisiveness, and a lack of virility. The ideas in this incipient form were first expressed in cultural domain but subsequently were to flower into full-blown nationalism which called upon Indians to be men and free their motherland from the British with force if necessary. Swami Dayanand's interpretation of Bible is quite literal and did not capture the symbolic content many of the myths in the texts. He also shows concern for consumption and food habits and advocated vegetarianism and supported cow-protection leagues although his plea was based on economic value and utilitarian logic. With regard to Vedas, Dayanand assumed that they contained eternal, universal wisdom and believed them to be source of all moral principles and thought that they anticipated modern scientific truths. Such textual strategies might have been based on the realisation that the Hindu's use of multiple scriptures in self-defence was not likely to cut much ice with the Christian Missionaries. By claiming a supernatural and exclusive 'truth' status for the Vedas, 'Hinduism', which was more of a congeries of different social-cultural and ritualistic practices, it too can be claim a status of rational and 'world' religion. Obviously, cultural revivalism of Dayanand Saraswati had political undertones to it and it had counter-aggressive aspects in that it sought to reclaim lost cultural territory to the colonial state.

Swami Vivekananda, who inherited the spiritual legacy of Sri Ram Krishna also sought to fortify Hindu self-pride. He had toured extensively throughout India during 1887-1893 and apart from spiritual gains that they might have brought in their wake, he was particularly moved by the material impoverishment of the people under the colonial rule. He had the heritage of Ram Krishna's religious humanism which taught no creed and dogma, but only human uplift as its supreme goal. He declared that religion is not for empty bellies. Realizing the weaknesses that had crept into institutionalised Hinduism, he felt offended by flamboyant meaningless rituals and oppressive mechanism of priesthood. He understood that social inequalities and fake religion nourished each other and it was the prime cause of India's spiritual downfall. For the religion to be meaningful, it ought to strive for collective salvation. For him, therefore, religion was not

individual subject matter but a crucial collective concern. Criticizing expenditure on maintenance of rituals he condemned extravagant expenditure on idols and temples while real creation of God, the living human beings died of hunger and disease. In a manner of introspection he was self-critical of degenerated Hinduism but also equally concerned about restoring the glory of classical Hinduism and he tried to demonstrate that by claiming a victory of Indian spiritualism over crass Western materialism and this is evident from his Speeches at the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893.

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## 7.6 LIMITS OF CULTURAL-IDEOLOGICAL BATTLE IN A COLONIAL MILIEU

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The cultural-ideological battle in the nineteenth century was two-fold. Firstly, the encounter between Western and Indigenous cultural forms impressed upon the intellectual with reforming zeal the need to revitalise the decadent elements of their own traditional culture. There were precedents of such reforms in pre-colonial India from time to time and hence, it can be safely said that nineteenth century reform and its agenda were not merely stimulated by the impact of Western education. However, the speedy intrusion of colonial cultural and ideological hegemony left its imprints on many cultural experiments of the nineteenth century. In the religious domain, the reformers tried to remove idolatry, polytheism and priestly control of rituals and scriptural knowledge. Since literacy was limited and confined to few, the reformers made use of mass-propaganda techniques and oral transmission of their ideas through vernacular languages in order to break the shackles of priestly oppression and exploitation by simplifying religious rituals and attacking superstitious ideas and religious dogmas. For this purpose, they translated religious texts into vernacular languages and reinterpreted them in the light of reason and logic. However, the impact of the ideas of these intellectuals was limited to small minority of people especially they remained confined to educated middle classes in most cases. The mass of people still continued to embrace traditional socio-cultural practices and principles of caste-hierarchy. Traditions die very hard and they continued to have their emotive appeal.

The early urge to challenge colonial cultural hegemony can be seen from the fact that none of the reformers advocated a blind imitation of Western cultural norms, something that happened in Japan after the Meiji Restoration in the name of modernisation. All intrusions in cultural territory were challenged by one or the other intellectual. This cultural defense found expression in attempt to give a new lease of life to traditional culture by reinterpreting it in the light of new ideological currents coming from Western world. But at the same time, we find that most of intellectuals favoured use of vernacular languages and stressed alternate system of education with modification in the indigenous pattern of education. They also emphasised Indian art and literature, did not dump Indian dress or food and persons like Swami Dayanand and Vivekanand strongly defended the main tenets of their religions. Raja Ram Mohan Roy debated religious points with Christian Missionaries.

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## 7.7 SUMMARY

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The cultural encounter between the British colonial rulers and the Indian colonised people was long perceived as a process of one-sided acculturation by which Indian educated elites adopted and assimilated the cultural norms and ethos of the English-speaking rulers. But like any other cultural encounter, it was never a stimulus-response type of relation. There were elements of selective appropriation of culture on both sides although being the conquerors, the British enjoyed political domination. The aim of colonial education was to transmit hegemonic colonial cultural norms and, in the process, create an educated elite who were to serve as intermediaries between rulers and the ruled and to fit Indians in European concepts of work and social relations. These cultural imperialist objectives of the British were contested by the nineteenth century Indian reformers and intellectuals. Although the intellectuals and reformers exhibited ambivalences peculiar to such cultural encounters, they never adopted a strategy of indiscriminate imitation. This Unit has highlighted some important aspects of such resistance on the part of indigenous intellectuals.

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## 7.8 EXERCISES

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- 1) Discuss the main forms of cultural resistance developed by early Indian intellectuals against colonial cultural hegemony.
- 2) In what ways the early cultural-ideological resistance was related to nationalism?
- 3) What were the limitations of cultural-ideological resistance in a colonial situation?

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# UNIT 8 TOWARDS RADICAL AND MASS POLITICS – SWADESHI MOVEMENT\*

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## Structure

- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Background
- 8.3 Partition of Bengal
- 8.4 Swadeshi Movement
- 8.5 Cult of Violence
- 8.6 Impact of Swadeshi Movement
- 8.7 Summary
- 8.8 Exercises

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## 8.1 INTRODUCTION

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The failure of moderate politics by the end of the nineteenth century set a reaction within the Congress circle and this led to the emergence of the extremist trend in nationalist politics. The moderates were criticised for their politics of mendicancy. In fact, this politics of extremism gained popularity in three main regions under the leadership of Bipin Chandra Pal in Bengal, Bal Gangadhar Tilak in Maharashtra and Lala Lajpat Rai in Punjab, but in the other areas extremism was less powerful if not totally absent. In this Unit, we will discuss the reasons for the origin, development, and decline of the Swadeshi movement. We will also briefly discuss the rise of the revolutionary movement after the decline of Swadeshi.

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## 8.2 BACKGROUND

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There were many factors behind the rise of extremism. In the opinion of some historians, it emerged from the faction fighting which had become prominent in every level of organised political life in India. While in Bengal there was rivalry between Surendra Nath Banerjee on one hand and the more radical Motilal Ghosh on the other, there also developed a faction fighting between Aurobindo Ghosh on one hand, and Bipin Chandra Pal, Brahma Bandhab Upadhyay, on the other side. In Maharashtra, there was competition between Gokhale and Tilak for controlling the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha. In Madras, three factions, the Mylapore clique, the Egmore Clique and the suburban elites jostled with each other for gaining supremacy. In Punjab, the Arya Samaj became divided after the death of its founder Dayanand Saraswati into the moderate college group and the radical revivalist group. In that sense the schism in the Congress between the extremists and the moderates was being witnessed in every sphere of public life in India around this time.

But, this emergence of extremism cannot be explained in terms of factionalism alone. There was a great deal of frustration with moderate politics. The Congress

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\* Resource Person: Dr. Rajsekhar Basu

under moderate leadership was governed by one-sided constitution. Although after repeated attempts by Tilak a new constitution was drafted and ratified in 1899, it was never given a proper trial. The Congress was also in a financial crisis as the Capitalists did not contribute and the patronage from the Rajas and the landed elite was insufficient. At the same time, the zeal for social reform on the part of the moderates, which was inspired by the liberalism of the west, also went against popular orthodoxy. This came to a surface during the Poona Congress of 1895, when the moderates proposed to have a national social conference concurrently with regular succession of the Congress. The orthodox leaders like Tilak argued that the social conference would ultimately split the Congress and the proposal was finally drafted. However, by this time moderate politics has reached a dead end and most of their demands had remained unfulfilled. This ultimately worked as a major factor behind the emergence of extremism. However, the anger against colonial rule was actually fuelled by the moderates through their critique of economic nationalism.

The strategies of the Curzonian administration further increased the anger of the nationalists. Lord Curzon believed in the despotic imperialism which had been advocated by ideologues like Fitzjames Stephens and Lytton Strachey in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Curzon was responsible for the reconstitution of the Calcutta Corporation through the Calcutta Municipal Amendment Act of 1899, which reduced the number of elected representatives in it. The Indian Universities Act which was also endorsed by Curzon placed Calcutta University under complete government control. Furthermore, the Indian Official Secret Amendment Act of 1904 restricted the freedom of the press.

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### **8.3 PARTITION OF BENGAL**

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However, the oppressive regime of Curzon is mostly associated with his decision to partition Bengal in 1905, ostensibly to weaken the Bengali nationalists, who had been controlling the Congress. But, rather than weakening the Congress, the Curzonian measures offered the opportunity to the extremist leaders to take control of the Congress and put it in a path of direct confrontation with the colonial rule. The partition of Bengal led to a radicalising in nationalist politics and this was witnessed in the method of agitation, and the change from the old political methods of prayer and petition to that of passive resistance. This meant opposition to colonial rule through violation of its unjust laws, boycott of British goods and institutions and development of indigenous alternatives i.e., Swadeshi and national education. The ideological inspiration of this new politics was drawn from a revivalist discourse influenced by orientalism. The Swadeshi movement which gained popularity in Bengal and some other parts of India was based on an imagined golden past and used symbols from a reconstructed history to arouse nationalist passion. This was a reaction to the gendered discourse of colonialism, which had sought to establish links between masculinity and political domination. Subsequently, this inspired a section of the nationalists to recover their virility in the kshatriyahood of the imagined Aryan past. In many places, historical figures were projected as national heroes. Tilak started the Shivaji festival in Maharashtra and this became popular in Bengal during the Swadeshi period. In fact, the advocates of the Swadeshi were also influenced by Vivekananda's idea of 'alternative manliness' which combined western concepts of modernity with the Brahmanical tradition of spiritual celebration of asceticism. Thereafter, a physical

cultural movement started with great enthusiasm and gymnasium sprung in different parts of Bengal, ostensibly to reclaim the physical prowess. But, the emphasis remained on spiritual power and self-discipline which was also privileged in the western idea of masculinity.

The Swadeshi movement began as an agitation against the decision of Curzon to partition of Bengal in 1905. The decision on the part of the colonial bureaucracy was explained in terms of administrative reasons arising out of the geographical spread and linguistic diversities within the presidency. However, the intention to safeguard the interests of Assam seemed to have been the most important consideration behind the policy decision on the part of the colonial state. In 1897, the Lusai Hills were transformed; Assam did not become a Lieutenant Governor's province. When Lord Curzon arrived in India, he went on a tour to Assam in 1900. During his visit, the scheme was revised again and the European tea planters preferred a maritime outlet nearer than Calcutta to reduce their dependence on the Assam-Bengal railways. Curzon drew up a scheme in his Minute of Territorial Redistribution of India in May-June 1903, which was later published in the Risley Papers of December, 1903. The scheme proposed the transfer of Chittagong division to Dhaka and Mymensingh to Assam, Chotanagpur to the Central provinces. Bengal would receive in turn Sambalpur and the feudatory states from the Central Provinces and Ganjam district and Vizapatnam Agency Tracts from Madras. In the following months the scheme gradually expanded although secretly, albeit through addition to the list of transfer district. The final scheme was embodied in Curzon's dispatch of February 2, 1905 to the Secretary of States Broderick who reluctantly accepted it without even a proper parliamentary debate on July 19, the partition of Bengal was finally announced and it was implemented three months later on October 16, a new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam was formed which comprised of all the districts in Chittaganj, Dhaka and Rajshahi division as well as Hill Tippera, Malda and Assam.

In fact, it was the anti-Bengali feelings of the colonial bureaucracy which Curzon inherited even before he became the Viceroy and the desire to weaken this politically articulate community seems to have prompted the move behind the partition. Curzon believed that the partition would destroy the dominance of the Bengali *bhadralok* who were land owners, moneylenders, professional and clerical classes, belonging mostly to the three upper castes of Brahmins, Ksatriyas and Vaidyas. These castes had monopolised education and employment to the virtual exclusion of all other communities and this had been the main source of their political power. So, Curzon believed that to break this dominance of the *bhadralok*, the linguistic identity of the other communities had been given prominence by the colonial bureaucracy. At the same time, Curzon by creating a province in Eastern Bengal sought to sow the seeds of disunity between the Muslims who were majority of the population and the Hindus who were minority in that region. In his speech deliberated in Dhaka, in February 1904, Curzon categorically stated in the new province of eastern Bengal with Dhaka as its head quarter that Muslims would enjoy a unity which they had enjoyed since the time of the old Muslim rule.

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## 8.4 SWADESHI MOVEMENT

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However, the partition, rather than dividing the Bengalis, united them through the anti-partition agitation. The Curzonian administration had ignored the fact that a Bengali identity cutting across narrow interests groups, class, as well as regional barriers were emerging in Bengal. The geographical mobility and the evolution of modern communication again had led to a horizontal solidarity. The dismal state of the economy of Bengal also created a volatile situation. The people's faiths in the providential British connections were shaken. The shrinkage of opportunity for educated Bengalis and consecutive bad weathers in the early twentieth century made life miserable for the middle classes. Rajat Ray has argued that the Swadeshi collection based on a political alliance between the Calcutta leaders and their East Bengali sympathisers brought about a revolution in the political structure of the Bengal society. The agitation against the partition had started in 1903, but became stronger and more organised after the scheme was finally announced and implemented as well in 1905. In the beginning it had the aim of securing the annulment of the partition, but it soon expanded into a more broad-based movement, known as the Swadeshi movement. The Swadeshi movement, itself integrated a whole range of political and social issues. Sumit Sarkar has identified four major trends in the Swadeshi, mainly the moderate trend, constructive Swadeshi, political extremism and revolutionary nationalism. In Sarkar's opinion, all these trends were present more or less throughout this period.

The moderates began to criticise the partition scheme ever since it was announced in 1903, they initially thought that the British would accept their arguments which they presented through petitions, prayers and public meetings. But, these efforts hardly succeeded, and in 1905, when the partition was announced, they were the first to devise a wider Swadeshi movement. On July 17, 1905 Surendra Nath Banerjee in a meeting in Calcutta gave a call for the boycott of British goods and institutions. In another mass meeting held at the Calcutta Town Hall on August 7, a formal boycott resolution was passed, which marked the beginning of the Swadeshi movement. In fact, it was for the first time that the moderates were trying to mobilise sections of the population other than the literate section of the Bengali society. Indeed, this explains why some of the moderate leaders got involved in labour strikes. At the same time the leaders of the Swadeshi movement also emphasised on self-reliance, village level organisation and constructive programmes to develop indigenous or Swadeshi brands which could be alternative for foreign goods. At the same time, national institutions for educating the people were being established as substitutes for the colonial institutions. Sarkar has argued that two main currents were visible in 1905—a non-political constructive Swadeshi with strong emphasis on self-development endeavours and political extremism with its main emphasis on passive resistance.

The Bengal extremists in the initial period were more inclined to the programme of constructive Swadeshi. The programmes included efforts to manufacture daily necessities, national education, arbitration courts and village organisations. In the 1890's, much before the Swadeshi movement, there had been emphasis on Swadeshi enterprise which was reflected in the establishment of companies like the Bengal Chemicals. In 1901, another factory was started to manufacture porcelain. The national education movement was led by people like Satish

Chandra Mukherjee who founded the Bhagavat Chatuspathi and the Dawn Society in Calcutta. Brahmabandhab Upadhyay founded the Saraswat Ayatan and Rabindra Nath Tagore founded the Ashram at Shantiniketan, Bhirbhum. The emphasis on non-political constructive programmes based on the principle of *atma-shuddhi* or self-strengthening in some cases were also linked to religious revivalism. A section of the Swadeshi leaders believed that Hinduism would actually provide a platform for establishing unity for the whole nation. The revivalist influence was also reflected in the writings of Rabindranath Tagore in the years between 1901 and 1906. In his Swadeshi Samaj address which was delivered in 1904 Tagore outlined the meaning of *atma-shakti* and this later influenced the popularity of Swadeshi enterprise in Bengal. National education moved forward with the founding of the Bengal National College and School in 1906. In Bakherganj, the Swadeshi Bhandav Samity also organised arbitration committees to settle local disputes.

However, the extremists by 1906 were arguing that without freedom there could not be any move towards the regeneration of national life. The movement soon intended into a new phase and it came to espouse the slogan of complete independence or Swaraj. The extremists favoured the boycott of British goods and institutions, development of indigenous alternatives, violation of unjust laws and violent movement if necessary to confront the oppression of the colonial state. Thus, it was argued by Sarkar that the Swadeshi movement anticipated much of the strategies inherent in the Gandhian programmes, with the exception of the use of violence. The extremist leaders like Aurobindo Ghosh were aware of the importance of mass mobilisation and therefore emphasised on religion as an agency for reaching the masses. Religious revivalism gave a new dimension to this politics. The *Bhagavat Gita* served as source of spiritual inspiration for the Swadeshi volunteers. Historians have pointed out that Hindu religious symbols and Sakta imageries were also frequently used to mobilise the masses. But, these developments also impacted on the minds of the Muslim masses and the lower caste Vaishnavite peasantry. Such development possibly explains the reasons behind the alienation of the Muslims from the Swadeshi movement.

During the Swadeshi movement, mass mobilisation also took place through the Samitis. Before the beginning of the five principal Samities, such organisations had been engaged in the propagation of Swadeshi message, Swadeshi craft, education and arbitration court. But, the mass mobilization programmes failed since the Samitis were not interested in extending their activities beyond the ranks of the educated Bengali Hindu *bhadralok*. The upper caste Hindu leadership, drawn mostly from the landed classes further alienated the lower caste peasantry who feared their coercive powers. The Swadeshi leaders deployed the tool of social coercion or social boycott to produce consent among the reluctant participants. The reluctance on the part of the substantial section of the ordinary masses can be explained in terms of interests from those of the elite leaders. They found it difficult to purchase the Swadeshi alternatives which were dearer than British goods. At the level of education, the national schools were also for less in number when compared with the government run educational institutions. The lower caste peasantry in Bengal like the Rajbanshis and Namasudras, as Sekhar Bandyopadhyay has pointed out, had also started developing their own corporate identities, based on their notions of social mobility and self-esteem which the Swadeshi leaders failed to accommodate in their programmes. The Swadeshi volunteers also tried to mobilise the workers employed in the foreign

companies. But, they could only penetrate into the ranks of the white collar workers, while the vast body of migrant labour from other parts of Eastern India and Northern India remained untouched. This possibly was one of the reasons behind the failure of the Boycott movement. By 1908, political extremism declined and this was followed by a more radical phase of revolutionary terrorism. The Surat split of 1907 definitely encouraged such developments. The well-known moderate leaders like Pheroze Shah Mehta, Dinshaw Wacha and Gopal Krishna Gokhale expressed their apprehensions over the activities of the extremists. In fact, Lala Lajpat Rai, one of the most prominent extremist leaders favoured a policy of restraint and wanted reconciliation between the moderates and the extremists. But, the radicalism generated by the Swadeshi movement in Bengal gave a new twist to the politics of the Congress at the All India level.

The 1907 session of the Congress, which was to be held in Poona which was a stronghold of the extremist politics, was shifted to Surat by the moderate leaders to avoid all the disturbances. Lala Lajpat Rai's name was proposed by the extremists for the post of the Congress President, while the moderate candidate was Rash Behari Ghosh. But, Rai did not want a split and he refused the nomination and so the fight between the two contending groups was centred on the question of retention or rejection of the four Resolutions passed in the Calcutta session. By this time, the differences between Surendra Nath Banerjee and Aurobindo Ghosh had reached a level where they could not be reconciled and the same happened between Gokhale and Tilak. The session at Surat ended in a scuffle over the election of Rash Behari Ghosh with shoes flying, chairs stopping and men running for shelter. After this incident, Tilak was willing to reunite the Congress but Mehta was reluctant. The Congress of 1908, known as the Mehta Congress was only attended by the moderates who were firm in their loyalty to the Raj. But, the extremist politics also lost its direction since Tilak died soon after and Aurobindo took up the life of a hermit. The two factions remained separate and it was only in 1920 that Gandhi once again united them.

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## 8.5 CULT OF VIOLENCE

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By 1908, political Swadeshi was certainly on the decline and had taken the shape of individual violence. Sarkar has argued that this shift from the non-violent creed to one of violence was primarily due to the failure of the mass mobilisation efforts of the nationalists. Bandyopadhyay has argued that the culture of violence as the mode of political protest had an appeal in India even after the suppression of the revolt of 1857. The writings of Bankim Chandra and Vivekananda infused a sense of masculinity among the younger generation of the educated Bengali youth, who also developed a sense of national pride and social service. However, the real story of revolutionary movement in Bengal began with the formation of four groups, three in Calcutta and one in Midnapore. The first such outfit was the Midnapore Society which was founded in 1902 and this was followed by the founding of a gymnasium at the Ballygunj Circular Road by Sarala Ghosal. In March, 1902, Dhaka Anushilan Samiti was founded by Satish Chandra Basu. However, the revolutionary movement did not gain much importance till 1905 and when the Swadeshi movement began it definitely brought about an upsurge in the activities of the secret societies in Bengal. In Calcutta, the Anushilan Samiti was headed by Barindra Kumar Ghosh, the younger brother of Aurobindo Ghosh, Hemchandra Kanungo and Prafulla Chaki. In August 1906, the first Swadeshi dacoity was organised in Rangpur to raise fund and a bomb manufacturing unit

set up at Maniktala at Calcutta. The activists made it a plan to assassinate oppressive officials and spies and commit burglary in the houses of the wealthy Saha merchants who had earlier refused to stop dealing in foreign goods. The movement reached a point of climax with the attack on the life of the Presidency Magistrate Kingsford on April 30, 1908 at Muzaffarpur by Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki. Subsequently the entire group at Maniktala including Aurobindo and Barindra Kumar Ghosh were arrested by the police for encouraging terrorist activities against the British Government.

This movement failed to achieve in terms of direct gains and most of its attempts ended up in failures. They did not believe that assassination or dacoities would bring about India's liberation, as was Aurobindo's original idea regarding an open armed revolution. However, it would be wrong to argue that they did not gain much, rather it has been pointed out that they achieved a lot. The hanging of Khudiram and the Maniktala Bomb Conspiracy Trial was given a great deal of publicity by the press and was immortalised in Bengali folk songs. All these definitely influenced the imagination, which became very much critical of the oppressive rule of the British raj. C.R. Das, who was still to achieve to fame as a barrister, appeared as the defence counsel lawyer for Aurobindo and argued that if the government considered preaching the principle of freedom as crime then the accused was surely an offender. Aurobindo was acquitted, but his younger brother Barindra and Ullaskar Dutta were sentenced to death and ten others were deported for life. However, on appeal the death sentences were reduced to life imprisonment and the terms of some other sentences were also reduced. The Maniktala Bomb Case Trial forced the revolutionaries to go underground and it became decentralised. But, it was not eliminated and continued as an effective alternative to reduce the earlier mendicant policies of the moderates. Revolutionary nationalism had acquired political legitimacy among a section of the masses who believed that revolutionary activities could drive out the British from the Indian soil. When the Morley-Minto Reforms were announced in 1909, many of them believed that it was the fear generated by revolutionary activities that had forced the British government to take such steps. The appointment of S.P. Sinha as the law member in the viceroy's Executive Council was surely the result of the pressure generated by these activities. The annulment of the partition of Bengal in 1911 was also to some measure dictated by the upsurge of popular pressure created by the revolutionary nationalist. The decision of the annulment of partition was also followed by the decision to transfer the capital from Calcutta to Delhi. The decision was itself a matter of great significance, since it brought about the end of Bengali dominance in the national politics of India. In this context, it could be argued that this decision did fulfil Lord Curzon's aim of weakening the Bengali politicians.

The annulment of partition did not bring an end to revolutionary terrorism. In fact, it had not been generated solely by partition. The revolutionary activities now moved away from Bengal to Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, where the Bengali activists were joined by the Punjabis returning from North America. These people had formed the revolutionary Ghadar party to carry out revolutionary activities against the colonial state. In 1912, the Ghadarites were involved in attempt to assassinate the viceroy Lord Hardinge. In September, 1914 the Punjabi Ghadarites who had boarded the Japanese ship *Kamagata Maru*, clashed with the British army near Calcutta. The outbreak of the First World War led to even more grand schemes of organising armed revolts in the Indian army. The revolutionaries

were interested in seeking help from Germany and Japan. Rash Behari Bose stationed in Lahore tried to organise an army revolt throughout northern India. But, his attempts failed to evoke much response from the sepoys and he finally ran away to Japan. In Bengal the revolutionaries, under the leadership of Jatin Mukherjee tried to smuggle arms manufactured by the Roda Company in Germany. However, this attempt was not well organised and Mukherjee himself died in a battle with the British police near Balasore, Orissa. The repression unleashed by the British government and the imposition of the defence of India Act of 1915 struck a blow to the revolutionary attacks in India. But, the spirit of the revolutionary violence and this trend in some places merged with the popular movements which were witnessed when the Sedition Committee made efforts to introduce the draconian Rowlatt Bills. It was Mahatma Gandhi who now becomes figure of action and he initiated a new phase in politics, when the focus shifted from violence to non-violence and from elite action to mass action.

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## 8.6 IMPACT OF SWADESHI MOVEMENT

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The anti-partition agitation and the Swadeshi movement were responsible for the spread of national ideas beyond the official and elite circles. In fact, these agitations were the formative experiences for the students and teachers who gave nationalism its main populist, idealist, progressive and even revolutionary meanings. News, debates and folklore entered into the public culture in most major urban centres. On the other hand, police repression was portrayed in songs, poems, cartoons, editorials and in public oratory. Incidentally, Victorian racism, merged with British brutality, stood as something opposed to Indian national aspirations. Nationalism became a political movement, which despite being small as compared to the vast population of the indigenous society, moved decisively beyond national moorings and attracted attention overseas. Several million Indians settled abroad also became involved in the movement. In California, activists among Punjabi Sikh farmers launched newspapers and raised funds to support the Indian cause.

More importantly, the new generation of Indian politicians that emerged in the movement came primarily from Bengal, Punjab and Maharashtra. The moderate leader Gopal Krishna Gokhale left his teaching position in History and Political Economy at Fergusson College, Pune in 1902 to enter full time politics. In 1895, he led the moderates as Congress President and like most moderates advocated social reform measures that were in the extremist agenda. Gokhale also founded the Servants of India Society, whose members took vows of poverty and service to the poor, especially to the poorest untouchable jatis in Hindu society who remained excluded. Another important leader, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, ran two newspapers *Kesari* in Marathi and the *Mahratta* in English, but he was opposed to social reform as a distraction from national goals.

Significantly, though the Congress nationalism spoke for everyone in native society, its public agitation also involved and provoked other official and unofficial social identities. The anti-partition movement witnessed the emergence of the cosmopolitan English literate youth whose professional prospect would be curtailed in partition of Bengal. The majority of the English educated youth who came to Calcutta for their education went back to villages and towns and spread the message of Swadeshi. The popular appeal of Hindu devotionism fanned the flames of movement among the poorest. The cosmopolitan literati invoked

the passion of the devotees excluded from the temple of patriotic love by tyranny of those who abuse their Goddess. The vernacular verses written by them expressed regional linguistic identities that were identified with the Indian nation.

In Eastern Bengal, Muslim leaders with various social identities, from various regions, ethnic groups and sects came together to form an old official identity, which later became a political public identity when they met at Dacca in 1906 to form the All India Muslim League. The League supported Curzon's partition plan and stood against the Congress as representatives of the Indian Muslim. In 1906, the Muslim League leaders felt that the creation of a separate East Bengal province would definitely benefit aspiring Muslims in Bengal and Assam. They believed that Congress opposition to the plan was derived from the economic implications for upper caste Hindu elites in Bengal. However, the Muslim leaders were not of one mind. Mohammed Ali Jinnah and many other Muslims believed that the Congress served the Muslim interest.

The aftermath of the Swadeshi movement led to unification of desperate political identities shaped by public activism which influenced most of the national leaders. Calcutta did remain as a centre of national sentiments, but groups in Poona, Bombay, Ahmedabad, Delhi, Lahore, Lucknow, Allahabad and places like Madras entered national politics. By the middle of 1910s, the differences between the moderates and the extremists waned. The new dilemma was to find common cause among forces, pulling the nation in different directions. Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* written in Gujarati in 1909 and later in English in 1910 had presented a new version of nationalism in colonial India. At the same time, V.D. Savarkar's *Indian War of Independence* had projected a more militant Hindu view of nationalism. In 1915, when Gandhi returned to India from South Africa, *Home Rule League* was active in major cities to propagate the idea of Indian independence. The nationalist leader Chittaranjan Das became involved in tackling the dilemma of defining the nation in terms of pragmatism. He and many others believed that the development in India should be based on India's distinctive, all inclusive national culture. But, while this call for a composite culture was repeatedly insisted by Gandhi as was reflected in his non-cooperation khilafat movement, the Hindu and the Muslim communalism could not be eliminated. The riot that followed the non-cooperation movement in 1920s proved beyond all doubts that the class and sectarian interest that had divided the Hindu and the Muslim in the years following the partition of Bengal, had continued to remain in India's body politics eliminating the high expressions of an all embracing nationalist movement.

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## 8.7 SUMMARY

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Swadeshi movement was a crowning achievement of nationalist politics. Disenchanted from the mendicant politics of the moderates and angered by the racist and divisive policies of the British, the young people all over India, but particularly in Bengal, Maharashtra and Punjab, became agitated. The partition of Bengal provided the spark to ignite the nationalist passion to a high pitch. A large number of people participated in the protest demonstrations organised by the nationalist leaders all over the province. Protests continued for quite some time. The repression by the colonial government and its apathy towards the demands of the people led the emergence of revolutionary nationalism which also spread in many parts of the country.

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## 8.8 EXERCISES

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- 1) What were the factors which led to the rise of Swadeshi movement?
- 2) Describe the variety of protest activities undertaken during the course of the Swadeshi movement.
- 3) Discuss the reasons for the decline of the Swadeshi movement.



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